

# FRIENDS OF STRADBROKE ISLAND



Established in 1988, FOSI is dedicated to the protection of the natural environment of North Stradbroke Island and its surrounding waters. FOSI also works to ensure that urban and economic development of the island is founded upon the principles of environmental protection and preservation of the unique urban characteristics of its townships.

**Issue #61  
December 2011**

**MEMBERSHIP RATES, 2011: Individual \$15.00 Family \$20.00 Concession \$5.00**  
Friends of Stradbroke Island, PO Box 167, Point Lookout QLD 4183.

## In this issue

National Park & Mining - Compatible? ..	1
Moreton Bay Water Quality Report Released.....	3
Urban Koala Survey 2011.....	3
Foreign Feathered Friends.....	4
Where to see Shorebirds on Straddie? ..	6
Looking after Straddie's Shorebirds – we all have a role to play .....	7
Big picture protection .....	8



**ABOVE: Tracks of the Beach Stone Curlew on Frenchman's Beach.**

**BELOW: Storm clouds on the day of the 2011 Koala Survey**



## National Park & Mining - Compatible?

### The Proposed National Park

The government's vision for North Stradbroke Island includes declaring further national park by the end of 2011.

The area to be added to that declared in March this year will result in approximately 50% of the island becoming national park. While any declaration of any area as national park is obviously something we welcome because it enhances protection, how much credit does the government deserve?

The new national park will in fact bear a close resemblance to the proposed national park map published in the mining company's own documents for a number of years, including in CRL's draft Enterprise Environmental Studies Report in 2002. The same map has also been regularly published in official company documents since. It is worthwhile comparing that map with the latest DERM national park map. Go to [www.savestraddie.com](http://www.savestraddie.com) to view both maps, under the 'library' tab.

Unfortunately, a significant proportion of the new national park will be degraded land – degraded by decades of sand mining. The undamaged areas included were not destined to be mined or were already protected from mining under the RAMSAR wetlands treaty which includes significant areas (not only 18 Mile Swamp). Large areas of Stradbroke, incredibly, including land being mined now, are also listed as part of the "national estate". Again, the maps of the national estate areas can be viewed at the savestraddie website.

### Mining National Park

As island environmentalists, our focus, naturally, has been on the areas under threat – the hundreds of hectares that are destined to be destroyed by sand

mining over the next 14 years unless there is a change of government policy.

The ultimate insult to the environment of NSI is that this government's 'vision' is to declare these threatened areas 'national park' – after they have been destroyed by mining. This is a disgraceful and irresponsible policy, which sets a dangerous precedent, and the government needs to be told this loud and clear.

### The Threat

A number of key mining leases granted for 21 years in the dying days of the Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen era expired in recent years. This government had an unprecedented opportunity to bring mining to an end – all it had to do was apply Queensland's expired lease laws. Those laws, in the Mineral Resources Act 1989, were intended to be applied to mining leases as they expired. Those laws contain balanced provisions designed to protect the environment of special places, where mining leases should never have been granted in the first place.

Sadly, the government chose to protect the billion dollar profits of a foreign mining company and short term destructive jobs (less than 14% of island jobs), using special legislation to extend the key expired leases, by passing the laws which still apply everywhere else in Queensland.

In extending mining for another 14 years, the government gave the mining company almost all it really wanted, given that commercial mineral deposits largely would have been exhausted by then anyway.

In the process, the government has left the door open for a future government, LNP OR ALP, to give the company absolutely

everything – it would just require a simple amendment of the inappropriately named *North Stradbroke Island Protection and Sustainability Act 2011*.

### At Risk

The island's complex natural hydrological system may be further damaged by deep dredge mining. Perched and window lakes, coastal fringing swamps, mangroves and wetlands, including 18 Mile Swamp have all suffered impacts. Increased protection is overdue. Moreton Bay relies on the island systems for its health and recovery. Stradbroke's massive aquifer, supplying Redlands with pure water, is also under threat, like aquifers the world over.

More mining will put at risk the ability of intact areas to nurture the recovery of mining rehabilitation. Scientific opinion maintains a tipping point is close and degradation may lead to collapse of the entire island ecosystem.

The Queensland Museum recognizes North Stradbroke Island as having the most diverse vegetation and fauna of all the Moreton Bay Islands and lists sand mining as one of the significant threats to the bay, in their newly-released handbook *Wild Guide to Moreton Bay*.

Ecotourism seems to be a lynchpin of the government vision for the island, providing sustainable employment, yet ecosystem collapse will leave us with a version of the Gold Coast which certain development lobbyists would relish. Stradbroke would no longer be the peaceful place to live or escape from big city life it should be.

