Migratory shorebirds on the brink

Migratory shorebirds travel thousands of kilometres each year from colder regions like Siberia, Alaska, and northern China to warmer coasts in South Australia and beyond. They depend on our wetlands and beaches to rest and feed for several months before returning north to breed.

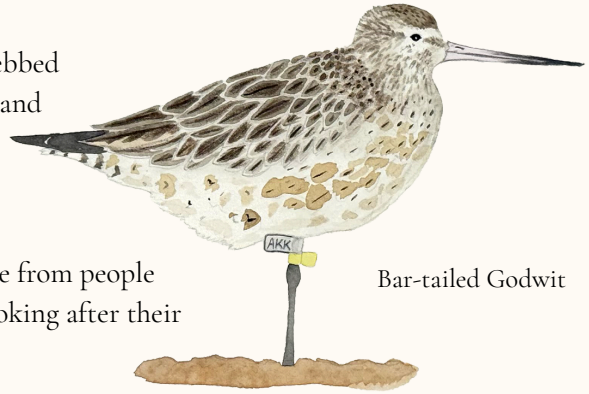
Far Eastern Curlew

Global travellers

Each year, more than 27,000 migratory shorebirds such as Red-necked Stints, which are small enough to fit in your palm, and the much larger Far Eastern Curlew, gather along South Australia's coasts, estuaries, and tidal mudflats. These areas provide food and shelter for birds that may fly over 11,000 km in a single trip. Over 37 species visit, making our shores a vital part of a global migration network.

Endurance and adaptation

Migratory shorebirds can fly non-stop for days, crossing oceans and continents. Before migrating, they nearly double their body weight and grow larger flight muscles. Some can sleep with half their brain at a time while flying. Most shorebirds do not have webbed feet, so they cannot swim - their long toes are made for walking on mud and sand, not paddling in deep water. They use the stars and Earth's magnetic field to navigate, and can sense weather changes, helping them avoid storms.



Bar-tailed Godwit

Facing big challenges

Many migratory shorebirds are now endangered. Their greatest threats are habitat loss, pollution, climate change, and disturbance from people and pets. The Far Eastern Curlew has lost over 80% of its population in Australia in just 30 years. Protecting these birds means looking after their habitats here and across the world.

Every action helps

South Australia protects these birds through places like the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary National Park - Winaityinaityi Pangkara, safeguarding over 60 km of coastline. Volunteers, scientists, and community groups restore wetlands and monitor bird numbers. You can help by respecting shorebird habitats, keeping dogs on leads, joining a volunteer group, and sharing their story.

Red-necked Stint

Nature Play SA

GREEN ADELAIDE

Wherever your adventures take you, we encourage you to connect with Traditional Owners to learn more about the significance of the plants, animals and landscapes.

Illustrations by Jason Tyndall, Nature Play SA