

The Swan River Estuary extends 60km from Fremantle to Ellen Brook, and includes 6km of the lower Canning River. Known as the Derbarl Yerrigan, it is a place of deep spiritual and mythological significance to the original people, the Noongar; and for thousands of years has been vitally important as a source of food, water, transport and recreation.

Original fringing vegetation included samphire flats, *Juncus kraussii* sedgelands, forests of paperbark (*Melaleuca raphiophylla* and *M. cuticularis*) and flooded gum (*Eucalyptus rudis*), and stands of river sheoak (*Casuarina obesa*). This vegetation protected the estuary margins, reduced erosion and filtered nutrients and pollutants which flowed into the river. However, very little of this vegetation now survives.

Covering 358.6ha, the Swan Estuary Marine Park and Adjacent Nature Reserves comprises estuarine lands and waters on the Swan River at Alfred Cove, Milyu and Pelican Point.

The Marine Park was established 'to protect, care for and promote the study of indigenous flora and fauna and to preserve any feature of archaeological, historic or scientific interest'. It is managed by the Department of Environment and Conservation.

The Nature Reserves provide sanctuary for native fauna - particularly bird-life. Waders and waterbirds move between the three areas on a daily basis, foraging and roosting, depending on weather and tidal conditions, and breeding. Avian visitors include threatened trans-equatorial migratory wading birds, for which multilateral cooperation for their conservation is encouraged through the Partnership for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Other birds which use the area are nomadic Australian Pied Oystercatchers, Black-winged Stilts and Red-capped Plovers, all known to breed in the Reserves, and bushbirds such as pardalotes, fairy-wrens, honeyeaters and parrots.

The community is strongly committed to protecting and restoring the health of this important habitat.



Curlew Sandpiper and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper



Swan Estuary Reserves Action Group Inc.

These community volunteers strive to enhance the long-term ecological health of the Swan River Estuary nature reserves and adjacent river parks for the benefit of native fauna.

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Birds of the Swan Estuary

Black-winged Stilt; photograph by David Quinn.



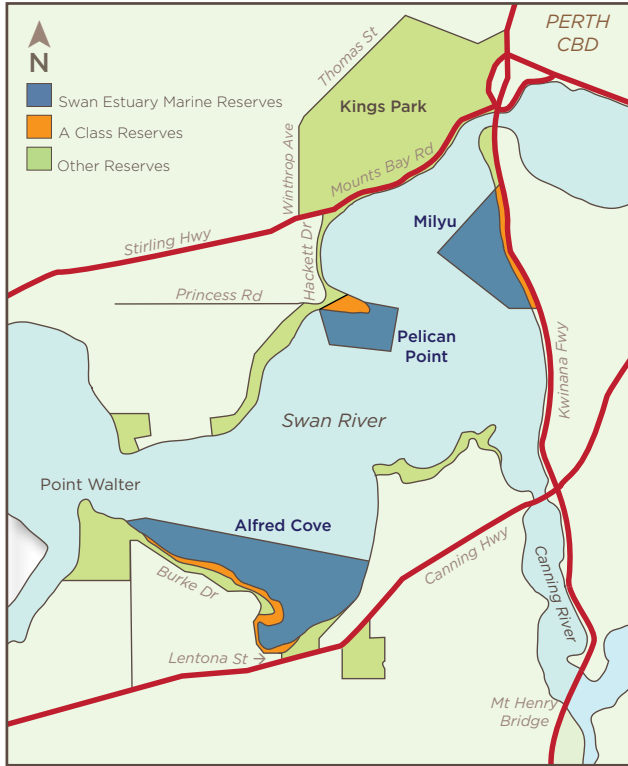
Pelican Point, Milyu and Alfred Cove

birds are in our nature



Swan Estuary Reserves

Swan Estuary Marine Parks and Adjacent Nature Reserves



The three Swan River Nature Reserves have been given A-class status — the highest level of protection for flora and fauna.



Red-capped Plover



Crested Tern

PELICAN POINT

Access: via Hackett Drive, Crawley.

Called Bootanup or Booriarup, meaning place of the balga (*Xanthorrhoea*), this area was favoured for crabbing and prawning by the indigenous Mooro people.

While there have been significant alterations through clearing and in-filling of marshlands over many decades, Pelican Point nevertheless provides local and migratory birds with some of the best remaining habitat for foraging, resting and nesting.

HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh visited Pelican Point in the early hours of 27 March 1963, expressing the hope 'that this and other sites in and around the City of Perth would be preserved as permanent bird sanctuaries'. A viewing pavilion and plaque commemorate the visit.

Significant species:

Black-winged Stilt, Australian Pied Oystercatcher, Little Pied and Little Black Cormorants are regular visitors and Red-necked Avocet is a possibility. Caspian and Crested Tern both occur regularly with the endangered Fairy Tern an occasional summer breeder. Treasured sightings in summer are trans-equatorial migratory waders such as Red-necked Stint and Common Sandpiper. Variegated Fairy-wren and White-cheeked Honeyeater are among the more common bushbirds.



White-faced Heron

MILYU

Access: On foot along the dual-use-path from the Narrows Bridge, or park on Melville Parade, Como and cross the Kwinana Freeway via an overpass.

Milyu is an Aboriginal name for samphire, and the main feature of the Reserve is a small peninsula vegetated with sedges and samphire. This is a very exposed site but the shores and shallow water are often used by waders and other waterbirds.

Significant species:

Four species of cormorant occur here. Little Pied and Little Black Cormorants feed and rest here regularly. Increasing numbers of Black Swans occur along the river shores. Eastern Ospreys nest a little to the south of the reserve and can often be seen fishing within it.

Australian Pied Oystercatchers and Red-capped Plovers can often be seen on the beach.



Pacific Black Duck

ALFRED COVE

Access: via Lentona St and Burke Drive in Attadale.

Alfred Cove was one of the many Noongar camping sites and meeting areas along the river. It is a significant feeding site for migratory waders.

The area of samphire within the actual cove is worth checking for feeding birds which are often well-camouflaged by the vegetation.

Birds move up and down the shoreline between here and Point Walter and numerous bushbirds make use of trees and shrubs further away from the water.

BirdLife WA offers regular walks to this area.

Significant species:

Migratory waders such as Grey Plover, Common Greenshank, Bar-tailed Godwit, Sharp-tailed and Curlew Sandpipers are often seen on the spit or beaches.

The Eastern Osprey has been recorded nesting here as have the Australian Pied Oystercatcher, Red-capped Plover, Pacific Black Duck and Black-winged Stilt. You may even be lucky enough to see a Buff-banded Rail with chicks.

Species Profiles

NB: This is by no means a complete list of species to be seen at these reserves. It simply profiles a variety of the many interesting species to have been recorded.

Australian Shelduck

PP, AC

Large, boldly marked duck. Common on fresh or salt water. Feeds by grazing or by sifting food from water.



Australasian Darter

PP, AC, MU

Long pointed bill and specially jointed neck allow it to stab prey under water with a sudden thrust; submerges with barely a ripple. Breeds in colonies.



Little Pied Cormorant

PP, AC, MU

Stubby yellow bill; usually fishes alone. The related Little Black Cormorant is sometimes seen fishing in flocks on the river. Roosts in colonies.



Great Cormorant

AC, MU

Larger bird with a conspicuous yellow facial patch. Usually seen singly or in small groups. Like the darter and all cormorants, have feathers that are not waterproofed, so wings must be spread to dry after each fishing session.



Eastern Great Egret

AC; IA

Tall, stately bird, usually alone, wades in deeper water. Waits motionless before making a lightning thrust at prey.

Eastern Osprey

PP, AC, MU; B (AC)

Large raptor; diet of fish, which are caught in talons. Numbers have gradually increased in metro area in recent years. Also breeds close to Pelican Pt and Milyu.



Buff-banded Rail

PP, AC; B (AC)

Usually shy; in dense vegetation along water's edge. Will also come onto grassland to feed but vanishes at first sign of intruders.

Australian Pied Oystercatcher

PP, AC, MU; B (PP, AC, MU)

Sturdy, handsome wader. Prefers sandy beaches. Feeds on molluscs. Often active at night.



Black-winged Stilt

(see cover image)

PP, AC; B (PP, AC): N

Wades through shallow water to take aquatic plants, insects and shrimps. Breeds in Australia, sometimes in huge numbers on inland lakes when conditions are right.

Red-necked Avocet

PP, AC; N

Distinctive long upturned bill. Wades through shallow water, sweeping bill in search of food.



