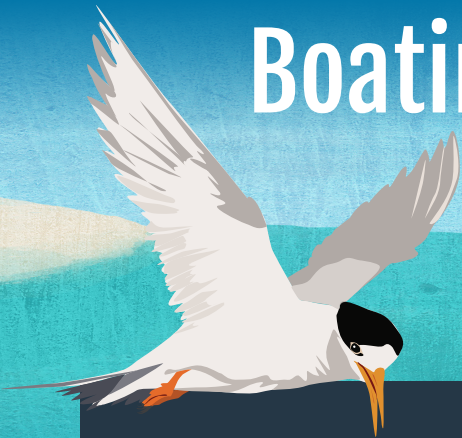


Boating, fishing and birding



What is this guide for?

Port Phillip Bay, Western Port, Corner Inlet and Gippsland Lakes are recognised as significantly important sites. Out on the water, you're likely to see rare and threatened birds. You are able to access areas that researchers can't get to 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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Large & Medium Terns

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Small Terns

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Cormorants & Gannets

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Shorebirds (breeding)

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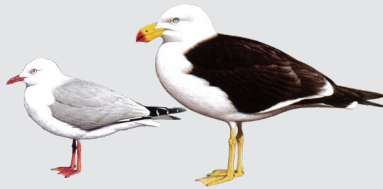
Shorebirds (migratory)

13

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

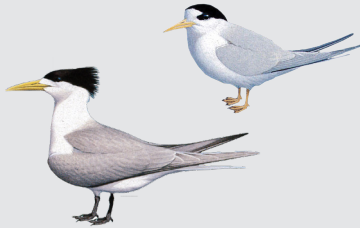
GULLS – Silver Gulls

are the main ones 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 endangered of all...

Fairy Terns are the most threatened in Victoria. They used to nest in their hundreds throughout Port Phillip Bay and Western Port, as well as in Corner Inlet, Gippsland Lakes and estuaries in East Gippsland. Now fewer than 100 breeding pairs are left.

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.



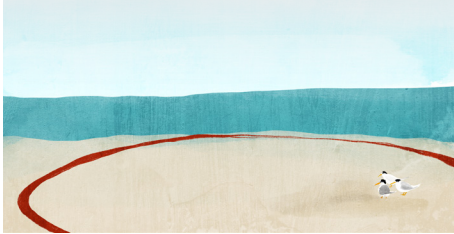
Sightings of Fairy terns are rare. We need your help, please let us know if you see them!



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:

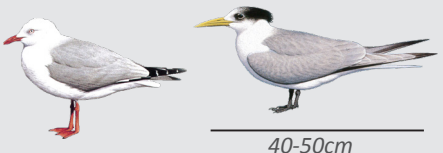
Large yellow bill, black cap and crest

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

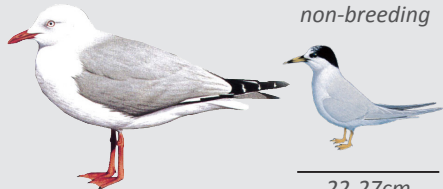
Habitat:

