



Illawarra Birders Inc. PO Box 1355, 116 Auburn St, Wollongong 2500.

Letter Re-Riverstone Wetlands

Illawarra Birders are a group with over 100 members based in the Illawarra Region of NSW. Our group has a strong conservation focus and many of our members travel across our state and around Australia in pursuit of birds.

In recent years we have been increasingly concerned by the loss of wetlands across NSW. Our members worry that as wetlands seem to be areas that are considered as wasteland they are often filled in and utilised for development.

Unfortunately even small wetlands may be of significance to many of our bird species. These birds may go unnoticed as they are not always present. Some are migratory and may only visit each wetland at certain times of the year. This does not minimise the significance of the wetland as it may be the ONLY wetland habitat in the area suitable for the bird to use before it moves again.

Latham's and Australian Painted Snipe are both wetland birds that simply 'turn up' at a wetland and may stay for a few days or a few weeks. Latham's are migratory and are protected under the BONN Convention, JAMBA (Japan- Australia migratory bird agreement) and ROKAMBA (Republic of Korea- Australia migratory bird agreement) treaties. Latham's Snipe numbers have been severely impacted by development, land clearing and habitat destruction caused by humans. Australian Painted Snipe are listed as Vulnerable in NSW and are known to utilise small wetland areas, often appearing in farm dams and smaller wetlands as well as larger freshwater wetland areas. Riverstone Wetlands have records for both of these species of birds.

It is normal for wetlands to undergo periods of drying out and re-filling as our weather patterns change. The MP. Mr Connolly that looked at the wetland and commented on its 'lack of significance' and deemed it suitable land for development obviously saw it during a dry period. Wetlands are also not 'clean or pristine' looking places – they are often muddy with grassy vegetation growing around the wet areas. If this wetland goes it is yet **one more** area missing for the birds that do use it. People think that to be 'significant' wetlands need to be constantly wet and with lots of birds that can be seen using them but this is NOT the case.

Riverstone is also a wetland area that is vitally important for shorebirds particularly many species of Sandpipers, which are migratory birds. The records for shorebird species are impressive and it appears this wetland is available for the birds to use when other areas are flooded and unable to be accessed. Many shorebirds are wading birds and require a shallow water shoreline with varying amounts of vegetation available to them so Riverstone provides them with a place of refuge.

Riverstone needs to be flagged as an area of importance for birds and treasured as an attraction for touring birders and the local community rather than being considered for development. Many areas that were man-made and have been left after the industry that created them closes are becoming vitally important to our wildlife. Wetlands are not only important for birds but are often also utilised by reptiles, mammals and many insect species. They are also a useful tool that can be valued for educational purposes and community awareness. Often community groups such as landcare, walking and birding clubs find these areas immensely rewarding.

Please consider our views when making any decisions about the lands that Riverstone Wetlands occupy. We have lost too many wetland areas in NSW already!

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Michelle Rower
Conservation Officer
Illawarra Birders Inc.