



# Wetland & Estuary Birds of the **Glenelg Hopkins** region





*Brolga protecting nest from stock - Photo - Bob McPherson*

Wetlands and estuaries are used by a large number of birds that depend on them for food, shelter and breeding. These important habitats support threatened bird species including the Brolga, Blue-billed Duck and the Little Tern as well as several other species at risk.

Wetlands include a variety of habitats, including seasonal freshwater marshes, deep freshwater lakes or saline lakes. Some birds prefer particular wetland environments, while others can be found across a range of wetland types.

Estuaries are partially enclosed water bodies formed when freshwater from rivers and streams mixes with sea water. Estuaries in the Glenelg Hopkins region vary from the narrow

river-like estuaries such as the Glenelg and Hopkins to broad open-water estuaries such as the Merri and Curdies.

Wetland and estuary birds rely on existing wetlands and estuaries for survival. The quality of these habitats is often affected by threatening processes such as grazing, drainage, clearance of associated wetland vegetation and changes to river flow patterns and tidal processes. Disturbance of wetland birds by livestock can result in the failure of breeding efforts, through the destruction of nests or disturbance of breeding birds themselves.

Wetland and estuary birds attract numerous visitors to our region to view them, as well as local bird watchers and naturalists. The process of purchasing a pair of binoculars can open up a

whole new world, as many birds have spectacular plumage and colours.

This field guide showcases a selection of wetland and estuary birds in the Glenelg Hopkins region.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
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The breeding season for each species is indicated by the colour orange on each page, as indicated by the above diagram.

The threatened species symbols used in this guide are as follows;

(E) = nationally endangered

(v) = vulnerable in Victoria

(e) = endangered in Victoria

(l) = lower risk in Victoria



## Magpie Goose - (*Anseranas semipalmata*) (e)

### Description:

Black and white bird, to 92 cm long, with a long neck and relatively long legs. Head characterised by a prominent, rounded knob on the forehead. Voice is a loud honk.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A deep bowl on a floating island made from water plants.

**Diet:** Corms and seeds of wetland sedges, rushes and grasses.

### Habitat:

Large freshwater lakes, slow-moving waterways and swamps.

**Note:** Disappeared from Victoria in early 1900's. Reintroduced to Victoria and SE South Australia in late 1900's.

### Preferred Breeding Months

jan	feb	mar	apr	may	jun	jul	aug	sep	oct	nov	dec
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Photo supplied by Viridans Biological Databases

## Black Swan - (*Cygnus atratus*)

### Description:

To 1.3 m long, with predominantly black plumage except for white flight-feathers on upper and lower wings (usually only seen in flight). Head characterised by a red patch of naked skin in front of the eye. Voice is a loud trumpeting noise (often in flight) or softer tootling noise when feeding.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A large mound, to 1 m or more wide, made of wetland plants and resting in shallow water or on a small island.

**Diet:** Soft plant material, mostly aquatic.

### Habitat:

A wide variety of freshwater, saline and marine wetlands.



#### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Rob Drummond



## Blue-billed Duck - (*Oxyura australis*) (v)

### Description:

To 49 cm long. Male - head, neck and tail black. Blue scooped bill. Rest of plumage predominantly dark brown. Female - brown with pale brown edges to the feathers.

Voice: Seldom calls.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A woven bowl of fine twigs and grass-like plants, close to water and under dense cover, often with a rough roof created over the top.

**Diet:** Soft plant material, seeds, algae, small aquatic invertebrates.

### Habitat:

A variety of wetlands, usually freshwater and with dense vegetation for breeding. Often in open fresh to saline wetlands when non-breeding.

#### Preferred Breeding Months

jan	feb	mar	apr	may	jun	jul	aug	sep	oct	nov	dec
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Photo supplied by Rob Drummond



## Musk Duck - (*Biziura lobata*) (v)

### Description:

To 73 cm long, with uniformly mottled dark and light grey-brown plumage. Body and tail usually half-submerged while swimming. Voice is a high-pitched whistling from males.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A rough bowl made from grass-like water plants, including cumbungi.

**Diet:** Aquatic plants and invertebrates.

### Habitat:

Freshwater lakes and swamps with dense surrounding vegetation, also coastal waters.

