

A large flock of seabirds, likely Sooty Terns, is captured in flight over a body of water. The birds are in various stages of flight, with wings spread wide, showing intricate patterns of brown and white feathers. The water below is a mix of light and dark greenish-brown, with small waves visible. The overall scene is dynamic and captures a moment of intense natural activity.

Birds of The Broadwater and The Spit

Gold Coast

Australia



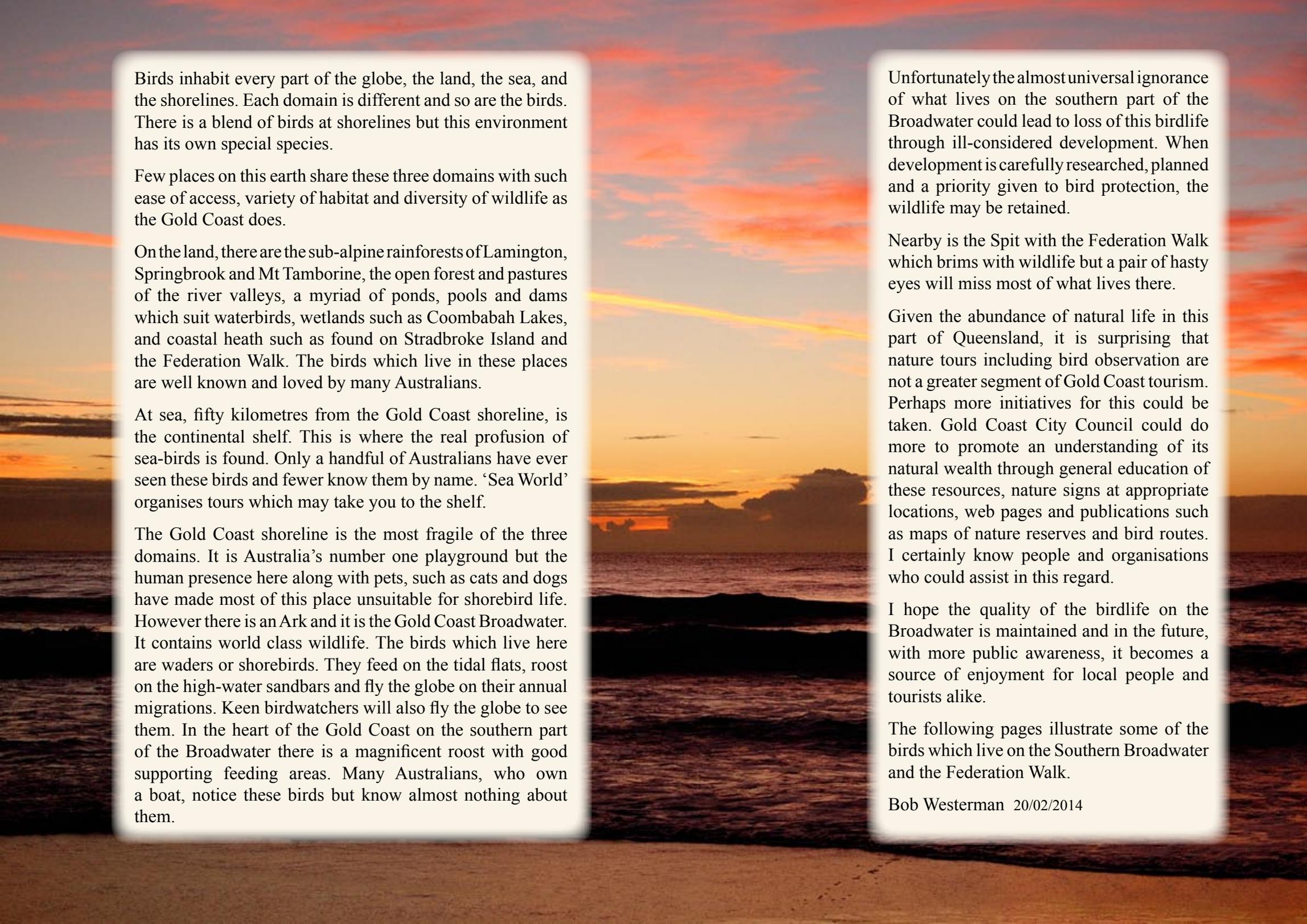
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and other material may be viewed and
downloaded at

www.broadwaterbirds.com

Every photo in this publication was taken on 'Curlew Island' or its
surrounding sandbank.



Birds inhabit every part of the globe, the land, the sea, and the shorelines. Each domain is different and so are the birds. There is a blend of birds at shorelines but this environment has its own special species.

Few places on this earth share these three domains with such ease of access, variety of habitat and diversity of wildlife as the Gold Coast does.

On the land, there are the sub-alpine rainforests of Lamington, Springbrook and Mt Tamborine, the open forest and pastures of the river valleys, a myriad of ponds, pools and dams which suit waterbirds, wetlands such as Coombabah Lakes, and coastal heath such as found on Stradbroke Island and the Federation Walk. The birds which live in these places are well known and loved by many Australians.

At sea, fifty kilometres from the Gold Coast shoreline, is the continental shelf. This is where the real profusion of sea-birds is found. Only a handful of Australians have ever seen these birds and fewer know them by name. 'Sea World' organises tours which may take you to the shelf.

The Gold Coast shoreline is the most fragile of the three domains. It is Australia's number one playground but the human presence here along with pets, such as cats and dogs have made most of this place unsuitable for shorebird life. However there is an Ark and it is the Gold Coast Broadwater. It contains world class wildlife. The birds which live here are waders or shorebirds. They feed on the tidal flats, roost on the high-water sandbars and fly the globe on their annual migrations. Keen birdwatchers will also fly the globe to see them. In the heart of the Gold Coast on the southern part of the Broadwater there is a magnificent roost with good supporting feeding areas. Many Australians, who own a boat, notice these birds but know almost nothing about them.

Unfortunately the almost universal ignorance of what lives on the southern part of the Broadwater could lead to loss of this birdlife through ill-considered development. When development is carefully researched, planned and a priority given to bird protection, the wildlife may be retained.

Nearby is the Spit with the Federation Walk which brims with wildlife but a pair of hasty eyes will miss most of what lives there.

Given the abundance of natural life in this part of Queensland, it is surprising that nature tours including bird observation are not a greater segment of Gold Coast tourism. Perhaps more initiatives for this could be taken. Gold Coast City Council could do more to promote an understanding of its natural wealth through general education of these resources, nature signs at appropriate locations, web pages and publications such as maps of nature reserves and bird routes. I certainly know people and organisations who could assist in this regard.

I hope the quality of the birdlife on the Broadwater is maintained and in the future, with more public awareness, it becomes a source of enjoyment for local people and tourists alike.

The following pages illustrate some of the birds which live on the Southern Broadwater and the Federation Walk.

Bob Westerman 20/02/2014



The Southern Broadwater

Prior to the construction of the Gold Coast Seaway in 1986, the southern Broadwater was a tangle of shallow channels and shifting sandbars. The new seaway and Wavebreak Island have stabilised the area to a great extent. Wavebreak was formed by filling in existing sandbanks.

Despite the development which has gone on, this part of the Broadwater still has its secrets. There are still some unnamed major features on it and it is the home to world class wildlife which is unnoticed by most Gold Coast residents and tourists. This is a pity because some knowledge of the wildlife, which is here, would enhance any experience on the Broadwater. In other parts of Australia, places with far less wildlife, have billboards proudly explaining and educating people about the treasures on their doorstep.

The hub of the wildlife is the small unnamed island just south of Wavebreak Island. It is referred to as 'Curlew Island' in this document. In past times several thousand shorebirds would roost here to wait out the high tide. Numbers are less today but still significant. As the tide drops they spread to the rich feeding areas on the sandbars which surround it.

Though this little island has grown in size in recent times and has become vegetated, it always has been a high tide roost and has been known as a bird life 'hot spot' of the Broadwater for many years.

An application has been made to name this island 'Curlew Island' and in this document it will be referred to as 'Curlew Island'.

This part of the Broadwater has a wonderful companion - the bush of the Federation Walk. It contains a host of bird species not normally found in a city environment. The two areas are genuine nature parks.

The following pages offer a glimpse of the birdlife which may be found in this part of the Gold Coast city.



The images at the top of pages 3 to 7 are one continuous view. The view was compiled from a series of shots taken by a telephoto camera mounted on a tripod. The location of the camera is shown by the pin on the map opposite.

The photos were taken on March 9, 2012 at approximately 11:35 am, about 1 hour 30 minutes after the high tide. By this time many birds had already left the roost for nearby feeding areas.

Curlew Island is the most important roost in the southern Broadwater. It is the only location which stands above all high tides, provides shelter in all conditions, is predator free and has low human visitation. It is also adjacent to the bird's favourite feeding areas.





