

Queensland Wader Study Group Newsletter No 6 June 1992

The Queensland Wader Study Group (QWSG) is a special interest group of the Queensland Ornithological Society Inc.

QWSG MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

CHAIRPERSON: Peter Driscoll
SECRETARY: Julien Bielewicz
TREASURER: Gary Harch
NEWSLETTER EDITORS: Andrew Geering and Margaret Bernard
COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Ian Gynther, Eddie Hegerl, Kees Hulsman, Kris Kristensen, Michael Lewis, David Stewart, Elizabeth Teakle.

QWSG NEWSLETTER

Contributions to the newsletter should be addressed to A. Geering and M. Bernard. Contributions can also be sent via fax (please forewarn us if you intend to use fax). Newsletters are published in March, June, September and December. Copy deadline for the next newsletter is May 31st, 1993. Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual contributors and are not necessarily those of the QWSG, nor the Queensland Ornithological Society.

Annual General Meeting

WHERE? QUEENSLAND MUSEUM THEATRE (entry is via Dinosaur Garden in Grey Street)
WHEN? THURSDAY, 19 AUGUST
WHAT TIME? 7.30 PM*

- AGENDA:**
- Reports from the incumbent management committee.
 - Election of a new management committee.
 - Short talk by Dr. Ian Gynther "Where the hell is Australia?? Navigation by migratory waders."
 - We hope, to have a second speaker from the Department of Environment and Heritage who will speak on the new marine park for, Moreton Bay.
 - Slide presentation of recent QWSG activities.
 - Coffee/tea and light supper.
- **Gates open at 6.45 pm. It is important to be punctual** as the gates will be locked by the museum security soon after 7.30 pm. If the gates are locked, security can be contacted by using the wall phone-to the right of the glass doors - dial 6 and ask to be let in.

Editorial

In this newsletter, you will find the first notice of an expedition to northern NSW which will be jointly run by the QWSG and the NSW Wader Study Group. We hope that many country members from both groups will participate in this expedition.

As the majority of founders of the QWSG live in the Brisbane district, it is perhaps inevitable that in the first year of operation, all QWSG activities have been in south-eastern Queensland. However, the Management Committee is looking at ways of expanding activities to more northern areas in Queensland. We have been approached by Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service to do some banding in the Great Sandy Straits, and to initiate, a regular program of surveys. We welcome suggestions on where else we could go, and encourage local community groups to become involved with the Organisation and running of expeditions.

Regular surveys of waders are conducted in Moreton Bay and Pumicestone Passage, but not anywhere else. We need small groups of people to start doing counts at other places - either along the coast or inland. For example, Cairns, an area of national importance for Common Sandpiper, Whimbrel and Pacific Golden Plover,

is also an area of rapid tourist development, and we have little knowledge of the effect of these developments on the local wader population.

Andrew Geering and Margaret Bernard

Telescope day

I wouldn't mind some new binoculars ... or perhaps a telescope would be nice, so I can finally distinguish between a Large Sand Plover and a Mongolian Plover. These thoughts may cross your mind when you open the letter box in August and find a whopping big cheque from the Australian Taxation Office. We live in hope.

It is sometimes difficult to evaluate different brands of binoculars or telescopes without taking them into the field for some real life testing. York Opticals in Fortitude Valley is providing a selection of their wares for this very purpose. If you come down to Lytton Roost on Saturday 21 August between 10:00 am and 1:00 pm, then you will have a rare opportunity to test a wide selection of telescopes and binoculars. You will so get a chance to fine tune your identification skills, and socialise with other members in a more leisurely atmosphere (at least at a more civilised time!) than is normally found on a cannon netting day.

Lytton Roost is on the right hand side of Port Drive (if heading towards Fishermans Island), and is opposite the Sewerage Treatment Plant. The UBD reference is Map No. 21, A7. If you have any further enquiries, please contact Gary Harch (#####).

Earthwatch

As a result of the great success of the first Earthwatch expedition hosted by the QWSG, two more expeditions will be held in March and October, 1994. Although the expeditions are very productive, they require a lot of Organisation and an intense period of work by the QWSG. We therefore need volunteers to help run the expeditions. Assistance is needed with cannon netting, wader surveys, local transport, shopping and meal preparation and provision of entertainment during the evening and on the weekend. The organisers of the first expedition found the experience very rewarding. If you are interested in helping with the next expeditions, please contact Peter Driscoll.

Wader identification

Beginning next issue, Mike Lewis and I will begin a regular article on wader identification. In each article, either particular species or a group of similar/difficult species will be covered, looking at major identification points, ageing characteristics and pit-falls.

Prior knowledge of distinct feather tracts and bird topography would be an advantage, and can be gained from general wader identification books such as *Shorebirds* by Hayman, Marchant and Prater, or *Guide to the Identification and Ageing of Holartic Waders* by Prater, Marchant and Vuorinen.

Two terms that will be used regularly through the articles are BASIC and ALTERNATIVE plumages. These terms are probably unfamiliar to most readers, but have many advantages and should be incorporated into every observers vocabulary. Basic plumage is what most people know as "non-breeding", "eclipse" or "winter" plumage. However, these three terms may be confusing as the birds are in Australia during our summer, and they may not necessarily be of a reproductive age. Alternative plumage is also called "breeding", "nuptial" or "summer" plumage. Likewise, these three terms may be confusing.

If anyone has particular identification subjects that they wish us to cover, please contact me
David Stewart

Expedition to northern NSW

The QWSG and the NSW WSG are jointly running a wader banding trip to the Clarence River estuary in northern NSW. The dates for the trip are 13-15 November. The tentative plan is for people to arrive on Saturday, set up the cannon nets, and fire on Sunday at one or both high tides (7:15 am and 7:45 pm) and again on Monday at the morning high tide (8:00 am). The roosts have good numbers of Whimbrel, Great Knot, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits, Lesser Golden Plover, and at times, both Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers. Further details of the trip will appear in the next newsletter.

The trip should be very productive as there will be a large pool of equipment and expertise. It will also be a great opportunity to meet fellow birders from as far afield as Sydney. Some of the organisers of this trip are also very involved with Shortlands Wetland Centre near Newcastle. Shortlands is an inspiring example of 'grass roots' conservation, through community action, a disused football field was converted into a valuable wildlife refuge and education Centre.

