

# Community Conservation of the Far Eastern Curlew

## FINAL REPORT

May 2019

### PROJECT OVERVIEW

Far Eastern Curlews are the largest of all the world's shorebirds. About 75 per cent of the world's curlews winter in Australia, so we have a special responsibility to protect them.

From September 2017 – June 2019, Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) led a project titled *Community Conservation of Eastern Curlew* to help protect this critically endangered species. Funds were provided by the Australian Government through the Threatened Species Recovery Fund under the National Landcare Program.



Project activities took place in 5 locations: Towra Point Nature Reserve (Sydney NSW), Moreton Bay and the Broadwater (SEQ), Hunter Estuary (Newcastle NSW), Shoalhaven Heads (Nowra NSW), and Casuarina Coastal Reserve (Darwin NT). Of these sites, two are Ramsar-listed wetlands and two are on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

### On-ground work

At time of writing (mid-May 2019), CVA teams completed a total of **106 on-ground team-days** at the five locations, with 8 days to go and we will be finished. We exceeded our targets, controlling weeds and mangroves across **380 hectares** against a target of 270 ha. Weeds controlled include Bitou Bush from the beach roost at Quibray Bay in Towra Point, and Spiny Rush which has invaded saltmarsh habitat adjoining the Shoalhaven River roost site. These weeds interfere with the open line-of-sight shorebirds need to feel safe from predators. Mangroves encroaching into saltmarsh habitat in the Hunter Estuary were removed each year. Our teams also **removed 2 tonnes of marine debris** from saltmarsh and beach habitat. The impact of marine plastics finding their way into the food-chain of shorebirds is of growing concern. It was great to help address this issue. CVA also planted 1215 local natives to close-off an unauthorised trail and prevent horse-riders from disturbing shorebirds at Towra Point.



## Community Awareness Events and Volunteer Participation

CVA hosted two community awareness events at each location, as well as engaging volunteers in the on-ground work. Our goal was to educate the community about the incredible challenge face by shorebirds on their epic annual migration and promote a stewardship ethic to reduce disturbance. In all, project activities attracted **2,429 people participants**, of whom **549 returned more than once**. Organisations involved included University of Queensland, Moreton Bay Regional Council, Hunter Bird Observers Club, Shoalhaven Birders, Shoalhaven City Council, Sutherland Shire Council, NSW Wader Study Group, Georges River Riverkeepers, NSW NPWS, Local Land Services and Larrakia Rangers. A class presentation and field trip for Year 8 geography students from Hunter River High School introduced young people to the wonder of shorebirds.

Evaluation surveys are undertaken at all community events. We have had a very enthusiastic response, as shown by the feedback:

*"I learnt how the young birds are flagged for monitoring, and how far they travel to rest on our shores."*

*"It is wonderful to be a part of this project to help protect and preserve these incredible, critically endangered species."*

*"Excellent education on migratory shorebirds and the importance of Shoalhaven Heads!"*

*"Worthwhile project. Anything that contributes to avoidance of the Eastern Curlew extinction is to be encouraged and applauded."*

*"Brilliant organisation! I'm getting a feel for the international nature of bird migration."*



*The channel between Comerong Island and Shoalhaven River reserve had the most significant number of Eastern Curlews. Volunteers recorded*

## Shorebird Monitoring Surveys

CVA exceeded our fauna survey targets, engaging volunteers to conduct 34 summer and winter shorebird counts which were uploaded to BirdLife Australia's BirdData portal. Across all sites, our teams counted **2,989 birds from 148 species**. Seeing shorebirds first hand and participating in citizen science surveys to help understand population trends, was a great way for community members to learn more about shorebirds and actively assist conservation efforts.

CVA appreciates support from local organisations assisting with the surveys, including Hunter Bird Observers Club, NSW Wader Study Group, Charles Darwin University, Larrakia Nation, and Darwin Field Naturalists. BirdLife Australia has prepared a summary report of Shorebird 2020 data for each location.



*Volunteers surveying shorebirds at Towra Point Ramsar site.*

## Stakeholder Workshops

In Year 2 of the project, we held a stakeholder workshop at each location. The purpose of these workshops was to bring together site managers, citizen scientists and Non-Government Organisations to share information and reports on population trends produced by BirdLife Australia using Shorebird 2020 survey data. Our goal was to improve management practices. The Brisbane workshop attracted participants from every local government agency managing shoreline on Moreton Bay, along with the Queensland Wader Study Group, State Government agencies, Mark Carey from the Australian Government's Migratory Species unit and Richard Fuller from University of Queensland. This event included a strategic planning session to start identifying and prioritising management practices that will help stop the decline of shorebirds. Priority issues tackled included community engagement and reducing disturbance; improving site management; and governance. The Newcastle workshop included an update from both Hunter Bird Observers Club and Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group, along with State agencies and NGOs. In all, 43 stakeholders attended these workshops to help improve shorebird management.

***CVA thanks our funder the Australian Government and all community, government and academic organisations that participated in this project to conserve Far Eastern Curlew, migratory shorebirds and saltmarsh habitat.***

*A cross-section of land managers, academics and citizen scientists attended the Brisbane Stakeholder Workshop*

