



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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Latham's Snipe recorded in big numbers across the Hunter Estuary

Migratory shorebird Latham's Snipe has been recorded in the hundreds across several locations in the Hunter Estuary this week, much to the delight of Hunter Bird Observers Club members.

Club vice president Mick Roderick said counts of snipe have been conducted by Club volunteers since 1996 in the Lower Hunter and this year's count of more than 250 birds across eight different locations is a very exciting result.

Mr Roderick said 'Also referred to as Japanese Snipe, these birds migrate from Japan where they breed in the northern hemisphere summer, arriving in south-eastern Australia from August into September. They seek out freshwater wetlands, and rest and feed for six months in preparation for the long journey back to Japan in autumn.'

'We have not had numbers in the hundreds like this for many years. In December 1997 there were 475 birds counted at Pambalong Nature Reserve, the highest count in the Hunter Estuary to date' said Mr Roderick.

Club life member Ann Lindsey said 'The birds returned to sites where they have previously been recorded in past years including Shortland, Wallsend, Fletcher, Irrawang Swamp, Rutherford, Bolwarra and Stockton. Latham's Snipe are known to return to the same places year after year.'

Ms. Lindsey said 'A national Latham's Snipe survey took place in mid-November and a record number of 205 birds were counted at one site in Shortland Waters Golf Club. We decided to do a second survey of the whole Golf Club site and 168 birds were still there despite heavy rain filling the wetlands. This number of Snipe in one location is of national significance and very exciting news for bird enthusiasts in the region.'

'Finding the Snipe in these numbers at the Golf Club is a clear indication of the high habitat value that the Golf Club can provide for this cryptic species. It inhabits different habitat to other migratory shorebirds and with well camouflaged brown plumage it can be difficult to see.'

'We will continue to monitor their numbers over the next few months as the birds prepare for the long flight back to Japan. Flying over 8,000km in just two days, the Snipe will return to their summer breeding grounds in Hokkaido during March and April' Ms. Lindsey said.

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For more information please contact the Hunter Bird Observers Club -

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