Grey Plover

AC, MU; IA; Mi Sp-Su

Medium-sized wader, large head and heavy bill; long legs. Often stands hunched, body horizontal. Shy, tends to stay far out on shallows or flats.

Bar-tailed Godwit

PP, AC; T; IA; Mi Sp-Su

Large wader. Sinks long, slightly upturned bill deeply into mud when feeding. Wades deeply. Singles, parties or flocks. May display breeding colour before heading north.



Common Sandpiper

PP; IA; Mi Sp-Su

Wanders solitarily along water margins, bobbing nervously. Note that the white of the breast forms a white 'hook' around bend of wing. Some over-winter.



Red-necked Stint

PP, AC; Mi Sp-Su; IA

Tiny sociable migratory wader. Darts about feeding with brisk stabbing motion. Small parties to large flocks along shore, often take to the air.



Caspian Tern

PP, AC, MU; IA

Largest of our terns. Heavy red bill is diagnostic. Patrols river on easy wingbeats. Plunges for prey.



Fairy Tern

PP, AC; B (PP); T

Tiny tern with yellow bill and legs. Breeds Oct - Jan. Feeds over shallow waters. Estimated to be less than 1600 pairs left in WA.



Rainbow Lorikeet*

PP, AC

Derived from aviary escapes in the 1960s. Now occurs over metro area and beyond. Varied diet of blossom, seeds, fruit and insects is part of the reason for their success.

Rainbow Bee-eater

PP, AC; IA; Mi Su

Arrives in Perth area in October. Excavates a nesting tunnel in sandy areas. Eats bees and other insects caught in flight.



Striated Pardalote

AC

Tiny bird. Searches for insects among eucalypt foliage. Strong, two note 'chip-chip' call. Often heard before being seen.



Variegated Fairy-wren

PP

Prefers dense shrubs and lives in family groups. Male in breeding plumage is brilliant blue with chestnut shoulder patches. Territorial during breeding season; forages widely otherwise.

Red Wattlebird

PP, AC

Largest of the local honeyeaters with fleshy red neck wattles. Note yellow belly. Noisy; aggressive to other birds. Feeds on nectar and insects.



White-cheeked Honeyeater

PP, AC

Boldly marked with bright yellow wing patch and distinctive large white cheek patch. Active, sometimes very vocal.



Welcome Swallow

PP, AC; Mi Su

Some are present all year round; more abundant in summer. Deeply forked tail. Builds a mud nest; catches insects in flight.



Tree Martin

PP, AC; Mi Au-Sp

Distinguished from swallows by pale rump and only slightly forked tail. Also takes insects in flight. Breeds in tree hollows.

BIRD PROFILE CODES

Area where most commonly recorded

PP Pelican Point
MU Milyu
AC Alfred Cove

Seasons when present

Su summer
Au autumn
Sp spring

Status

* Introduced
Mi Migratory
T Threatened
IA Protected by International Agreement
N Nomadic, seasonally dispersive
B Breeds in these reserves

ABOUT OUR SHOREBIRDS

- Swan Estuary Reserves provide critical resources for diminishing numbers of trans-equatorial migrants which visit each summer.
- These birds breed in the Siberian / Alaskan summer, travelling thousands of kilometres to and from Australia each year.
- Some fly to the west coast then disperse to coastal mudflats and inland wetlands.
- Other non-migratory species sometimes nest above high water mark on our beaches in spring and summer. Because the nest is merely a scrape in the sand or among low vegetation, it is easily trodden on or found by curious dogs.
- Disturbed adult birds leave eggs and young vulnerable to extreme temperatures, predators such as gulls, ospreys, herons and ravens, and other visitors.
- Time spent hiding reduces feeding time available for chicks.
- Shorebirds feed by day or night, on worms, insects, shellfish and snails in wet sand, mud-banks or weed banks, samphire beds and tussocks.



Red-capped Plover and nest

YOU CAN HELP:

- Stay well away from nesting, resting or foraging birds.
- Stay on walkways or cycle paths.
- Avoid walking along the beach or trampling the vegetation.
- Use binoculars or a telescope - and remember birds are easier to see nearer to high tide when water covers most of the spits.
- Dogs and other pets are not allowed in the reserves.
- Keep watercraft (canoes, paddleboards, kite-surfers etc) well away from shores and obey speed regulations.
- Take any rubbish home with you.