**Note:** Rarely flies, dives when threatened.



### Preferred Breeding Months

jan	feb	mar	apr	may	jun	jul	aug	sep	oct	nov	dec
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Photo supplied by Viridans Biological Databases



## Grey Teal - (*Anas gracilis*)

### Description:

To 48 cm long, with predominantly grey-brown plumage. Feathers of body and most of wings grey-brown edged with pale grey. Upper wing mainly dark grey-brown, secondaries glossy black, tipped with white. Lower wing mainly grey-brown with white triangle near body. Head dark grey-brown on crown and forehead, pale grey-brown on face and chin, throat pale grey to white. Voice is a short, high-pitched peep (males) repetitive quacking (females).

### Ecology:

**Nest:** Tree hollows, depressions on ground, rock crevices, hollow logs.

**Diet:** Soft plant material, seeds, algae, small aquatic invertebrates.

### Habitat:

A wide variety of wetlands throughout the state.

#### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Rob Drummond



## Australian Shelduck - (*Tadorna tadornoides*)

### Description:

To 72 cm long, with striking light brown and black plumage. Males - head, upper neck, belly and outer wings black, breast mid-brown. Neck with a white circle on the border between black and brown plumage. Upper wings black on primaries, deep green on secondaries, chestnut on tertiaries and white on the shoulders. Females similar to males but with chestnut breast and white around the eye and base of beak. Voice is a loud, goose-like honk.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** Usually a hollow in a large tree.

**Diet:** Soft plant material, seeds, algae, invertebrates etc.

### Habitat:

A variety of freshwater, saline and marine wetlands and open grasslands.



### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Rob Drummond



## Pacific Black Duck - (*Anas superciliosa*)

### Description:

To 60 cm long, with predominantly brown plumage. Feathers of body and most of wings mid to dark brown edged with pale brown. Upper wing mainly brown, secondaries deep, metallic green, tipped with black and white. Head characterised by black crown and forehead, a pale beige to white face and upper throat, and black bands running through the eye to the beak and along the chin to the cheek. Voice consists of various quacking noises.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A bowl made from fine grassy material, usually on the ground and also tree hollows.

**Diet:** Soft plant material, seeds, algae, small aquatic invertebrates and crustaceans.

### Habitat:

A wide variety of wetlands throughout the state.

#### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Rob Drummond

## Hoary-headed Grebe - (*Poliiocephalus poliocephalus*)

### Description:

To 30 cm long, with grey brown plumage on the back and lighter brown plumage, grading into white, on breast, belly and neck. The head in the breeding season is black with white streaks swept back from the beak, hence its common name. In the non-breeding season the head is brown above the eye and white below. Voice: Seldom calls. Sometimes makes soft piping noises.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A structure, on water, made from water plants and mud which is often partially submerged, and anchored to living plants. Nesting is communal.

**Diet:** Small fish, frogs, tadpoles and aquatic invertebrates.

### Habitat:

A variety of freshwater lakes, dams and slow-moving waterways.



### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Rob Drummond



## Little Pied Cormorant -

(*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*)

### Description:

To 60 cm long, with black plumage on top of head, back and wings, and white on whole face, neck, breast and belly. Head is characterised by a black band extending from the eye to the beak. Voice: Seldom calls but sometimes utters nasal croaks and coos.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A structure of twigs and small branches, in trees, shrubs or on ground. Usually near water. Breeds in colonies.

**Diet:** Principally fish but also a variety of other aquatic animals.

### Habitat:

A wide range of freshwater, saline and marine waterways.

#### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Rob Drummond

## Australian Pelican - (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*)

### Description:

To 1.8 m long and wingspan to 2.5 m, with predominantly white plumage and black on wings and tail. Head is characterised by a short, bristly crest on the crown and a yellow band of naked skin around the eyes. Large bill. Voice made up of snorting or grunting noises.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A stick structure, in shrubs and small trees.

**Diet:** A variety of fish and crustaceans and also scavenges.

### Habitat:

A wide variety of waterways, lakes, swamps, estuaries and the sea.

**Note:** Colonial breeder.



### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Rob Drummond





## Great Egret - (*Ardea alba*) (e)

### Description:

To 90 cm long, with a very long neck (much longer than body) and legs. Plumage entirely white. Breeding birds have long, wispy plumes on back. Head characterised by a patch of blue-green (breeding) or yellow (non-breeding), naked skin between the eyes and beak. Voice is a deep, sharp croak.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A structure of twigs and small branches, usually in a tree or shrub often some distance from water.

