



# Save the Murray

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## Birds



The Murray-Darling Basin is home to an estimated 370 bird species. The variety of habitat types and the large area means the Basin can support a great diversity of birds.

### Are birds in the Murray-Darling Basin in trouble?

A number of the birds found in the Basin are of conservation significance. At least 35 species out of the 370 in the Basin are listed as endangered. The Orange-bellied Parrot is one of Australia's most endangered species. Population estimates average less than 200 individuals. The Coorong is one of the preferred places for Orange-bellied Parrots to rest in winter when they migrate from Tasmania to the Australian mainland. Significant implications arise for the viability of the species if the health of the Coorong continues to decline.

Many birds use the wetlands of the Murray-Darling Basin to rest and feed during migration. Migration is the regular annual movement of a whole population (or a large part of it) between two places, often some distance apart. Some species travel thousands of kilometres from the Northern Hemisphere. Migration is triggered by changes in environmental conditions.

Factors such as salination, over-grazing, land clearance, habitat fragmentation and invasive weeds have led to decreases in suitable habitat for many birds, particularly woodland species. The over-grazing and draining of some wetlands and the rising salinity and poor quality of water has implications for many aquatic

bird species. Introduced predators such as foxes and cats are also creating problems for Australia's native bird life.

### What birds use the Coorong?

The Coorong is one of the Murray-Darling Basin's premier bird habitats. Eighty-five bird species have been recorded at the Coorong. Additionally, the region is regarded as a major site in South Australia for more than 30 species of waterbirds.

The region is important for migratory waders, principally Red-necked Stints, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Curlew Sandpipers. The Coorong is an important habitat for waders' migratory flyway between Australia and their northern breeding grounds. These species, among other waders, are also protected under the Japanese-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA) and the China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (CAMBA). Resident waders such as stilts, avocets, plovers, lapwings and oystercatchers are present at the Coorong.

Other birds in the area include Ducks, Black Swans, Pelicans, Ibis, the rare Fairy Tern and the endangered Little Tern. At times, the numbers of Grey Teal can be in excess of 50 000. Australian Shell ducks also occur in large numbers. In drought years, up to several hundred thousand ducks use the Coorong.

There are also about 2000 Cape Barren Geese during the summer months. Pelicans, ibis and swans all use the Coorong to breed.

### Can we feed birds?

Feeding of birds is not encouraged as people provide food that is not part of a bird's normal diet. How many ducks do you see buying bread for lunch? Feeding can cause birds to become dependent on humans for support and can cause health and behavioural problems such as aggressively seeking out food from humans. This is not a natural behaviour. Some birds play an important role in pollination for plants, if we feed them, plants may suffer too. By feeding birds we are interrupting the natural food chain.