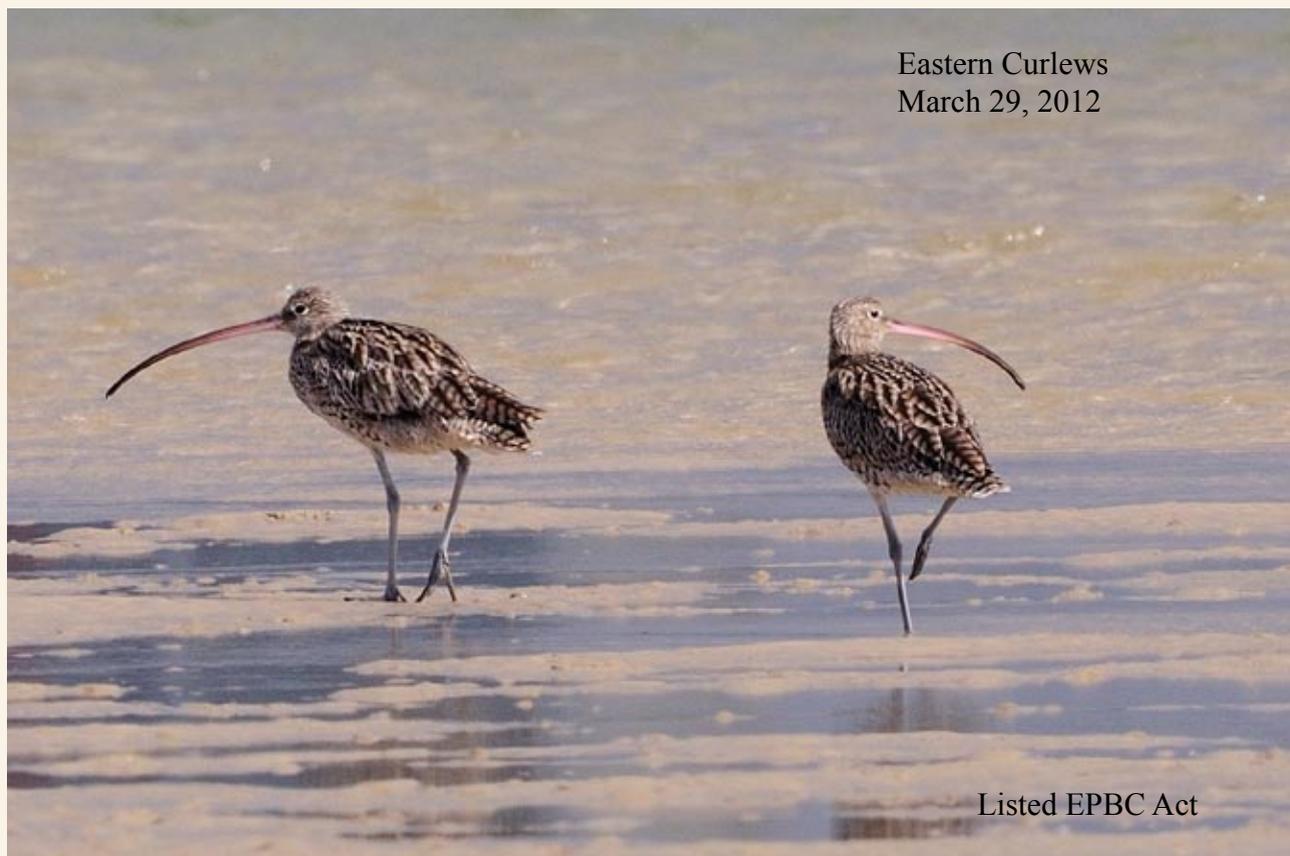
The Broadwater is the summer home to about 400 migratory waders. The three main species are Eastern Curlews, Whimbrels and Bar-tailed Godwits. While some remain on the Broadwater during winter, most take part in one of the great feats of nature.

During March and April they leave here on their annual migration to northern polar lands such as Siberia and Alaska where they breed. They return to Australia in August and September, having completed a round journey of between 16,000 and 20,000 kilometres.

The Eastern Curlew is special. It is the world's largest wader. It is the signature bird of 'Curlew Island. The estimated world population is between 28,000 and 38,000 and 40-80 are normally present here..

They are faithful to their preferred habitat with the same birds returning to their favoured territory year after year. It is very predictable where they may be found.

At low tide they may be seen feeding on the western side of the sandbanks between the Grand Hotel and Biggera Creek.

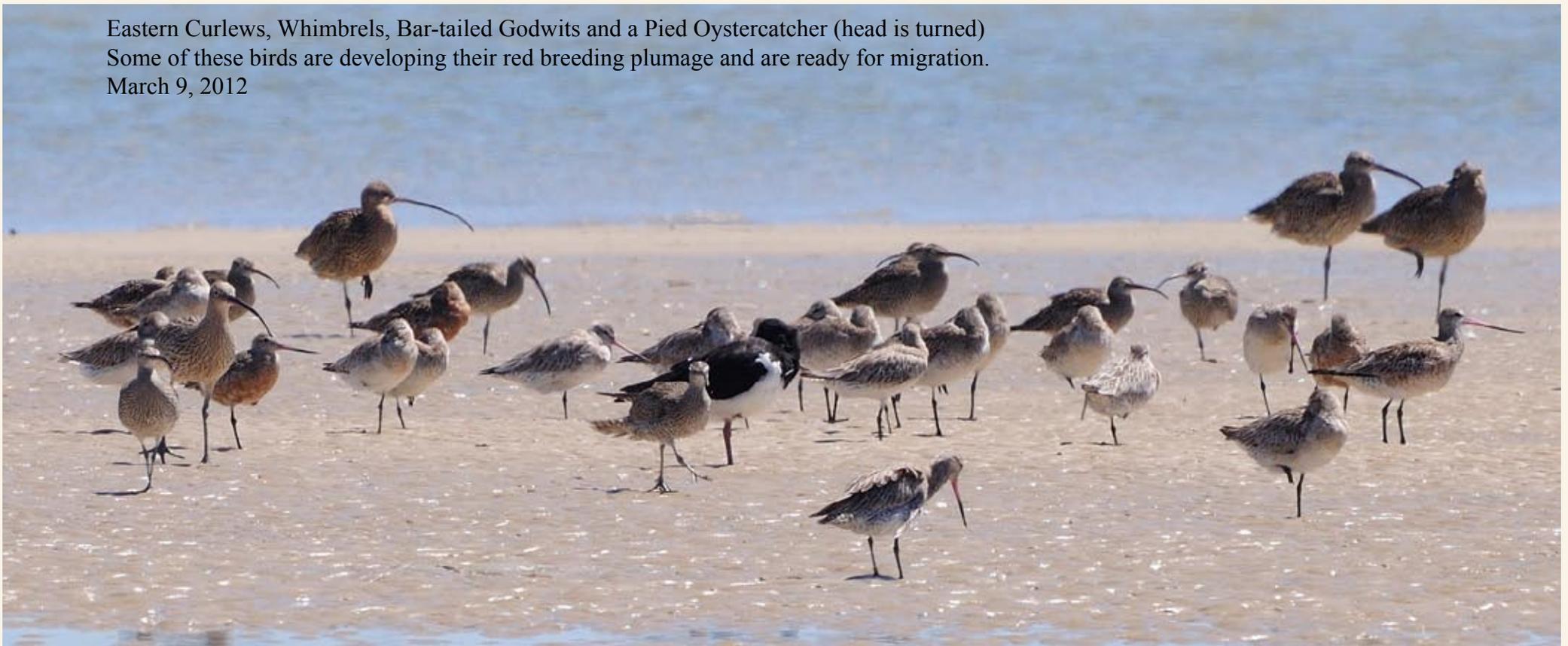


Eastern Curlews
March 29, 2012

Listed EPBC Act



Eastern Curlews, Whimbrels, Bar-tailed Godwits and a Pied Oystercatcher (head is turned)
Some of these birds are developing their red breeding plumage and are ready for migration.
March 9, 2012





Silver Gulls and Crested Terns

These are the most common birds on the Broadwater. They frequently form flocks of 200-400 birds.

During summer there are also large flocks of Common Terns and they often mix with the Crested Terns.

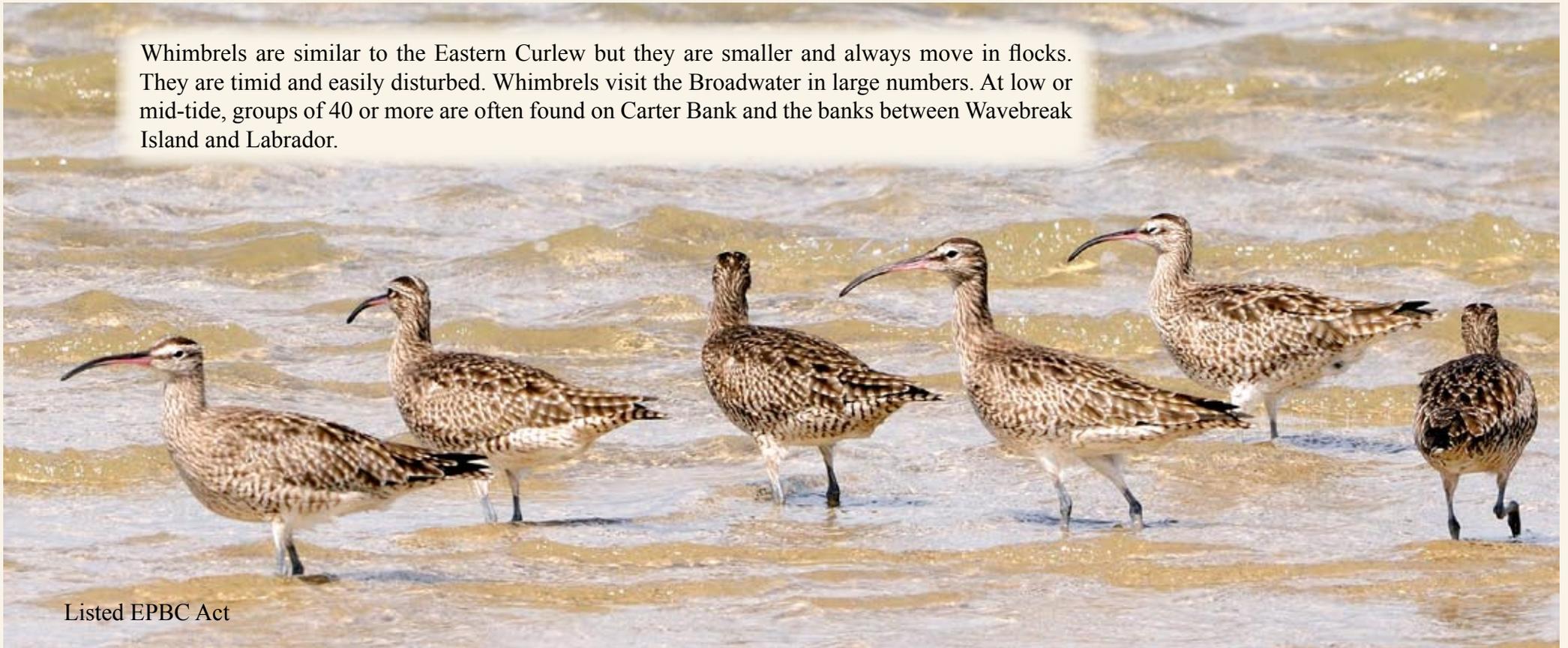


Estimated number of birds in Photo.