NB. The next Australasian Wader Studies Group expedition to Broome/80 Mile Beach/Port Hedland Saltworks will take place in March/April 1994. An extended 8 week visit has been planned because of the exciting data gathered this April on visible departures of migrants setting off on their 5000 km/3 day non-stop flight to China. Altogether, 36 000 waders in 370 flocks were seen departing from the 'assembly point' at Roebuck Bay, Broome, on 22 days. For the first time, accurate and quantifiable data on the exact departure periods of each species was obtained. *Inter alia*, this greatly aids the assessment of take-off weights.

In addition to migration watches, there will be regular counts and daily cannon netting. Upon arrival at Broome, costs are moderate: \$5/day for camping in Broome, \$15/day for food, and \$100 (max. \$300) per week for 4WD hire and other costs. If you are interested in participating, please contact either -
Clive Minton or Doug Watkins

Wader Count Program

The wader count program organised through the QWSG and supported by the Dept of Environment and Heritage has been running for 15 months and a report has been prepared to cover this period. Much of the data has been distributed to people doing the counts and QWSG is happy to make the report available to any member upon request. With the good will of those involved, the program will continue according to the normal schedule of count days given in this newsletter. There will be some changes to the procedures we have been using and counters will be advised of these over the next few months. Further interpretations of the data will be made and where it seems appropriate information will be published in *The Stilt* or *Sunbird*.

We need more people to participate in the counting to spread the workload (but it's fun) and to ensure that we're able to regularly count the major roosts. There are a number of important sites that are still not being counted (eg. Cabbage Tree Creek, Hays Inlet, southern parts of the Bay) and others where we need people to help, or take over at times when the regular person is not available. This work has only been possible through the voluntary participation of more than 30 people. The QWSG Committee is most grateful to all those involved and will endeavour to use the data to the greatest possible benefit of the birds and their environment.

Over 420,000 counts of birds were reported on 364 count sheets, mostly from high tide roosts in Moreton Bay and Pumicestone Passage. Other counts were made at other times of the tide on feeding grounds and these are being analysed separately by the Dept of Environment and Heritage. Perhaps the most important aspect of the project is that it is a beginning. The data will be most useful as part of a long term monitoring program (hopefully over a minimum of five years) that will complement work by other wader study groups throughout Australia. We need to monitor wader numbers in view of the increasing threats to habitat here and overseas.

As an example of some aspects of the data the figures on the following pages show the location of major roost sites that have been counted, and the total number of migratory waders recorded at some of these sites throughout the year. The maximum number of birds for any one graph is shown at the top left of the figure and counts at different times are indicated across the bottom of the graph (March 1992 to May 1993, seasons separated by vertical lines). The last four graphs are for particular sites whereas the first graph shows the total for the combination of sites AMPO, BSIS, CLRB, FICP, LYN2, LYTT, MAHA, MIPO, REPO, and LUPO (see site locations). Only three values are given because these are the only days when data were available from all of these sites. This graph shows a total of about 20,000 birds for January when numbers are most stable and represents a significant proportion of the birds in Moreton Bay at this time of year. The overall changes through the seasons are best illustrated by the second graph which includes counts from AMPO, CLRB, LYTT, LUPO and MAHA. These sites were counted most regularly although by combining counts for all species the seasonal pattern is less clear because different species have different arrival and departure times. The data have been analysed for individual species.

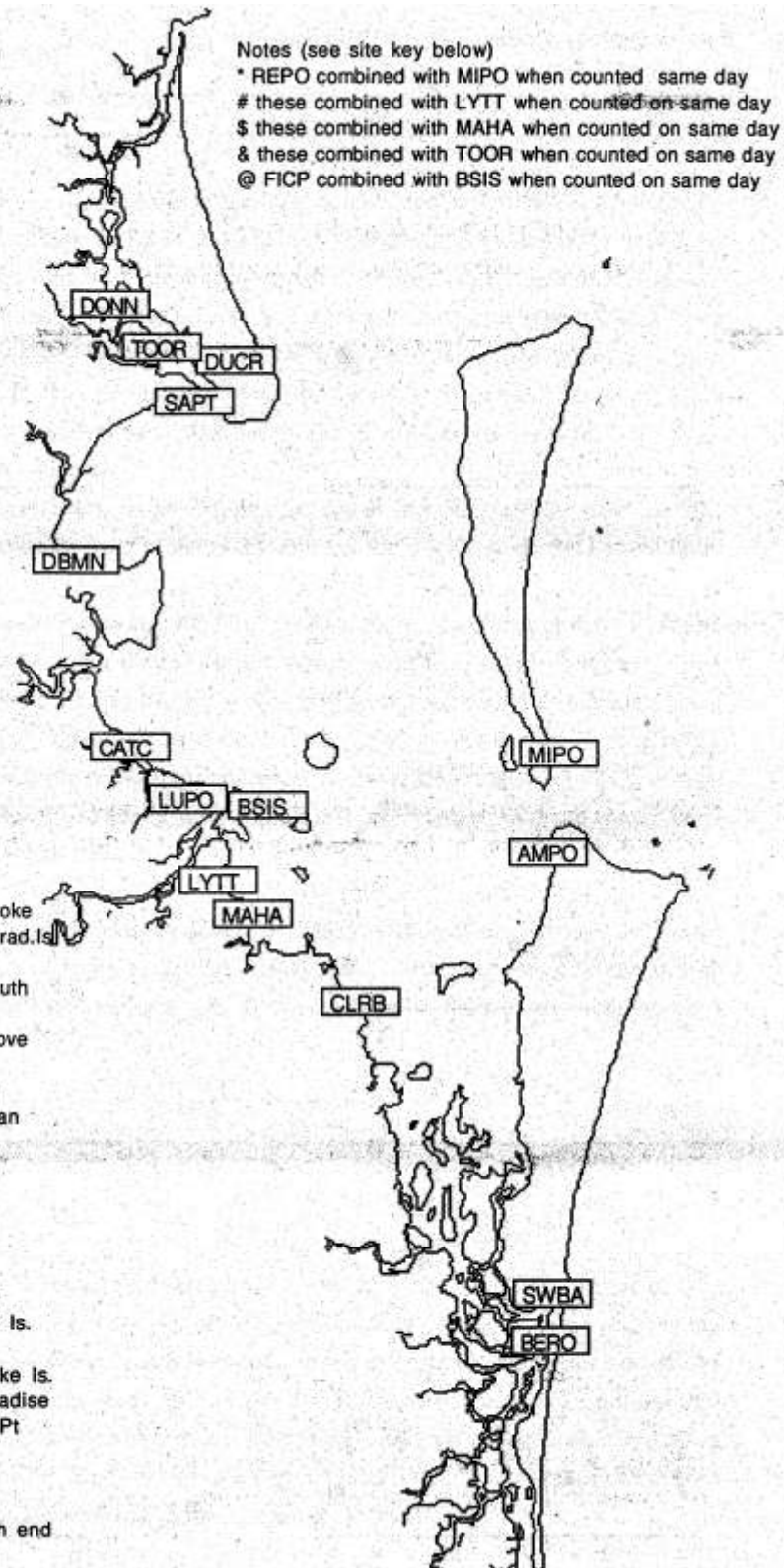
The following people have contributed in some way to the count program: Julien Bielewicz, Frank Biggs, John Carter, Jill Chamberlain, Jean Corney, Olwyn Crimp, Linda Cross, Phil Cross, M. Cubis, Jill Dening, Peter Driscoll, Bev Durrant, Don Gaydon, Andrew Geering, Carol Green, Ian Gynther, Sandra Harding, Joyce Harding, Kees Hulsman, John Leonard, Mike Lewis, Linda Lewis, Lois McRae, David Milton, C. Neligan, John Noyce, Betty Pares, Nigel Robers, Scott Rogers, Martin Schulz, David Stewart, Jeremy Thompson, Jean Tilly,