Story: Sue Ellen Carew

Cartoon: Australian Financial Review 9 Sept 2011



## Moreton Bay Water Quality Report Released

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Eastern Banks	B-	C	B	A	A	A	A	A-	A	A	A-
Eastern Bay	A-	A-	A	A	A	A-	A-	B	B-	B	B-

The Healthy Waterways 2011 Ecosystem Report Card was released last month providing an insight into the health of South East Queensland’s waterways and Moreton Bay.

The results show the full force of the flood with water quality deteriorating due to the significant amount of sediment and nutrients that have flowed into the bay from catchments.

Three of the region’s five catchments flowing into the bay scored F (which means “Conditions do not meet set ecosystem health values; most key processes are not functional and most critical habitats are severely impacted”) and Central Bay, Deception Bay and Bramble Bay scored D+, D+ and D-.

The good news is, in spite of Southern Moreton Bay scoring F, the water around Stradbroke Island is generally of a superior quality. The Eastern Banks scored A- and Eastern Bay scored B- while Waterloo Bay scored B+.

There have however been reports of

increasing mortality rates for dugongs and turtles and oyster farmers have had to remove barnacles that have grown due to increased nutrient levels. The local oysters themselves seem to be doing well.



Overall the Report Card highlights the need to prepare catchments for rainfall events by managing erosion, rehabilitating riverbank areas, stabilising creek channels, investing in good agricultural practices and sustainably managing water.

More info including maps of the regions may be found at [www.healthywaterways.org](http://www.healthywaterways.org)

William Dart

## Urban Koala Survey 2011

We were woken early on Saturday 15 October by a storm which eased as we headed for Cleveland and the water-taxi to Dunwich to take part in the 2011 NSI Urban Koala survey, organised by RCC Wildlife. There were about 30 volunteers this year and we surveyed the streets of each township in small groups, beginning at Dunwich. Here we found 10 koalas; then to Amity Point where we found 19 plus 1 at Flinders Beach. After lunch on the shore at Amity we surveyed Point Lookout but sighted only 1 koala there, a grand total of 31 for this year – 3 higher than last year. Where were the koalas which we know have been seen at Point Lookout? There have been

photos and records of them and locals told us they have seen them but they seemed to be hiding away on the survey day!

However, it was a good day; even the weather smiled on us – sunny and warm after the morning storm and then a magnificent storm brewing at the end of the day as we boarded the water-taxi back to Cleveland!! The rain came down as we left One Mile but cleared as we approached Cleveland leaving a double rainbow across the sky and we drove home in fine weather.

