



WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY - 13 MAY 2023

Feral pigs threaten migratory bird habitat in the Gulf of Carpentaria



Feral pigs are not considered to be a primary threat to most migratory shorebird species, but they disturb and damage habitat used by migratory birds. While feral pigs primarily inhabit terrestrial environments, they venture into coastal regions and estuaries in search of food and water.

The impact of feral pigs on migratory shorebirds arises from their foraging behaviour. Feral pigs are known to root in the soil, creating disturbances and damaging vegetation in their search for food. This activity can lead to the destruction of habitats used by shorebirds for feeding and nesting.

Feral pigs can directly prey upon eggs, chicks, or adult shorebirds. Nests located on the ground or in shallow depressions are particularly vulnerable to predation by feral pigs. The presence of feral pigs in coastal areas can lead to increased nest predation rates and a decline in shorebird populations.

Shorebirds rely on intertidal areas and mudflats as critical feeding grounds during their migration. These habitats support a rich diversity of invertebrates and small organisms, which are essential food sources for the birds. The rooting behaviour of feral pigs can disrupt the delicate balance of these habitats by uprooting plants, disturbing sediments, and altering the availability of food resources.

It is important to note, that many species of migratory shorebird that visit Gulf coasts do not nest in the area, they only visit to feed along their migration route.

East Asian-Australasian Flyway

Three sites in the Gulf of Carpentaria form part of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (Delta Downs), Nijinda (Tarrant), and the Leichhardt River to Gore Point (Wernadinga Coast)). This flyway is an internationally significant collaborative project involving over 130 sites across 22 countries. The sites in this voluntary network, are recognised as internationally important for waterbirds that migrate along the East Asian–Australian Flyway.

Nijinda Durlga (Tarrant) -

includes approximately 40,000ha of wetland habitat. The site comprises an important section of the South-East Gulf of Carpentaria shorebird area, with two major roosts of migratory shorebirds. Over 10,000 migratory shorebirds of at least 16 species feed and roost in the site.

Karumba Smithburne

(Delta Downs) - comprises of 20,000 ha of wetlands. Over 20,000 migratory shorebirds of at least 20 species feed and roost in the site including critically endangered species such as the far eastern curlew and the great knot.

Leichhardt River to Gore Point (Wernadinga Coast) -

The site is composed of approximately 7,080 hectares of wetland. It supports up to 13,000 migratory shorebirds of at least 22 species, including seven Australian threatened species, as well as internationally important numbers of species such as great knot, red knot and greater sand-plover.

Efforts to manage feral pig populations and mitigate their impact on migratory shorebirds are crucial. These may include strategies such as habitat restoration, the use of exclusion fencing to protect sensitive areas, and targeted feral pig control measures.

Research and monitoring of feral pigs would be required in the Gulf of Carpentaria to fully understand how they are impacting on the birds and therefore inform future management programs.

For more information, contact:

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