Charles Turner, Ian Venables, Paul Walbridge, Denis Watson, Cyn't Webster, and participants in the Earthwatch expedition. I apologise for any omissions.
 Peter Driscoll.

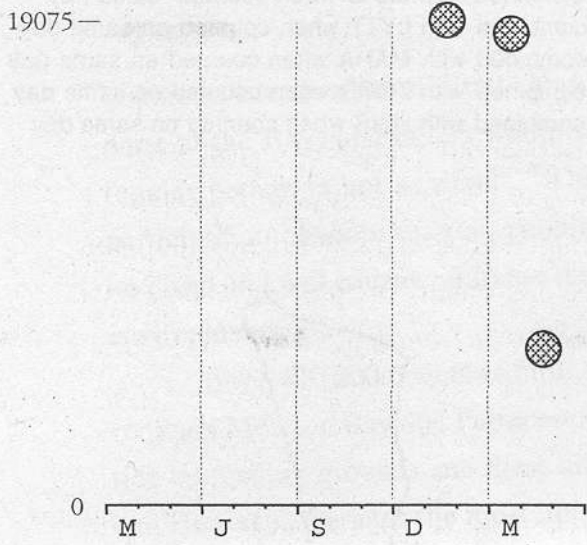
Key to sites counted regularly at high tide - several other sites have been counted at other stages of the tide in Pumicestone Passage and near Caloundra.

Notes (see site key below)
 * REPO combined with MIPO when counted same day
 # these combined with LYTT when counted on same day
 \$ these combined with MAHA when counted on same day
 & these combined with TOOR when counted on same day
 @ FICP combined with BSIS when counted on same day

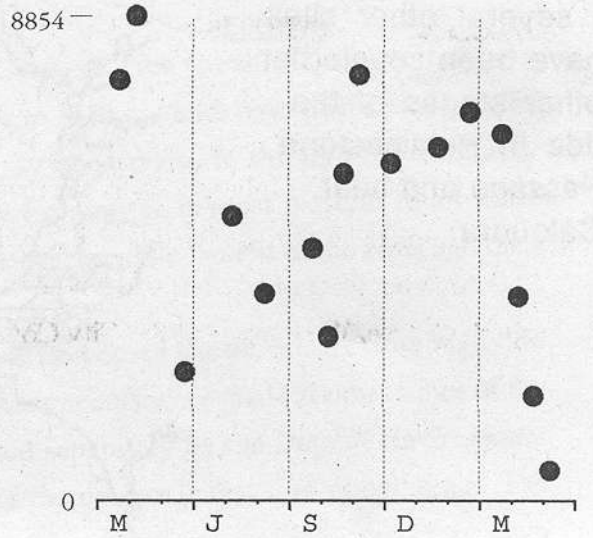
- AMPO Amity Point Nth Stradbroke
- BERO Bedroom & nth - Sth Strad. Is.
- BSIS Bishop Island
- CATC Cabbage Tree Creek mouth
- CLRB Cleveland/Raby Bay
- DBMN Deception Bay - mangrove
- DONN Donnybrook claypan
- DUCR Dux Creek Bribie Island
- FICP@ Fisherman Island claypan
- LUPO Luggage Point
- LYN1# Lytton Claypan No. 1
- LYN2# Lytton Claypan No. 2
- LYTT Lytton
- MAHA Manly Harbour
- MALES Manly Lota Esplanade
- MIPO Mirapool Moreton Island
- REPO* Reeders Point Moreton Is.
- SAPT Sandstone Point
- SWBA Swan Bay Nth Stradbroke Is.
- THAPS Thornside Aquatic Paradise
- THMPS Thornside Mooroondu Pt
- THQES Thornside Queens Esp.
- TOOR Toorbul
- TRDM& Toorbul Dam
- TRNT& Toorbul 1 km nth of sth end



