

Nature

New South Wales



Summer 2012

**Wilderness, Tourism
and National Parks**

taking stock and looking ahead

Rewilding Europe

European approaches to protecting
wilderness

The Red-necked Stint

creature feature

Conservation

in production landscapes



The Red-necked Stint Creature Feature

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Natural history

The Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* belongs to a group of birds collectively known as shorebirds (Charadriiformes), whose ecology is strongly associated with intertidal areas on the coast and inland wetlands. Along the former, their lives are dictated by the tides, feeding on marine invertebrates that get exposed on rocky shores and mud flats when the tide recedes, then roosting on rocky outcrops and sandy beaches when the tide rises.

By far the most amazing feature of this tiny bird, with a weight of just 30 g, is the intercontinental flights undertaken every year between the northern and the southern hemisphere. This species breeds in the tundra of Siberia and Alaska, the treeless vegetation that dominates the northernmost part of the world, an inhospitable environment with unbearable frozen winters. Adult Red-necked Stints arrive there by the end of the northern hemisphere spring with a tight schedule to mate and nest. Their chicks are highly precocial, hatching well developed and growing

quickly. As parents conclude their duties and chicks reach full size, they take off, leaving their offspring behind, returning to the southern hemisphere non-breeding grounds on coastal areas and inland wetlands across Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

Subsequently, it is up to the newly fledged Red-necked Stints to find their own way south, leaving their breeding grounds before the snow blankets the tundra again, thus commencing their independent lives. Juvenile birds will then start replicating their parents' migratory pattern, travelling between the northern and the southern hemisphere every year. Red-necked Stints arrive in Australia in spring and depart in autumn, completing an annual migration cycle of thousands of kilometres covered by long-haul flights, with stopovers, along the east coast of Asia (see text box).

Conservation status

The Red-necked Stint is not considered endangered and its global population may not be declining. However, habitat destruction in critical stopover areas along their migration

route, as well as in estuaries in Australia, should be considered cautiously.

Even though this species is listed as Least Concern by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the Commonwealth *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* and the NSW *Threatened Species Act*; several Bilateral Migratory Bird Agreements between Australia, China, Japan and South Korea have granted it protection.

Red-necked Stint watching

Red-necked Stints can be easily seen along the NSW coast. Some reliable locations include the estuaries of the Richmond, Clarence and Shoalhaven Rivers, as well as Long Reef and Boat Harbour within the Sydney region. As these birds are small, the use of binoculars and spotting scopes is recommended.

Further Information

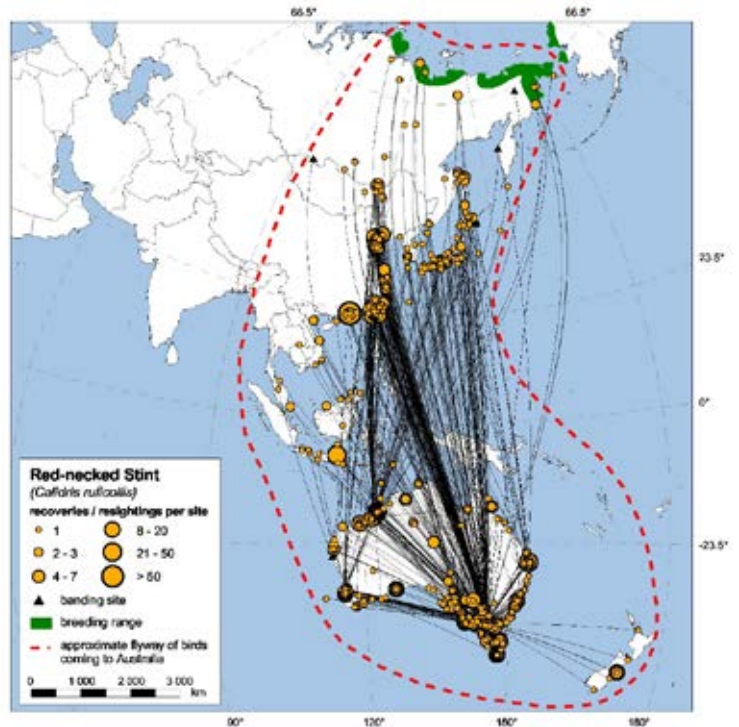
Geering, A., Agnew, L. and S. Harding. 2007. *Shorebirds of Australia*. Canberra, Australia: CSIRO Publishing. 256 pp.
www.longreefwaders.org
www.shorebirds.org.au

The Red-necked Stint is a fascinating bird telling us a story of endurance, travelling thousands of kilometres in order to complete its life cycle.

The migratory path of the Red-necked Stint has been unveiled by coordinated and continuous monitoring. This process has involved the deployment of uniquely numbered bands and region-coded colour leg flags that can be then used to track individuals along their way (see photo). Amateur birdwatchers and scientists have reported many of these marked birds across the Asia Pacific region over the years enabling the mapping of their migratory route (see map). This information has allowed the identification of critical areas for their conservation.



This Red-necked Stint was recorded at Long Reef in Sydney's northern beaches. The displayed colour leg flag combination indicates that this individual was initially caught at Bohai Bay in the northwestern section of the Yellow Sea in China, over 8,000 km away. **Photo:** Alfred Schulte.



Distribution of Red-necked Stint: non-breeding grounds include Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand; breeding grounds (green areas) encompass the tundra across Siberia and Alaska. Yellow dots and black triangles represent places where banding and band recoveries have occurred. **Map:** © 2004 Australasian Wader Studies Group.

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