

Birds of the Marine Rock Platform

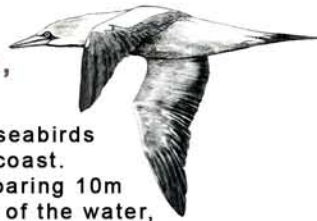
New South Wales coastal rock platforms are occupied by a great diversity of bird species, with some of these species having threatened, endangered or internationally significant conservation value. All rock platforms are important for these shorebirds and are utilised for feeding and roosting (rest).

Birds you are likely to see on the rock platform change with the seasons, with diversity decreasing in the winter months after migratory birds have departed. This includes the Ruddy Turnstone which departs to its northern hemisphere breeding ground during our winter.

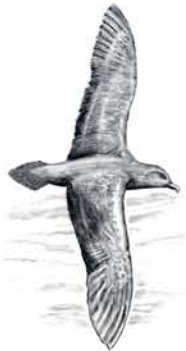
Our rock platforms are used by people in many ways from recreation to education and it's important that they be conserved for present and future generations. Visitors to rock platforms should be careful to avoid disturbing birds feeding or roosting in the area. Dogs are to be on a lead at all times.

Coastal and Marine

Australasian Gannet, *Morus serrator*



Australasian Gannets are seabirds and a familiar site off the coast. They are expert fishers, soaring 10m or more above the surface of the water, herding fish into dense shoals, then folding their wings back and diving into the water to catch their prey. The bird stays under the water for about 10 seconds. The fish is normally swallowed before the bird reaches the surface.



Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus*

Also called a muttonbird. Its common name is derived from the large wedge-shaped tail which may help the species glide. It feeds in the open ocean on fish, squid and crustaceans. Birds are monogamous, forming a long-term pair bond which lasts for several years. This species is protected under an international treaty.

White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*

Normally seen soaring over waterways and land, or perched high in a tree. Birds form permanent pairs. They feed mainly on aquatic animals such as fish, turtles and sea snakes but also take birds and mammals. Wingspan is approx 1.8 - 2.0 metres. This species is protected under an international treaty.



Shore & Estuarine



Sooty Oystercatcher *Haematopus fuliginosus*

Striking black shorebird with a long red bill, red eye and pink legs. Prefers rocky shores. It breeds on offshore islands and isolated rocky headlands. It feeds on molluscs, crabs and other crustaceans, sea stars, urchins and small fish. It uses its long bill to stab at prey or to lever, prise or hammer open food items. This is a threatened species.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Distinctly marked with black or brown and pale areas, almost like tortoise shell, with a white breast. Found alone or in small groups along the coastline, on exposed rocks or reefs, often in shallow pools and on beaches. They feed busily by probing, pecking and poking into cracks. They turn over stones and seaweed to find insects, crustaceans, molluscs and spiders. This species is protected under an international treaty.



Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae*



Found virtually at any watered habitat, but seldom ventures out to sea. This bird has become a successful scavenger yet also eats worms, fish, insects and crustaceans. They nest in large colonies on offshore islands. It has been able to increase its population in areas of human activity.

Pelican *Pelecanus conspicillatus*

Most characteristic feature is the elongated bill with its massive throat pouch. Wingspan is 2.3 - 2.5 metres. They are widespread on freshwater, estuarine and marine wetlands including rocky shores. Not capable of sustained flight but can stay in air for 24 hrs covering hundreds of kilometres. They feed on fish.



Egrets & Herons

White-faced Heron *Egretta novaehollandiae*

Mostly light grey in colour with a characteristic white face. It has a long, slim neck and pointed grey-black bill. Legs are long and dull yellow in colour. When breeding the birds have long feathers on the head, neck and back. Feed on fish, insects and amphibians.



Eastern Reef Egret *Egretta sacra*

Lives on beaches, rocky shores, mangroves and exposed reefs. They are largely sedentary birds, hunting both day and night for small fish, crustaceans and insects. Feeds in clear water by stealth, crouching low as it moves through shallow water over rocks and coral.



Terns

Terns are slender seabirds that fly with long narrow wings and deeply forked tails. They are aerobatic fliers that can dive into the sea from a considerable height to capture small fish with their fine dagger-like bills. All terns fly with their heads and bills pointed down to see their prey.

All the local terns have variable black caps with white foreheads that develop or enlarge when they are in non-breeding plumage. The Caspian Tern is the largest and most easily recognized tern with a brilliant red beak and black legs, whereas the smaller Crested Tern has a yellow beak and black legs. Although the tiny Little Tern also has a yellow beak it has yellow legs as well. The Common Tern and the White-fronted Tern are very difficult to separate as they both have black beaks and black legs. However, the Common Terns are usually present only during summer while the White-fronted Terns are present during the cooler autumn to winter months.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*



Largest tern in Australia. Long, slender backswept wings and a slightly forked tail. Brilliant red bill and black legs. They are common and widespread, mainly sedentary, but numbers fluctuate seasonally. Feed almost entirely on fish. Most feeding activity is in the early to mid morning. Whole fish are regurgitated to the young.

Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*



Second largest of the terns found in Australia and the most commonly seen species. Forms small to large flocks, often with other species, on islands, beaches, lakes and inlets. Feed mainly on small surface fish. Fishermen often use the flocks to locate schools of fish.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*



A migratory bird that eats small fish, insects and crustaceans and other invertebrates. Extremely sensitive to human disturbance when breeding and is in rapidly declining numbers. Nesting sites usually located where humans swim, walk, exercise dogs and drive 4WD vehicles. The Little Tern is a threatened species.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*



More common in northern hemisphere and less so in Australia. Mainly coastal, migratory bird moving north for breeding. Breeds when 4 yrs old, sometimes younger. Both sexes share nest building, incubation and care of young.

White fronted Tern *Sterna striata*



Feed in large flocks by plunge diving on small fish which have been driven to the surface by larger fish. They breed in New Zealand and migrate to south-eastern Australia in winter. Breeding is between October and January in large colonies on rocky cliffs and offshore islands.

Cormorants

Four of Australia's six species of cormorant-like birds are found on rock platforms along the NSW coast. Cormorants are black or pied waterbirds that have a long neck, a long tail and short legs with webbed feet. They all swim very low in the water and dive for fish. After fishing for a while, cormorant feathers become waterlogged so they must come ashore, or sit on a branch to spread and dry their wings. Cormorants do not have oil glands as ducks do, so they do not float high in the water. Because of this they sit low in the water allowing them to sneak up and dive underwater to catch their prey. Some cormorants, such as the Little Black Cormorant, hunt in flocks, herding shoals of fish before them.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Often observed on coastal inlets and estuaries. Feeds mainly on fish. It is an excellent swimmer and captures its food in shallow underwater dives, lasting up to 1 minute.



Little Black Cormorant *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*



Congregates in large flocks and flies in V-shaped formation. Feed on fish, crustaceans and aquatic insects. Catches prey underwater, by diving and swimming using its large fully webbed feet for propulsion. Feathers aren't waterproof, and they are often seen perched with their wings outstretched to dry after fishing.

Little Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*

Seen in large flocks on coast especially where large numbers of fish are present. Feed on a wide variety of aquatic animals from insects to fish.