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

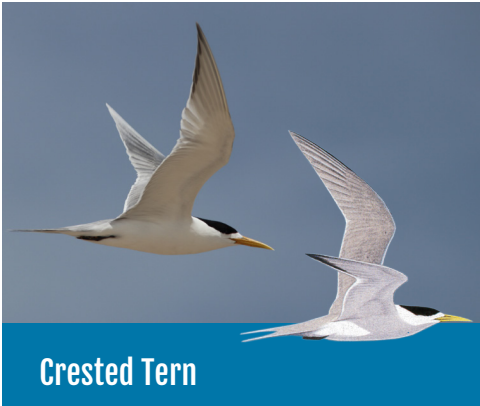


non-breeding



32-37cm

Terns in flight

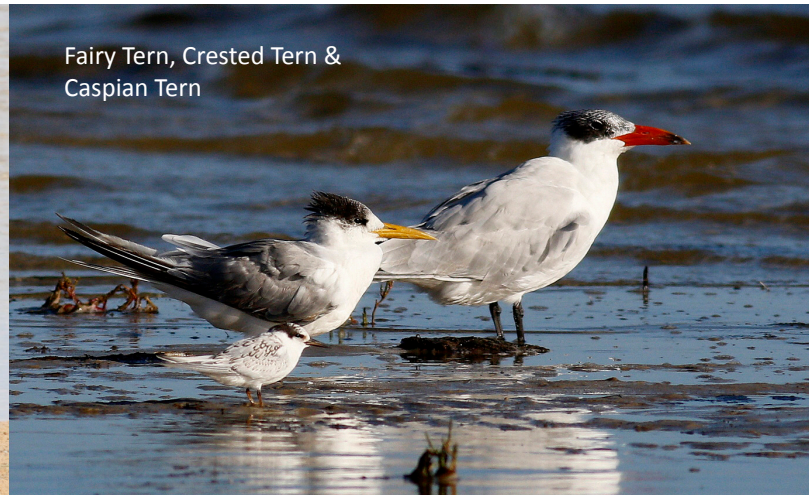


Tern comparisons

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



Caspian Tern, Silver Gull
& Little Tern



Fairy Tern, Crested Tern &
Caspian Tern



Caspian Tern, Silver Gull & Australian Gull-billed Terns



Crested Tern & Caspian Tern

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)

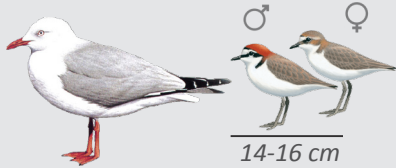
Shorebirds that breed in Australia

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

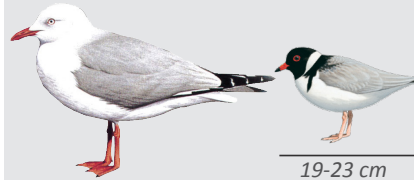
Key features: Male: red cap, female: brown cap



Hooded Plover

Habitat: Strictly ocean beach, high wave action areas

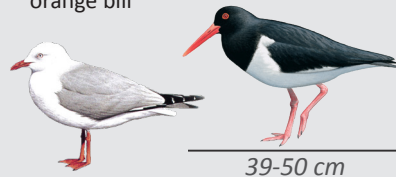
Key features: White collar, black hood



Pied Oystercatcher

Habitat: Prefers ocean beaches, also sandflats, samphire flats

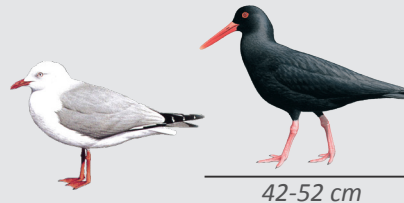
Key features: Black and white, orange bill



Sooty Oystercatcher

Habitat: Prefers rocky coasts

Key features: All black, orange bill



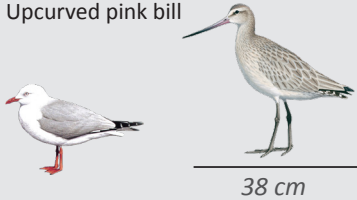
Shorebirds that feed in Australia

These are some of the common migratory shorebirds that you may see while out on the water in Victoria. 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

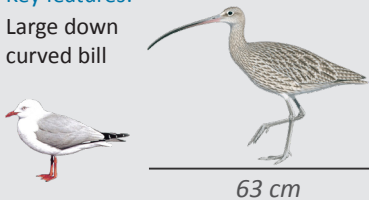
Key features: Smallest shorebird



Eastern Curlew

Habitat: Prefers intertidal mudflats, sandflats, inlets

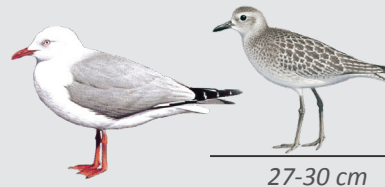
Key features:
Large down curved bill



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 beachnestingbirds@birdlife.org.au or 03 9347 0757



Illustrations: Chrissie Cloete, Jeff Davies, Anna Wilson

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Text by Grainne Maguire and Amy Adams

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With our specialised knowledge and the commitment of an Australia-wide network of volunteers and supporters, we are creating a bright future for Australia's birds.

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