Edith Mc Phee

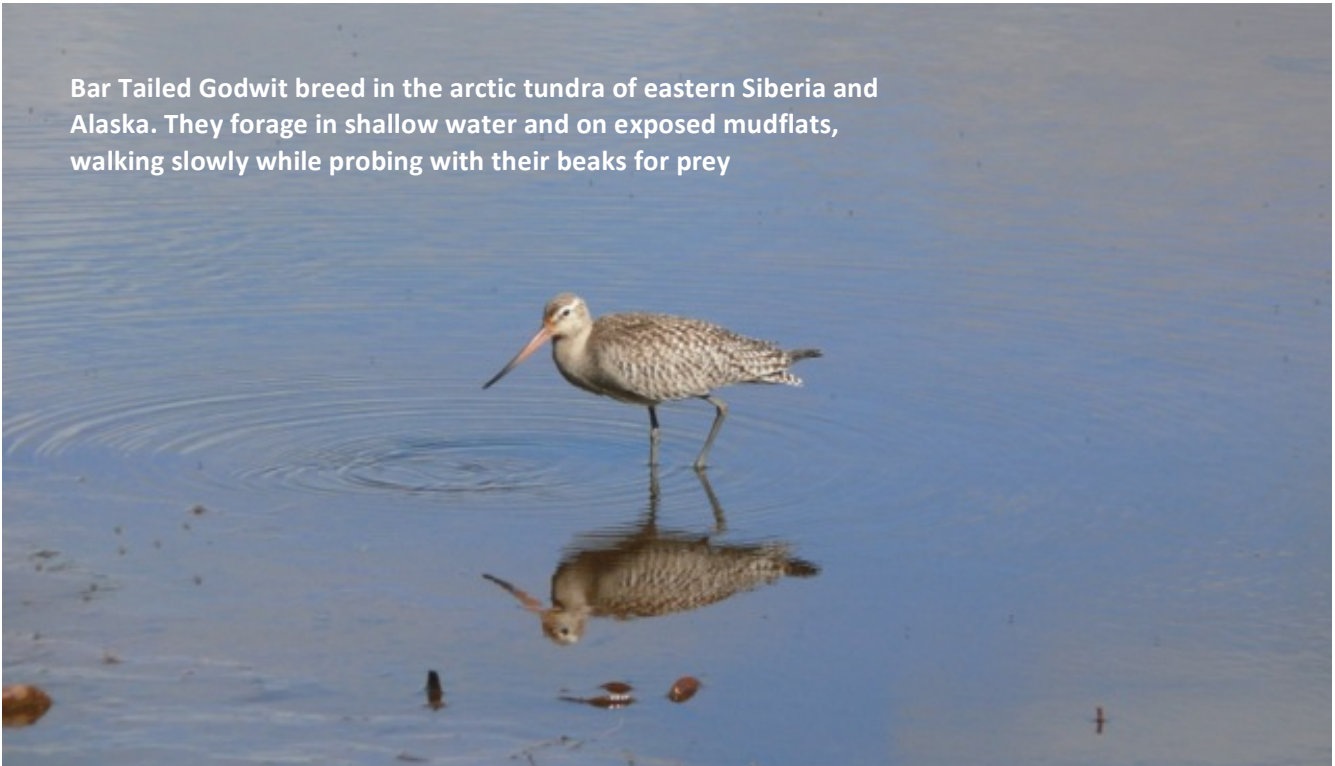


## Foreign Feathered Friends

It seems that the plight of immigrants and how Australia should welcome - or reject - them has dominated the news for months lately. While all this has been going on North Stradbroke Island has been quietly providing a temporary home to thousands of undocumented and hungry arrivals. Beginning in early September, Amity Point, 18 Mile Swamp and other wetlands across Straddie and throughout Moreton Bay have been providing a temporary refuge to thousands of migratory shorebirds.

Shorebirds, also known as waders, are a diverse group of birds commonly seen feeding in intertidal areas or on the fringes of freshwater wetlands. They generally have long legs in relation to their body size, no webbing on their feet and they do not swim. But they can certainly fly!

Bar Tailed Godwit breed in the arctic tundra of eastern Siberia and Alaska. They forage in shallow water and on exposed mudflats, walking slowly while probing with their beaks for prey



**Bar Tailed Godwit photographed on Home Beach**

Most of the migrants spend the months of June and July on their breeding grounds in the northern parts of Siberia, Alaska, China and Mongolia. They breed in areas where melting snow brings masses of insects, providing a vital food source for self-feeding chicks. With the onset of winter in the Northern Hemisphere and the depletion of food sources, the

breeding adults, followed a short time after by their offspring, set off for the feeding grounds of Australia and other warm southern parts. The birds travel remarkable distances of up to 25,000 kilometres each year, flying through extreme weather and avoiding predators. The smallest of these birds have

***Migratory shorebirds recorded at Straddie***  
*Greater Sand Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Double-Banded Plover, Pacific Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Sharp-Tailed Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Sanderling, Red Knot, Great Knot, Curlew Sandpiper, Red-Necked Stint, Grey-Tailed Tattler, Wandering Tattler, Bar-Tailed Godwit, Black-Tailed Godwit, Eastern Curlew, Little Curlew, Whimbrel, Common Greenshank, Terek Sandpiper*

bodies no larger than a hen's egg, yet they still manage the journey. The birds fly at more than 60 km/hr, for three days and nights and for up to 10,000 km non-stop! Shorebirds make the journey in several weeks, stopping two or three times along the way. In doing this, they use favourable weather patterns when they can, but even so will commonly lose 40 per cent of their bodyweight flying. When they stop, they must 'refuel': they feed and rest to build up energy reserves. At these times they may increase their body weight by more than 70 per cent before undertaking the next marathon stage of their journey. The birds navigate a chain of wetlands from the northern to southern hemispheres along what is known as the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

Migrating shorebirds need huge amounts of energy to complete their journey. One of the best-studied species, the eastern curlew, dramatically builds up its body weight just prior to migration. During its 13,000 kilometre flight from Siberia to Australia it will burn 40 percent of its body weight. This is equivalent to an 80 kilogram person running 16 million kilometres almost non-stop and losing 32 kilograms, twice a year!

The beaches, mangroves, mudflats, seagrass beds and coastal wetlands of Stradbroke Island, Bribie and many other areas in Moreton Bay are often the first Australian sites used by shorebirds on their southern journey and the last site before they return north. Around 40,000 shorebirds migrate to Moreton Bay each year.

