

# Birding guide for Encounter Marine Park



## What is this guide for?

The Encounter Marine Park is recognised as a significantly important site for many species of birds and contains some of Australia's best-preserved ocean wilderness. Out on the water, you're likely to see rare and threatened birds. You may be able to access areas that researchers can't visit often so we would love you to report these sightings! This guide helps you identify the birds you're likely to see.



36-44cm

Silver Gull (seagull) is being used throughout to help indicate relative size.

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## The main groups of birds that you'll encounter are:

### **GULLS - Silver Gulls**

are the main birds you'll know, but the larger ones that hang about when you're cleaning your fish are usually Pacific Gulls.



### **TERNS**

are similar to gulls, but they are rarer and usually seen quietly diving for fish. Page 10 describes their behaviours.



### **SHOREBIRDS**

are typically seen running about on the shores and sandflats. Some live entirely in Australia and breed here, and some migrate thousands of kilometres between the Arctic and Australia, experiencing an endless summer! Migratory shorebirds are more commonly found in big flocks and are shades of grey and brown.



## Why do the birds need my help?

Many seabirds and shorebirds in Australia are threatened species. A number of these are beach-nesting birds which nest directly on beaches and islands where they are very vulnerable to threats. These include natural threats like high tides and native predatory birds but also many new threats like foxes, abundant gull and raven predator populations, and disturbance from people and dogs.

Terns typically nest in colonies on islands or estuaries, where they are close to their favourite fish! They need to be close to food so they don't have to leave the colony for too long and can return quickly with food for their partner and chicks.



The eggs of beach-nesting birds are incredibly small and camouflaged (see pictures below). The chicks too do not move when you approach, and so you could easily accidentally stand on them.



## The most threatened of all...

Fairy Terns are endangered in South Australia. The majority of their nesting is now restricted to islands and on some stretches of coast on mainland South Australia, like the Murray Mouth.

## Diving for dinner

Fairy Terns can completely submerge when diving for fish and go as deep as their entire body length!



## Bait fish eaters

Their favourite bait fish species are bluebait, whitebait, pilchards, sardines, garfish, hardyheads and trevally but can even eat squid! As their chicks are growing, the parents gather bigger and bigger fish which the chicks eat whole.



Sightings of Fairy terns are rare. We need your help, please let us know if you see them!

# What can I do to help?

## Give the birds space

Keep your distance from groups of feeding, resting or nesting birds.



## Go slow

Please slow down when passing groups of birds. This avoids bird strikes and creates a smaller wave.



## Bait bags and fishing line snags

Try not to let your litter blow away or end up in the ocean. It's safest to take your rubbish home to dispose of. If you can, cut up fishing line in to small pieces as it commonly entangles birds.



## Dog in the boat?

Ideally leave your dog at home. Please don't let your dog off the lead on islands or estuaries. Keep well away from any groups of birds. To the birds, no matter how well behaved your dog is, they will see him/her as a predator.



## Boat landings

During spring and summer, islands and spits are a haven for nesting birds. Please try to avoid landing in these spots, especially if you notice groups of birds there. Bait pumping disturbs birds and removes their food source. If you bait pump, please follow recreational limits.



