



Seabirds and Shorebirds of Exmouth Gulf

Many birds rely upon the islands, sand flats and shoreline of Exmouth Gulf. Some, like the Eastern Curlew, Curlew Sandpiper and Bar-tailed Godwit, are listed as critically endangered. The Australian Fairy Tern is another, listed as Vulnerable, by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The Gulf has both migratory birds and others that have permanent habitat. To ensure their conservation, especially in relation to wetlands, the Australian Government has adopted international agreements with Japan, China and the Republic of Korea, including the Bonn Convention, and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.



Shorebirds and seabirds are particularly vulnerable to disturbance and predation, making protection of wetland habitat from degradation and habitat loss especially important.

While every bird species has its own life history and characteristics, there are some general observations that can be made about these birds.

Where do they live?

The Gulf has mangrove forest, intertidal mudflats and sandy coastal shorelines. Many of these birds are known to inhabit sheltered coastal estuaries, mangroves, bays and lagoons. And some favour both fresh and saline wetlands. There is a sedentary, resident population of the endangered Fairy Terns (*Sternula nereis*) from Exmouth Gulf to Dampier, and the migratory Curlew, Sandpipers and different Terns are known to inhabit this area.



What do they do? Depending on the species, the shorebirds and seabirds feed and forage for fish, crustaceans and gastropods. These birds are often seen hunting prey, stalking, probing and picking from the intertidal flats of the Gulf.

What about nesting and breeding?

In general, seabirds live longer and have a lower reproductive rate than other birds. This makes nesting and breeding extremely important for survival. The size of breeding colonies can be small or have millions of birds in it.

Nests may be on the beach above the high tide mark, on spits or ridges. Some are shallow depressions in the sand, some lined with seagrass or small shells. Terns have nesting colonies, and have adapted behaviours to reduce the chance of predation.

Major threats

For many shorebirds and seabirds survival is reduced due to habitat loss, coastal development and increasing disturbance from human activities, which often impact breeding.



Wetland destruction and change, pollution and predation by feral animals are also major threats. Changes in global climate, rising sea and estuary levels, coastal erosion and sedimentation patterns are also major factors contributing to natural habitat loss.

Want to learn more?

Fairy Terns:

<http://bit.ly/fairyterns>