Once they arrive the shorebirds devote themselves to eating and regaining weight in preparation for their return to the North. During summer at low tide, regardless of day

or night, the birds feed constantly – pecking and probing for worms, insects and crustaceans. With their highly variable and specialized bills they feed around intertidal flats, beaches, rocky headlands and along the fringes of freshwater wetlands. As the incoming tide cover these feeding areas, they begin to congregate in large numbers in relatively safe roost sites nearby. These roost sites provide areas where they can interact, preen, digest their food and rest while they wait for the ebbing tide to again expose their feeding grounds.

Following the birds' summer 'holiday' at Stradbroke and around Moreton Bay, their numbers dramatically decrease during March and April as the adults begin their epic

journey back to the Northern hemisphere breeding grounds. Each year, around 15 percent of the migrating shorebirds that visit Moreton Bay in the summer remain for the whole year. This includes most of the first year birds that are too young to breed or adults that are too weak for the northern journey. From February to August these birds are joined by the only shorebird of Moreton Bay that undertakes an east-west migration - the

Double-banded Plover from New Zealand which can sometimes be sighted at Flinders Beach and Amity.

These temporary visitors share the beaches and wetlands with Straddie's resident shorebirds and water birds which can be seen all year round. Some of the most recognizable species include the pied oystercatcher, bush stone-curlew, lapwings, terns and red-capped plover and our resident waterbirds – the herons, egrets, ibis and spoonbills. The vulnerable beach stone-curlew can also be found on Stradbroke while another rare shorebird, the sooty oystercatcher, is occasionally spotted on rocky beach outcrops on Frenchman's Beach.

***Did you know the following Straddie Shorebirds breed in Australia?***

- Bush Stone-Curlew
- Beach Stone-Curlew
- Black-Fronted Dotterel
- Black-Winged Stilt
- Comb-Crested Jacana
- Masked Lapwing
- Australian Painted Snipe
- Pied Oystercatcher
- Sooty Oystercatcher

## Where to see Shorebirds on Straddie?

For a good look at shorebirds, sit quietly at a distance and study them through binoculars or a spotting scope. Disturbance from boats, people and dogs is a problem and these sites are best viewed out of the holiday season.



**Sooty Oystercatchers on the rocks at Frenchman's Beach August 2011**

### Amity and Flinders Beach

One of the best places to see Straddie's migratory shorebirds is on the Amity sandbanks at the north-western end of the village where the birds roost at high tide and on the exposed mudflats at low tide. Many thousands of waders and terns are sometimes present in summer. Bar-tailed Godwit and Grey-tailed Tattler are usually very abundant, while Whimbrel and Eastern Curlew are common. From February to August, the Double-banded Plover from New Zealand can be sometimes sighted at Amity but more often at Flinders Beach. Amity is also a great place to see resident shore and water birds such as bush stone-curlew (especially at dusk in the camp grounds), red-capped plover, Crested Tern, lapwings, herons, egrets, ibis, spoonbills and cormorant and, if you are lucky, the beach stone-curlew.

### Point Lookout

Shorebirds such as Bar Tailed Godwit are spotted making use of the beach lagoons on Cylinder and Home Beach along with lapwings,

flocks of crested tern and other sea and waterbirds. Bush stone-curlew are now fairly common and can be seen at dusk on roadsides and heard calling all over the township at night. The tracks of the beach stone-curlew have been spotted on Deadman's and Frenchman's Beaches with an occasional rare sighting of the bird itself.

Pairs of sooty oystercatchers are sometimes spotted on rocky beach outcrops on Frenchman's Beach.

### Polka Point

A small high tide roost and mudflats near the One Mile Ferry jetty is always worth checking out to see which shorebirds are making use of the area. Australian pelicans are also commonly seen.

### 18 Mile Swamp

Somewhat hard to access, this very significant Ramsar wetland is our new National Park. The area is still under threat from nearby deep dredge mining.



## Looking after Straddie's Shorebirds – we all have a role to play

Shorebirds are very easily disturbed by close activity. A disturbance is any action that interrupts the breeding, feeding or resting of shorebirds. For example, causing a shorebird to take flight represents a significant disturbance. When shorebirds take flight they use critical energy that is required for migration and breeding. Repeated disturbances and disturbances that occur before or after migration are particularly damaging for shorebirds. Without sufficient energy reserves shorebirds may be unable to complete their migration or breed.

