

Identify waterbirds by where they feed

This diagram shows waterbirds and their typical feeding habitats. Use this diagram alongside Birdlife Australia's Wetland Birds of south eastern Australia, Identification booklet to determine which waterbirds are using your property.

Over-water

terns
fairy martin
welcome swallow

Pasture

Australian shelduck
Australian wood duck
brolga
cattle egret
lapwings
plumed whistling-duck
straw-necked ibis
white-faced heron

Reedbed and fringing vegetation

bitterns
black-tailed native-hen
crakes
dusky moorhen
golden-headed cisticola
little grassbird
purple swamphen
reed warbler

Shallows

black swan
ducks (most species)
egrets
herons
ibises
red-necked avocet
spoonbills
stilts

Deep water

Australasian darter
Australian pelican
blue-billed duck
cormorants
Eurasian coot
grebes
hardhead
musk duck

Mudflat

crakes
dotterels
Latham's snipe
plovers
sandpipers
stints
other shorebirds



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Waterbirds on farms



Fencing and planting wetlands, dams, and other rural water bodies can enhance habitat for waterbirds while improving water quality and creating a natural asset for the landholder.

This guide can help private landholders understand the habitat requirements of different waterbirds.



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1 Safe roosting sites

Many waterbirds will roost on dead branches which sit above the water, where they can be safe from predators such as foxes.

These structures are particularly important for cormorants and Australasian darter to air dry their plumage.

2 Fringing vegetation

Rushes, sedges, grasses and herbs that grow on land at the water's edge provide cover and feeding opportunities for reclusive birds such as swampheens, rails, crakes and snipe. Some waterfowl, including Australasian shoveler and grey teal, will nest among dense grasses and sedges. Lignum provides a favoured nesting site for crakes.

3 Fencing

Fencing a body of water is a simple and effective way to improve its suitability for waterbirds. By preventing or limiting stock access, vegetation can more readily establish and avoid using barb wire, to reduce the risk of injury to wildlife.

Peripheral vegetation will help also improve water quality by filtering runoff and reducing nutrient inputs.

4 Reedbeds

Reedbeds provide outstanding habitat for many different waterbirds. Reedbeds are characterised by tall, dense stands of upright aquatic plants, including cumbungi, common reed, giant rush and tall sedges.

Reedbeds provide excellent cover for waterbirds to roost at night. Water hens, reed warblers, bitterns, hardhead, blue-billed and musk ducks nest among reeds.

5 Shallow, gentle gradient edges

Shallow water (<30cm) provides foraging opportunities for herons, egrets, ibises, spoonbills and stilts. These birds use their long legs to wade in the shallows, feeding on fish, frogs, yabbies and other invertebrates. Over summer, muddy edges are exposed as the water level drops. This provides ideal foraging conditions for a variety of birds, including dotterels, sandpipers, rails and crakes, which patrol the muddy flats for invertebrates.

6 Aquatic vegetation

Plants that grow at or beneath the water's surface provide habitat for aquatic life such as fish and invertebrate, which are great food for waterbirds.

Herbivorous species, such as black swan, Eurasian coot and hardhead, benefit directly by grazing on the foliage. Aquatic plants include water milfoil, water ribbon, eelgrass and pondweeds.

7 Deep, open areas

Deep water is favoured by waterbirds that dive to forage, including grebes, cormorants, Australasian darter, Eurasian coot, hardhead, and blue-billed and musk duck. Such areas also provide resting and loafing opportunities for waterfowl.

