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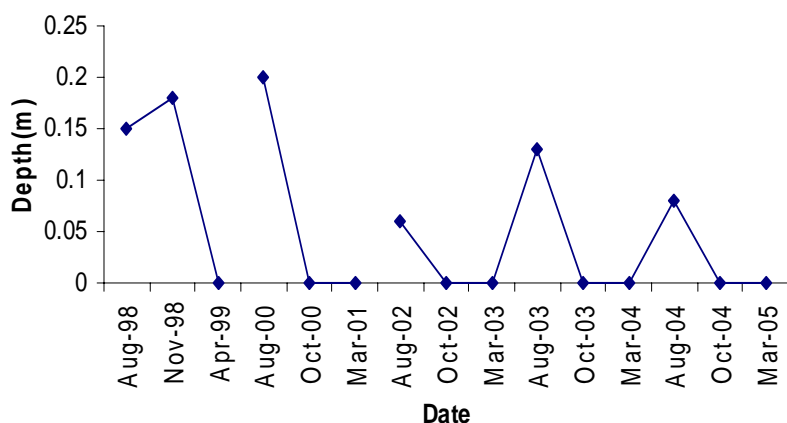
Lake Altham Waterbirds

The Wheatbelt Wetlands Monitoring Program

The Wheatbelt Wetlands monitoring program commenced in 1997 with 5 wetlands and was expanded to 25 wetlands by 1999. Lake Altham was first surveyed in 1998. Each wetland in the program is surveyed at least every second year for aquatic invertebrates and waterbirds and water chemistry and ground water parameters are measured. Waterbirds are surveyed using binoculars and a spotting scope to count all birds present. Evidence of breeding is recorded when observed, i.e. broods or nests with eggs, however, nests are not searched for and these data will be incomplete.

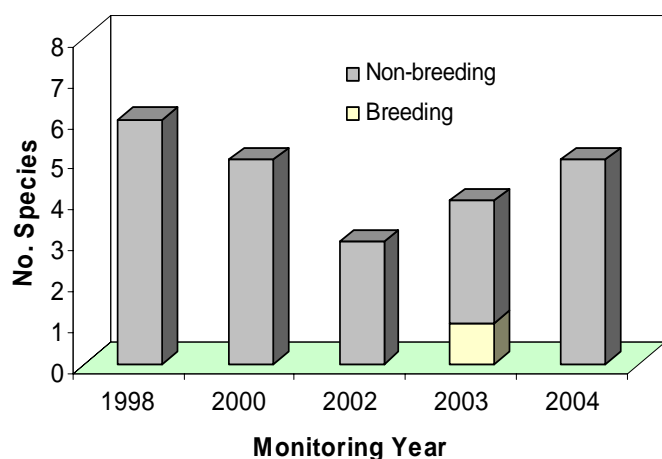


Lake Altham Depth at Gauge



Waterbirds were surveyed at Lake Altham in late Winter (August), Spring (October) and Autumn (March) of each sampling year since 1998, i.e. 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003 and 2004. However, water levels were low over this period and the lake dried before the spring survey each year except 1998 when water persisted until early summer. Eight species have been recorded since monitoring began with a maximum of six species in any one year. Jaensch *et al* (1988) surveyed Lake Altham and recorded 15 species between 1981 and 1985 during which time the lake reached depths of 1.5m. These authors also recorded three breeding species.

