

Australia plan to protect 'long-haul' birds

April 8 2016



A bar-tailed Godwit is shown feeding on a sandbar in Merimbula in southern New South Wales in this photo from Birdlife Australia

They are the international travellers who come to Australia each year to rest and feast, but migratory birds face a perilous journey, officials said Friday as they launched a plan to help protect them.

Feathered tourists such as the grey plover, red knot and common sandpiper commonly spend several months each year Down Under after

their breeding season in the northern hemisphere, travelling thousands of kilometres to get here.

"Shorebirds such as the female bar-tailed godwit match the incredible long-haul range of an Airbus A380," Environment Minister Greg Hunt said in a statement.

"But the perilous nature of migration, where [birds](#) cross multiple national boundaries, means shorebirds face a multitude of threats."

Hunt said a new plan, designed to help protect some 35 species, recognised that some populations of these birds were in decline.

"There is a growing need to reduce the threats to their habitat," he said, adding that this was critical for the birds' continued survival.

Australia's coastal and freshwater wetlands are a resting and feeding zone for the migratory shorebirds—with some travelling up to 11,500 kilometres (7,146 miles) non-stop to journey south.

Many travel along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway which extends from breeding grounds in the Russian tundra, Mongolia and Alaska south through Asia to non-breeding areas in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand.



Australia's coastal and freshwater wetlands are a resting and feeding zone for the migratory shorebirds—with some travelling up to 11,500 kilometres (7,146 miles) non-stop to journey south

Hunt said cooperation between countries was required to protect the birds and the new Wildlife Conservation Plan for Migratory Shorebirds provided the foundation for this.

"This plan is guiding our bilateral talks with Japan, China and the Republic of Korea on how threats to migratory shorebirds in the Yellow Sea region can be managed with the help of local communities," he said.

The plan notes that habitat loss as a result of development is the most significant threat to [migratory birds](#) in Australia.

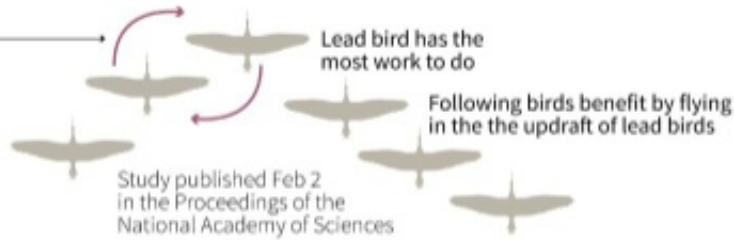
The flying V

Study of migratory birds shows remarkable egalitarianism in how pairs cooperate

Key finding

Study found frequent position changes allows each bird to rest

Data analysis of pairs showed time spent leading precisely matched time spent trailing



► "First convincing evidence for 'turn taking' reciprocal cooperative behavior in birds": study authors

Study subjects



Northern bald ibis
Geronticus eremita

► 14 hand-reared birds
Critically endangered

► Imprinted to human foster parents

► Taught to follow a microlight to learn migration routes

Previous study

■ A study published last year found that birds in formation coordinated their wing flaps with precision to maximise efficiency

■ Each bird either flaps in phase or out of phase with a leading bird depending on their exact position



► Suggests ability to sense or predict patterns of air turbulence caused by other birds

Source: PNAS/Waldrappteam/Nature/StevePortugal

AFP

Graphic on energy conservation by migratory birds flying in a V-formation

Along the route it said coastal development in stop-over areas in the Yellow Sea region bordered by North Korea, China and South Korea was of particular concern and the plan aimed to protect remaining tidal flats in the Yellow Sea.

Chris Purnell from BirdLife Australia welcomed the plan but said there was still work to be done studying wetlands in Australia given gaps in the existing knowledge.

© 2016 AFP

Citation: Australia plan to protect 'long-haul' birds (2016, April 8) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-04-australia-long-haul-birds.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.