

Red-necked Stint

Calidris ruficollis

#3 MARCH 2021



Hunter Bird
Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia



Red-necked Stints in non-breeding plumage (photo: Steve Merrett)

Description

The Red-necked Stint is a very small migratory shorebird, the smallest of the regular visitors to our region's shorelines. It has short black legs and a fine, short all-black bill which is slightly downcurved. No subspecies are recognised. Birds are often seen in flocks foraging on tidal flats or on sandbanks and beaches. Their behaviour when foraging is distinctive – they are almost always on the move, pecking or “stitching” (i.e. making rapidly-repeated pecks) constantly as they roam about.

It breeds in north-eastern Siberia and south-western Alaska, and we mainly see birds in non-breeding plumage, when they are grey above and white below. However, many birds are in partial breeding plumage when they first arrive back here and in the final weeks prior to departure (i.e. during this month). In partial breeding plumage they have developed a pale red throat and a rufous wash on their upperparts. In full breeding plumage, rarely seen in Australia, birds have a uniformly reddish throat and neck, well-coloured upperparts (featuring red and black) and dark streaking on their upper breast. Immature birds remain in Australia until they are two years old, and they can

develop subdued breeding colours in our winter months.

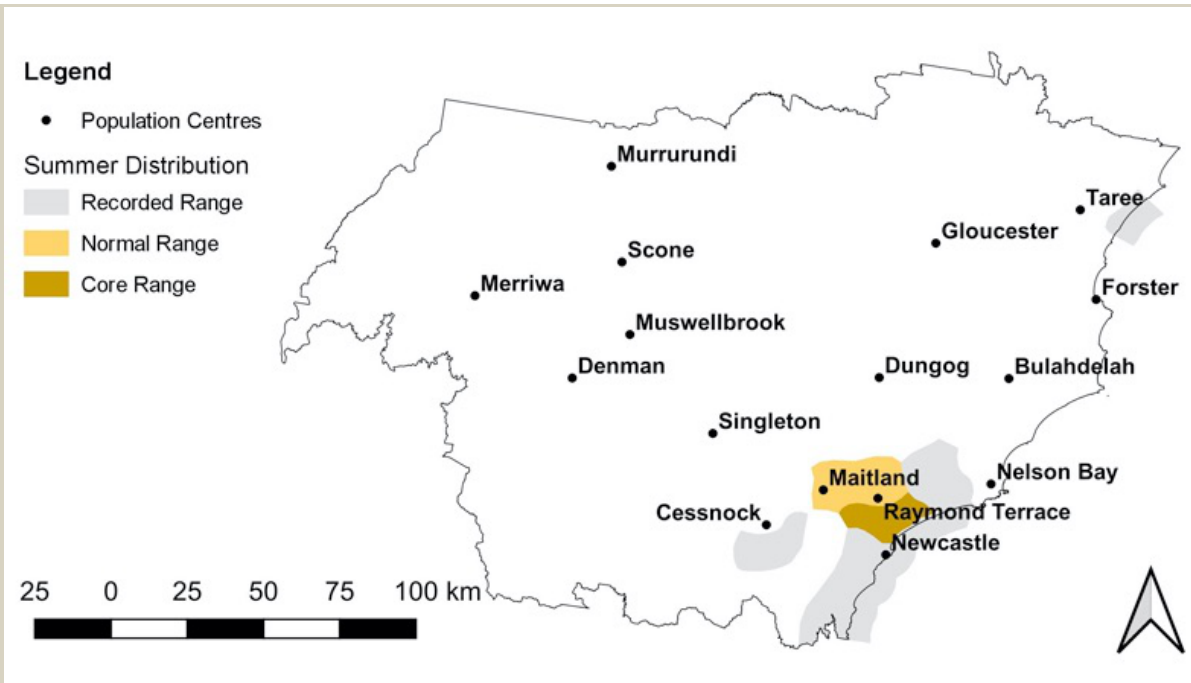


Red-necked Stints in partial breeding plumage and non-breeding plumage (photo: Tom Kendall)

Regional status

The Red-necked Stint is primarily found at coastal locations in the Hunter Region. The distribution map, which essentially is based upon reporting rates, indicates the hot spot to be the Hunter Valley around Maitland but the map is affected by frequent records of birds in small numbers at wetlands in Chisholm. Within the Hunter Valley, the numbers of birds are greater in the tidal parts of the Hunter Estuary, particularly Tomago Wetland, also sometimes along Newcastle Bight particularly the Worimi Conservation Lands shorelines.

However, by far the greatest numbers of Red-necked Stint now are recorded in the Manning Estuary, especially in Manning Entrance State Park near Old Bar. This is at the sometime-southern mouth of the Manning River. When the river's mouth closes over, as is the current situation, massive amounts of sand accumulate, and the site becomes a haven for small shorebirds including Red-necked Stints. A similar situation happened in the mid-2000s, until the mouth was re-opened in about 2010 and the stint numbers dropped away sharply.



Red-necked Stint distribution in the Hunter Region (map by Dan Williams)

Adult birds begin to arrive into the Hunter Region in September and they remain here until about mid-March. Although there are fewer birds present overall in the winter months, there still are many winter records, especially from Manning Entrance State Park. Sometimes there can be 50-100 birds in winter and it might be that some birds have moved in from other locations.



Red-necked Stint timeline in the Hunter Region (prepared by Dan Williams)

The stunning migration achievements

Red-necked Stints only weigh around 25g and initially they could not be tracked by electronic devices as those were too heavy relative to the bird's weight. However, geolocators weights have reduced, which has enabled studies to get underway. It turns out that they make the same sort of epic journeys that the much larger shorebirds do. For example, one individual completed its northward migration of >9,400 km in two marathon flights; the second leg of that journey was completed in a nonstop flight of 5,350 km (Journal of Avian Biology, 2020).

That same study tracked three birds. Although they bred within 2 km of each other, each wintered in three different localities spanning nearly 5000 km!

About the name

Red-necked Stint

“Red-necked” is descriptive for the bird in breeding plumage. The origins of “stint” are obscure, but possibly they are linked to the verb (“to stint”), implying a small amount i.e. it is a small shorebird!

Calidris ruficollis

“Calidris” is from the Greek word *skalidris* meaning speckled waterbird. Originally it was the specific name for Red Knot (*Tringa calidris*, it is now known as *Calidris canutus*). The first mention of *skalidris* is by Aristotle in c 330BC although there seem to be at least eleven species that he might have been alluding to!

“Ruficollis” derives from the Latin words *rufus* (red) and *collum* (the neck) and is descriptive for breeding plumaged birds



Red-necked Stint in breeding plumage, photographed in Japan (photo: Alan Stuart)

Design Rob Kyte at Conservation Matters 0420 821 460 **Text** by Alan Stuart based on information mainly sourced from • HBOC's Hunter Region annual bird report series • Volumes 1-7 of HANZAB (the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds) • Bird in the Hand (ABSA information sheet series) • Ian Fraser & Jeannie Gray (2013). Australian Bird Names. A Complete Guide.

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