



SHOREBIRD CONSERVATION IMPROVING AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF SHOREBIRDS: The Moreton Bay Shorebird Management Strategy.



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Where

Moreton Bay is located in south eastern Queensland adjacent to the city of Brisbane. It is one of the largest estuarine bays in Australia and one of only a few areas of extensive intertidal mudflats, seagrass beds, mangroves and saltmarsh on the east coast of Australia. The high nature conservation values of the area have been recognised with the listing of Moreton Bay under the Ramsar convention which identifies wetlands of international importance. The site is also protected by the Moreton Bay Marine Park.



The birds

Each summer, Moreton Bay is home to around 50 000 migratory shorebirds which use the area for feeding and roosting as well as a stop over site during migration. Up to 35 migratory species have been recorded at Moreton Bay and 16 resident shorebird species are also present. Species of conservation concern recorded at Moreton Bay include the beach stone-curlew, eastern curlew, painted snipe and sooty oystercatcher.



Dog disturbing shorebirds on mudflats

Who

The Draft Moreton Bay Shorebird Management Strategy was prepared by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) which is a Queensland Government agency. The QPWS aims to protect and manage Queensland's coastal resources, which encompass a range of ecological, economic and social values. The objective of the Draft Shorebird Management Strategy is to provide guidelines for the protection of Moreton Bay's shorebird populations by promoting their values and managing threats to their survival. The QPWS was heavily involved with a wide range of stakeholders when compiling the Strategy. These included other government agencies and local councils, business and industry groups, recreational groups and community conservation organisations.

Problems and challenges

Being located on the doorstep of a major city, Moreton Bay and its shorebirds face many different threats and pressures. However, most users of the bay do not intentionally cause harm or disturbance to shorebirds. More often this occurs simply because people are unaware of the shorebirds, their requirements and of the impacts that simple actions such as approaching too closely can have. A lack of understanding and awareness from the broader community can prove to be a major threat to shorebirds in heavily populated areas.

Other issues include habitat loss and degradation that has occurred in the bay as a result of development for both housing and port development. Pollution in the form of excess nutrient and sediment runoff from the surrounding urban areas also reduces habitat quality. Because the boundary of the marine park only covers tidal lands and waters up to the highest astronomical tide, many important areas, including some high tide roost sites, remain unprotected on land managed by private landholders, local councils and other land managers. In some instances, these land managers are unaware of the importance of reducing threats and disturbance to shorebirds.



Solutions

A key step taken by the QPWS in tackling some of the threats and challenges faced by shorebirds in Moreton Bay was the acknowledgement that a general lack of awareness in the broader community was a threat in itself which needed to be addressed. This is why community education is such an important component of the Draft Moreton Bay Shorebird Management Strategy.

The QPWS has focused on targeting all users of Moreton Bay in its community education campaign with particular emphasis placed on recreational users. It is hoped that by developing an understanding and empathy for shorebirds, users will change their behaviour to reduce the impacts and disturbance that their activities may have.

A media campaign has been launched to reach target audiences. This has included the presentation of information about Moreton Bay Marine Park and focused on shorebird conservation messages on television programs and advertisements and in newspapers. Information on the marine park and its shorebirds is also available on the Queensland Government website and will soon include a fact sheet specifically dealing with shorebirds. Specific target audiences have been reached by placing information in specialised media such as water sports and boating magazines. A particularly innovative approach has been the distribution of information to boat owners together with their boat registration papers.

In Moreton Bay Marine Park there is a range of legislative tools to ensure that the levels of disturbance to shorebirds are minimised. For example, any undue disturbance to birds and their habitats by people, their boats and animals can attract on the spot fines.

The Draft Moreton Bay Shorebird Management Strategy also sets out proposals for protecting critical shorebird sites and habitat. Especially, it encourages local government and other land managers to include measures to recognise and protect important shorebird areas in planning schemes. This is of particular importance where such areas occur close to proposed developments or above the highest astronomical tide and in effect are outside of the jurisdiction of the Moreton Bay Marine Park. It is envisaged that local governments and other land managers will utilise the strategy as a guide to protecting shorebirds and their habitat.

The recognition of the need to identify and engage key stakeholders is one of the strengths of the Strategy. A wide range of groups has been consulted or involved including industry groups, recreational users, educational institutions and traditional owners. The QPWS also operates in close conjunction with the Queensland Wader Study Group which is made up of a band of volunteers dedicated to shorebird conservation.

Outcomes for the environment

- Community awareness of shorebirds and shorebird conservation issues is being enhanced through the use of a range of different media.
- Comprehensive mapping and assessment of shorebird habitat has been conducted to identify the distribution and threats to important shorebird areas in Moreton Bay.
- A Draft Shorebird Management Strategy has been prepared for Moreton Bay and is in the process of being finalised.

Outcomes for participants

- The QPWS has integrated itself with a range of stakeholders and groups and built several partnerships.
- The public profile of the organisation and its projects has been enhanced.
- The communication, negotiation and planning skills of members have been improved as a result of dealing with such a wide range of stakeholders.