**Diet:** A range of small, mostly aquatic, vertebrates and large invertebrates.

### Habitat:

A variety of freshwater lakes, coastal shores, slow-moving waterways and open country near wetlands.

#### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Viridans Biological Databases



## White-necked Heron - (*Ardea pacifica*)

### Description:

To 91 cm long, with a long neck and legs. Plumage black on back and wings, white on head and neck, with black spots on lower neck. Breast and belly with grey-brown and white streaks. Head characterised by a band of naked, blue-grey skin in front of the eyes.

Voice is a deep, sharp croak.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A structure of twigs and small branches, usually in tree or shrub above water.

**Diet:** A range of small, mostly aquatic, vertebrates and large invertebrates.

### Habitat:

A nomadic species found in a variety of freshwater lakes, slow-moving waterways and open country near wetlands.



### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Rob Drummond



## White-faced Heron - (*Ardea novaehollandiae*)

### Description:

To 70 cm long. Plumage principally grey or blue-grey, darker on wings than body. Breast and lower neck with coarse, chestnut plumage. Head characterised by white plumage on the face, chin and upper throat. Voice is a deep, sharp croak.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A structure of twigs and small branches, usually in tree or shrub often some distance from water.

**Diet:** A range of small, mostly aquatic, vertebrates and large invertebrates.

### Habitat:

A variety of freshwater lakes, coastal shores, slow-moving waterways and open country near wetlands.

#### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Viridans Biological Databases

## Nankeen Night Heron - (*Nycticorax caledonicus*)

### Description:

A stout, large bird, to 59 cm long, with a short neck. Plumage predominantly a chestnut colour on the back and wings, and pale beige to white on the breast and belly. Head characterised by black plumage on top (above the eyes) and back, and, when breeding, two long, narrow, white plumes on the back of the head. Voice is a sharp croak, usually calls at night.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A structure of twigs and small branches, usually in a tree or shrub.

**Diet:** A range of small, mostly aquatic, vertebrates and large invertebrates.

### Habitat:

A variety of freshwater lakes, coastal shores, slow-moving waterways and open country near wetlands.



### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Viridans Biological Databases



## Yellow-billed Spoonbill - (*Platalea flavipes*)

### Description:

To 90 cm long, with a long neck and legs, and a long spoon-shaped beak. Plumage entirely white. Head characterised by a black line running from forehead to chin, and behind the eyes, which surrounds an area of naked, pale pink skin on the face. Voice is various soft grunts and bill clattering.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A structure of twigs and small branches in a tree or large shrub, often near water.

**Diet:** A range of small aquatic vertebrates and invertebrates.

### Habitat:

A variety of freshwater wetlands, slow-moving waterways and open country near wetlands.

#### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Viridans Biological Databases



## Brolga - (*Grus rubicunda*) (v)

### Description:

To 1.4 m tall, with a long neck and legs. Plumage principally grey. Head characterised by a complete lack of feathers. Forehead and ears grey, rest of head red with a black flap of skin (dewlap) hanging from the throat. Voice is a continuous, warbling bugle.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A platform of grasses, sedges or reeds, usually near wetlands.

**Diet:** A range of small, often aquatic, vertebrates and large invertebrates, as well as seeds, corms and soft plant material.

### Habitat:

A variety of shallow freshwater marshes and open country near wetlands when breeding. Flocking often observed in open paddocks during non-breeding season.



### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Rob McPherson



## Swamp Harrier - (*Circus approximans*)

### Description:

A bird of prey. Females up to 61cm long, males up to 57cm. Plumage predominantly dark brown on head, back and upper wings, and pale brown below. Rump is white. Neck and breast with variable lighter and darker streaks. Head with a noticeable unstreamed mask-like face. Voice is a series of high-pitched short whistles, but the bird seldom calls.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** Made of reeds, rushes or sedges, usually in swamps.

**Diet:** A variety of water birds and other ground vertebrates.

### Habitat:

Open grasslands, woodlands, estuaries and freshwater wetlands.

#### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Rob Drummond



## Dusky Moorhen - (*Gallinula tenebrosa*)

### Description:

To 40 cm long. Plumage predominantly black, dark brown on back and upper wings. Head characterised by a bright red shield on forehead, which is continuous with the beak. Voice is a combination of high-pitched squeaking or clucking calls.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A platform made from wetland plants, nearly always near water.

