

Virtual Field Study of Some Migratory Shorebirds of Moreton Bay

I'm Neil and I'm down at Thorneside Beach at Moreton Bay, and you'll see behind me some migratory shorebirds. That's not all of the ones that'll be here soon for our spring and summer. The rest of them are not here yet, they're still in the northern hemisphere. And just in case you can't get down to Moreton Bay to see them, we will show you now a virtual field study via videos of some of the migratory shorebirds, starting with the largest one, the Far-eastern Curlew.

This is the Far-eastern Curlew, feeding at low tide on its own particular territory. It uses its long bill to dig down into the mud, for worms and little crabs. Its bill is even long enough to touch the tip of its tail.

It's constantly on the move whilst feeding, its long legs help it cover a lot of ground quickly and to be able to continue feeding even in shallow water. When the tide comes in it finishes eating and moves to the high-tide roost, joining all the other Far-eastern Curlews.

While there seems to be a lot of Far-eastern Curlews in this shot, overall their numbers, like a lot of other migratory shorebirds, have been dramatically declining. Particularly at their refuelling places in the East China and Yellow Sea, which is on their way to their breeding grounds in china and Russia.

Their stopover feeding grounds are disappearing as factories and other buildings are constructed on those mud flats. They face similar threats in Australia, so we need to look after these amazing Far-eastern Curlews. They spend most of the year here, in Moreton Bay.

These two Whimbrells look as though they're doing a dance, but they're not. They are actually having a dispute as each one wants the other to move away from his or her territory. The Whimbrells have long curved bills, but not as long as the Far-eastern Curlews bills. The Whimbrells' bill can touch the base of their tail. They also have smaller body size than the Far-eastern Curlew and are about the same body size as a Bar-tailed Godwit, but it's darker in colour. Another way to tell a whimbrel from a Far-eastern Curlew, is the two dark stripes with a pale stripe in between on the top of their head.

Here's a Bar-tailed Godwit feeding. Unlike the Far-eastern Curlew the Bar-tailed Godwit has a long, slightly upturned beak that is pink at the base, near the head, and black at the tip. When the shorebirds sleep they put their heads in their feathers and often stand on one leg.

These are Grey-tailed Tattlers. Now Grey-tailed Tattlers have a straight beak, slightly longer in length than their heads, and they have yellow legs.

Now here's some Curlew Sandpipers. They're a lot smaller, and these are feeding even though they are at the high tide roost.

These are Red-necked Stints, and are the smallest of the regular, migratory shorebirds from the northern hemisphere. And these two seem to be having a dispute as they're feeding at the high tide roost. Like many of the smaller shorebirds, they do tend to have a lot of disputes.

Now these are Golden Plovers. Notice the big eyes, short straight beaks and a speckled pattern on their feathers. This video was taken in September just after they arrived back here in Moreton Bay, from Alaska. And they've got these black patches on their bellies and around the edges of their faces. That's the remnants of their breeding plumage.

Here's a Latham's Snipe at a lagoon near Sandgate. It's using its long beak to probe for invertebrates. Latham's Snipe breed mostly in Japan, some also breed in east Asia. In Australia they most likely be found on the edges of swamps, marshes or lakes rather than mud flats.

I hope you enjoyed the videos of the Virtual Field Study of the shorebirds that come to Moreton Bay. Which one is your favourite?