

WATERBIRDS OF THE SWAN RIVER AND THEIR HABITATS

Report
by

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A. WATERBIRDS.

The Swan River, its tidal sand and mud flats, and the adjoining shoreline, support a variety of waterbird species. These species may be divided into three major groups.

1. Fish-eating Birds.

This group includes the Cormorants, which may be seen on the river at most times of the year - Pied Cormorant, Little Pied Cormorant, ¹⁰Black Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant. The Black Cormorant is ^{an} ubiquitous species (Phalacrocorax carbo), the others are mainly restricted to Australia^{Asia}.

Two species of Tern are always present on the river - Crested Tern and Caspian Tern. The Fairy Tern may be seen occasionally.

The Pelican frequents the Swan River in small numbers during the summer months, moving to its breeding grounds in the Shark Bay area each winter.

2. Ducks and Swans.

As the inland lakes and dams dry up each summer, large flocks of ducks and swans move to the rivers and estuaries along the coast. The most common species seen on the Swan River at this time of the year are the Mountain Duck, Black Duck, Grey Teal and Wood Duck. The Black Swan is rarely seen in groups of more than thirty, flocks of this size occurring during dry summers only.

3. Wading Birds.

These birds feed on the worms, insects and insect larvae harboured by sand and mud flats and decaying weed at the water's edge.

There are two major categories of wading birds, the migratory waders, and the resident waders.

The resident waders (see checklist) are present on the river at most times of the year, the largest flocks being a hundred or more Red-necked Avocets.

The migratory waders (see checklist) usually feed in large mixed flocks which build up during early Autumn, to flocks of over three thousand birds. Migration to breeding grounds in the Northern Hemisphere then begins. These waders return to the Southern Hemisphere at the completion of breeding (end of our winter), thus

avoiding the harsh winter of the high latitudes.

B. HABITATS.

Much of the habitat of the waterbirds has been destroyed by dredging, reclamation and development for recreational activities. Between Fremantle and Perth, only three (3) suitable feeding areas for the wading bird remain.

These are the sandflats of Pelican Point, the Kwinana Freeway, and Point Waylen (see map).

The tidal flats extending from Point Waylen, two-thirds of the way to Point Walter, are the most extensive tidal sandflats of the river. Because of their size, variety of formations and of food supply, they support many species of waterbird.

The Kwinana Freeway tidal flats are exposed only by very low tides, and so supply occasional vast sources of food for wading birds.

The Pelican Point flats are of a gentle sloping nature and thus provide suitable feeding conditions for all species of waterbirds under most conditions.

Because the three areas vary in their comparative suitability for feeding according to weather conditions, wading birds move in large groups from one area to another, depending upon food accessibility.