**Diet:** A variety of invertebrates, small vertebrates, carrion, seeds and soft plant material.

### Habitat:

Lakes, swamps and billabongs.



### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Viridans Biological Databases



## Purple Swamphen - (*Porphyrio porphyrio*)

### Description:

Up to 48 cm long. Plumage predominantly black with deep purple-blue on neck and breast. Head characterised by a bright red shield on forehead which is continuous with the beak.

Voice is a high-pitched, harsh shriek.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A large platform made from trampled wetland plants (often reeds), nearly always near water.

**Diet:** A variety of invertebrates, small vertebrates, seeds and soft plant material.

### Habitat:

Found amongst tall aquatic vegetation such as reeds and sedges in lakes, swamps and estuaries. Often seen feeding in open paddocks near wetlands.

#### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Viridans Biological Databases

## Eurasian Coot - (*Fulica atra*)

### Description:

To 39 cm long. Plumage is entirely black. Head characterised by a clear white shield on forehead which is continuous with the beak. Voice is a sharp, harsh shriek.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A loose platform made from wetland plants, on or near water.

**Diet:** A variety of invertebrates, small vertebrates, seeds and soft plant material.

### Habitat:

Estuarine and inland wetlands with submerged vegetation.



### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Rob Drummond



## Baillon's Crake - (*Porzana pusilla*) (v)

### Description:

To 16 cm long. Plumage predominantly brown with black and white streaks on back, top of head and upper wings; grey on face and breast; and black with white bars on belly. Voice is a rapid, mechanical trill.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A cup made of sedges and other aquatic plants, in dense cover, and often with a shelter built over it. On the ground, in or near water.

**Diet:** Invertebrates, also small vertebrates, seeds and soft plant material.

### Habitat:

Swamps, wet grasslands, billabongs.

#### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Rob Drummond



## Marsh Sandpiper - (*Tringa stagnatilis*)

### Description:

A wading bird, to 22 cm long. Plumage on back, upper wings and top of head, predominantly pale grey. Belly, breast, throat and rump white. Head characterised by a white eyebrow stripe and forehead. Short, broad tail with pale grey and white bars. Voice characterised by high-pitched chirps.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** Birds do not breed in Australia.

**Diet:** A variety of small invertebrates.

### Habitat:

Various coastal environments, estuaries and shallow inland wetlands.

**Note:** A summer visitor from northern Europe and Asia. Similar to Common Greenshank from which it can be distinguished by its smaller size, more slender bill and white forehead.



### Preferred Breeding Months

jan	feb	mar	apr	may	jun	jul	aug	sep	oct	nov	dec
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Photo supplied by Viridans Biological Databases



## Common Sandpiper - (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

### Description:

A small wading bird, to 20 cm long. Plumage on back, upper wings, head and sides of breast predominantly brown. Belly, chin and lower breast white. Upper breast pale grey with brown mottles. Head characterised by a white eyebrow stripe and chin. Voice: Very high-pitched 'twits'.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** Birds do not breed in Australia.

**Diet:** A variety of small invertebrates.

### Habitat:

Various coastal and inland shallow wetlands.

**Note:** A summer visitor from northern Europe and Asia.

### Preferred Breeding Months

jan	feb	mar	apr	may	jun	jul	aug	sep	oct	nov	dec
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Photo supplied by Viridans Biological Databases



## Red-necked Stint - (*Calidris ruficollis*)

### Description:

A small wading bird, to 15 cm long. Plumage on back, upper wings and top of head, predominantly grey-brown with darker streaks. Belly, breast and throat white. Rump black. Head characterised by a white eyebrow stripe.

Voice is a high-pitched series of twittering and cheeps.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** Birds do not breed in Australia.

**Diet:** A variety of small invertebrates.

### Habitat:

Various coastal environments, estuaries and inland shallow wetlands.

**Notes:** A summer visitor from Siberia. The common name refers to breeding plumage. This is the smallest of the wading birds.



### Preferred Breeding Months

jan	feb	mar	apr	may	jun	jul	aug	sep	oct	nov	dec
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Photo supplied by Viridans Biological Databases



## Black-winged Stilt - (*Himantopus himantopus*)

### Description:

A slender, long-legged, wading bird, to 38 cm long with fine bill. Plumage predominantly white with black on upper wings and on back of neck. Voice is a series of short, repeated puppy-like yelps.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A depression in mud or a small island of plant material in shallow water.