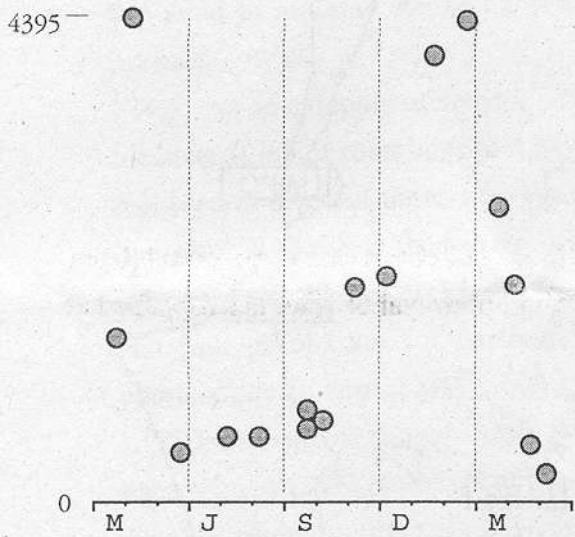
Total migratory waders - central Bay sites



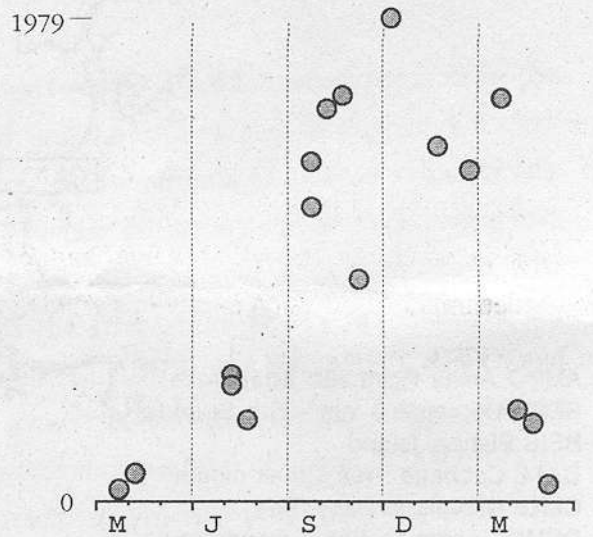
Total migratory waders five sites



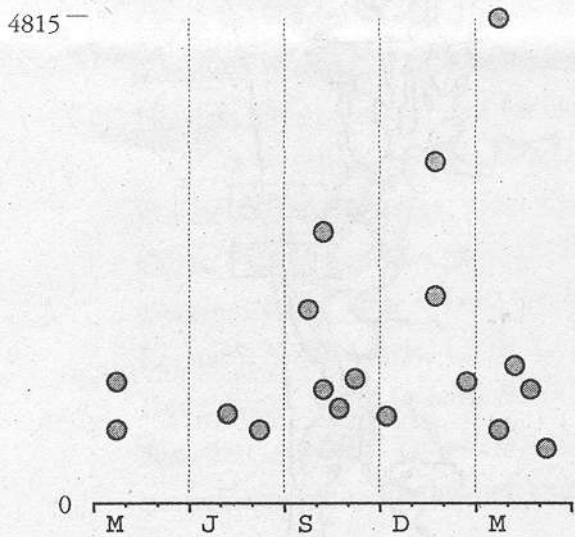
Cleveland/Raby Bay



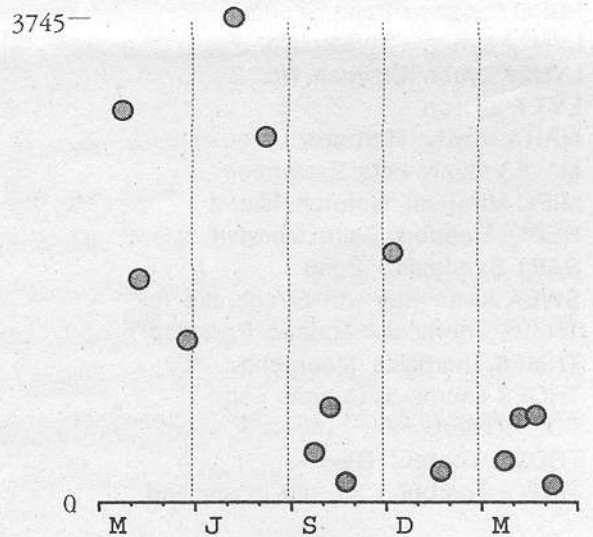
Manly Harbour



Toorbul



Luggage Point



Good and bad news!

The good news is that the Pine Rivers wetland, subject of a protracted dispute between a canal estate developer, conservationists and Brisbane City Council, is now to be bought by the Council as part of its bushland acquisition program. Those of us who know the area couldn't be more pleased, those who don't, now have the opportunity of enjoying it sometime in the future. We commend the City Council and the people who have worked over the years to achieve this result, notably Roy Sonnenburg. The 304ha site, between the Hornibrook and Bruce Highways, caters for waders using mudflats in the Pine River and Hays Inlet, and high numbers of waterbirds and ducks.

The bad news is that too many significant roost sites around the Bay are still inadequately protected and that even in the short term we could witness the loss of the Raby Bay, Manly Boat Harbour and Dux Creek roosts. Because the sites are privately owned, the general public and private companies need to be convinced of the importance of these areas and some remedial actions encouraged where birds are being forced away from traditionally used sites. Reclamation and changes to feeding areas are being muted at Toorbul and Sandgate, and birds are being increasingly disturbed by more and more people that use the Bay. A major extension to limestone dredging in the Bay is proposed and would include much of the eastern side of Green Island. Recent changes to the shoreline at Clontarf have no doubt been detrimental and Wayne Lawler's article (see below) is a vivid portrayal of what has happened at Scarborough.

QWSG members need to raise the public profile of waders by encouraging articles in newspapers, by talking to people or by coming up with ideas for posters, signs and an information kit. If you are keen, let's get together, contact one of the executive and/or come along with your thoughts to the AGM.

Loss of roost sites

The Steady Attrition of Wader Roost Sites at Scarborough, Queensland.

I owned a huge 600mm tele lens before I owned a motorcar. The result of this chronological anomaly was that in my youthful search for waders, I would trudge with my big lens and tripod through suburban Scarborough from my parents house to the marvellous expanse of saltmarsh, mangrove shrubland and intertidal flats that lined the Deception Bay shoreline at Scarborough. That was in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I have been returning to Scarborough regularly ever since, and have witnessed the virtual disappearance of the high tide wader habitat, and the sad decrease in wader numbers at Scarborough.