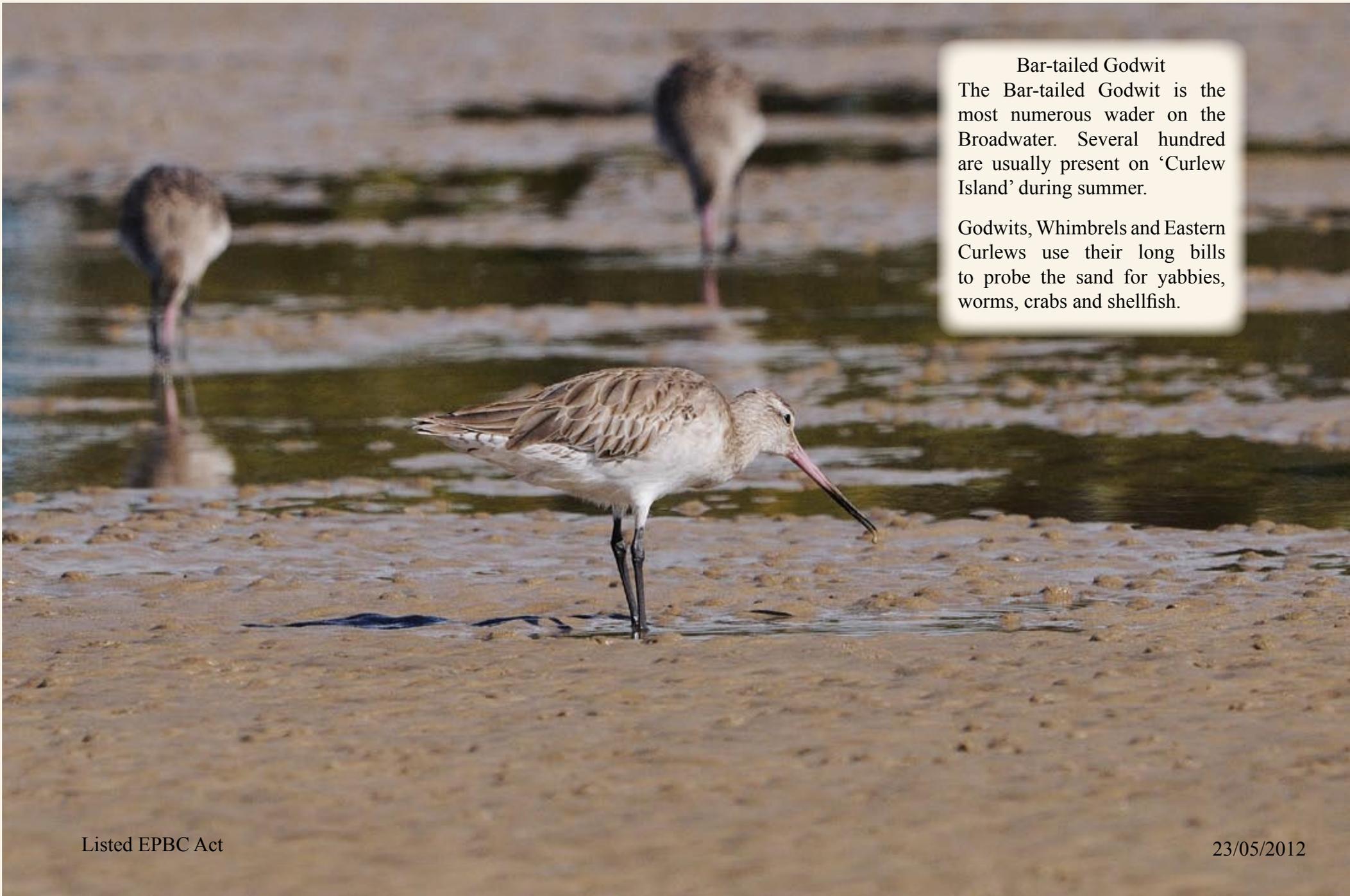
Eastern Curlews	26
Bar-tailed Godwits	84
Whimbrels	83
Crested Terns	141
Silver Gulls	46
Common Terns	6
Pied Oystercatchers	2
Total	388

There are a further 23 birds in the background on page 5 but they are too distant to identify.

Whimbrels are similar to the Eastern Curlew but they are smaller and always move in flocks. They are timid and easily disturbed. Whimbrels visit the Broadwater in large numbers. At low or mid-tide, groups of 40 or more are often found on Carter Bank and the banks between Wavebreak Island and Labrador.



Listed EPBC Act



Bar-tailed Godwit
The Bar-tailed Godwit is the most numerous wader on the Broadwater. Several hundred are usually present on 'Curlew Island' during summer.

Godwits, Whimbrels and Eastern Curlews use their long bills to probe the sand for yabbies, worms, crabs and shellfish.



Listed EPBC Act

23/05/2012



Double-banded Plovers

These small birds migrate from New Zealand to the East Coast of Australia in Winter. They are one of the few migratory birds which make an East-West journey over the sea.

At high tide on May 23, 2012, there were 84 present on "Curlew Island".

Females are lighter in colour than the male. When these birds are in breeding plumage they have a bright red band across their breast.

The number of Double-banded Plovers which visit the southern Gold Coast Broadwater during winter, is significant under the criteria for the Commonwealth EPBC Act



Listed EPBC Act

18/09/2012

Curlew Sandpiper

These small birds perform very long migrations. They breed on the northern shoreline of Siberia, well inside the Arctic Circle. Their migration destinations include Europe, South Africa, India and Australia.

They were once present in large numbers along the Australian coast during summer but in recent years there has been a large drop in numbers visiting all world destinations, prompting concern for the survival of the specie.

The photo below shows them feeding with Bar-tailed Godwits and a Whimbrel.



Red-necked Stint & Red-capped Plover

17/08/2012



Listed EPBC Act

Red-necked Stint

The Red-necked Stint (Left above) was an early lone arrival in August on the Broadwater and made friends with a family of resident Red-capped Plovers.

These birds are only 3-16 cm and they are our smallest migratory bird. They breed in the Siberian and Alaskan tundra zones of the Arctic and migrate to Australia and New Zealand through Asia and India. They usually move in flocks of several hundred along the Australian coastline during summer.

In former times flocks of hundreds were observed on 'Curlew Island' but in recent times they are fewer in number.



Gull-billed Tern

The Gull-billed Tern is a large tern with a heavy black bill. They are found in low numbers on every continent. They like their own company and prefer tidal flats and salt pans to the open sea. They may be found on inland Australia lake shores. A small number are usually present on the Gold Coast Broadwater.

The Caspian Tern is a large solitary Tern and one or two are usually present on the Broadwater sandbanks.



Listed EPBC Act

Common Terns are summer migrants from SE Asia. They arrive in early summer in several flocks of about 200 birds and then mingle with the Crested Terns.



Listed EPBC Act



Little Tern

The Little Tern is approximately 1/4 the size of a Silver Gull. The larger Terns in the background of the photo above are Crested Terns.

They are the smallest member of the Tern family to visit SE Qld and are considered an endangered specie. Large numbers have been observed here. They migrate from SE Asia but have been known to breed here on the Broadwater.

Opposite Photo:

The Little Terns are keeping company with Crested Terns, a Caspian Tern and a Common Tern.

18/10/2012



The Golden Plover is a migrant from Alaska and Western Siberia. This bird still has its breeding plumage and is about to moult in to its brown summer colour.



Listed EPBC Act

18/09/2012

The Grey Plover is a migrant from the high tundra in Northern Asia.



Listed EPBC Act

03/10/2012

18/08/2012



Red Capped Plover

Several pairs of this beautiful little resident bird are usually found on the Broadwater for most months of the year. They usually dart from place to place catching their prey and only occasionally allow people to approach them closely.

They are an endangered Australian resident. Most of their natural habitat has been lost to coastal development. They nest in the high tide debris. They need a location where their eggs will not be eaten by rats or walked on by people. If they breed successfully their chicks have to be safe from feral cats and foxes. They will not share a beach with people and domestic dogs.

If human visitation to 'Curlew Island' could be managed there is every likelihood they would breed here.

What is a Bird Roost ?

A roost is a place where a bird may rest or shelter from adverse conditions. Many terrestrial birds roost in trees but most shorebirds are unable or are reluctant to do this. Gulls and Terns have the options of swimming but prefer to roost on a sandy beach. Gulls are very tolerant of human beings and Terns are less so, but they will still roost near human activity.

Waders do not tolerate human presence. They are unable to swim and most of them do not roost in trees such as mangroves. Their prey is the multitude of small marine animals such as worms, yabbies, crabs and shellfish which inhabit the tidal flats of coastal rivers and bays. As the tide rises and their feeding areas are covered, they require a roost where they may wait for the tide to change. This is usually a sandbar or island which stands above the highest annual tide. The location needs to be free of predators such as dingoes, foxes, feral cats, rats, domestic dogs and human beings. They are also subject to attack from the sky by Sea Eagles, Whistling Kites, Brahminy Kites and other birds. To counter these threats they prefer a roost which has clear vision in all directions so they may fly away from approaching danger. Only a small number of suitable wader roosts now exist along the East Australian coast. Each one is valuable. Loss of a strategically placed roost may force birds to fly long distances to an alternate roost or encourage certain species to abandon the area.

