

Shorebirds face hunger and death on annual migration

VIVIENNE RYAN

A BOOK compiled to raise awareness of the plight of thousands of shorebirds that make Roebuck Bay their home for part of the year was launched in Broome last week by Greens Senator Rachel Siewert.

Aptly titled *Invisible Connections*, the book documents the lives and the challenges faced by migrating shorebirds using research from local man Chris Hassell of the Global Flyway Network.

The book was edited by Broome's Jan Lewis and is illustrated with 240 pictures by Dutch wildlife photographer Jan van de Kam.

A series of beautifully shot and alarming pictures show the birds' facing hunger and death as vital feeding grounds on their migration path are destroyed.

The birds travel up to 14,000km each year from as far south as Tasmania and New Zealand, up over the Yellow Sea bordering China and Korea to feed before heading on to Alaska or Siberia to mate.

However, Mr Hassell said industrial development on the Yellow Sea's mud flats was destroying the birds' much needed pit stop.

"When they migrate from here they can't fly 10,000km in one hit straight to the Arctic breeding



A group of curlew sandpipers takes off.



A grey plover feasts.

cerns for the birds as the mud flats were being decimated by development.

The birds are found all over Australasia but two of the most important habitats are believed to be Roebuck Bay and Eighty Mile Beach.

The book's editor and bird enthusiast Ms Lewis said some birds faced extinction if their feeding grounds continued to be destroyed.

The population of shorebirds on Roebuck Bay can hit 130,000 during summer.

However, Ms Lewis said numbers were dwindling because of the destruction of the feeding grounds.

The book is available from the Broome Bird Observatory and the Kimberley Bookshop.

grounds – they need to stop over," he said.

"They use the Yellow Sea to replenish their energy and fat stores to fuel the next leg of their journey. That is where the main problem is for the birds."

He said there were grave con-



This bird has been fitted with leg bands and flags.



curlew sandpipers probe for food on the shores of the Yellow Sea.

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Bird researcher Chris Hassell and bird enthusiast Jan Lewis launched *Invisible Connections* last week.

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