We still don't know how roost site loss and disturbance affect wader survival or feeding site use, even though it is basic wader-management information. But my observations at Scarborough over the years, where roost area loss has been much greater than feeding area loss, suggest to me a link between the loss of roost sites and the decline in wader numbers and species using adjacent feeding areas. Waders need more than mudflats; does the loss of quality roost sites nearby reduce the value to waders of feeding areas?

My casual observations at Scarborough don't answer this question. I don't have census data to prove the decline, and I can't isolate roost loss as a cause anyway - there has been some feeding area loss, and perhaps change. Hence the importance of long term monitoring of numbers and species, and also ecological studies of habitat. For example, comparative invertebrate sampling of the Scarborough mudflats with those retaining mangrove foreshores might show a reduction in wader food at Scarborough. But if I relate something of the stages of wader habitat loss in 20 years at Scarborough it, will reflect a serious continuing trend in our coastal areas, and perhaps point to a need for careful research on the effect of roost site loss on waders.

In the early 1970s there was no such thing as Newport Waterways - a prestige canal development which now displaces the natural wetland environment I describe. Behind the De La Salle college grey gum and paperbark open forest graded into salt tolerant shrubland and sedgeland which graded into salt marsh of halophytic shrubs and bare salt pans. Towards the Bay, a broad band of stunted mangrove shrubland, mainly *Avicennia* sp., was fringed by a narrow band of low mangrove forest of the same species. Between these trees and the low tide mark was intertidal mudflat. The flats continued from the Scarborough boat harbour (which in those days dried at low tide!) to beyond Beachmere - entirely fringing Deception Bay and creating extensive wader feeding habitat.

Most of these intertidal mudflats remain. About a quarter of the spring low tide area between the harbour and Newport has been lost by reclamation at Newport and around the boat harbour, a dredged channel for access

from Newport to the bay, and the dredged interior of the boat harbour. A greater proportion of the neap low tide area, and half tide area, has been lost because the encroachment comes from landward. At half tide only about one third of the original feeding area remains east of Newport. North-west and north of Newport the flats remain unaltered. However, the mangrove and saltmarsh landward of the flats is almost completely gone at Scarborough.

Waders fed on the intertidal mudflats on the lower half of the tide and the flats were busy with birds of many species in season. They would congregate on higher spits and beaches as the tide rose, but at high tide they roosted in the mangrove trees, on bare areas in the mangrove shrubland, and on the salt pans of what is now Newport. The next important high tide roosts around the bay's shoreline were in the mangrove lagoon on the southern edge of Deception Bay township, six kilometres away, and, for small waders, the Nathan Road wetlands 2.5 kilometres away. So presumably the Scarborough roost served that portion of the Deception Bay shoreline from Reef Point to roughly the isthmus of Redcliffe Peninsula.

Tattlers, Terek Sandpipers and some Whimbrel roosted in the mangrove trees. The soft mud and shallow water of the mangrove shrubland held Greenshank, Marsh Sandpipers, Pied Stilts, Sharp-tailed and Curlew Sandpipers, Stints, Godwits, Whimbrel and Eastern Curlew. The harder, drier salt pans were favoured by Sand Dotterels, Turnstones, Pied Oystercatchers, Red-capped and Masked Plovers, Golden and Grey Plovers, a flock of Whiskered Tern, and sometimes Little Whimbrel. I can't quote numbers but I always enjoyed the spectacle of large flocks of Sand Dotterels, Sandpipers and Godwits wheeling over the saltmarsh and I have old photographs of Little Whimbrel and Golden and Grey Plover groups showing more than just ones and twos. I took this profusion of waders for granted in those days, thinking it was the same up and down the coast. I know differently now.

In the late 70s, work began at Newport. The sedgeland, saltmarsh and mangrove was dug up but it was a long process and for what seemed to be years the area was a raw landscape of fallow ploughed land and piles of excavated soil. The topography changed as the construction of canals and roads progressed but beyond the finished product there was always bare open ground little disturbed by humans. Although it was a disaster for the Bitterns and Land Rails, the Mangrove Warblers, Honeyeaters, Kingfishers and Herons, the waders continued to use the area as a roost because the soft open, undisturbed ground they needed remained available. The tidal influence was minimised by drainage ditches and levees, but rainwater puddles and dredging lagoons maintained soggy ground.

I was not aware of any decline in wader numbers using either the roosting or the feeding areas, and I recall long stalks over loose rubble photographing the roosting birds on forbidden ground - for the area was now private property and trespassers, so the signs mutely warned, would be prosecuted.

In the early 80's the pace of change accelerated. Newport Estate took shape and the profile of the shoreline became profoundly different. Rather than a gradual decline in elevation to low tide level, the land was shaped to be thoroughly above tidal influence, level, and increasingly grassed, sealed, kerbed and channelled. Rock walls separated land from sea, and the drop to sea level occurred over one or two metres of rock rather than hundreds of metres of sandy mud. Disturbance was continuous because of house construction and a resident human population. Waders no longer roosted at Newport.

During this period the boat harbour was dredged and the dredgings were dumped either side of the harbour, creating extensive bare, poorly drained areas 1.5 kilometres from Newport. These dumps became the new wader roosts. I saw no Golden or Grey Plovers, Whiskered Terns or Marsh Sandpipers now, few Whimbrel, and fewer waders generally. In the late 80's Tattlers, some Curlew Sandpipers and a few Tereks roosted on the more remote rock walls. Small groups of Godwits, Greenshank, Stilts and a few Curlew roosted in the small shallow brackish pond in the centre of the dredging dump on the western side of the harbour. A small number of Sand Dotterels, Red-capped Plover and Stints roosted on the dry dredgings on the seaward dump towards the harbour mouth. Turnstones and Oystercatchers stayed on the beaches. Disturbance from people walking over the new land was frequent. A natural, high quality roost had been turned into an artificial roost at Newport, then had been replaced with another, but interior, artificial roost at the boat harbour.