## Large and medium terns

### Crested Tern



**Key features:**

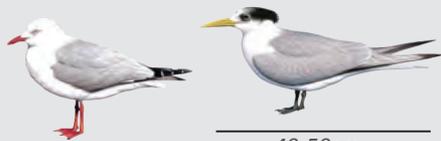
Large yellow bill, black cap and crest

**Habitat:** Prefers ocean beaches, islands and harbours

*breeding*



*non-breeding*



40-50cm

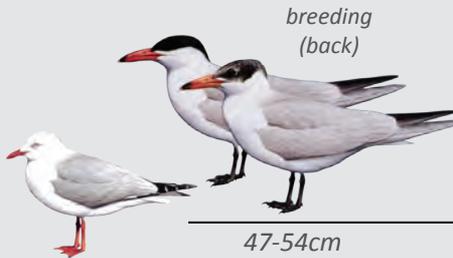
### Caspian Tern



**Key features:** Enormous red orange bill, black head

**Habitat:** Prefers coastal areas and inland beaches

*breeding (back)*



47-54cm

### Australian Gull-billed Tern



**Key features:** Thick black bill, black head, long black legs

**Habitat:** Prefers beaches, estuarine mudflats, salt lakes

*breeding*



*non-breeding*



35-38cm

# Small terns

**Fairy Tern**

**THREATENED SPECIES**



**Key features:** Yellow bill, white gap between eye and bill

**Habitat:** Prefers beaches, estuarine mudflats, salt lakes

*breeding*



*non-breeding*




22-27cm

**Little Tern**



**Key features:** Yellow bill with black tip, black line from eye to bill

**Habitat:** Prefers coastal areas and islands

*breeding*



*non-breeding*




20-28cm

**Common Tern**



**Key feature:** Black head, black bill

**Habitat:** Mainly coastal on ocean beaches

*breeding*



*non-breeding*



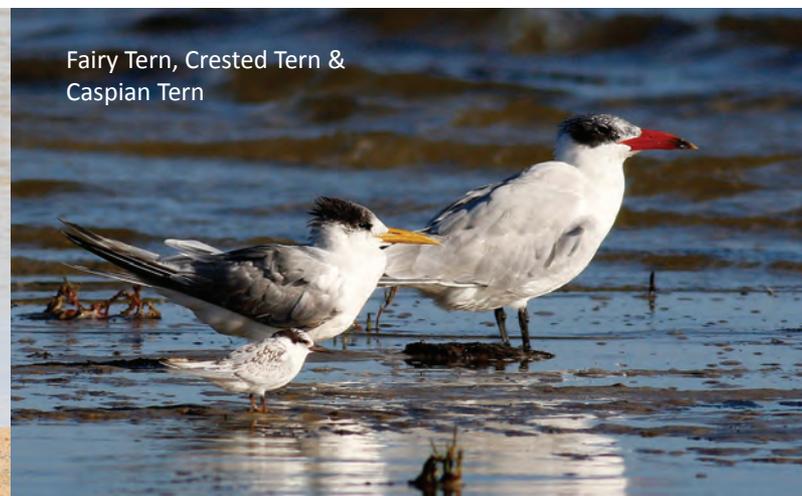

32-37cm

## Terns in flight



## Tern comparisons

Here are some examples of different terns together to help get an idea of the different sizes (named from left to right).



# Behaviours we are especially interested in!

If you see any of these behaviours, please report these with your Fairy Tern observation.

## Calling/dive bombing:



this usually happens when they have eggs or chicks nearby!  
Keep your distance.

## Courting the ladies:

you might see a bird carrying a fish or giving it to another bird, a sign nesting will start soon.



## Checking out the site:

you might spot birds landing on a spot, this means they might be seeing if it is good for nesting.



## Chicks and juveniles:

you might spot some tiny chicks poking out of their parent's wings or see the adults feeding chicks and juveniles.



## Sitting on the nest:

birds sitting low and slightly spread out is a sure sign of a nesting colony.



# Cormorants and Gannets

Common waterbirds you will also see in the bays and inlets



in size order

Little Black Cormorant



**Key features:** Entirely black including bill

Little Pied Cormorant



**Key features:** Small yellow bill; white face, neck and body

Black-faced Cormorant



**Key features:** Black face and wings; white belly

Great Cormorant



**Key features:** Yellow throat patch; black body and wings

Australasian Gannet



**Key features:** Yellow orange head; black wing tips



Photo showing a mix of cormorants and Pacific Gulls together (left to right: Pacific Gull, Little Black Cormorant, Little Pied Cormorant & Great Cormorant)

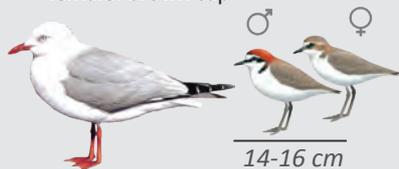
# Shorebirds that breed in Australia

These birds nest in pairs, commonly on beaches, spits, dunes and estuaries. They nest in spring and summer, and have several nests per season. You'll usually spot them running fast along the sand.

