

WATERBIRDS OF THE BUSSELTON WETLANDS – A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The Wetlands and the Ramsar Convention

The Busselton Wetlands extend from Forrest Beach in the east to Newtown Beach in the west, a distance of 23 kilometres.

The main components are the Vasse and Wonnerup Estuaries, the Deadwater, Wonnerup Inlet (the estuaries' common mouth to Geographe Bay), Malbup Creek (a high water level connection between the estuaries), the lower Vasse River, the New River and Broadwater Lake.

In 1990, the Vasse and Wonnerup Estuaries and Wonnerup Inlet were listed as a Wetland of International Importance under the "Ramsar" Convention on Wetlands, at the Government of Western Australia's request. The Site's boundaries were extended in 2001 to include adjoining areas already reserved for conservation.

Waterbird Numbers and Species

The Vasse and Wonnerup Estuaries support 35,000 waterbirds of 60 species each year. Around 90 species have been recorded *in toto*. Numbers are greatest from late November to February each year. Numbers decline to a few thousand in late autumn and winter.

Broadwater Lake supports 7,000-11,000 waterbirds each summer. Other areas probably support 1,000 or so.

The total number of waterbirds using the Busselton Wetlands each year is therefore around 45,000.

Breeding Sites and Migrants

Some waterbird species, such as black swans, make their nests on the Busselton Wetlands. Others, like the Australian shelduck breed mainly in inland agricultural areas.

Several species migrate from more remote parts of Australia, for example pelicans which nest on islands off the north-west coast and banded stilt which nest in the eastern goldfields and on Lake Eyre.

A small group have their breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere, for example the red-necked stint which breeds on the tundra of far-eastern Siberia.

The main waterbird breeding areas on the Busselton Wetlands are Swan Lake (formerly the north-eastern end of Wonnerup Inlet), the Vasse estuary near the Sabina River mouth, the Lower Vasse River Wetlands (upstream of Ford Road), the New River, Broadwater Lake and an isolated floodplain swamp near Bayside.