

# Education

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Waterbird Diversity, Reedy Swamp (Vic). Photo: Keith Ward

A visit to a wetland can be a feast for all your senses. A cacophony of frog calls will often greet visitors long before sighting superbly adapted wetland birds. Coastal or estuarine wetlands may assault your sense of smell, perhaps pleasantly, with fresh, salty air or maybe in a slightly unpleasant way, with rotting vegetation. Whatever kind of wetland you visit they present an opportunity for learning. This opportunity is grasped by many wetland managers who may provide information boards, bird hides, brochures or formal education sessions for schools and community groups. In this issue of *The Bird Observer*, I will describe a selection of Australian wetland education centres and online resources.

## WETLAND EDUCATION CENTRES

### COCKBURN WETLANDS CENTRE (WA)

[www.cockburnwetlands.org.au](http://www.cockburnwetlands.org.au)

The Cockburn Wetlands Centre is situated in the Beelii Regional Park in Western Australia. The Beelii wetlands lie on the Swan Coastal Plain south-west of the City of Perth. There are more than twenty discrete lakes and hundreds of small swamps in this wetland complex. They follow the swales of the coastal dune system along the south-west coast of Australia between the escarpment and the Indian Ocean.

The Centre was first established in 1993 and offers education programs for schools and guided walks for visitors.

### EAGLEBY WETLANDS (QLD)

The Eagleby Wetlands Conservation Reserves comprise a cluster of wetland reserves on the floodplain of the Logan and Albert Rivers. The largest of these reserves, Eagleby Wetlands, is part of Oliver Sports Complex.

Visitors to Eagleby Wetlands can learn more through interpretive signs and a brochure is available. A wetlands education CD has been produced by the Gould Group and distributed to schools in the area.



Sharp-tailed Sandpipers at Eagleby Wetlands (Qld). Photo: John Greenhill

### HUNTER WETLANDS (NSW)

[www.wetlands.org.au](http://www.wetlands.org.au)

Hunter estuary wetland system, known as Hexham Swamp, had been progressively filled by rubbish and used for railways and recreation, leaving only fragmented patches of remnant wetlands across the estuary.

In the mid 1980s, the local community and some far-sighted organisations joined forces to protect and restore this remarkable wetland. Today, Hunter Wetlands Centre Australia is regarded as a wetland of national and international importance and the centre enjoys a growing reputation for excellence in wetland conservation, education and ecotourism.

The school program caters for students from kindergarten through Year 12 and offers a series of topics to cater for students across a range of age and ability levels and reflects topics in the NSW School Curriculum. Programs are focused on wetland animals, wetland habitats, ecosystem values, functions and management.

A regular community program includes breakfast with the birds and canoe trips.

## TAMAR ISLAND WETLANDS (TAS)

[www.parks.tas.gov.au](http://www.parks.tas.gov.au)

Tamar Island Wetlands is an urban wetlands reserve just ten minutes drive from the heart of Launceston in Tasmania's north. The wetlands are managed by the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, with assistance from Wildcare volunteers who operate the Centre and provide visitor services year round.

The Interpretation Centre offers visitors the opportunity to learn about the great value of the wetlands. Schools and community groups can book a guided visit. Self-guided walks can be taken on boardwalks and birds may be viewed at the bird hide.

## WONGA WETLANDS (NSW)

[www.wongawetlands.nsw.gov.au](http://www.wongawetlands.nsw.gov.au)

Wonga Wetlands is an environmental development that has taken shape downstream from Albury. Water from the Albury City's wastewater treatment systems fills the wetlands. During the warmer months the reclaimed treated wastewater is used for irrigation, while in wetter months it is redirected to the wetlands. Since the construction of the Hume Dam in 1919, the Murray River has been regulated for irrigation and does not flood as often. The Wonga Wetlands development is an opportunity to revert to the original hydrological regime, with birds and other wildlife now returning to the wetlands.

Wonga Wetlands offers education activities for schools, from kindergarten to Year 12, as well as tours for the community. Topics covered in the program include ecology, wastewater management, macro-invertebrates, birds, chemistry and indigenous culture.

