



# WATCH THE BIRDS GO BY

Broome and Roebuck Bay are regarded as the most significant place in Australia to see migratory shorebirds, as Mandy Soymonoff, of Broome Bird Observatory explains:

The whole of Roebuck Bay and Eighty Mile Beach can contain 380,000 birds at this time of year. Over 40 species of shorebirds use the northern beaches of Roebuck Bay and the adjacent wetlands in preparation for their annual migration. The birds can be seen roosting at high tides. Many species form mixed flocks, watching for predators and awaiting the receding tide. Once the tide begins to ebb, the birds re-inhabit the vast mudflats to feed. The mud flats are among the most biodiverse in the world, containing a large number of species that the birds prey upon such as shellfish, crustaceans and worms.

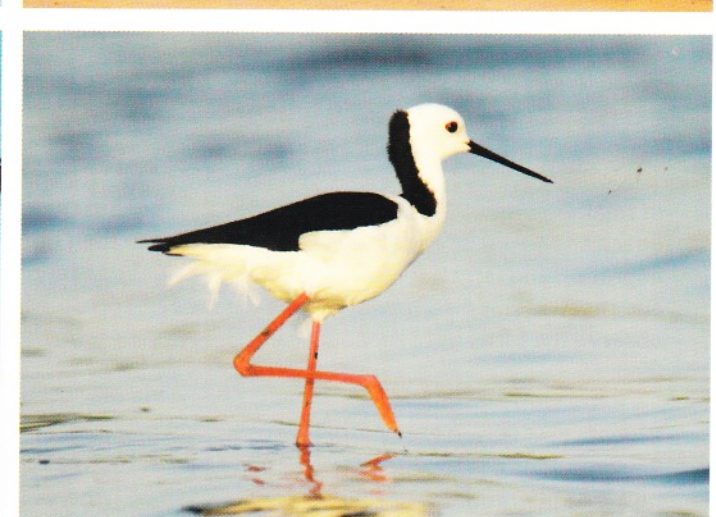
The abundance of life in the mud fuels the birds before their migration. Some birds put on around 70 per cent of their body weight to make the long flights required. Larger species

such as the Bar-Tailed Godwit, make the journey to their first destination, China's Yellow Sea, without stopping. There they feed again in preparation for the rest of their flight to breeding grounds in Northern Siberia, Russia. By the time this bird has returned to Roebuck it will have undertaken a 20,400km round trip. Other species of shorebirds nest in Mongolia, Northern China, the New Siberian Islands and Alaska taking advantage of the abundant insect life in the short Northern Hemisphere summer.

Not every shorebird leaves the bay. The immature birds that made their inaugural flight the year before are not ready to breed as yet. During the dry season between 5,000 and 8,000 birds stay in the area to perfect their feeding technique. From August to October, the adults and newly fledged chicks will return to North Western Australia to begin the cycle again.

As shorebirds need a range of habitats in different countries, research is conducted which provides critical information for the protection of the birds and their environments. Throughout





Roebuck Bay  
 Bottom left: Bar-tailed Godwit  
 Bottom Right: A mixed flock of shorebirds roosting in Roebuck Bay

Bottom Left: Black-winged Stilts and Red-necked Avocets roosting with the gulls and pelicans.  
 Bottom right: Black-winged Stilts and Red-necked Avocets roosting with the gulls and pelicans.

Photos courtesy of Ric Else.





Bar-tailed Godwits and Great Knots in flight

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the dry season, members of the public can assist with the research on selected dates by contacting the Broome Bird Observatory.

March and April are perfect months for learning to tell the difference between shorebird species as most will have changed into their spectacular breeding plumage ahead of the mating season. Birds such as the Red Knot, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwit become a conspicuous brick orange and others such as the Great Knot sport a black breast. Most afternoons between mid March and Early May, flocks of shorebirds assemble, start calling excitedly and launch into the sky to begin their journey. This is the perfect time to observe this marvel of nature against the incredibly beautiful backdrop of Roebuck Bay.

In smaller numbers, shorebirds also visit Reddell Beach, Town Beach and Cable Beach to roost and feed. Due to their long migration and large food requirements, they need to feed and rest without disturbance. If you are at the beach, please observe the birds from a distance and keep any pets on the lead.

Broome Bird Observatory conducts 2 ½ hour tours of Roebuck Bay on suitable tides, the cost is \$70 per adult. There will be a free migration watch community day in April where you can learn about the birds and watch the migration take place. Research is conducted in the dry season and volunteers are required. Contact the Broome Visitor Centre for more information.



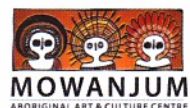
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