'Curlew Island' is a very good roost and at high tide a large number of birds shelter here. It has some problems. It is receiving an increasing number of visitors. If this happens at high tide and the visitors release dogs there is severe disruption to wildlife.

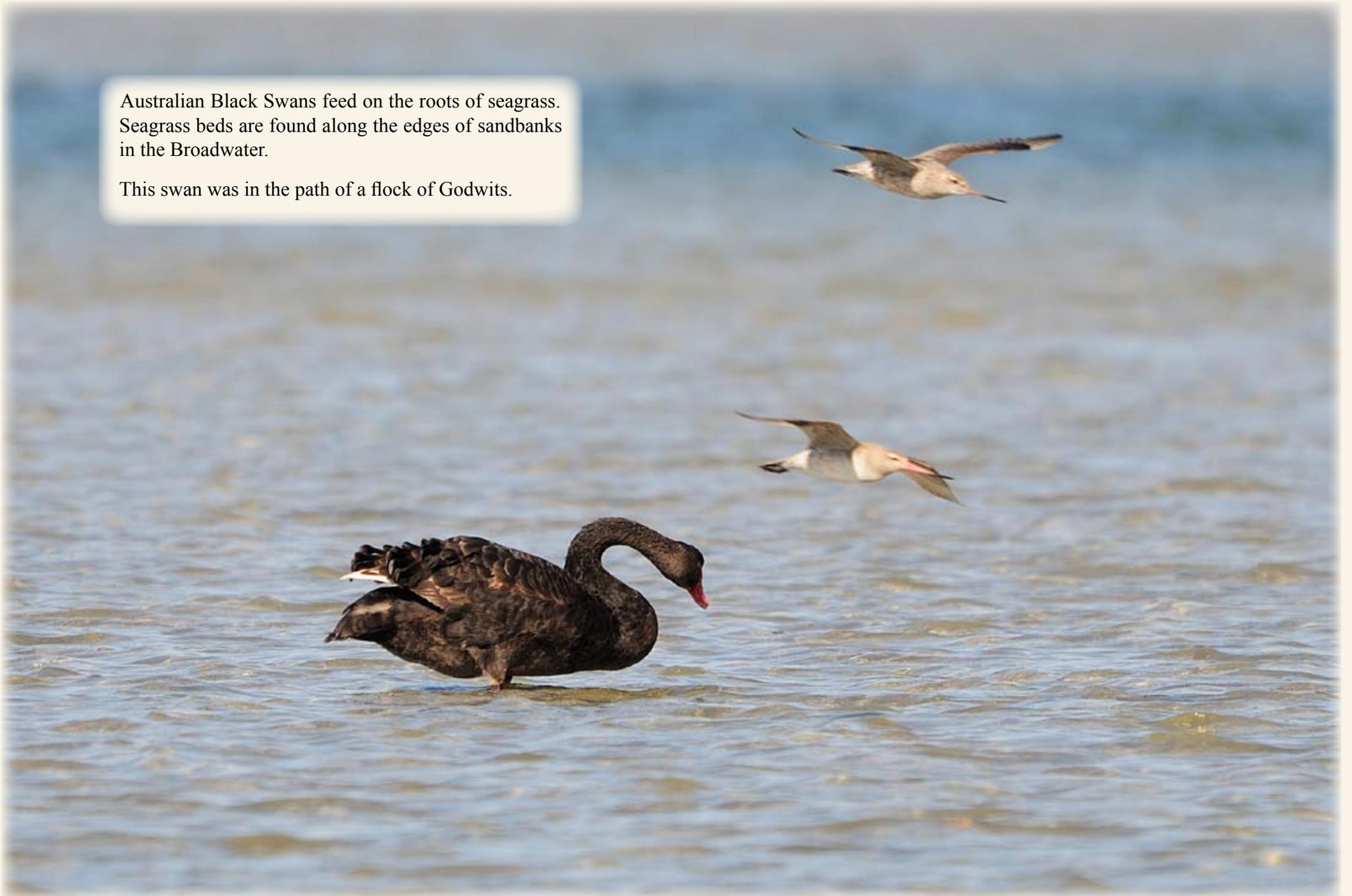
There has been a build up of natural debris along the shore of this island at high tide mark. This is an ideal nesting area for Red-capped Plovers, Little Terns and Pied Oystercatchers. If this island is properly protected we may see these birds breed here.

Pied Oystercatchers are beautiful Australian shorebirds. They do not migrate. It is usual to find about ten on the Broadwater at anyone time. Development and human beach activity have greatly reduced their numbers.



Australian Black Swans feed on the roots of seagrass. Seagrass beds are found along the edges of sandbanks in the Broadwater.

This swan was in the path of a flock of Godwits.



17/08/2012

Australian Pelican

It is usual to find 60 or more of these popular birds on the Broadwater at any one time.





Little Black Cormorants are very common birds on the Broadwater. Sometimes they form tightly packed rafts of about 400 birds. After a while they may fly off as a group or disperse into smaller groups or fish as individuals.

29/03/2012

18/02/2014



Little Egret
SE Qld has three species of Egrets -
Little, Intermediate and Great. All three
have been sighted on Curlew Island.

18/02/2014

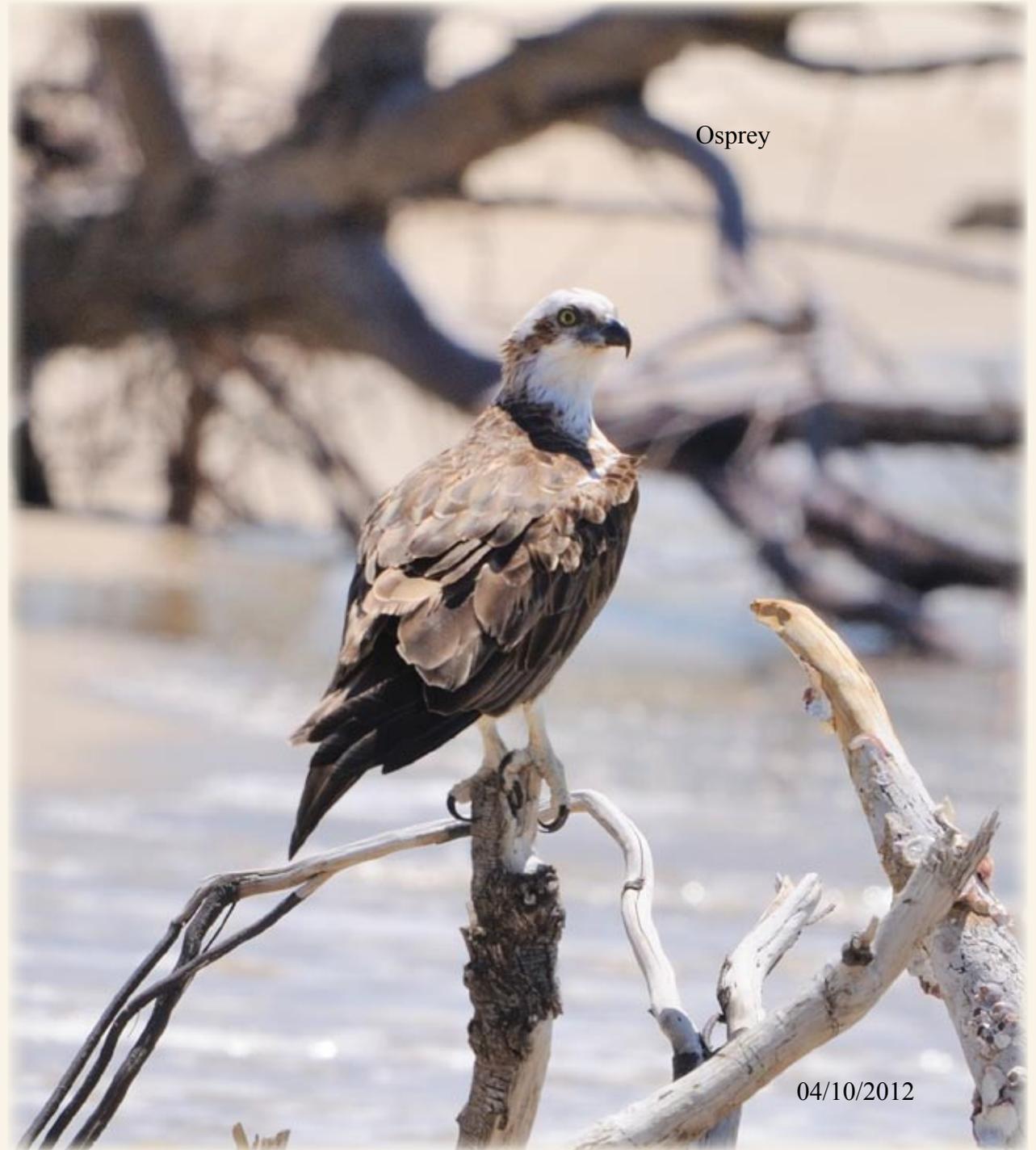


White-faced Heron
Frequently seen on Broadwater
and surrounding areas.



