

Threatened Fauna of the Hunter & Mid Coast



Eastern Curlew

{Numenius madagascariensis}

The astonishingly large migratory shorebird, Eastern Curlew, undertakes an epic migration from Australia to northern China and Russia to breed, a flight of 12,000 kilometres. To complete this journey, they feed in Australia along tidal areas during summer, boosting their weight by between 40 – 70%, which is then lost over two or three days of continuous flight. Small chicks leave the nest at only six to eight weeks of age for their first migration, they have an instinctive sense of direction and distance which allows them to navigate to feeding areas.

You can help the Eastern Curlew, the largest migratory shorebird in the world known to travel over 12000kms, by minimising disturbance in and around wetland and estuary habitats

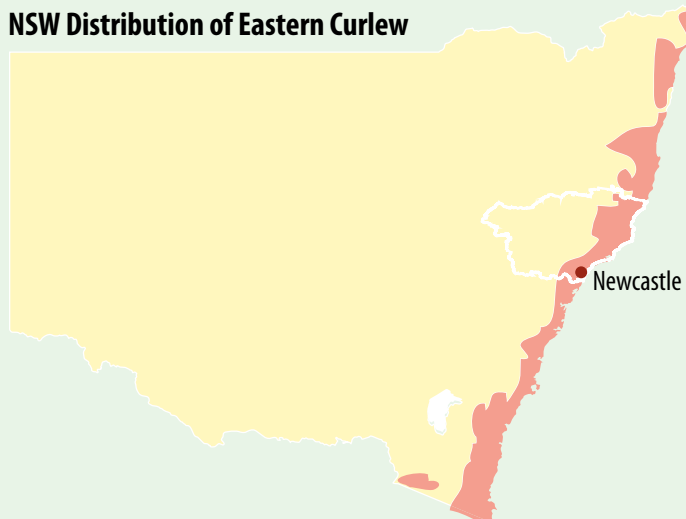
Hunter and Mid Coast region



- Known
- Predicted

The areas shown in pink and purple are the sub-regions where the species or community is, or known to occur. They may not occur throughout the sub-region but may be restricted to certain areas. The information presented in this map is only indicative and may contain errors and omissions.

NSW Distribution of Eastern Curlew



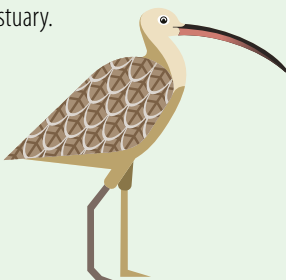
Are Eastern Curlews found near you?

The Eastern Curlew is endemic to the East Asian–Australasian Flyway. It breeds in Siberia and Kamchatka in Russia, as well as in north-eastern Mongolia and China. The Yellow Sea in the Republic of Korea and China is an important stopover site when the species is on migration. This species is also a common migrant in Japan and Indonesia, and is occasionally recorded moving through Thailand, Brunei, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore. During the non-breeding season a few birds occur in southern Republic of Korea, Japan and China.

About 25% of the population is thought to winter in the Philippines, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

Most (about 73% or 28,000 individuals) spend the non-breeding season in Australia, where they are found primarily on the coast of all states, particularly the north, east and south-east regions, including Tasmania.

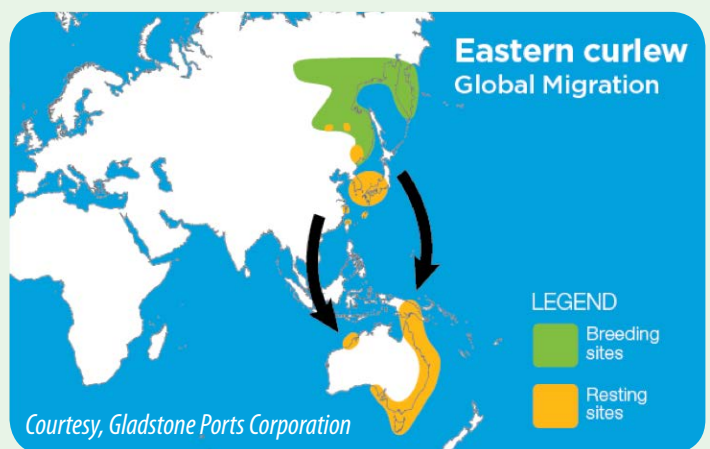
Within the Hunter and Mid Coast regions, this species inhabits coastal areas. It prefers estuary and wetland areas feeding amongst tidal flats with local populations noted at the Manning River estuary, Port Stephens and Hunter River estuary.