In the 1990s there are few waders feeding on the intertidal flats of Scarborough. Compared to my memories of halcyon days past. None roost at Newport to my knowledge. The only area of mangrove left - less than half a hectare - still miraculously supports Mangrove Heron, Mangrove Kingfisher and Mangrove Honeyeater, although I haven't heard the sweet song of a Mangrove Warbler recently. Sacred Kingfishers, Little Egrets and sometimes Osprey and Brahminy Kites also use this tiny nature strip remnant, which has now assumed critical conservation, amenity and aesthetic value for Scarborough. None of the original saltmarsh remains, only a scrap of regrowth in one dredging dump. Most of the dredging dump areas remain unused but disturbance by people or dogs is high since fences have gone or fallen over, and Scarborough harbour is

increasingly popular. Also, rank vegetation is taking hold on some areas formerly bare. All the reclaimed land is earmarked for either parkland or future development. Terns and gulls roost on asphalt on one area which is now a car park.

Most of the loss occurred before our present environmental awareness - few people thought about the little brown birds from Siberia in the 1970's. There has been no attempt, to date, to provide alternative wader roosts at Scarborough as has been done with success in some New South Wales estuaries. When there are no suitable high tide roosting sites left at Scarborough, will waders still feed on the mudflats there at low tide?
Wayne Lawler

Trip Reports

Bishop Island (20 March)

On Saturday morning, my alarm roused me at 5:00 am and I leapt out of bed joyful and singing to begin my second cannon netting experience. Now you can believe that if you like! However, by the time I had driven to the gates of the wharf complex, I was really ready to participate in what is a very interesting experience.

Fortunately, Peter, Gary and Andrew had set two nets on the Friday afternoon and we were prepared to fire them at around 8:00 am. Various people are needed to ensure that no bird is injured during this period and the maximum number of birds are netted. Hence, we had radio contact with hidden observers, a jiggler line to move birds off the nets (a favourite perch for Pied Oystercatchers) and Peter well placed to coordinate the whole activity. A group of people waited in reserve and when the nets were fired by Andrew, a race was on to cover the birds with shade cloth. Getting the birds out of the nets is a procedure which requires careful but rapid attention. Although this was only my second experience, I had been shown a few simple skills to ensure that this could be done with little stress to the birds.

Sam, Joe and Fiona proved to be efficient runners, taking freed birds to Margaret who put them into various holding cages, one species to a cage. Then the intricate work of banding, flagging, sexing, and measuring weight, head, bill and wing length began. With the arrival of David, Paul and Lindsay, we had enough people with necessary experience to have three teams on the job. Fiona, Ian, Beth, Gary and Andrew set up a rhythm - Beth collecting birds, Gary banding and describing, Fiona scribing and Ian weighing. The final step required Andrew to glue green flags onto the unbanded leg and then to release the birds. Green signifies Moreton Bay. This facilitates remote identification of banded birds. Occasionally a bird needed a dose of glucose to replenish its energy to enable it to fly after this procedure and Natasha was on hand to provide this service.

Altogether, we processed 220 birds and spent nearly 8 hours on the mudflats. We caught the following species: 172 Great Knots (including 20 retraps), 8 Red Knots, 9 Bar-tailed Godwits (including 2 retraps), 1 Curlew Sandpiper and 3 Grey Plovers. All retrapped birds were banded by the QWSG in Moreton Bay.

The day was fulfilling, socially pleasant and I can assure you that a bird in the hand is more educational than a Slater at home. We had quite a library of information with us and Peter was very patient in answering our questions. I won't tell you who gracefully subsided onto his back, clutching his bird and sticky gluey feather in the air. All I can say is that prong-legged stools are likely to sink into the mud with substantial posteriors planted on them! Yes, we did get muddy, but it was enjoyable to see so many birds already in their mating plumage and their tucker bags full for the journey ahead. It is quite awesome to hold 190 grams of life and know that it flies around the Pacific Rim each year on migration, some 22,000 kilometres. By the way, don't plan to do any shopping on your way home. The check-out chicks think they've got a real weirdo if you explain that you're all muddy because you've, been banding waders. Then again, you may just stand next to a woman who has been trying to contact the banders to be able to join in. Eh Sylvia!

Beth Smyth

Amity Spit, North Stradbroke Island (9 April)

The weekend began on Friday with a 7:45am departure on the barge bound for Dunwich. We arrived at Amity Spit when the birds were already at the roost. While we watched, the birds were disturbed several times by vehicles, people and power boats. Most of the birds seem not to return to this roost after being put up but went to other roosts. The wind was 20 kilometres and SSW. The boat, which was running poorly, was checked and found to be OK. That evening we set up camp, set charges, in the cannons and drove to Point Lookout for dinner. Jeremy and Liz arrived with the complement of the gear later that night.

Sunday began with a 7am start. Wyn arrived with his National Parks vehicle and helped us transport gear to the spit. It was not obvious at this point if the weather would permit a successful trapping operation, and throughout the morning, frequent showers hampered the set-up. Two nets were set, but when checked, the wiring of the large net was found to be faulty and only the small net was used. As soon as we moved away from the roost, the birds arrived and settled in front of the net. After checking the situation at the net, the order was given to fire, within minutes of wiring and charging the detonator.

Details of the catch are as follows: 65 Bar-tailed Godwit (including 5 retraps), 2 Curlew Sandpiper, 10 Grey-tailed Tattler, 4 Eastern Curlew, and 16 Whimbrel. All retrapped birds were banded by the QWSG in Moreton Bay.

Most birds were in their first year and in no condition for migration. The number of birds in the area seemed to be low. During processing of the catch, Wyn did a wonderful PR job introducing the birds to the many people who showed interest in our activities. Everyone worked well together throughout the weekend. Thanks go to the following people for their assistance - Jeremy Thompson, Liz, Stephanie and Cecily Tonkin, Peter and Sam Driscoll, Wyn Boon and family, Alvin de Pano Alcova and Glenn Morley.

The weekend was very interesting, informative and enjoyable for all. Special thanks go to Peter Driscoll for organising and running the expedition. I believe the work of the Queensland Wader Study Group and their counterparts is, vital for the development of practical management plans and the welfare of the birds both here and internationally. I look forward to further participation in the future.

Glenn Morley.

Cabbage Tree Creek (3 May)

In still very dark conditions, well before the dawn chorus, Peter Driscoll and his WSG stalwarts gathered at the Shorncliffe boat ramp for transport across to the netting site. Several trips with the trusty inflatable saw the entire cast of about 18 safely across awaiting the dawn and the top of the tide. The nets had been set the previous day by Peter and a couple of enthusiastic helpers.

