

## SHOREBIRD ANNUAL CYCLE - PART 4

### SOUTHWARD MIGRATION

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Once breeding is finished it is time to move south again. Generally, females leave the breeding areas before the males and before that year's clutch of chicks. Once the chicks are independent and flying, the males leave. The young birds then gather into flocks and undertake their first migration with no parental guidance or experienced birds to rely on. They may only be 6 weeks old when they start their journey of up to 10,000 km back to Roebuck Bay's shores.



*A young Great Knot on the tundra breeding grounds © Jan van de Kam*

Southward migration is slightly less demanding on shorebirds, as the timing of arrival at their destination is not as critical as it is on northward migration. Arriving too late to the breeding grounds can result in failure to breed. Arriving too late to the non-breeding grounds, has no impact on breeding and little implication for the bird's survival. However, it is typhoon season during southward migration, so it is still some undertaking for a first-time migrating bird. As timing is less important both adult and juvenile birds tend to stop at more sites on their southward journey than the adults did on the northward journey. The entire southward migration is of longer duration when accounting for all flying and stopping days. One staging area on southward migration for some birds is the Indonesian archipelago. A final stop before the last leg of the journey back to the Australian mainland, this is not an area they use during northward migration. Adult birds will almost always return to the site they left from. Their navigational skills are exceptional, and they are very 'site faithful'. Young birds are more likely to explore and not necessarily stay at the first mudflat they encounter when they reach Australia.

As the young birds have no experience or accumulated knowledge of the route to the non-breeding areas, their first migration is innate. If that first trip is successful, they will then have acquired knowledge of their flyway and will use that for subsequent migrations.