Why is this species important?

Eastern Curlews are shorebirds which feed amongst tidal areas on a range of crustaceans, ensuring the ecological balances of these areas are maintained. They are a link within the web of life which ensures the continued functioning of our ecosystems.

The Eastern Curlew is listed as critically endangered under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.



Habitat and Biology

This species breeds in northern China and Russia during March – August and returns to Australia to feed during summer. Eastern Curlew have been satellite tracked and were found to travel 12 000 kilometres, day and night, from south-eastern Queensland to northern Russia on their way to breeding sites. Breeding begins when they are three or four years of age when the species makes a small mounded nest in swampy areas.

While in Australia in the non-breeding season, they feed amongst sheltered coastal areas such as estuaries, bays or harbours and forage on crustaceans (crabs, shrimps and prawns) and small molluscs. Often seen along mudflats or sand flats, the Eastern Curlew is extremely wary and easily spooked, often taking flight when a person or agitator is up to 250 metres away. They are therefore highly susceptible to disturbance.

Courtesy, D Ingwersen



Threats

For this species it is estimated that total population declines of approximately 80% have occurred over the past 30 years. This has been primarily attributed to land reclamation along the coastal areas of the Yellow Sea which provide a 'stopover point' for the birds when on migration. Without these much needed temporary feeding sites to boost their energy levels, the species is not able to make the long-distance flight.

Other potential threats within Australia aren't clearly understood but are thought to be disturbance and habitat degradation. Disturbance of the birds when feeding or roosting is thought to be detrimental by reducing available feeding times, which are often dependent on tidal influences. Migratory shorebirds require productive, undisturbed feeding and roosting sites in order to provide enough stored bodily reserves through summer to successfully migrate to their breeding grounds in China and Russia. Other threats include mangrove invasion into prior saltmarsh/mudflat feeding areas, coastal land development or predation by introduced species such as foxes, particularly at roosting sites.

Identification

Eastern Curlews are the largest migratory shorebirds in the world, with a wingspan of 110cm and weight of approximately 900 grams. It is a bulky, darkly-streaked bird with a remarkably large downward curving beak with a length around 18.5cm. Notably, they have a prominent white eye-ring with a whitish chin and throat. Females are noticeably larger than males with a longer bill.

Eastern Curlews may be confused with other migratory shorebirds including the Whimbrel, who are smaller and have a significantly shorter beak. All migratory shorebirds should be treated with the same protection and care if sighted.



*Two Eastern Curlew and Godwit (bottom)
forage in saltmarsh and mudflats.
Courtesy, R Palazzi*

You can help the Eastern Curlew.



1. **Reduce disturbance** by keeping dogs on leashes and ensuring people, horses or vehicles aren't within 250 metres of feeding or roosting birds, drones are also a common disturbance for Eastern Curlews and should not be used nearby sensitive estuary areas or mudflats.



2. **Reduce disturbance** by ensuring boats aren't within 250 metres of feeding or roosting birds.



3. **Reduce disturbance** by ensuring any land development is greater than 500 metres from feeding or roosting birds.



4. **Keep rubbish from entering waterways** by adequately disposing of materials at designated locations.



5. **Undertake fox and cat control** nearby to any feeding or roosting sites.



6. **Ensure water runoff patterns are maintained** within estuaries and surrounding landscapes.



7. **Report any sightings** away from known sites to BirdLife Australia or the Hunter Bird Observers Club.

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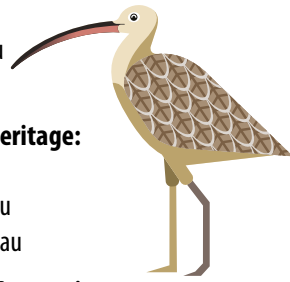


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Courtesy, D Ingwersen

Birding routes in the Hunter Region can be found at
<https://www.hboc.org.au/resources/birding-routes/>