

WINGS ACROSS THE WATER

The East Asian - Australasian Flyway

SHOREBIRDS

Shorebirds are among the most impressive migratory species in the world and are found feeding in shallow water at both coastal and inland wetlands. Some well known examples include plovers, sandpipers, curlews and snipe.

Migratory shorebirds experience endless summers by flying between the southern and northern hemispheres. During their non-breeding phase, they fly to the southern hemisphere in flocks; their destinations include South-east Asia, the Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand. Millions of migratory shorebirds arrive in Australia during August and September. During the Australian summer, the birds will feed mainly on small creatures living in mudflats. In April, these birds fly from their Australian feeding grounds to breed in the tundra areas of the northern hemisphere, such as the Russian Far East and Alaska.

FLYWAYS

Each year, millions of migratory shorebirds travel great distances between their breeding and non-breeding areas. Some species of shorebird, weighing as little as 30 grams, may travel 25,000 kilometres in one year. Some larger shorebirds are known to have flown more than 6,000 kilometres without stopping.

Shorebirds make the journey in several weeks stopping several times, or perhaps only once along the way. When they stop, they need to build up reserves of fat for the next long stage of their journey.

The routes they travel along are called flyways. The East Asian-Australasian Flyway extends from the Arctic Circle through Eastern and South-east Asia to Australia and New Zealand (see map). Flyways consist of chains of important wetlands, usually coastal mudflats. These mudflats provide abundant and easily found food, which the shorebirds must rapidly consume in order to gain strength for the next leg of their journey. The ability to find food

quickly is vital when the birds are flying to their northern breeding grounds as the northern summer is very short. The birds cannot afford delays that can affect their chance of breeding successfully.



THE EAST ASIAN-AUSTRALASIAN SHOREBIRD SITE NETWORK

Shorebirds use wetlands like stepping stones on their journey around the globe. During migration, they fly from feeding ground to feeding ground, so a disturbance at one site could be catastrophic. Pollution, land reclamation and other factors associated with industrialisation have destroyed or degraded many of the coastal mudflats that migratory birds rely on.

In March 1996, an international program was established to protect migratory shorebirds along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, known as the East Asian-Australasian Shorebird Site Network. The Network links wetlands throughout the Flyway which are important to shorebirds.

The East Asian-Australasian Shorebird Site Network is an international cooperative effort supported by both government and non-government organisations. The Network is supported by Wetlands International with funding from Environment Australia. To date, the Network includes 28 sites from 9 countries. The Shorebird Site Network promotes the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands that shorebirds use during their annual migratory flights.

The Network brings sites and people together. Site managers are encouraged to establish local advisory or liaison groups and develop management plans. Such activities help gain support for the management of these sites. The Network also helps site owners, managers, local people and participating organisations to gain international recognition and support for their site and conservation efforts.

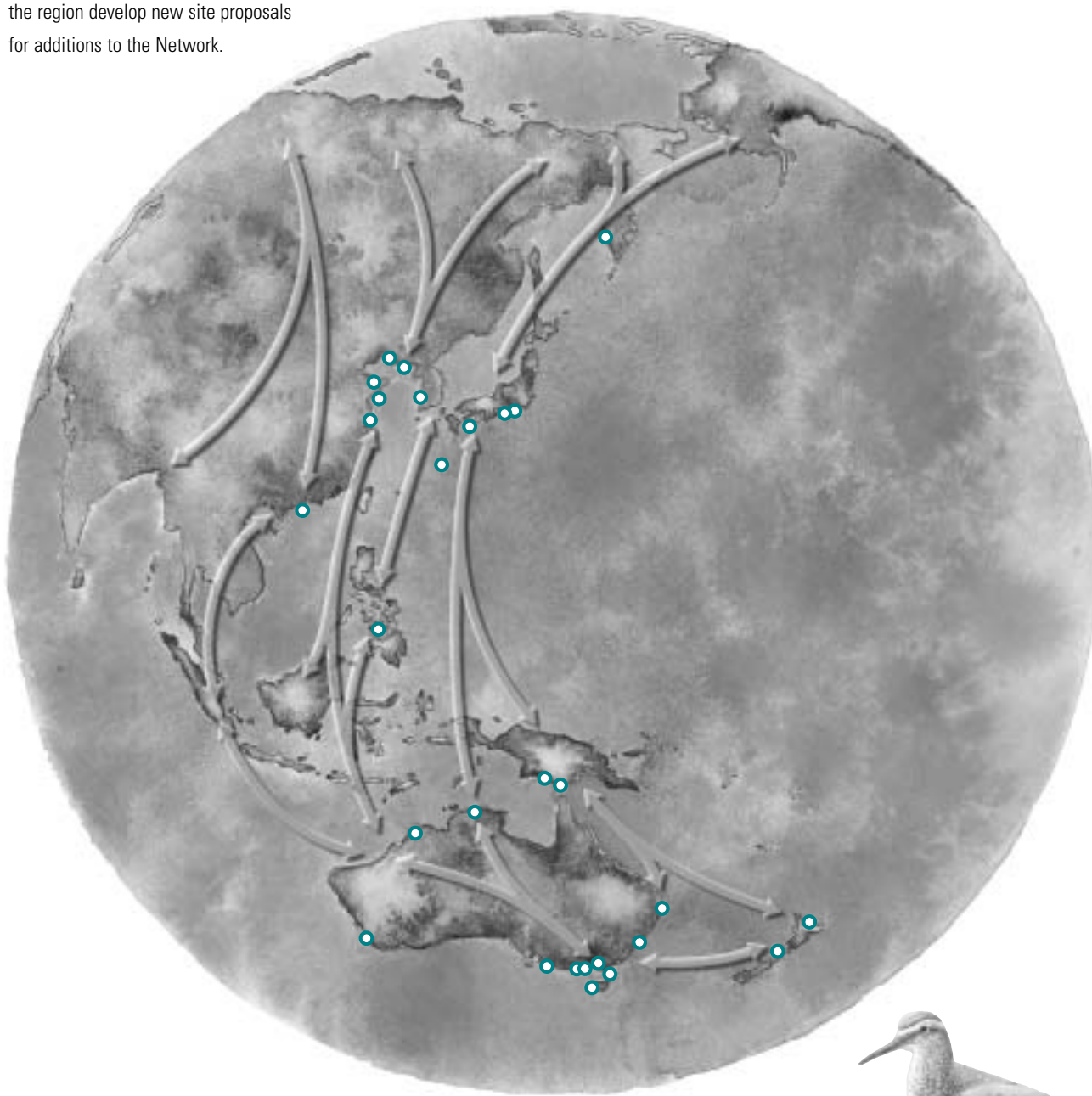




HOW SITES ARE ADDED TO THE NETWORK

Wetlands that support 20,000 or more shorebirds or 1% of the Flyway population of a migratory shorebird or subspecies, are eligible to join the East Asian-Australasian Shorebird Site Network. Governments in the region develop new site proposals for additions to the Network.

VISIT OUR WEB SITE AT:
www.environment.gov.au/water/wetlands



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