Waterbird Species Richness at Lake Altham



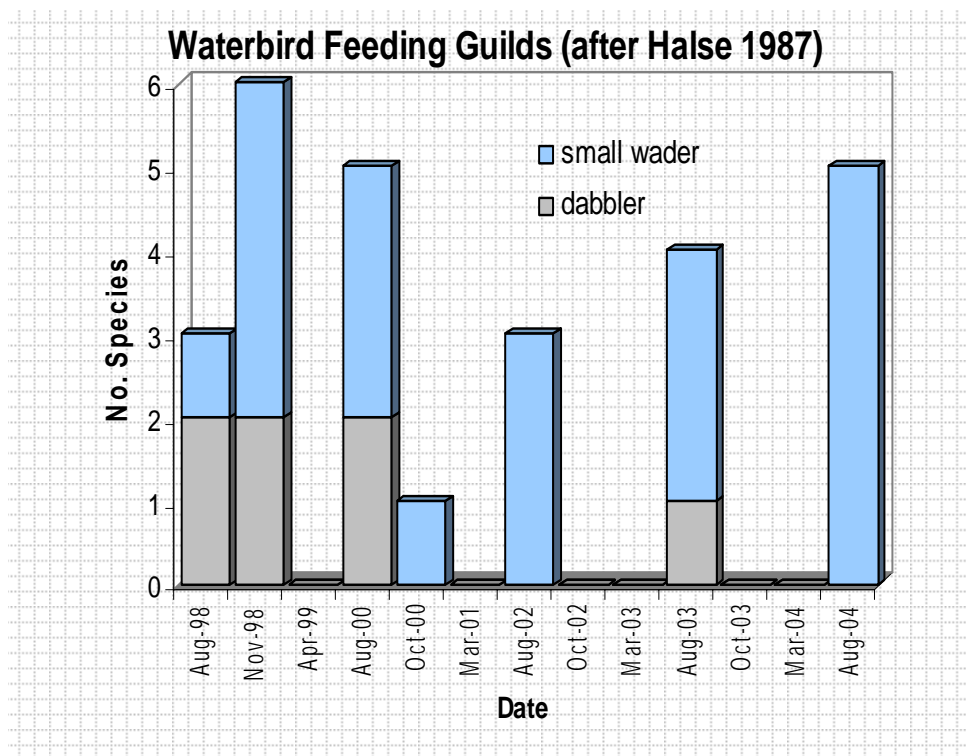
The Red-capped Plover was recorded breeding on the lake during late winter 2003 when the lake had a maximum depth of 0.13 m. This species was recorded in all years and most surveys when water was present (Table 1). In 2002 it was the most abundant species recorded with 159 individuals in late winter

The Hooded plover was the most frequently encountered species and was the only species present in spring 2000 when the lake was dry.



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The distribution of species richness amongst feeding guilds gives an indication of the niches available for waterbirds. Only two feeding guilds have been recorded at Lake Altham during the monitoring program. Dabblers were represented by Australian Shelduck and Grey Teal in 1998 and became increasingly less common over the monitoring period. It is likely their presence in

1998 was on the tail end of a wetter period which has not been replicated more recently.

With continued dry conditions only the highly mobile small waders have been abundant with small flocks taking advantage of abundant aquatic invertebrate food sources when they were available e.g. 172 Banded Stilt, 28 Black-winged Stilt and 21 Red-necked Avocet in spring 2004

TABLE 1 Waterbird species list for Lake Altham. % Occurrence is the proportion of surveys, with depth greater than 0 m, for which the species was recorded

Species	1998	2000	2002	2003	2004	% Occurrence
Hooded Plover	√	√	√	0	√	100.0
Red-capped Plover	√	√	√	√	√	83.3
Australian Shelduck	√	√	0	√	0	66.7
Grey Teal	√	√	0	0	0	50.0
Banded Stilt	√	0	√	0	√	50.0
Red-necked Stint	√	√	0	√	0	50.0
Red-necked Avocet	0	0	0	√	√	33.3
Black-winged Stilt	0	0	0	0	√	16.7

Further reading:

Cale D.J., Halse S.A. and Walker C.D. (2005) Wetland monitoring in the Wheatbelt of Western Australia: site descriptions, waterbird, aquatic invertebrate and groundwater data. *Cons. Sci. W. Aust.* **5** (1): 20-135

Halse S.A. (1987) *Probable effect of increased salinity on the waterbirds of Lake Toolibin*. Technical Report No. 15. Dept. Conservation and Land Management, Perth Western Australia.

Jaensch, R.P., Vervest, R.M. and Hewish, M.J. (1988) *Waterbirds in Nature Reserves of south western Australia 1981-1985 reserve accounts*. Royal Australian Ornithologists Union Report No. 30 1988