As the dawn broke it revealed good numbers of waders in the firing area along with several hundred gulls and about 20 *Pellicanus conspicuatus*. A flock of Pied Oystercatchers were also nearby with about 40 Black-winged Stilts. Captain Peter and several others set off in the inflatable to get a good view of the net positions from the water. Phil Venables was put ashore in the mangroves to the south despite his protests about crocodiles (he is from the far north). A couple of soaring raptors created some havoc amongst the roosting flock while we waited to fire the nets. After some skilful manoeuvring and plenty of communicating on the two-way radios, the gulls and pelicans departed and good numbers of waders were in front of the southernmost net. The order was given to fire!

The result was the best catch to date by QWSG; 340 birds including 236 Great Knots, 47 Red Knots, 50, Bar-tailed Godwits and 6 Black-winged Stilts. Among these were 27 retraps, all previous, QWSG bandings. With a good mix of experienced handlers and enthusiastic runners, the de-netting went relatively smoothly and soon the birds were in the pens ready for processing. Three teams led by Peter, Gary Harch and David Stewart then swung into action; banding, flagging, weighing, measuring and checking plumage. The veterinarians, Louis and Natasha, tended any birds which looked stressed during the course of processing. It was very interesting banding the Stilts as even the experienced banders had not handled this species before. When the processing was finished, we faced the daunting task of packing all of the gear and carrying it across the vast expanse of mudflats to the channel near the boat ramp. Where had all the water gone? We were very thankful that Peter and helpers had done all the setting up the previous day! Despite an outboard not wanting to run, we all managed to get back across the channel (without the help of the local Coastguard team).

Roy Sonnenburg

Waders get press Coverage

The Bayside Star (26 May 1993).

Beach-roaming dogs blamed for wader-birds 'decline'

DOGS running wild on Nudgee Beach are causing problems for wader birds which migrate annually from Siberia to Australia, according to the chairman of the Queensland Wader Study Group, Peter Driscoll.

The Queensland Wader Study Group is a specialist interest group of the Ornithological Society, concerned with monthly counts to determine whether wader birds are declining in number.

Mr Driscoll said about 20 species of wader birds made the 20,000km round trip each year to enjoy the Australian summer.

They include the Mongolian sandpiper, eastern curlew, curlew sandpiper, bar-tailed godwit, great knot, red knot, wimbrel, and the red-necked stint.

Mr Driscoll said Moreton Bay was an internationally recognised wetland and one of the primary reasons for its listing as such was the number of migratory waders which used the area.

However, dogs and horses on the beach, in particular Nudgee, disturbed the birds to such a degree that the Queensland Wader Study Group believes it may have an effect on their ability to migrate.

Mr Driscoll said overseas reports had shown that that type of disturbance did effect their migration ability. Wader birds migrate from mid-March to the end of April.

He said the birds foraged at low tide and at high tide they sought appropriate places such as claypans or sandspits to roost.

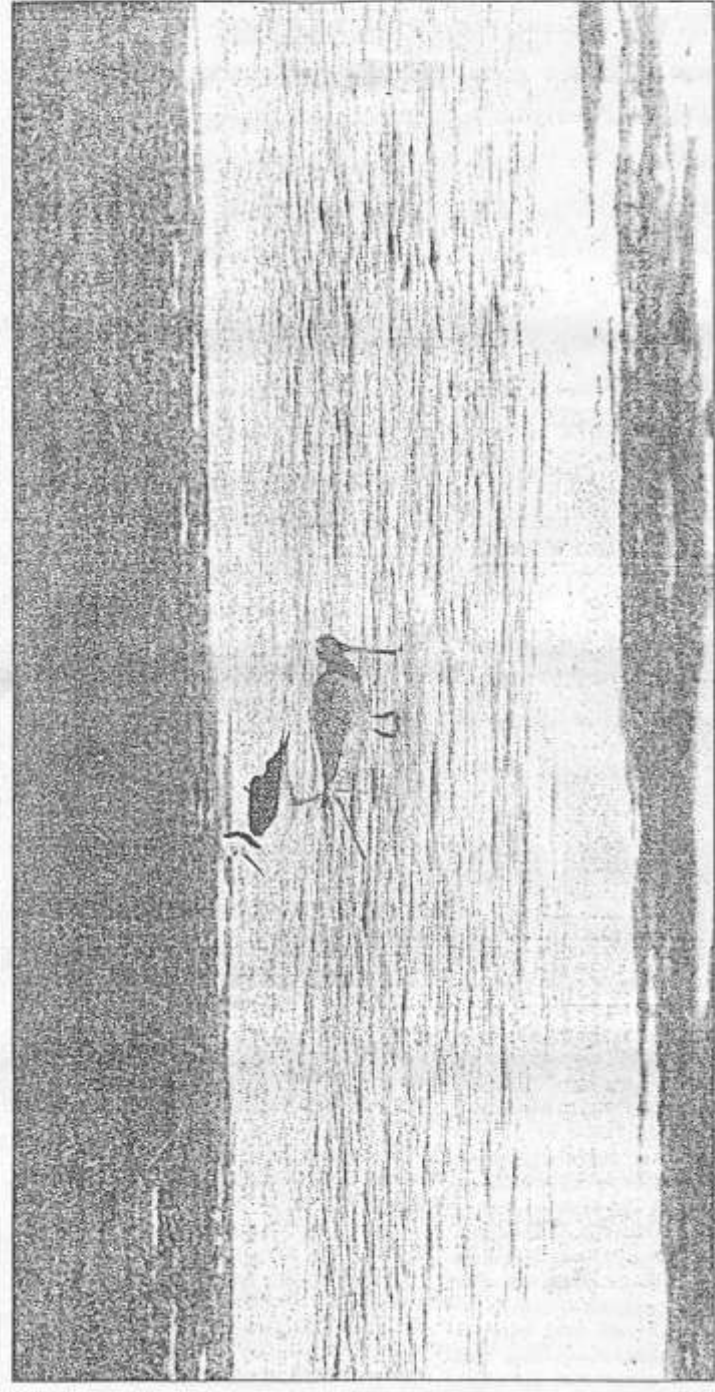
"They are linked to the tides, not night and day," Mr Driscoll said.

