

2020 Community Wildlife Conservation Award

The Community Wildlife Conservation Award is awarded to a community group that is making a significant contribution to wildlife preservation in Australia.

The award for 2020 was presented to the Queensland Wader Study Group of Clayfield, Queensland.

The Queensland Wader Study Group is a dedicated community group. For about thirty years, volunteers have been conducting migratory shorebird surveys from Cape York, Queensland, to the New South Wales border. The migratory shorebird surveys are a citizen science project which has been remarkably successful over such a long period. The training and education which volunteers receive are also open to the public. The Queensland Wader Study Group has identified key habitat sites for shorebirds, educational signs have been erected, and educational programs are organised for the general public.

In addition to school programs, the group has developed a children's education mobile application – 'My Shorebird Watcher'. The mobile application is designed for children to study the shorebirds along Queensland's coastline and meet Australian education curriculum requirements. Queensland Wader Study Group has also involved local groups in building roost sites to protect the shorebirds.

The Queensland Wader Study Group has a massive data collection from its long-term observations. Some of the data has been used to produce scientific papers in collaboration with university research centers. The data has also helped identify threatened species and protect key habitat sites. The designation of RAMSAR sites on Queensland's coastline, including Moreton Bay, was primarily built on Queensland Wader Study Group's data.

The Queensland Wader Study Group is a real example of a community group. The group is an excellent example of what citizen science can achieve and is very worthy of the 2020 Community Wildlife Conservation Award.

Acceptance Speech from Queensland Wader Study Group David Edwards, Chairman, Queensland Wader Study Group

I would like to thank the Australian Wildlife Society, the President, the Board, and members for bestowing the Community Wildlife Conservation Award to the Queensland Wader Study Group. We are both honoured and excited to receive this prestigious award.

The Queensland Wader Study Group was founded in 1992. Technically, we are a division of the Queensland Ornithological Society Incorporated. The best way to describe us is that we are a particular interest group of Birds Queensland. We are dedicated to the study and protection of waders (also called shorebirds) and their habitat. To that end, we are very much an activities-based group.

From the earliest days, volunteers have been out in nature splashing through mud in good and bad weather conditions, counting and recording shorebird numbers. The Queensland Wader Study Group has sampled shorebird numbers every month since 1992, collecting data from nearly ninety shorebird high-tide roost sites on the Queensland coast. We have also undertaken many surveys of shorebirds in the more remote areas of Queensland. These have included the Great Sandy Strait, the extended Mackay region, the lower Gulf of Carpentaria, the rivers of the western side of the York Peninsula, and Bowling Green Bay near Townsville.

Implementing our survey collection work means that we have a vast database of shorebird sightings used by governments for the appropriate management of wildlife and habitats. University students and researchers also use the data to publish scientific publications that measure shorebird population size and distribution changes.

We have also been very active in catching shorebirds, taking measurements, and using several tracking methods to track their movements. Initially, coloured flags were used to follow migratory shorebirds. However, in the late 1990s, we were one of the first groups to use satellite trackers. The Endangered far eastern curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*) of south-eastern Queensland was the first targeted shorebird to be satellite tracked – a world first to document its movements in the East Asian-Australasian flyway.

From those early days, we have kept up to date with new developments in tracking. Smaller and smaller satellite trackers, geolocators, and radio transmitters have all been used by the Queensland Wader Study Group to follow shorebirds locally and internationally. Using these methods, we have successfully tracked the far eastern curlew, Eurasian whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*), bar-tailed godwit (*Limosa lapponica*), Pacific golden plover (*Pluvialis fulva*) and grey-tailed tattler (*Tringa brevipes*). Today, the techniques are so sophisticated that you can use your mobile phone to see where the shorebirds are in real-time.

The Queensland Wader Study Group is also very mindful of the importance of education to inform and influence the public's wildlife conservation behaviour. We hold identification days in the field to explain the intricacies of shorebird identification to beginners and experts alike. Our shorebird courses are always well-attended, during which we provide a complete overview of shorebird identification, migration, and conservation. We have developed a mobile application to use as a teaching tool for children when they are out bird watching, which is proving very popular. Informing the broader community on Queensland's shorebirds also occurs through our website and Facebook page.

Like so many groups, we are passionate about our speciality, which is both a blessing and a curse. Knowing so much about each speciality is a blessing. However, the curse is that influential voices and messages are often lost in the modern world's cacophony.

The Queensland Wader Study Group has been informing governments (local, state, and federal) of the decline in shorebird numbers for approximately the last fifteen years. I am sure that this is the same for so many other community groups. To draw on today's reality: all state governments are looking to and relying on medical science to help them get through the COVID-19 pandemic. So, now is the time for them to listen to the science that citizen scientists give them to make wise decisions for the future.

I accept the 2020 Community Wildlife Conservation Award on behalf of all the hard-working volunteers of the Queensland Wader Study Group, but I would also like to extend it to the other community groups working hard to preserve Australia's wildlife.



Suzanne Medway AM and Minister Matthew Kean MP presenting Queensland Wader Study Group the 2020 Community Conservation Award, accepted on behalf of David Edwards (Chairman).