

# Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands

Categories approved by Recommendation 4.7 of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

## 1. Date this sheet was completed/updated:

1998

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Designation date

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Site Reference Number

## 2. Country:

Australia

## 3. Name of wetland:

Roebuck Bay, Western Australia

## 4. Geographical coordinates:

Latitude: (approx.) 17° 58'S to 18° 16'S; Longitude: (approx.) 122° 08'E to 122° 27'E

## 5. Altitude:

## 6. Area:

Approximately 55 000 ha.

## 7. Overview:

A tropical marine embayment with extensive intertidal mudflats that support many migratory wader species in large numbers. Up to 170 000 have been counted. Parts of the bay are extremely accessible.

## 8. Wetland Type:

marine-coastal: A B C D E F **G** H I J K  
inland: L M N O P Q R Sp Ss Tp Ts  
U Va Vt W Xf Xp Y Zg Zk  
man-made: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

## 9. Ramsar Criteria:

**1a** 1b 1c 1d | 2a 2b 2c 2d | **3a** 3b **3c** | 4a 4b

Please specify the most significant criterion applicable to the site:

10. Map of site included? Please tick *yes*  -or- *no*.

## 11. Name and address of the compiler of this form:

Department of Conservation and Land Management  
Locked Bag 104  
Bentley Delivery Centre WA 6983

12. Justification of the criteria selected under point 9, on previous page.

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**13. General location:**

Roebuck Bay from Fisherman's Bend, east of Broome, to south of Sandy Point, north-western Australia.

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**14. Physical features:**

Between Fisherman's Bend and Fall Point there is a narrow beach of pindan red sand with mudflats to seaward and a 2-5 m high red sand cliff on the landward side. Pindan shrubland grows behind the cliff. South of Fall Point there are extensive mudflats, on which a belt of mangroves grows. Above the high tide-mark the *Sporobolus* grasslands of the Roebuck Plains occur.

The dominant species in the pindan vegetation is *Acacia eriopoda*. The major mangrove species are *Avicennia marina*, *Rhizophora stylosa*, *Ceriops tagal* and *Bruguiera exaristata*. *Sporobolus virginicus* is the principal species in the grasslands of the Roebuck Plains.

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**15. Hydrological values:**

The principal hydrological values are those of a tropical marine embayment with a large tidal range.

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**16. Ecological features:**

North-western Australia is the most important region for waders on the continent, regularly supporting over 500 000 birds and with up to 850 000 birds using it annually. The major sites in the region are Eighty-mile Beach and Roebuck Bay. The largest number of waders counted at Roebuck Bay is 170 000 in October 1983 and it regularly supports over 100 000 birds, being the fourth most important wader site in Australia. It is one of the best places in the world for viewing waders because of the unique combination of accessibility, high species diversity and very high density. Numbers are highest in the austral spring when Palaearctic migrants stop there to feed on their southwards migration but the area supports about 10 000 birds during winter and considerably larger numbers over summer, because many migrating birds remain in northern Australia rather than continuing south. Fewer birds stop on the north-western coast to feed on the northwards migration but, nevertheless, numbers in autumn are very high. Based on counts made between 1981-85 the most numerous species at Roebuck Bay are:

Large Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>	26 900
Oriental Plover	<i>C. veredus</i>	8 755
Red-capped Plover	<i>C. ruficapillus</i>	3 300
Grey-tailed Tattler	<i>Tringa brevipes</i>	3 185
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	65 000
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	11 230
Great Knot	<i>C. tenuirostris</i>	22 670
Red-necked Stint	<i>C. ruficollis</i>	19 800
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>C. ferruginea</i>	6 000

Some species that are rarely seen in Australia occur regularly at Roebuck Bay, e.g. Asian Dowitchers *Limnodromus semipalmatus* and Redshanks *Tringa totanus*.

The development of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union Bird Observatory near Fall Point has considerably enhanced the waterbird conservation value of the area.

The *Sporobolus* grasslands behind the tidal mudflats are an interesting and unusual vegetation association. The mangrove vegetation is also interesting but the principal non-avian conservation value of Roebuck Bay is that it represents a superb example of a tropical marine embayment.

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**17. Noteworthy flora:**

See ECOLOGICAL FEATURES.

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**18. Noteworthy fauna:**

See ECOLOGICAL FEATURES.

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**19. Social and cultural values:**

The principal social value of the wetland is recreational fishing.

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**20. Land tenure/ownership:**

It is proposed that two additional Nature Reserves will be gazetted within the Wetland of International Importance. One will cover the area around Fall Point and contain within it an existing smaller reserve housing a Bird Observatory. The other reserve will extend south from Fall Point to opposite Goldwyer Well but will be restricted more-or-less to the area between high and low tide-marks.

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**21. Current land use:**

At present there is light recreational use of the northern part of Roebuck Bay, principally fishing. The presence of the Bird Observatory will result in more people using the area.

There is mining for gravel in 35493, which is to the west of the Ramsar site. Exploration permits for petroleum are held over the wetland area.

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**22. Factors (past, present or potential) adversely affecting the site's ecological character, including changes in land use and development projects:**

The existing and foreseeable land uses are compatible with Roebuck Bay remaining an important site for waders. In particular, present levels of stocking on the cattle stations behind the Ramsar site appear to have had no adverse effect on waders.

Petroleum exploration may occur in future and, subject to appropriate environmental safeguards to maintain the ecological character of the wetland and habitat for waterbirds using it, will be compatible with the status of a Wetland of International Importance.

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**23. Conservation measures taken:**

None.

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**24. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:**

There is a proposal to have a marine park declared in Roebuck Bay.

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**25. Current scientific research and facilities:**

Banding of waders is conducted on a large scale every 18 months or 2 years by the Australian Wader Study Group (AWSG) and efforts are being made to encourage other research. The Department of Conservation and Land Management is doing limited work on diet of waders and prey abundance. The Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union has an Observatory at the northern end of the wetland, which can be used as a base by researchers.

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**26. Current conservation education:**

A limited conservation education program is undertaken by the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union via Observatory staff.

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**27. Current recreation and tourism:**

Recreational use consists of fishing and bird watching. There is also growing tourist use of the wetland, largely centred around waders.

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**28. Jurisdiction:**

Government of Western Australia.

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**29. Management authority:**

Department of Land Administration, Central Government Building, Cathedral Avenue, Perth WA 6000

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**30. Bibliographical references:**

Lane, B. (1983). AWSG research - progress report. Stilt 4, 21-22.

Lane, B. and Jessop, A. (1985). Report on the 1985 north-west Australia wader studies expedition. Stilt, 2-16.

Minton, C. (1982). AWSG wader expedition in north-west Australia, August/September 1982. Stilt 3, 2-4.

Minton, C. and Martindale, J. (1982). Report on wader expedition to north-west Australia in August/September 1981. Stilt 2, 14-26.

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