## Red-capped Plover

**Habitat:** Beaches high or low energy, wetlands, sandflats

**Key features:** Male: red cap, female: brown cap



## Hooded Plover

**Habitat:** Strictly ocean beach, high wave action areas

**Key features:** White collar, black hood



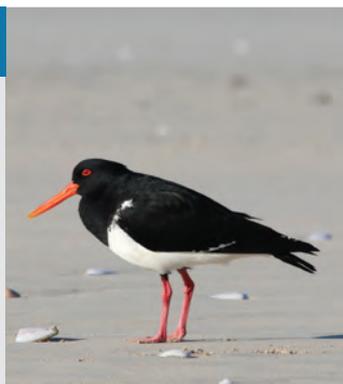
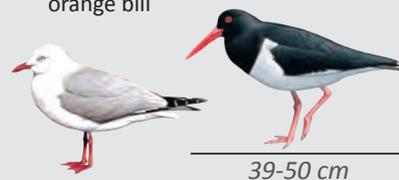
**THREATENED SPECIES**



## Pied Oystercatcher

**Habitat:** Prefers ocean beaches, also sandflats, samphire flats

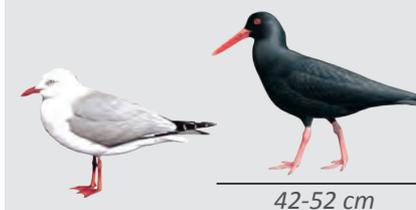
**Key features:** Black and white, orange bill



## Sooty Oystercatcher

**Habitat:** Prefers rocky coasts

**Key features:** All black, orange bill



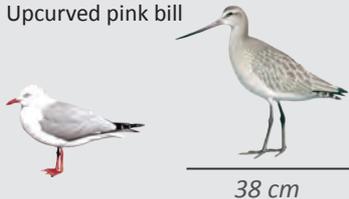
## Shorebirds that feed in Australia

These are some of the common migratory shorebirds that you may see while out on the water. You may see large flocks of them, and they have their favourite spots for feeding and will then rest in other spots at high tide. Try not to make these large flocks fly away.

### Bar-tailed Godwit

**Habitat:** Prefers estuarine mudflats, beaches and mangroves

**Key features:**  
Upcurved pink bill



### Red-necked Stint

**Habitat:** Prefers sheltered inlets, bays, lagoons, estuaries and intertidal mudflats

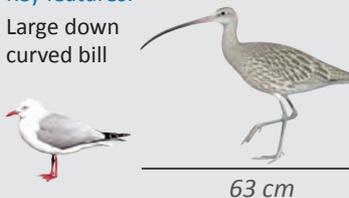
**Key features:** Smallest shorebird



### Eastern Curlew

**Habitat:** Prefers intertidal mudflats, sandflats, inlets

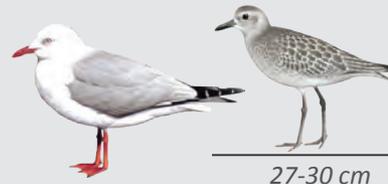
**Key features:**  
Large down curved bill



### Grey Plover

**Habitat:** Prefers coastal areas, tidal mudflats and sandflats

**Key features:** Tall, large eye



## What information should you collect?

If you have been lucky enough to spot a Fairy Tern or two while on your boat, we would love for you to report that to us.

Information to note down includes:

- date and time
- location
- number of birds
- any behaviours you may have seen.



Reports, any interesting sightings or questions can be sent to [beachnesitngbirds@birdlife.org.au](mailto:beachnesitngbirds@birdlife.org.au) or sightings can be entered directly into our Birdata app.



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