Australian Pipit

17/09/2012

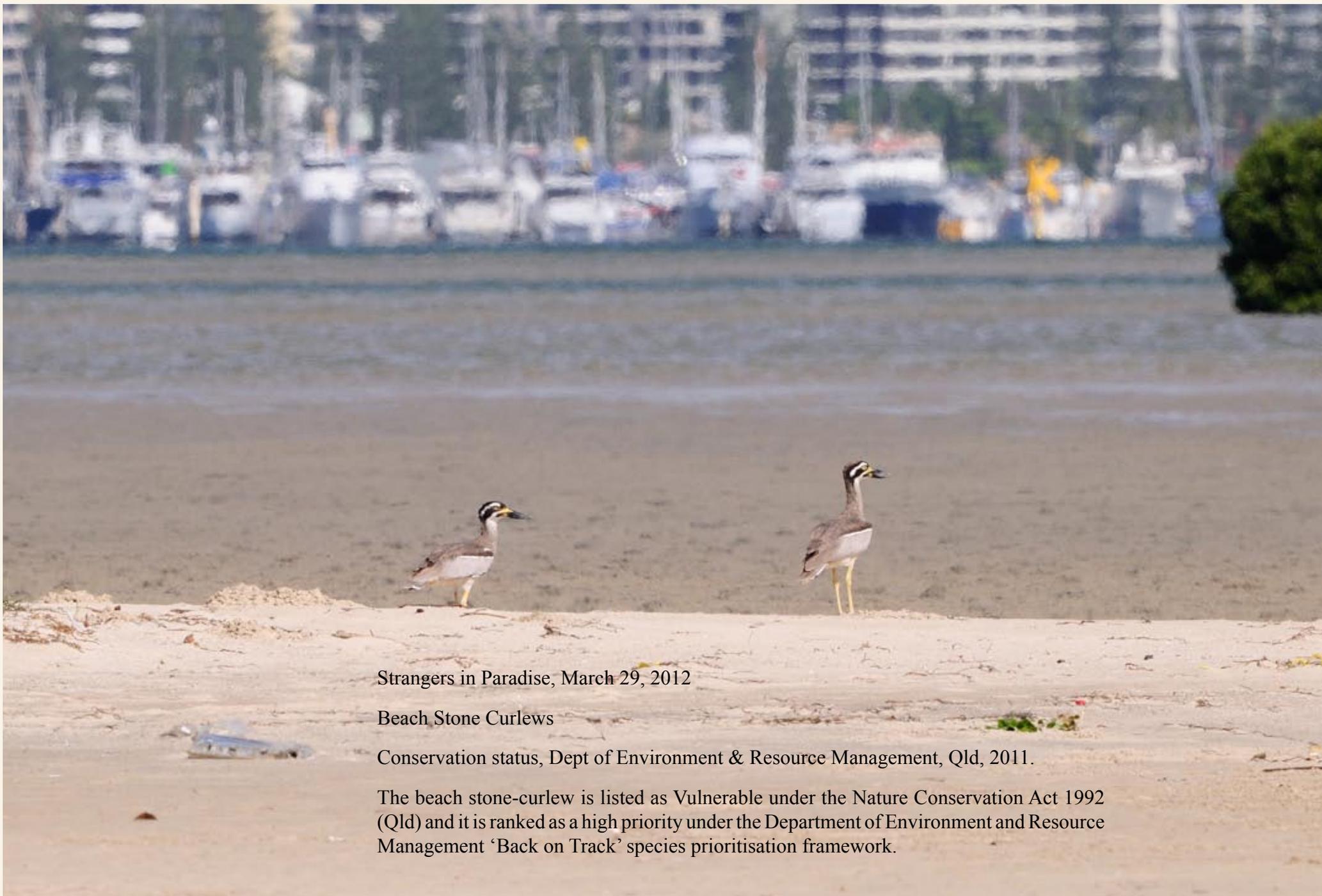


Osprey

04/10/2012

Curlew Island now has a covering of grass and trees. Terrestrial birds are frequently seen here. This Australian Pipit was observed gathering nesting material. At the same time Golden Cisticolas were heard calling.

The main Raptors of the Broadwater are Sea Eagles, Whistling Kites, Brahminy Kites and Ospreys. All four have been seen on 'Curlew Island'.

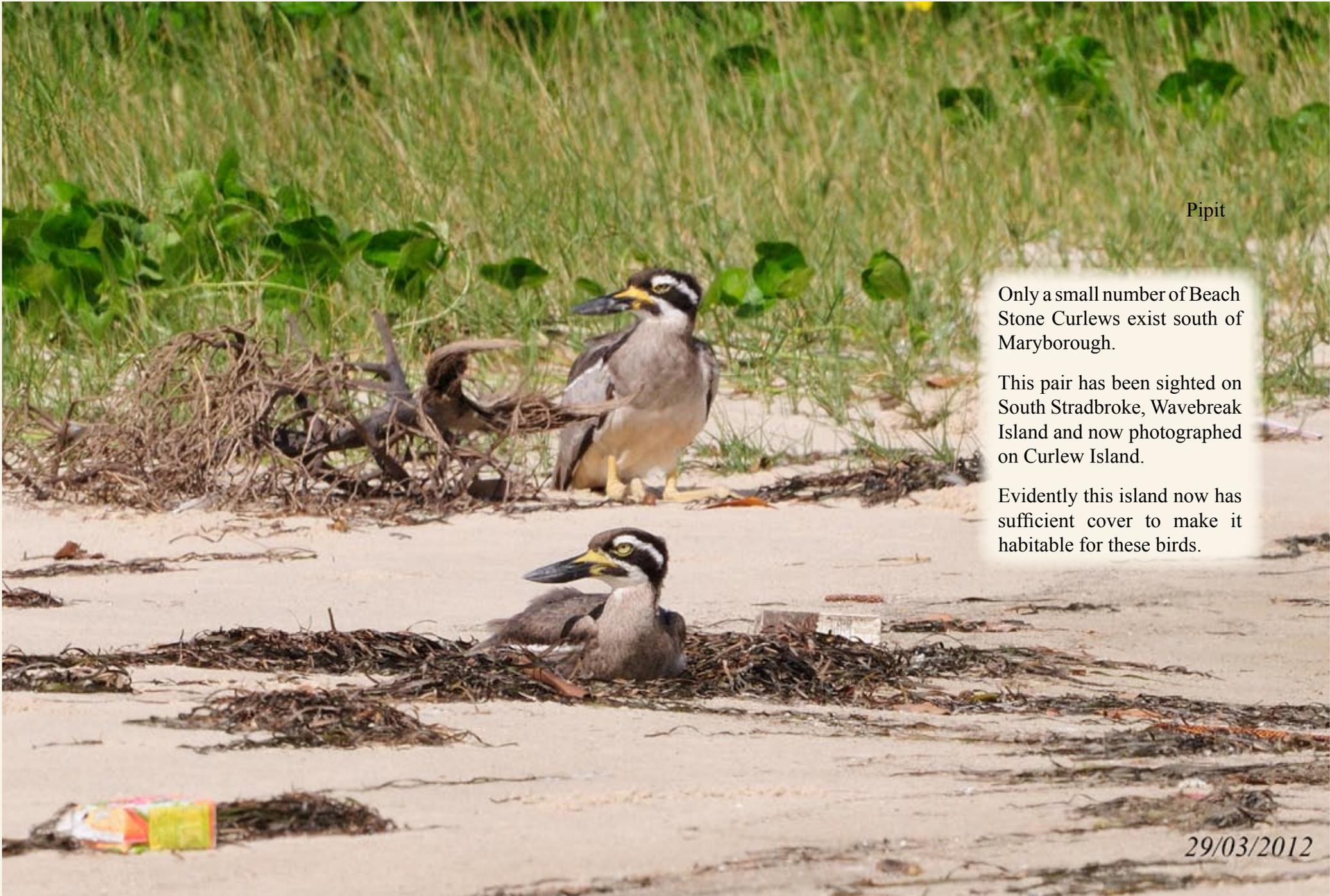


Strangers in Paradise, March 29, 2012

Beach Stone Curlews

Conservation status, Dept of Environment & Resource Management, Qld, 2011.

The beach stone-curlew is listed as Vulnerable under the Nature Conservation Act 1992 (Qld) and it is ranked as a high priority under the Department of Environment and Resource Management 'Back on Track' species prioritisation framework.



