

Little Swan Bay, a previously unrecognised high-tide shorebird roost site in Port Stephens

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Received 27 September 2026, accepted 12 October 2026, published online 15 October 2026.

This note describes a recently identified additional shorebird high-tide roost site in Gir-um-bit National Park at Swan Bay (32.700°S, 151.957°E) (**Figure 1**). The site is roughly 102 hectares in size and comprises a tidal creek and shallow tidal embayment surrounded by Grey Mangrove-River

Mangrove Forest, Estuarine Sea Rush Swamp Oak Forest and Samphire Saltmarsh (Bartrim 1980), (<https://www.treesnearme.app>) (**Figure 2**). The site is 1.5 km northwest of the existing Swan Bay roost site.



Figure 1. Location map, Little Swan Bay roost site. (Image Google Earth)



Figure 2. Little Swan Bay shorebird site showing the embayment surrounded by samphire saltmarsh, grey mangrove forest and swamp oak forest. (Image by Andrew McIntyre 21 September 2024)

Monthly surveys of the site commenced in June 2024 as part of a study of White-fronted Chats *Epthianura albifrons* and now continue as part of the existing monthly Swan Bay shorebird count as described in Fraser *et al.* (2024). The first migratory shorebirds were recorded on 24 August 2024 with 49 Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis* present. The site has subsequently been included in

the national shorebird monitoring program (<https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/> accessed 25 September 2026). In order to understand the significance of the site for shorebirds I compare the maximum site counts with the species counts from the biannual boat-based Port Stephens shorebird count for the summers of 2024-2025 (14 February 2025) and

2025-2026 (16 February 2026) (Hunter Bird Observers Club unpublished data).

Twenty-eight monthly surveys have been completed between 22 June 2024 and 12 September 2026. Twenty-one shorebird and waterbird species were recorded with an average of four species per survey (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Records, maximum counts and reporting rates of shorebirds and waterbirds recorded during the survey period.

Species	No. of records	Reporting rate	Maximum count
Maned Duck <i>Chenonetta jubata</i>	2	7%	3
Pacific Black Duck <i>Anas superciliosa</i>	2	7%	3
Chestnut Teal <i>Anas castanea</i>	8	29%	19
Grey Teal <i>Anas gracilis</i>	5	18%	71
Buff-banded Rail <i>Gallirallus philippensis</i>	1	4%	1
Pied Stilt <i>Himantopus leucocephalus</i>	4	14%	5
Pacific Golden Plover <i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	4	14%	5
Black-fronted Dotterel <i>Thinornis melanops</i>	5	18%	11
Masked Lapwing <i>Vanellus miles</i>	18	64%	8
Far Eastern Curlew <i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	14	50%	81
Bar-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa lapponica</i>	2	7%	14
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper <i>Calidris acuminata</i>	6	21%	60
Red-necked Stint <i>Calidris ruficollis</i>	1	4%	1
Black-necked Stork <i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>	1	4%	1
Royal Spoonbill <i>Platalea regia</i>	1	4%	1
Australian White Ibis <i>Threskiornis molucca</i>	15	54%	6
Straw-necked Ibis <i>Threskiornis spinicollis</i>	2	7%	6
White-faced Heron <i>Egretta novaehollandiae</i>	27	96%	20
White-necked Heron <i>Ardea pacifica</i>	1	4%	1
Great Egret <i>Ardea alba</i>	4	14%	3
Eastern Cattle Egret <i>Ardea coromanda</i>	2	7%	2

The most frequently recorded species was the White-faced Heron *Egretta novaehollandiae* with a 97% reporting rate and a maximum count of 20 birds on 24 August 2024 (**Figure 3**). Five species of migratory shorebirds and three non-migratory species were recorded (**Table 1**, **Figure 3**). The Pied Stilt *Himantopus leucocephalus* was recorded four times in 2025, with a maximum of five birds on 22 December 2025 (**Figure 3**). The Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* was present on four occasions with a maximum count of five birds on 11 January 2025 (**Figure 3**). The birds were consistently sighted along an old fence line on the western edge of the park. The Black-fronted Dotterel *Thinornis melanops* was recorded on five occasions in the winters of 2025 and 2026 with a maximum count of 11 birds on 22 June 2026 (**Figure 3**). The Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles* had a reporting rate of 68% with a maximum count of eight birds on 6

December 2025 (**Figure 3**). The Far Eastern Curlew has been recorded on 50% of surveys with a maximum count of 81 birds on 20 October 2024 (**Figure 3**). In the past three years, Far Eastern Curlew were first recorded on 24 August 2024 (49 birds), 8 November 2025 (55 birds) and 15 August 2026 (one bird) with 22 birds recorded on 12 September 2026. Results from monthly shorebird surveys at Swan Bay indicate that the species regularly over winters in Port Stephens (<https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/>). Bar-tailed Godwits *Limosa lapponica* have been recorded on two occasions with a maximum count of 14 birds on 8 November 2025. The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata* has been recorded on six occasions with maximum counts of 60 birds on 14 December 2024 and 15 February 2025. A single Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* was observed on 13 June 2026.