When continually chased by dogs, the waders were unable to get sufficient rest nor foraged adequately so that they could build up their body weights to enable them to migrate back to Siberia.

Development was also affecting the birds, Mr Driscoll said.

Whilst studies had not yet proved that dredging harmed the birds, Mr Driscoll said it was a possibility that the dredges were pulling pollutants out of the bottom of the creek and they were then ingested by the birds.

Anyone wishing to join the Queensland Wader Study Group can telephone Peter Driscoll on 289 0237 or Gary Harch on 262 2648.



BIRDS under threat . . . a bar-tailed godwit, in the foreground, breeds in Siberia and north Alaska and usually migrates to Australia from August to April. Behind the godwit is a black-winged stilt. The birds are in danger from people walking domestic animals in the wetlands.

Picture: DEREK MOORE

A long way from home - and threatened

By BRIAN WILLIAMS

ONE of the world's great seabirds has been on the move for 14,000 years plus. Migrations of birds to Alaska and Siberia is in danger from people erecting their dogs in Brisbane's wetlands.

Each year wetlands on the very edge of Queensland's largest city host one of the world's great animal migrations. Thousands of birds fly from places such as Siberia, Mongolia, Alaska, China and Japan to complete a breeding or feeding cycle in Australia.

Some birds use about 40 per cent of their weight to peregrinate by the thousands of kilometres over periods of several days. As the birds stop to rest and feed they are being disturbed

by people erecting domestic animals in the wetlands and in Brisbane's wetlands. These domestic animals, which include species such as the great knot, bar-tailed godwit, curlew, sandpiper, Marescaux plover, large sand plover, red-necked stilt and whimbrel, are just as impressive as the efforts by flagship species such as whales.

Brisbane City Council will erect signs asking people to restrain their animals at the northside reserve and beach. The situation is part of the greater problem of wetlands being drained and filled to suit housing and flood mitigation.

Wetlands supply more than two-thirds of the world's fish harvest, provide habitats for countless animals, rival rain-

forests in productivity, lock up large amounts of global warming gases and sustain a significant proportion of the world's genetic resources and biological diversity.

Recreation and health care man Aid David Hinchcliffe yesterday appealed to dog owners not to take their animals to the wetlands.

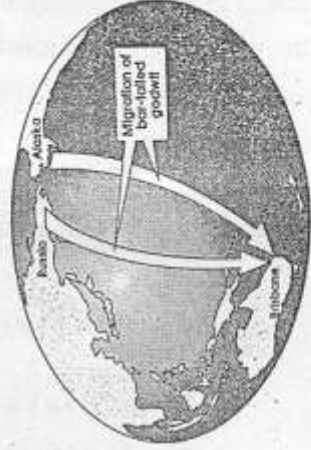
"It is crucial to safeguard this important feeding habitat for these birds, some of which are rare and endangered," he said. Aid Hinchcliffe said Boondall was the largest intact area left along the city's perimeter where the birds could rest. The council was investigating means of protecting the birds which were jurisdictionally administered when they were worked in 1989. It is later in the year during their return trip.

"If they are frequently disturbed, they will lose vital energy which they need to continue," Aid Hinchcliffe said. "If the birds lose too much energy and condition, many

simply will not make the long return flight." Aid Hinchcliffe said areas had been fenced to keep out four-wheel-drive and motorbike enthusiasts but ways of protecting the birds from pets still had to be found. The Boondall wetlands are internationally recognised.

The area is one of 504 world sites listed under the Ramsar Convention, signed by 26 countries. The convention aims to protect these sites so the birds have a chance to survive their massive migrations.

Boondall is one of several sites the birds use along the Australian coastline. At Coffs Harbour a wedge-tailed shearwater or muttonbird rookery has become a major tourist attraction.



Migration of bar-tailed godwit

Activities

For netting activities, please confirm with Peter Driscoll three days in advance for confirmation of time and place. In the case of weekend trips please confirm at least 1 week in advance. For the wader counts, please ring Ian Gynther, David Stewart, Kees Hulsman or Peter Driscoll. All completed count forms must be returned to Peter Driscoll.

Annual General meeting

19th August, 7:30pm, Old Museum Theatre

Telescope- Day!

(see article) 21st August, 10am – 1pm Lytton roost

Wader Counts (general monitoring)

Sat. 24 th July	High of 2.04 m at 1:09pm.
21 st or 22 nd Aug	High of 2.20 m at noon (Sat), 2.18 in 12:49 pm (Sun)
Sat. 18 th Sep	High of 2.36 in at 10:53 am.
Sat. 2 nd Oct	High of 2.16 in at 10:09 am.
Sat. 16 th Oct	High of 2.46 m at 9:47 am.
Sat. 6 th Nov	High of 2.14 in at 1:51 pm.
Sat. 4 th Dec	High of 2.32 m at 12:41 pm.

Cannon Netting

Fri 23 rd - Sun 25 th July	Moreton Island- high of 2.04 in at 1:09 pm on Saturday. Barge on Friday night. Preferably enquire 10 days before.
Sat 4 th Sep	Tentative - site to be determined. High of 2.05 at 11:08 am.
Sun 19 th Sep	Fisherman Island. High of 2.36 at 11:40am.
Sat 9 th Oct	Cabbage Tree Creek mouth. High of 2.01 at 3:30 pm.
Sat 30 th Oct	Tentative - site to be determined. High of 2.24 at 9:13 am.
Sat 13 - Mon 15 Nov	Clarence River Estuary- joint outing with NSW WSG (see article - Expedition to Northern NSW).

Wader identification

Sat 21 st Aug	9:00 am - 1 pm. In conjunction with Telescope Day (see article). - Lytton high tide roost.
Sat 9 th Oct	8:30 am. Introductory talk on waders for Wildlife Pres. Society Nudgee Beach Field Study Centre. Wader identification on rising tide at Nudgee Beach 9:30 am onwards (2-3 hrs). Cannon netting at Cabbage Tree Creek mouth (high 2.01 m at 3:30 pm).