We can all help prevent shorebird disturbance by **following these guidelines:**

- Keep dogs and cats under control and well away from shorebirds. Every time shorebirds are forced to take flight, they burn vital energy.
- Avoid driving or operating all forms of vehicles, vessels and recreational devices near shorebirds. Use 4 wheel drive vehicles only where permitted and drive close to the water's edge to avoid crushing nests. Don't drive along the beach at high tide or above the high-water mark - especially between September and March in the summer breeding season.
- If fishing from a sandbar, choose the opposite end to where the birds are gathered.
- Feral animals can kill shorebirds — report any sightings of foxes and other feral animals to Redland City Council.
- Consider how our actions may disturb shorebirds. This can include where we set up camp or whether we stroll through a roost site at high tide. We should keep our distance from shorebirds.
- At home, try to minimise water wastage and be conscious of what chemicals we empty down the drain.

Congratulations to Michael Dickinson, Straddie fox catcher, who has trapped 70+ foxes in the past few years. The recent increase in Bush Stone Curlew around Point Lookout island is probably due to his fantastic work as foxes are considered to be the biggest threat to curlews and have caused their near extinction in Southern Australia.



**Vehicles parked and driven all over Home Beach (which is 'allowed' out of school holidays). This is destructive to shorebirds and their habitat.**

## Big picture protection

There are numerous threats to waders in Australia and in other countries of the flyway. In many parts of South-east Asia the birds are hunted and there is widespread habitat loss through coastal reclamation and industrial development, especially in China and South Korea. In Queensland, there is inadequate protection of roost and feeding sites and threats from pollution.

### *Interested in learning more about shorebirds?*

*To get involved in wader counting and monitoring please contact the Queensland Wader Study group at <http://www.waders.org.au/>*

Beach Stone Curlew are listed as Vulnerable under Queensland's Nature Conservation Act 1992 – the highest rating available. These uncommon, primarily nocturnal birds are found singly or in pairs on undisturbed beaches and intertidal mudflats. They forage for crabs and breed during spring and summer, laying their eggs in shallow depressions on bare ground, often among beach debris.



**The elusive Beach Stone Curlew on Frenchman's Beach**

Australia is a signatory to international treaties aimed at protecting migratory waders including the Ramsar Convention (Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat) which promotes wetland conservation, and the Bonn Convention (Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals) which provides a multinational framework for the conservation of migratory species. In the East Asian-Australasian flyway, 15 of the 22 countries in the flyway have signed the Ramsar Convention. Australia also has special migratory bird agreements with three countries in the flyway - Japan, China and Korea.

Moreton Bay and 18 Mile Swamp, the longest wetland of its type in the world, are listed as

Ramsar sites for special protection and sustainable management. A Shorebird Management Strategy for Moreton Bay was released in 2005 by the Queensland Government. Within Moreton Bay Marine Park, the Marine Parks (Moreton Bay) Zoning Plan 1997 contains provisions for managing shorebirds. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) is the agency responsible for the management of the marine park including its shorebirds and their habitat. In addition, state and regional coastal management plans provide a framework for managing shorebirds in coastal areas including the marine park. Outside the marine park, the responsibility for protecting shorebirds is a matter for landholders, local governments and other land managers.



FOSI members are very concerned to ensure that the threats to Stradbroke's shorebirds are recognised and addressed. While it's great that 18 Mile Swamp has been included in the new national park, excessive water extraction for mining and water reticulation poses an ongoing major risk to 18 Mile Swamp and Stradbroke's ground water systems. The integrity of 18 Mile Swamp is at risk from deep dredge mining at Enterprise mine next to the swamp and the impact of the Yarraman mine near the northern Key Holes. Shorebirds, especially our resident birds, also face continual threat from vehicles on

beaches particularly when driven at high tide or above the high-water mark. Destruction of birds and nests by dogs, cats and foxes and rough human feet is another ongoing threat while the proposed development and release of extra land at Amity and Flinders Beach in the vicinity of key migratory shorebird habitat must be monitored closely to ensure that adequate buffer zones are put in place to protect the bird's habitat.

Mary Barram

## Spring Wildflowers

The spring wildflowers depicted below were photographed growing alongside the Blue Lake Track in September 2011 by Gail Quinn and Mary Barram.



Forest Boronia (*boronia rosmarinifolia*)



Guinea Flower (*hibbertia salicifolia*)



Phyllota philicodes



Agiortia pedicellata



# Happy Holidays and Season's Greetings to all Friends of Stradbroke Island!



The FOSI Committee thanks you for your support in 2011 and looks forward to working with you in 2012 to preserve our beautiful island.



Australian Pelican and Silver Gull on Main Beach – Photo by Bruce Martin

**Is your newsletter still arriving by post?** If you'd prefer to receive it by email, please send your email address to Edith McPhee at [emcphee@westnet.com.au](mailto:emcphee@westnet.com.au). Thank you.

**Check out our new blog!** This edition and new stories will be posted to <http://www.fosi.org.au> and over time back issues may also become available.