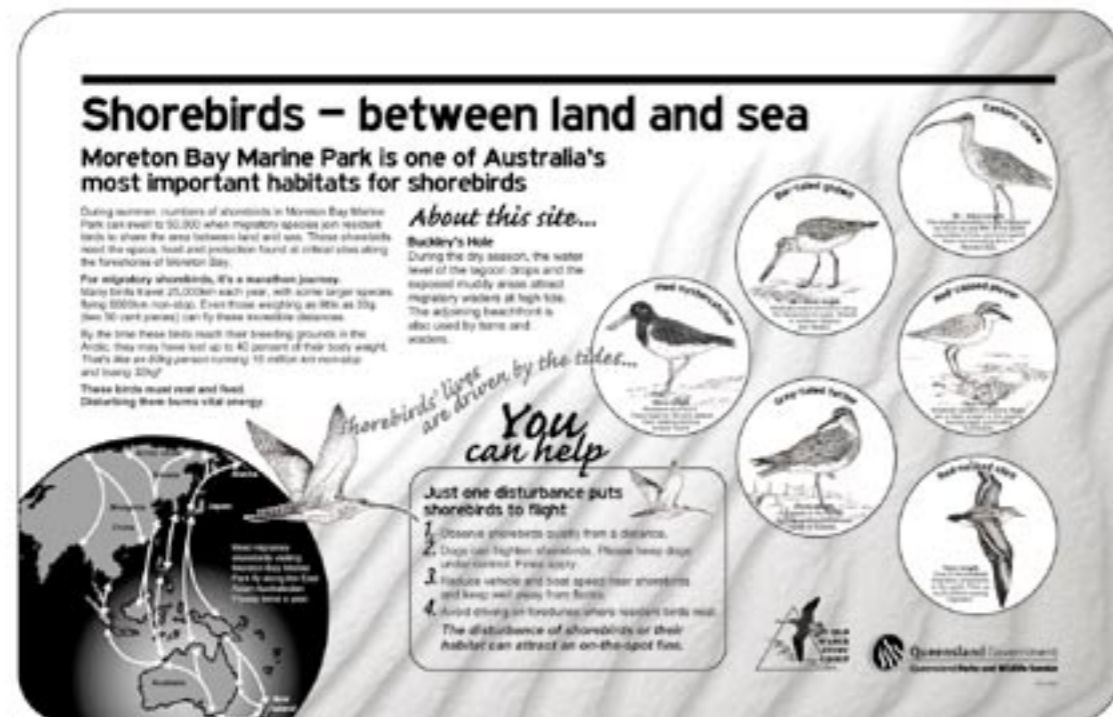
Measures of success

Because this project is still in its early stages, it is difficult to say how successful it has been in alleviating threats to shorebirds or raising the public's awareness of these issues. There has certainly been a concerted effort to reach key target audiences but only time will tell how successful this has been. Likewise, it will be interesting to see if levels of compliance with existing regulations are improved as a result of the public education campaign.

A regular monitoring program, coupled with the regular reporting of project outcomes against set targets will be required to see how successful the Strategy has been. The level to which the Strategy is utilised by other land managers in guiding them to fulfil their conservation obligations will also need to be measured.

Future strategies and actions

- The Draft Moreton Bay Shorebird Management Strategy is still being finalised. The consideration and incorporation of comments and suggestions from a wide spectrum of stakeholders will be a major future undertaking for the project.
- The QPWS will be working on the development of implementation plans which will deliver actions for the conservation of shorebirds in conjunction with local governments, landholders and other land managers.



Curlew sandpiper.





Summary

The Draft Moreton Bay Shorebird Management Strategy will make an important contribution to shorebird conservation by;

Raising the awareness of the general public through a diverse and innovative education campaign using a range of different media ranging from television to specialist magazines.

Consulting and integrating all stakeholders involved with the use of Moreton Bay.

Developing and implementing a shorebird management strategy.

Important future objectives for the organisation and project include;

Finalisation of the draft shorebird management strategy and liaison with all stakeholders affected.

Development of a quantitative and long term monitoring program of project outcomes.

Key contacts and groups

Birds Australia

Tel (03) 9882 2622
Email: mail@birdsaustralia.com
Website: www.birdsaustralia.com.au

WWF Australia (Shorebird Conservation Project and Threatened Species Network)

Freecall 1800 032 551
Website: www.wwf.org.au

EPA/QPWS:

Website: www.epa.qld.gov.au/parks_and_forests/marine_parks/moreton_bay

Department of the Environment and Heritage Australian Wetlands Database

Website: www.deh.gov.au/water/wetlands/database/

Queensland Wader Study Group

Website: www.waders.com.au

Australasian Wader Studies Group

Website: www.tasweb.com.au/awsg/



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Shorebirds on mudflats, Moreton bay, Brisbane.

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