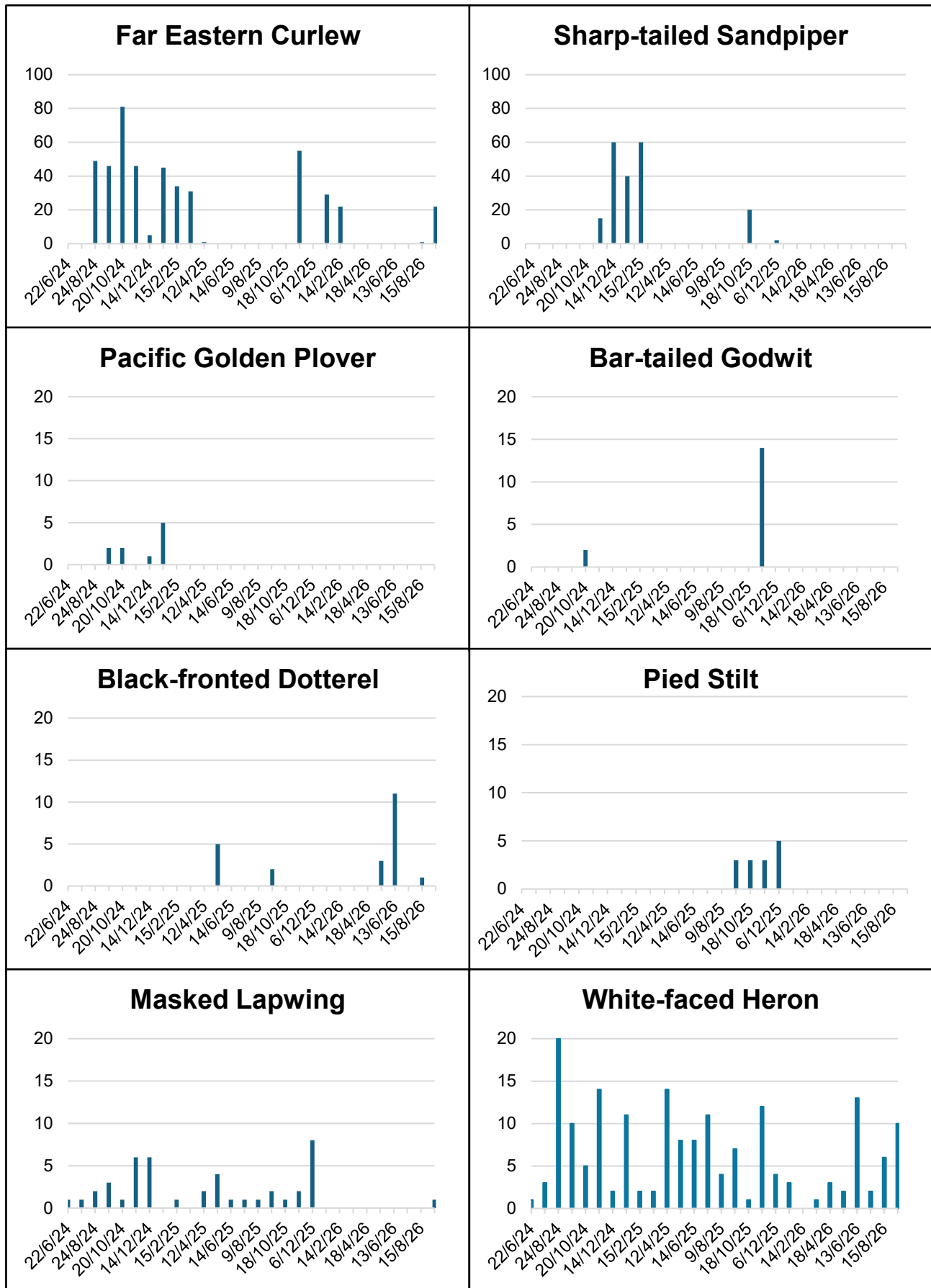


Figure 3. Numbers of shorebirds recorded at Little Swan Bay

In comparing the maximum counts on the site with the total counts for Port Stephens summer shorebird surveys, two species are of note. The site counts for the Far Eastern Curlew for 2024/2025 summer represent 43% of the Port Stephens count (81 birds of a total of 186), and 35% of the 25/26 summer (55 of 154 birds). The site counts for the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper in 2024/2025 summer represent 78% of the Port Stephens count (60 birds of 76 in total) and 20 birds were counted in the 2025/2026 summer with no birds recorded in the Port Stephens count.

The surveys have demonstrated the importance of the site to shorebirds in Port Stephens and the value of visiting locations that had been overlooked in

previous surveys of the area. They also demonstrate the need to conduct simultaneous shore-based surveys to support the boat-based surveys and obtain a more complete count for Port Stephens.

REFERENCES

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- Fraser, N., Mee, L. and Fleming, S. (2024). Estuarine habitat change and its impact on shorebirds at Swan Bay, Port Stephens, NSW. *The Whistler* **18**: 39-49.