



## SHOREBIRD CONSERVATION ROBBINS PASSAGE/BOULLANGER BAY WETLANDS AREA

### Values Mapping Project



### Where

Robbins Passage and Boullanger Bay are located on the far north west coast of Tasmania. This location contains the largest area of tidal mud and sandbanks in the state as well as a series of islands and tidal channels, beaches and estuaries. This variety of habitats makes the area especially important for many shorebird species. Although the region is generally sparsely populated, a number of activities such as dairy farming and commercial fishing have been practiced for over a century.



### The birds

The Robbins Passage Wetlands are claimed to support higher numbers of shorebirds than all other shorebird sites in Tasmania combined. The area is especially important for migratory species such as eastern curlew, ruddy turnstone and curlew sandpiper. Resident species that occur in high numbers include the sooty and pied oystercatchers and the hooded plover.

### Who

The main players in the Values Mapping Project included the Robbins Passage Wetlands Coast and Landcare Group, Birds Tasmania, Community Solutions and WWF Australia. The catalyst for the Values Mapping Project and the involvement of so many stakeholders was a nomination to have the wetlands of this area listed under the Ramsar convention identifying it as a wetland of international importance. Considerable opposition was voiced by locals who were concerned that such a listing would impose restrictions upon use of the area. These events led to the formation of the Robbins Passage Wetlands Coast and Landcare Group which aims to promote community awareness of the conservation values of the wetland and to ensure that the area is appropriately managed.

### Problems and Challenges

The important habitat value of the Robbins Passage Wetlands for shorebirds in Tasmania has only been fully appreciated in recent times. However, the area has been utilised for commercial and recreational purposes for well over a century. In the beginning, the general community's awareness of the importance of this area to shorebird conservation was low and no formally organised group existed to manage this extensive coastal wetland.

There was a perception from the locals that the public consultation process associated with the nomination for Ramsar listing was inadequate.

This situation had the potential to create major division in the community and to result in a negative outcome for all parties involved. It was felt that the historical, social and recreational values of the area to the local population were not duly recognised.

Other problems facing the site include human disturbance- especially by the inappropriate use of four wheel drive vehicles, overfishing, impacts on water quality from surrounding dairy farms and the spread of weeds such as rice grass which have the potential to make shorebird roosting and feeding sites unusable.



Red-necked stint.



## Solutions

Following local opposition, the nomination of the area for Ramsar listing was not endorsed by State Government. Instead, a local plan for managing the area was adopted which involved the formation of the local Robbins Passage Wetlands Coast and Landcare Group. The group recognised the need to build partnerships and raise awareness of the environmental values and issues of the area. This included a close working relationship with Birds Tasmania who had prepared the original Ramsar nomination. Both organisations were able to put the past behind them and work together to wisely manage the wetland.

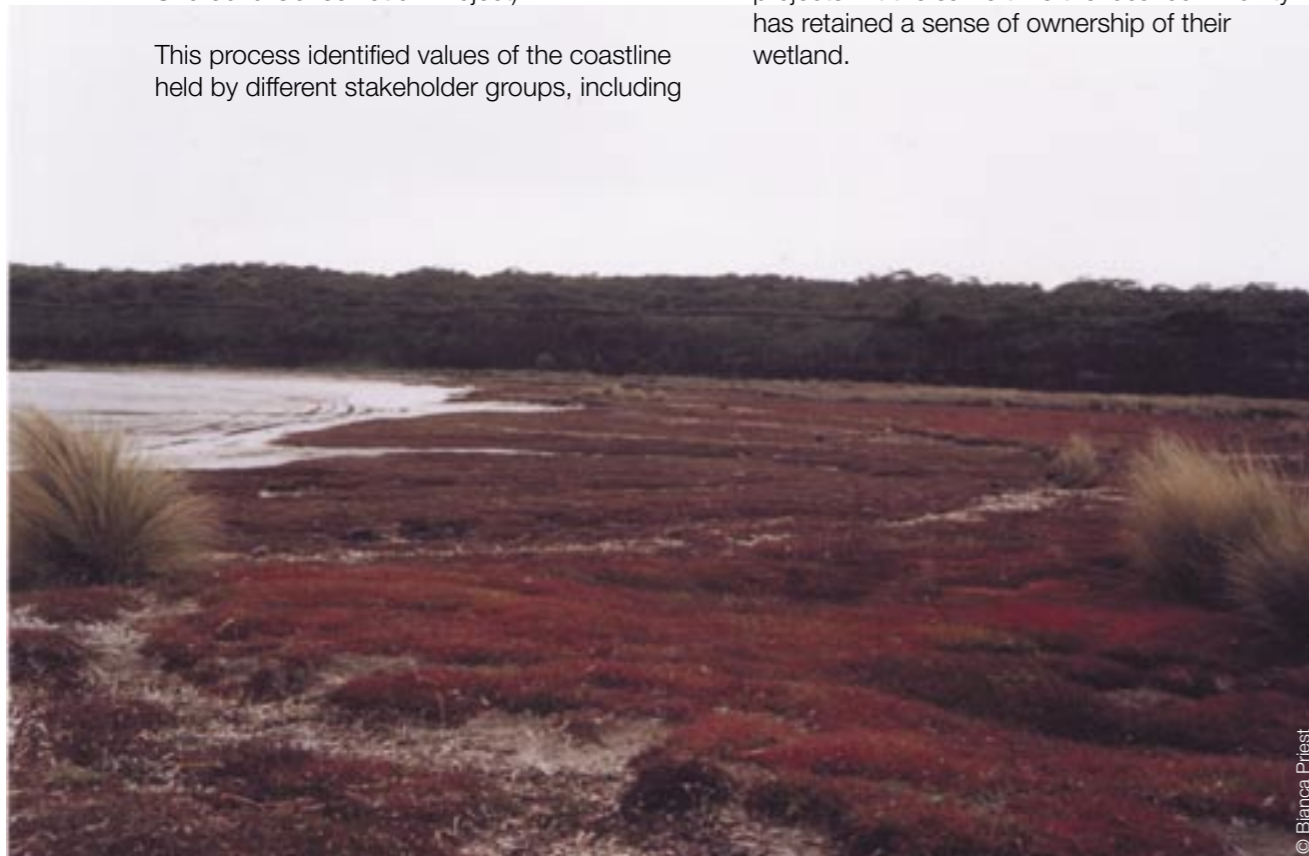
This special area of coastline is valued by many different people for a range of reasons. The Values Mapping Project was proposed to bring together the range of stakeholder groups – user, management and interest – to identify and discuss important areas within the wetlands and any issues concerning their use, especially in relation to shorebirds. The Values Mapping Project took place over three days in Smithton and included small group discussions, a field trip followed by a series of presentations on the wetlands and a workshop on the final day. The project was coordinated by Community Solutions - independent consultants with experience in resolving conflict – in partnership with Birds Tasmania and WWF Australia (as part of the Shorebird Conservation Project).