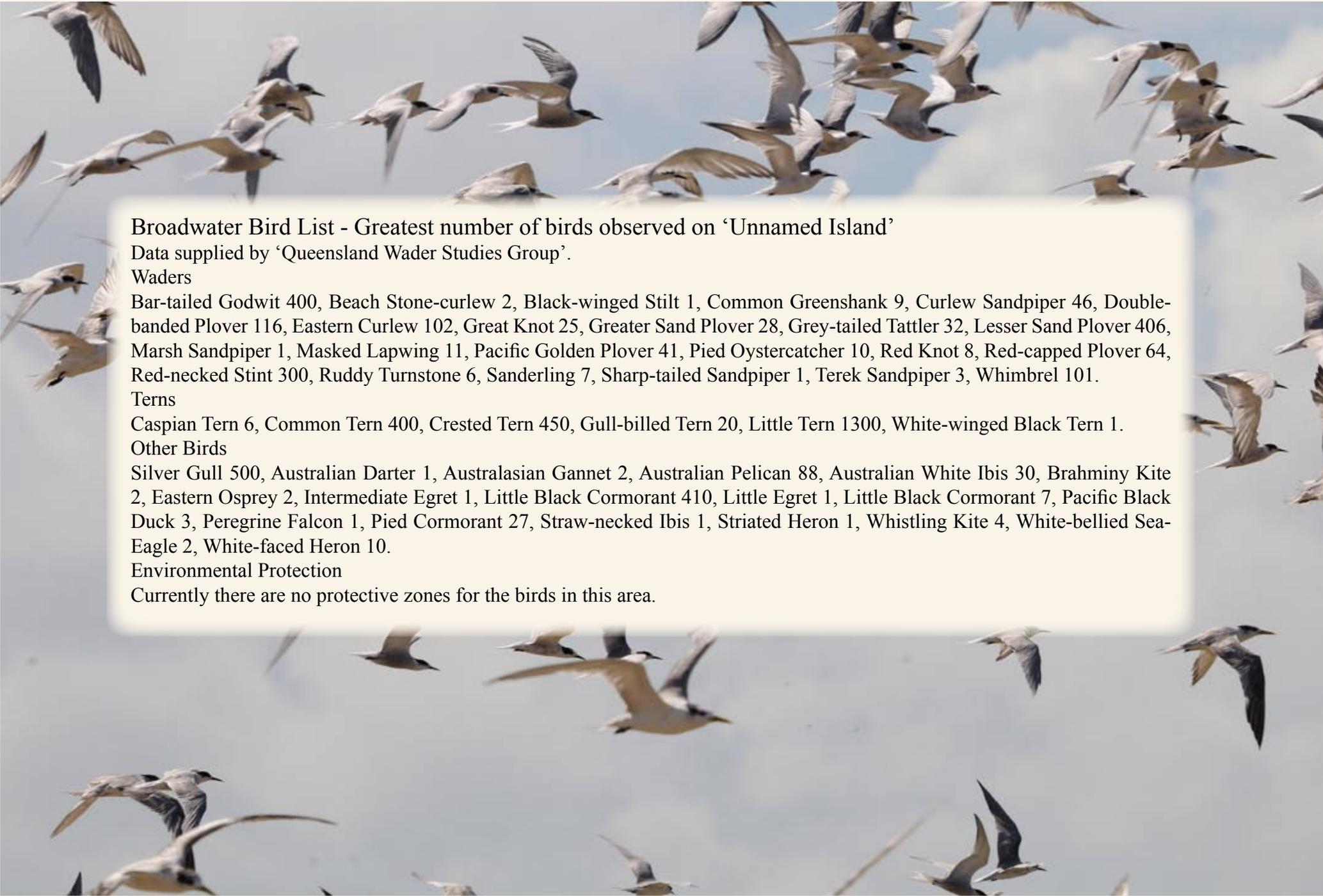
Pipit

Only a small number of Beach Stone Curlews exist south of Maryborough.

This pair has been sighted on South Stradbroke, Wavebreak Island and now photographed on Curlew Island.

Evidently this island now has sufficient cover to make it habitable for these birds.

29/03/2012



Broadwater Bird List - Greatest number of birds observed on 'Unnamed Island'

Data supplied by 'Queensland Wader Studies Group'.

Waders

Bar-tailed Godwit 400, Beach Stone-curlew 2, Black-winged Stilt 1, Common Greenshank 9, Curlew Sandpiper 46, Double-banded Plover 116, Eastern Curlew 102, Great Knot 25, Greater Sand Plover 28, Grey-tailed Tattler 32, Lesser Sand Plover 406, Marsh Sandpiper 1, Masked Lapwing 11, Pacific Golden Plover 41, Pied Oystercatcher 10, Red Knot 8, Red-capped Plover 64, Red-necked Stint 300, Ruddy Turnstone 6, Sanderling 7, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper 1, Terek Sandpiper 3, Whimbrel 101.

Terns

Caspian Tern 6, Common Tern 400, Crested Tern 450, Gull-billed Tern 20, Little Tern 1300, White-winged Black Tern 1.

Other Birds

Silver Gull 500, Australian Darter 1, Australasian Gannet 2, Australian Pelican 88, Australian White Ibis 30, Brahminy Kite 2, Eastern Osprey 2, Intermediate Egret 1, Little Black Cormorant 410, Little Egret 1, Little Black Cormorant 7, Pacific Black Duck 3, Peregrine Falcon 1, Pied Cormorant 27, Straw-necked Ibis 1, Striated Heron 1, Whistling Kite 4, White-bellied Sea-Eagle 2, White-faced Heron 10.

Environmental Protection

Currently there are no protective zones for the birds in this area.

The Friendly Federation Walk

The Federation Walk located on the Spit – Gold Coast is like no other park in the Gold Coast City. Extensive areas have been restored through the planting of native vegetation and weed control to allow for natural regeneration.

Together with Gold Coast City Council the Friends of Federation Walk and community volunteers have spent years of time to make this place the special place it is today. (Refer to Page 2 the Marine map to see what it looked like in 1982).

Just like any piece of coastal reserve it has suffered its disasters. It has been burnt out several times by bushfire and like our natural bushland we have to take care that this does not happen again.

The Federation Walk vegetation communities consist of small patches of coastal woodland and large areas of heath, just like a piece of original Queensland Coast. The bird life is different to what you may find in suburban Gold Coast. A stroll along the Federation Walk is a fresh experience for tourists. With a little patience they are able to find many iconic Australian Birds.

The benefit of this reserve is felt way beyond its boundaries. It is a safe home from which birds are able to forage in other parts of the city. The once rare Bush Stone Curlew is now a common site in the evening around the Broadwater. However, when day breaks some return to the Spit haven for their day camp.

These pages are a mere glimpse of what lives here. All photos in the following pages were shot on the Federation Walk or on a nearby track.



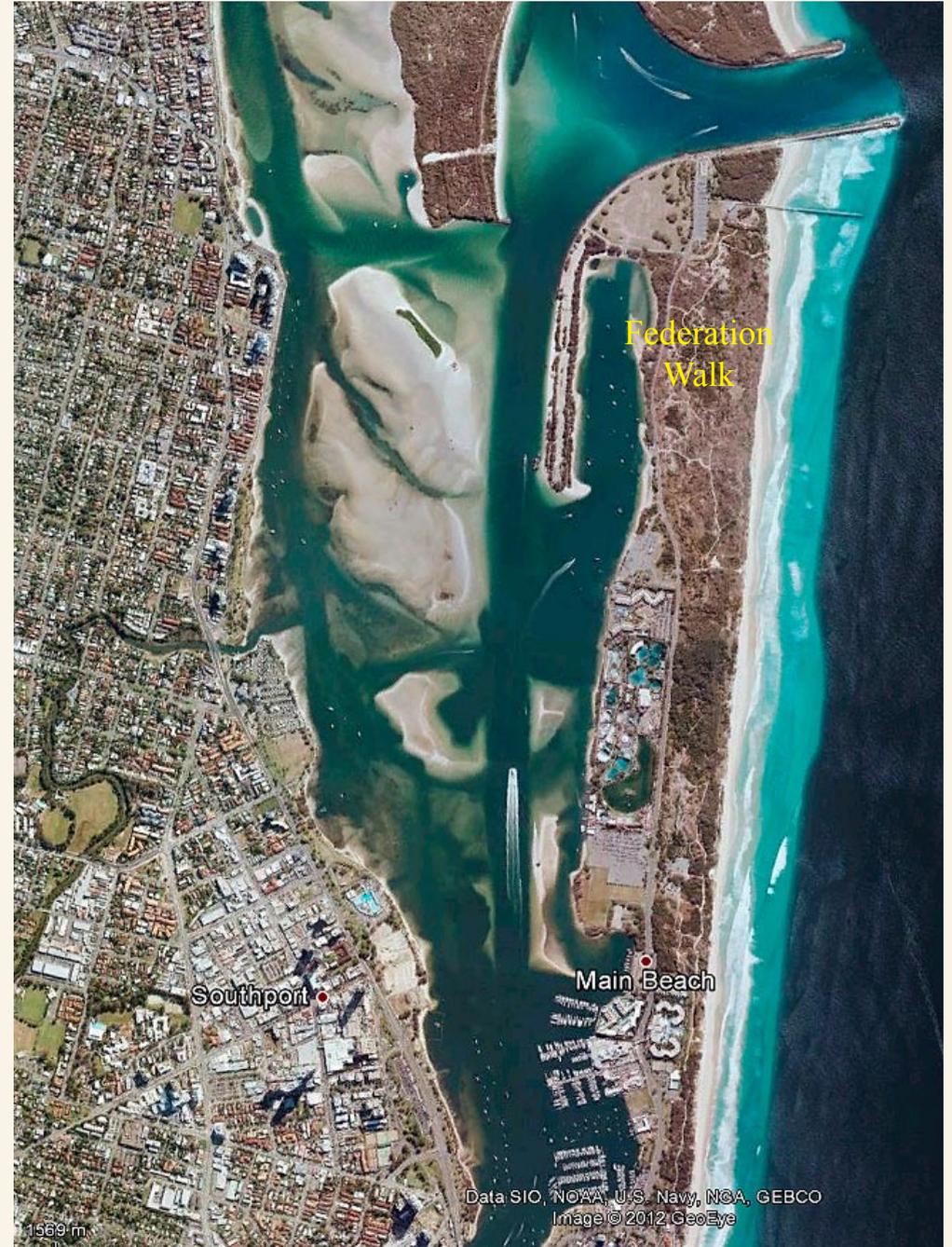
Bush Stone Curlew



Bar-shouldered Doves



Rainbow Bee-eater



The above map is a computer screen shot from 'Google Earth'.