## WETLAND EDUCATION RESOURCES ONLINE – NOT JUST FOR KIDS

*Croudace Bay Wetlands Education Kit* is a simple kit that could be adapted to other wetlands. The suggested activities consider wetland ecology, plants and animals (including birds), in a multi-sensory way. It is aimed at teachers and students in primary schools and includes background information, activity sheets and a list of other resources. This kit is available from [www.lakemac.com.au](http://www.lakemac.com.au) - click on environment, then education.

*Our Wetlands – a Field-based Research Unit* is a joint project of Townsville Central Primary School and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Association. It is a very comprehensive document, giving detailed information for the content and assessment requirements for a ten week program. The overall theme of the program is to trace the journey of a droplet of water from Townsville to the Great Barrier Reef. It is site specific but could be a source of inspiration for anywhere. Although it does not obviously include birds it refers to animals, food webs and diversity so it would be easy to expand the focus to include more

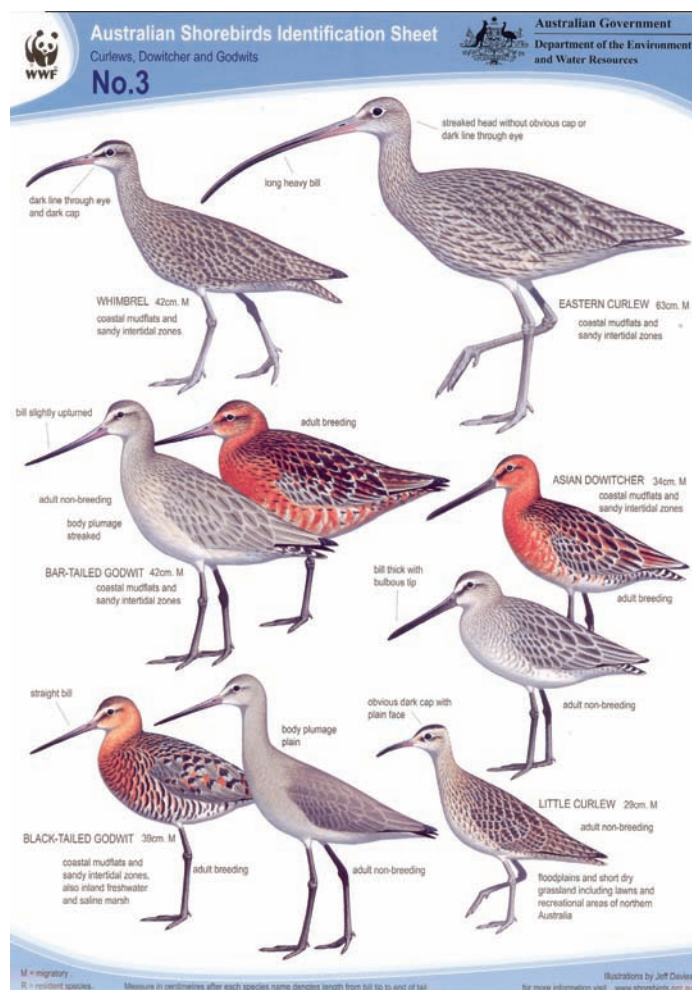
about birds. This document is available at <http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/wetlandinfo/site/spreadtheword/GBR/Curriculum.html>.

Coloured and silhouette bird identification sheets can be downloaded from the Adelaide Waterwatch site. [www.waterwatchadelaide.net.au](http://www.waterwatchadelaide.net.au) - click on teaching resources, topics, then birds.

The identification of shorebirds is sometimes considered a specialist area but online resources are available from [www.shorebirds.org.au](http://www.shorebirds.org.au). Click on the learning resources button and you can view a PowerPoint presentation and print a series of shorebird identification cards. These could be useful for teaching yourself or others.

The websites of Catchment Management Authorities are also worth a look, for example, Glenelg-Hopkins CMA have a series of documents titled the *Estuary Entrance Management Support System*. It is a manual for landholders that includes information about birds, fish and estuary ecology.

These are just some of the wetlands and wetland education resources available but I hope they inspire and assist you to learn more about wetland habitats and wetland birds. If you have any problems accessing these resources please contact Annette Cook at BOCA at [education@boca.org.au](mailto:education@boca.org.au).



Australian Shorebirds Identification Sheet