This process identified values of the coastline held by different stakeholder groups, including

recreational, social and economic values as well as the conservation values. Key areas where conflicting uses were likely to occur were identified and a conflict resolution process was undertaken. In nearly all instances favourable outcomes were achieved for all parties involved either by finding alternative sites where activities could be carried out where they had a lesser impact on other values, or by modifying the timing and the way in which activities were carried out. The project generated much trust and goodwill amongst participants and cleared the path for a collaborative approach to future management and planning to proceed.

The approach taken in this instance is one of total community inclusion. Eighteen stakeholder groups have been regularly involved in consultation and management of the wetland. These include organisations which can provide scientific advice and expertise such as the Nature Conservation Branch within the Department of Primary Industries, Water and the Environment (DPIWE) and Birds Tasmania, as well as user groups including the local oyster-grower's association and community groups such as local schools, indigenous groups and local council.

This close relationship with a wide range of stakeholders has helped the group to obtain nearly \$100 000 of funding for a range of projects. At the same time the local community has retained a sense of ownership of their wetland.



Bird Pt (Robbins Isl) - an important roost site for shorebirds in NW Tas.

## Outcomes for the environment

- Community awareness of the wetland and its values has been enhanced.
- Establishment of a close working relationship between the group, locals and other stakeholders.
- Interpretive signage has been installed at key access areas to the wetland and inappropriate four wheel drive vehicle access and use has been curtailed.
- Long term monitoring of shorebird numbers during summer and winter by experienced observers has been implemented.
- An innovative program to control the weed Rice Grass has commenced.
- A comprehensive water quality monitoring program is in use which utilises latest technology and will provide a high quality monitoring system.

## Outcomes for the participants

- The public profile of the group has been raised substantially.
- Participants have gained knowledge and expertise from scientists, professionals and other stakeholders.
- Valuable experience in successfully applying for grants has been gained.



Shipwreck Pt (Perking Isl) - an important roost site for shorebirds.

## Measures of success

This project has successfully achieved a number of positive social outcomes, including the following;

- Conflicts over the use of the wetland have been successfully resolved.
- The profile of the wetland and its ecology among the local community has increased and a sense of ownership of the wetland has been developed.
- A community group with a desire to look after the environment has been established.

With time, the results of the current bird counts and water monitoring programs will provide valuable insights into the effects of certain activities. It is only then that it will be possible to see how successful the Values Mapping Project has been in protecting shorebirds from disturbance and habitat degradation.



Robbins Passage Wetland Group



Sign at bird breeding site, Tasmania.





## Future strategies and directions

- The continuity of the public's support and enthusiasm will need to be maintained.
- Further survey work of shorebird numbers and distribution is required as it is likely that new roosting sites will be discovered.
- Monitoring of impacts of existing and proposed wind farms will be required.
- The appointment of a wetland coordinator to develop and initiate projects agreed as important during the values mapping project. These projects will focus on education, investigating shorebird use of the wetlands and weed control.

## Key groups and contacts

### Birds Australia

Tel (03) 9882 2622

Email: [mail@birdsaustralia.com](mailto:mail@birdsaustralia.com)

Website: [www.birdsaustralia.com.au](http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au)

### WWF Australia (Shorebird Conservation Project and Threatened Species Network)

Freecall 1800 032 551

Website: [www.wwf.org.au](http://www.wwf.org.au)

### Community Solutions:

Website: [www.communitysolutions.com.au](http://www.communitysolutions.com.au)

### Robbins Passage Wetlands Coast and Landcare Group

### Australasian Wader Studies Group

Website: [www.tasweb.com.au/awsg/](http://www.tasweb.com.au/awsg/)

## Summary

The Robbins Passage Wetlands Coast and Landcare Group and values mapping project has made an important contribution to shorebird conservation because;

All stakeholders were included and worked together cooperatively

The local community was empowered to manage their wetland appropriately.

The group and project have utilised the media well to let the community know what they were doing and why the wetland was so important.

Important objectives for the group and the project in future will include;

Continuing to engage and cooperate with all existing stakeholders and include new stakeholders in the project as the need arises.

Continue to develop quantitative monitoring programs and gather data on project outcomes on a regular basis.



Sharp-tailed sandpiper.

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Common Greenshank.

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The shorebird case studies were developed by Birds Australia as part of the Shorebirds Conservation Project which is funded by the Natural Heritage Trust and managed by WWF Australia