Willy Wagtail



Noisy Friarbird



Brown Honeyeater
Having a bad hair day



Superb-blue Fairy Wren



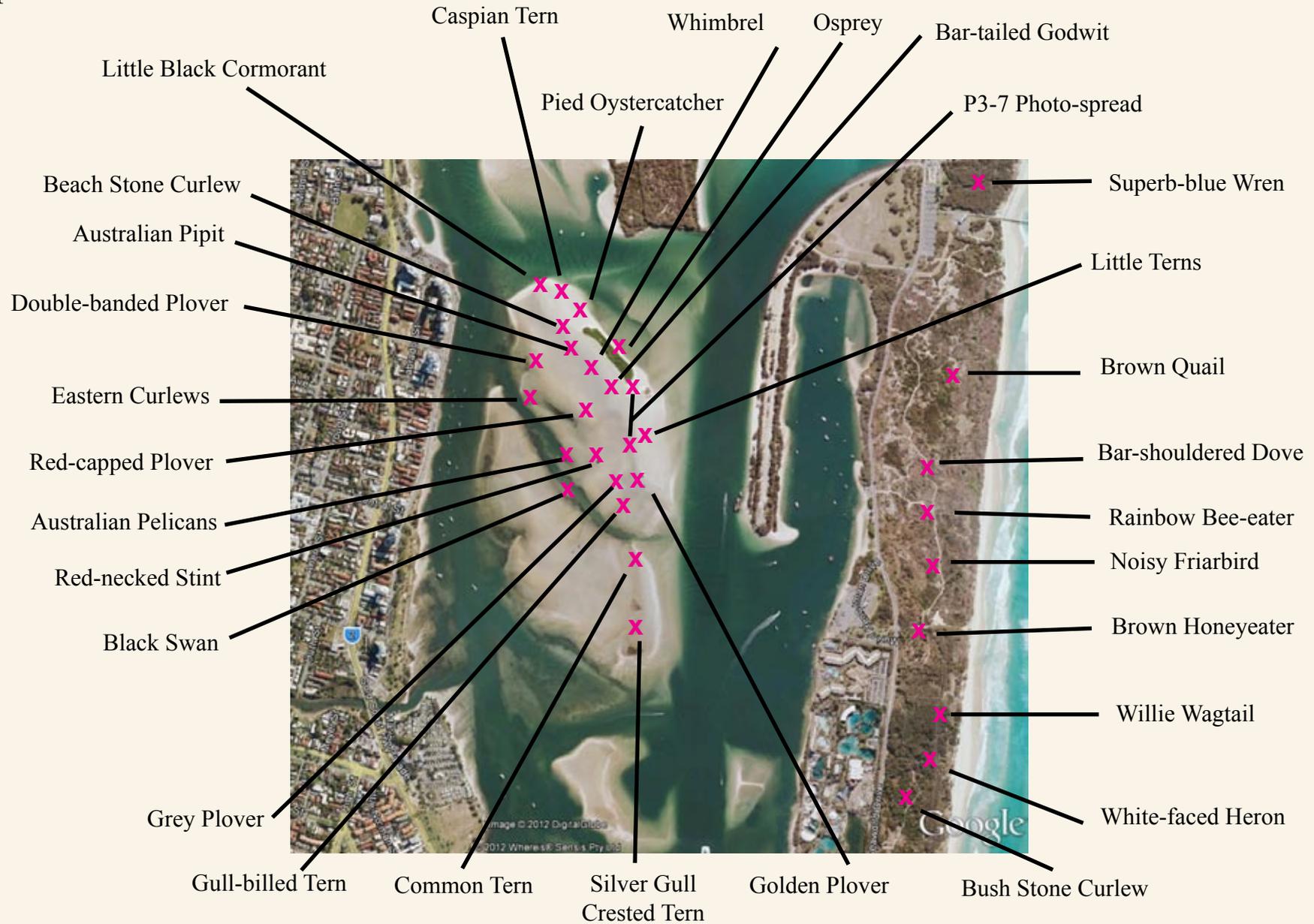
White-faced Heron





Brown Quail

Where the photos were taken.



About the Photos

All the photos were taken with a Nikon D300 camera and a Sigma 500mm lens. The camera was fitted with a GPS unit which records global position of the camera and Universal time and date. Images were recorded in NEF Raw format. No matter how the image is modified the original data is retained. All photos are authentic.

Where the Broadwater Birds are Found

Carter Bank: This bank is north of Wavebreak Island. It may be viewed from Marine Parade, Labrador. Carter Bank is submerged at high tide. However when the banks become exposed Eastern Curlews, Godwits, Whimbrels, Terns and Gulls roost on the bank and feed in the surrounding areas. Carter Bank is subject to frequent human visitation and this influences the number of birds which are present at any one time.

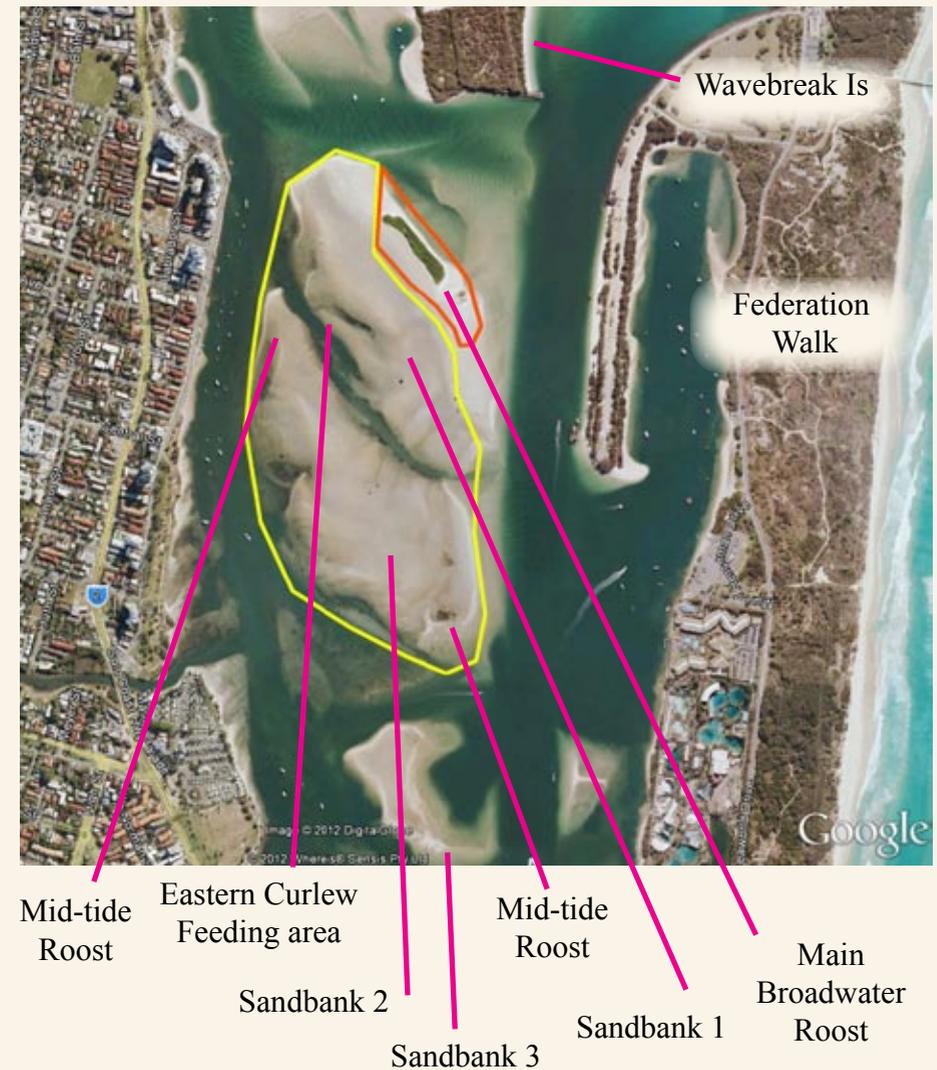
Wavebreak Island: Wavebreak is subject to heavy visitation on holidays and the week-end. During those times only a small number of shorebirds are present on its beaches. However in quiet times the western beach of the island is popular with shorebirds. Whimbrels, Godwits, Pied Oystercatchers, Pied Cormorants and Little Black Cormorants are found here.

Wavebreak Is Banks: These banks are between the island and the mainland and become exposed at half-tide to low-tide. They are visible from the boat ramp near the Grand Hotel. Many Whimbrels feed here.

Curlew Island: This is the most important bird site on the Broadwater. It is usual to see in excess of 400 birds here at high tide. It is the principal high tide roost for most of the birds using the Broadwater. It is the only point between Carter Bank and the Gold Coast Bridge where birds have a roost which stands above the highest tide of the year, avoids human disturbance and allows birds to see the approach of predators. It is also at the centre of their preferred feeding grounds.

Broadwater Sandbanks 1 and 2: This is the principal feeding habitat for migratory waders and other shorebirds on the Broadwater. The banks beside the shallow channel between 1 and 2 is where the majority of Eastern Curlews may be found at low tide. Hundreds of birds may be found on these banks when they become exposed at low tide. There are currently no conservation arrangements in place for the valuable habitat of these banks and the 'Curlew Island'.

At high tide a large number of birds congregate on the sandbar running off the southern end of the 'Unnamed' island. A lesser number are sometimes present on the sandbar running to the north-west of the island. As the tide drops a large number of birds occupy the banks immediately in front of the Grand Hotel. As the tide drops further most birds leave this area, abandon the 'Unnamed' island and spread out over the western side of banks 1 and 2. There tends to be mid-tide roosts for terns and gulls at the northerly tip of bank 2 and the southerly tip of bank 2.



Broadwater Sandbank 3: This is opposite Broadwater Park. It has a low level of bird activity. Several Eastern Curlews are often present here.

Firsherman's Wharf Island: This is a high water roost. It is mainly used by Silver Gulls and Crested Terns. It is close to human activity and a only small number of migratory waders, mainly Godwits, use it.

Protection

There is a concern that there has been a dramatic decline in Wader numbers along the East Coast of Australia in recent years.

