

Stockton Sandspit

Shorebird habitat rehabilitation



Importance of Stockton Sandspit

Stockton Sandspit is located within Hunter Wetlands National Park on the north arm of the Hunter River near Newcastle, NSW. The sandspit was incidentally formed in the late 1960s during construction of the Stockton Bridge.

It was an immediate attraction for shorebirds given its bare coarse sand and clear line of sight to warn of approaching predators.



Red-necked Stints at Stockton Sandspit

The sandspit is a site on the East-Asian Australasian Flyway, part of a Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance and covered by three international treaties protecting migratory bird habitat.

Since the 1970s shorebird numbers have more than halved in the Hunter River estuary as roosting sites have become unsuitable due to development and encroachment by mangroves and weeds. Given the declining value of the site as a shorebird roost, it was recommended that Stockton Sandspit be rehabilitated.

Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project (KWRP)

KWRP began works on the sandspit in the mid 1990s and successfully reduced damage by vehicles, cleared weeds and created wader habitat for foraging and roosting with a lagoon and island with saltmarsh surrounds.

Bird response was positive but not optimal as fringing mangroves were still obstructing the view for birds using the site. Hunter Bird Observers Club recommended removal of half a hectare of mangroves from the beach edge and National Parks and Wildlife Service removed these mangroves in 2002. As a result, thousands of shorebirds returned to the sandspit during the 2002/03 season.



Pied Stilts at Stockton Sandspit

With on-going maintenance by bird observers, the sandspit has been reinstated as part of the most important shorebird roost in NSW and one of the largest concentrations of shorebirds in Australia close to a major city and industry.

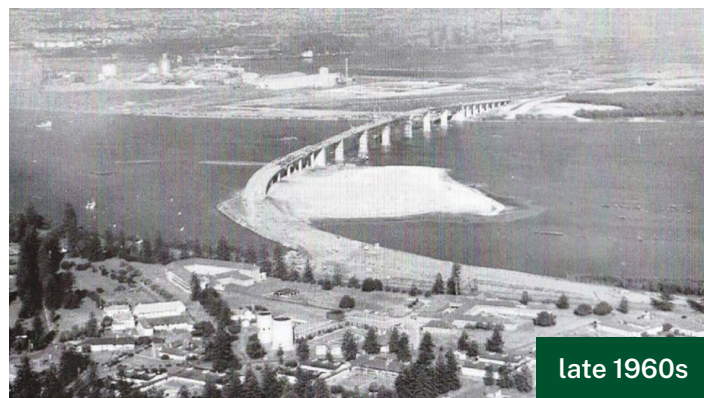
The most visible birds are often Red-necked Avocets which flock to the sandspit in great numbers. Less visible but of great international importance are long-distance migratory species including Eastern Curlew, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit, Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew Sandpiper and Red-necked Stint.

The sandspit is an iconic site for Newcastle and the Hunter Region in bringing biodiversity to a coastal city and being accessible to many bird enthusiasts who are often rewarded with easily visible migratory waders in great numbers.

Aerial photos show changes over time from the late 1960s to the present.

Rehabilitation timeline

1960s	Construction of Stockton Bridge results in formation of the sandspit
1971	Stockton Bridge formally opened and sandspit used by thousands of shorebirds
1983	Kooragang Nature Reserve gazetted
1984	Hunter Estuary Wetlands listed as Ramsar site. Sandspit overgrown and value to shorebirds severely reduced
1993	Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project launched and sandspit identified as a priority area for rehabilitation
1994	Detailed landscape plan for rehabilitation of the sandspit
1995	Rehabilitation of the sandspit commenced with restriction of vehicular access, excavation of a lagoon and removal of rubbish
1996	Access road and carpark constructed and edge planting commenced
2001	Use of site by shorebirds limited by mangroves; an application for removal of mangroves submitted
2002	Approximately 0.5 hectare of mangroves removed
2003	Sand replenishment and replacement of rock
2007	Hunter Wetlands National Park established
2012	Landscape master plan produced by the City of Newcastle for adjacent land
Present	Ongoing mangrove and weed control and appropriately located riparian planting by Hunter Bird Observers Club



late 1960s



1997



2002



2023

Updated July 2023. Major partners: Hunter Local Land Services (Hunter Catchment Contributions), National Parks and Wildlife Service, City of Newcastle, Hunter Bird Observers Club, Kooragang volunteers (Friends of the Schoolmasters House), NSW Department of Primary Industries (Fisheries) and Brambles (1995)

Bird photos courtesy of Steven Merrett

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