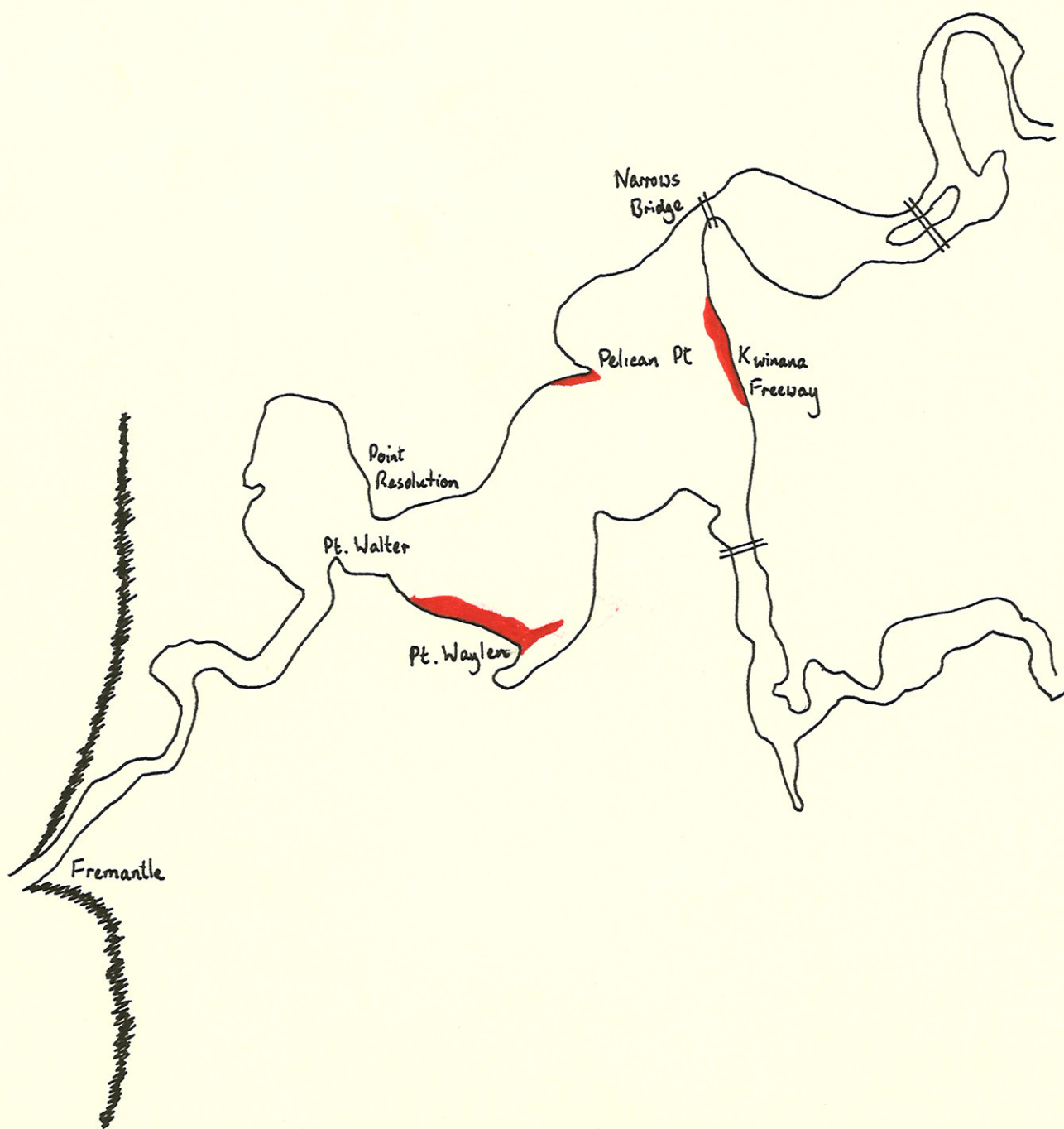
It is therefore important that all three areas be retained as bird sanctuaries.

At present, only one (Pelican Point) is a recognized bird sanctuary. Steps are now being taken by this department to have the other two areas protected.

J.A.K. LANE.

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Tidal Flats

CHECKLIST OF COMMON WATERBIRDS OF THE SWAN RIVER

	<u>References</u>
Black Swan	Plate 16
Pelican	Plate 9
Pied Cormorant	Plate 12
Little Pied Cormorant	Plate 12
Black Cormorant	Plate 12
Little Black Cormorant	Plate 12
Black Duck	Plate 18
Mountain Duck	Plate 16
Wood Duck	Plate 17
Grey Teal	Plate 18
Chestnut Teal	Plate 18

RESIDENT WADERS

Banded Stilt	Plate 41
White-headed (Black winged) Stilt	Plate 41
Red-necked Avocet	Plate 41
Red-capped Dotterel	Plate 39

MIGRATORY WADERS

Common Sandpiper	Plates 34, 35
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	Plates 32, 33
Curlew Sandpiper	Plates 32, 33
Black-tailed Godwit	Plates 41, 42
Bar-tailed Godwit	Plates 41, 42
Greenshank	Plates 34, 35
Little Stint (Red-necked Stint)	Plates 32, 33
Curlew	Plate 41