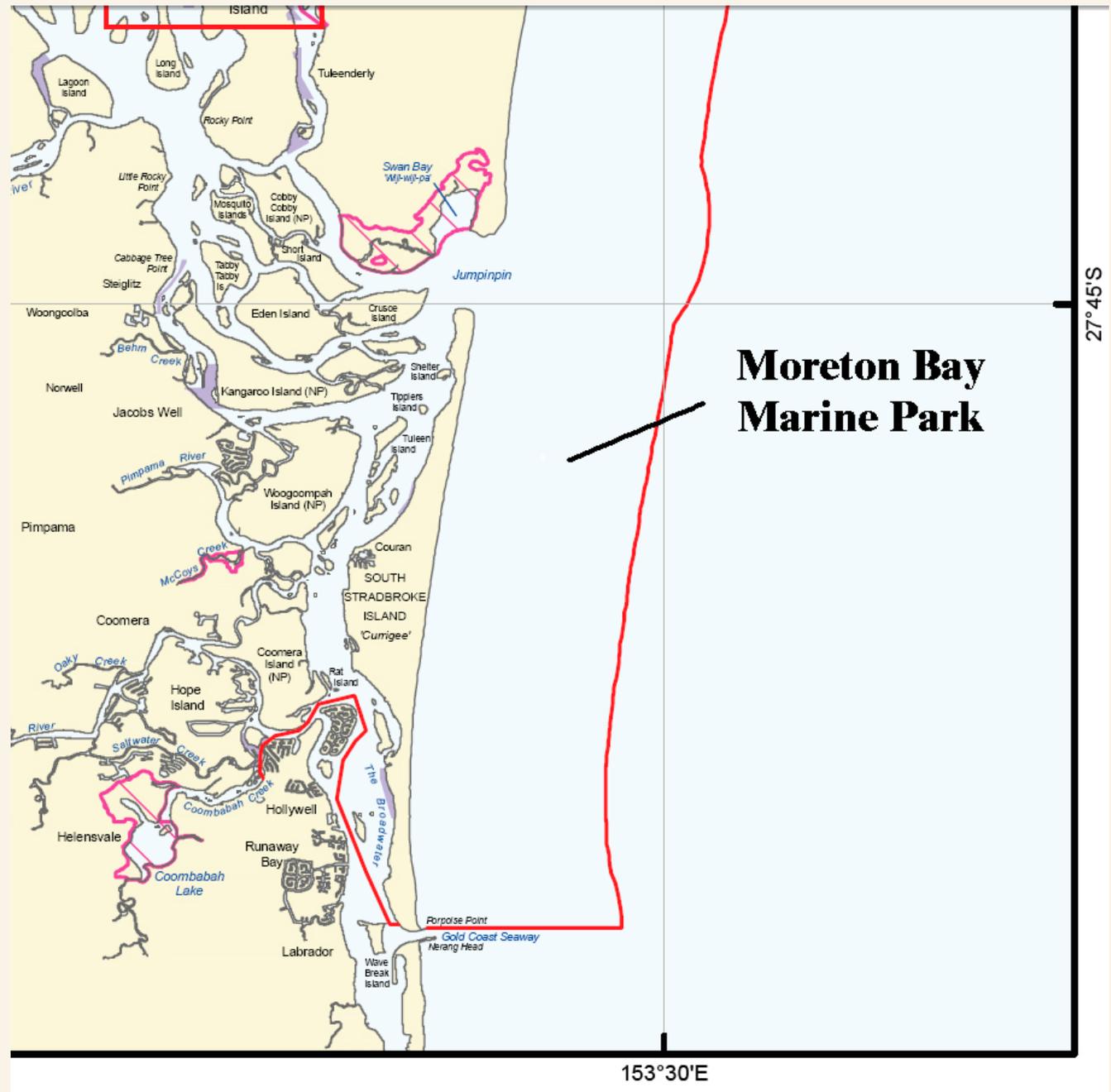
There has been a loss of habitat throughout their range, particularly in Northern China and Korea where there has been large scale reclamation of coastal mud flats (their feeding grounds) for industrial development. Waders use these areas as a refueling stop on their journey north.

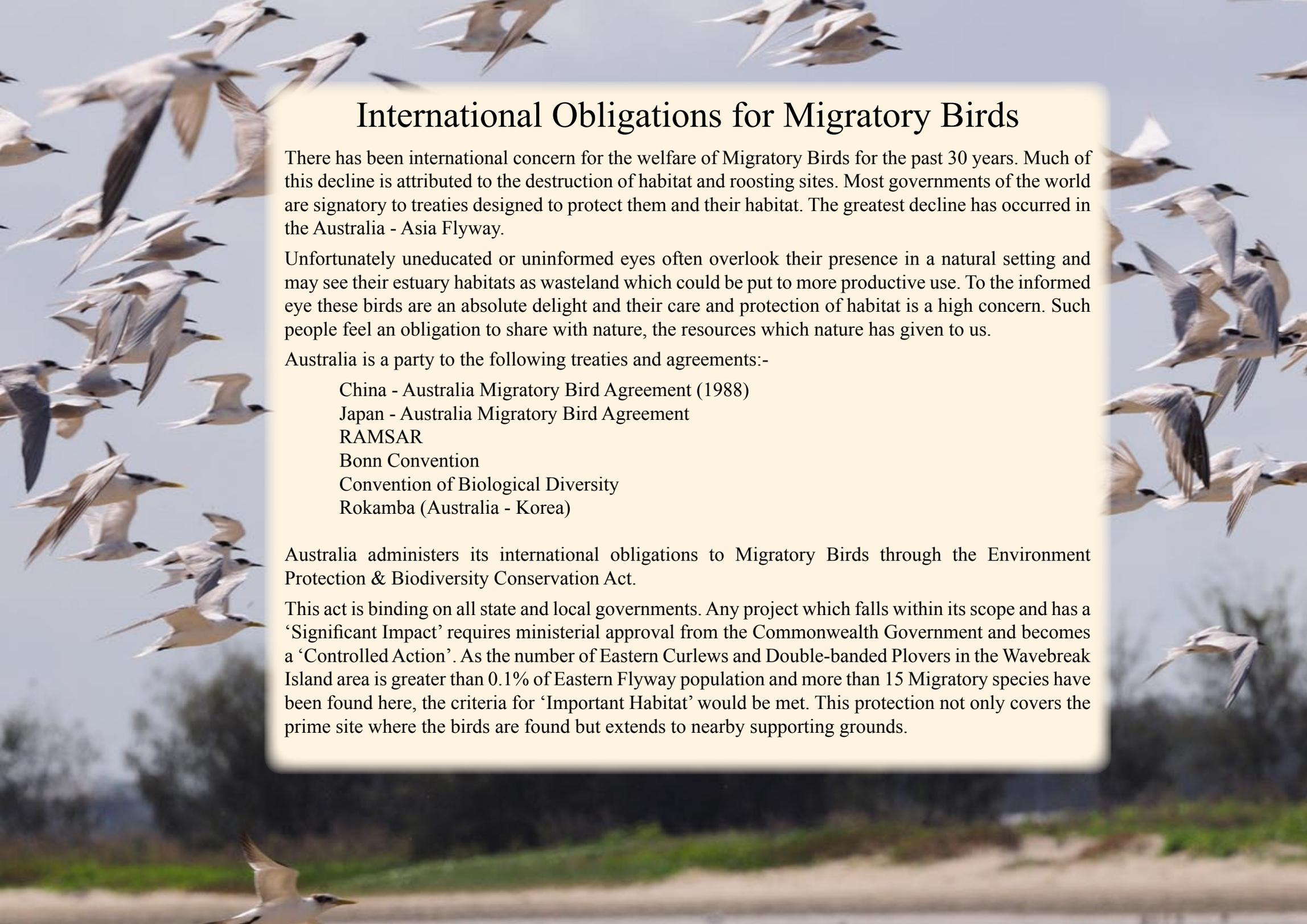
Wader sites in Moreton Bay are given some protection by RAMSAR and the Moreton Bay Marine Park.

The Broadwater extends from the Gold Coast bridge at Southport to the Jumpinpin Bar. However most people associate this term with the water between Southport-Labrador foreshore and the ‘Gold Coast Spit’.

The Moreton Bay Marine Park extends into the ‘Broadwater’ but finishes in a line between the mouth of the Coomera River and the Gold Coast Seaway.

There is significant Wader activity south of the marine park boundary. This includes Carter Bank, Wavebreak Island, the sandbanks south of Wavebreak Island and ‘Unnamed Island’. The wildlife here has little protection because this area falls outside the Moreton Bay Marine Park. Apart from reference to the EPBC Act there are few enforceable environmental guidelines for commercial activities or development.





International Obligations for Migratory Birds

There has been international concern for the welfare of Migratory Birds for the past 30 years. Much of this decline is attributed to the destruction of habitat and roosting sites. Most governments of the world are signatory to treaties designed to protect them and their habitat. The greatest decline has occurred in the Australia - Asia Flyway.

Unfortunately uneducated or uninformed eyes often overlook their presence in a natural setting and may see their estuary habitats as wasteland which could be put to more productive use. To the informed eye these birds are an absolute delight and their care and protection of habitat is a high concern. Such people feel an obligation to share with nature, the resources which nature has given to us.

Australia is a party to the following treaties and agreements:-

- China - Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (1988)

- Japan - Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

- RAMSAR

- Bonn Convention

- Convention of Biological Diversity

- Rokamba (Australia - Korea)

Australia administers its international obligations to Migratory Birds through the Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act.

This act is binding on all state and local governments. Any project which falls within its scope and has a 'Significant Impact' requires ministerial approval from the Commonwealth Government and becomes a 'Controlled Action'. As the number of Eastern Curlews and Double-banded Plovers in the Wavebreak Island area is greater than 0.1% of Eastern Flyway population and more than 15 Migratory species have been found here, the criteria for 'Important Habitat' would be met. This protection not only covers the prime site where the birds are found but extends to nearby supporting grounds.