

# Shorebirds of Australia

**ANDREW GEERING, LINDSAY  
AGNEW AND SANDRA HARDING  
2007.**

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The editors and contributors to this volume are to be congratulated for producing what amounts to an annotated photographic field guide or handbook to the shorebirds of Australia. It breaks new ground by presenting a wealth of information on migration, breeding ecology, plumages and moult as well as a brief chapter on current threats and conservation measures underway in Australia. All this is presented in addition to the usual species accounts for the 55 species of shorebird regularly occurring in Australia in a concisely written and manageable sized book of about 250 pages that could readily be taken into the field.

The species accounts are more detailed than those found in traditional field guides and illustrated where appropriate with excellent photographs of the species in both breeding, non-breeding and juvenile plumage as well as distribution maps showing the usual Australian locations. Each species entry also includes a brief discussion of possible confusion species and tips on how to differentiate between them. Those new to birding will find this aspect of the book an invaluable guide to the identification of shorebirds, as will those birders who have always found shorebirds a difficult group. From the South Australian perspective the book is notable because it highlights a lack of transmission of South Australian records to the national database. From my own experience I noted omissions of inland records of Long-toed Stint, Pectoral Sandpiper, Oriental Plover, and Australian Painted Snipe. There are also no records in this volume of

Oriental Pratincole or Little Ringed Plover from South Australia yet there are 12 records of the former and 3 of the latter on the Birds SA database. A similar but less important observation could be made about some of the vagrant species that have been recorded in South Australia but no reports were made to BARC. The obvious examples here are at least two records of Lesser Yellowlegs; the Short-billed Dowitcher at the Saltfields over the summer of 1999/2000 that was well twitched by many; and the Hudsonian Godwit that has been spending the summer on the Gulf St Vincent mudflats, Buckland Park lake (when full) and the Dry Creek Saltfields since 2001! This book highlights a communication problem in South Australia, a problem that needs to be rectified.

The next important section that birdwatchers will find invaluable is the chapter by Danny and Annie Rogers on plumages and topography. Many birdwatchers, particularly beginners, are put off shorebirds because they systematically change their appearance. Just as you get used to identifying Curlew Sandpipers in February by March they are moulting into breeding plumage and look rather different! Apart from the excellent photographs in this volume, chapter 5 provides a concise and clear explanation of moult and plumage topology that will make the transition to shorebird watching a lot easier for the beginner.

Finally, in addition to the wealth of information of use to the birdwatcher this little volume includes fascinating detail on the migration patterns of different species along the Australasian flyway that is now the subject of detailed study employing radio transmitters in addition to the traditional use of leg flags. The chapters on the feeding ecology and habitat selection of shorebirds will be invaluable to environmentalists and planners when they grapple with the difficult task of reconciling the pressures

for development with our international obligations under the JAMBA and CAMBA treaties. Chapter 7 deals with the threats to shorebirds in Australia and along the Australasian flyway, and discusses conservation strategies that have been applied successfully in Australia. Birdwatchers everywhere should take note and encourage their local government and councils to study this book and apply its advice to their development planning. In short this is a book that should be read by all Government environment ministers and local council officers around Australia.

**Colin Rogers**