**Diet:** A variety of small, aquatic invertebrates caught by probing with long beak.

### Habitat:

Estuaries, shallow freshwater and saline wetlands.

#### Preferred Breeding Months

jan	feb	mar	apr	may	jun	jul	aug	sep	oct	nov	dec
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Photo supplied by Rob Drummond

## Black-fronted Dotterel - (*Charadrius melanops*)

### Description:

To 18 cm long. Sexes similar. Plumage grey-brown, mottled with black and grey, on back, top of head and upper wings; and white on face, breast and belly. Breast with a broad, black v-shaped band. Shoulders with a deep red-brown band. Head characterised by a red ring around the eyes and a black band through the eyes and on forehead. Voice consists of high-pitched 'chip chip'.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A shallow depression in sand, loose soil or the pebbles of a riverbed.

**Diet:** A variety of small invertebrates.

### Habitat:

Margins of shallow lakes, dams and slow-moving rivers.



### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Rob Drummond



## Pacific Gull - (*Larus pacificus*) (I)

### Description:

A large, robust sea-bird, to 63 cm long. Plumage predominantly white on head and body. Wings black above with white edges; white below, with dark-grey to black flight-feathers, tail is broad, rounded, white with black band near the tip. Voice is a deep, rather mournful 'eaow'.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A rough bowl of twigs and other plant material, often on the ground or a ledge.

**Diet:** A variety of marine vertebrates and invertebrates, eggs, young birds and carrion.

### Habitat:

All coastal areas and estuaries.

#### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Viridans Biological Databases



## Crested Tern - (*Sterna bergii*)

### Description:

To 46 cm long. Breeding plumage predominantly white on face and body. Tapered wings grey above, white below, with grey tips on primaries. Head characterised by a crested, black hood running from just above the white forehead, through the eyes, to the nape. Non-breeding plumage similar but head lacks crest and is streaked. Voice is characterised by harsh, argumentative barks and 'arrrk' sounds.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** Eggs laid in shallow depression on the ground.

**Diet:** A variety of marine vertebrates and invertebrates.

### Habitat:

All coastal areas and estuaries.



### Preferred Breeding Months

jan	feb	mar	apr	may	jun	jul	aug	sep	oct	nov	dec
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Photo supplied by Viridans Biological Databases



## Little Tern - (*Sterna albifrons*) (Ev)

### Description:

A marine bird, to 23 cm long. Breeding plumage predominantly white on face and body. Tapered wings grey above, white below, with black tips on primaries. Head is characterised by a white forehead, a black crown and nape, and a black band running from the beak through the eye. Voice is a series of high-pitched squeaks.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** Eggs laid in shallow depression on the ground.

**Diet:** A variety of marine vertebrates and invertebrates.

### Habitat:

Coastal areas including estuaries.

**Note:** This species has been listed as nationally endangered due mainly to human disturbance and destruction of breeding sites.

### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Viridans Biological Databases



## Masked Lapwing - (*Vanellus miles*)

### Description:

To 35 cm long. Brown on back and upper wings; black on flight-feathers, top of head and side of neck, and white elsewhere. Wings have prominent, sharp, yellow spurs. Head characterised by a yellow ring around the eye and a yellow, fleshy shield on the forehead which is extended into two, long, triangular wattles either side of the beak. Voice consists of a loud, rapid 'cerk clerk clerk clerk', which fades.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A shallow depression in the ground, loosely lined with plant material.

**Diet:** A variety of invertebrates, some seeds.

### Habitat:

A variety of habitats including estuaries and inland wetland margins.



### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Rob Drummond



## Clamorous Reed-Warbler -

(*Acrocephalus stentoreus*)

### Description:

Small brown bird, to 17 cm long. Plumage predominantly brown on upper head, back and upper wings. Breast and belly off-white. Head characterised by a pale brown face with an off-white eyebrow stripe. Voice is a clear, melodious combination of chirrups and warbles during the breeding season.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A deep cup woven from grass, reeds and various other pieces of plant material. Attached to the stems of reeds or cumbungi.

**Diet:** Insects and other invertebrates.

### Habitat:

A range of lowland freshwater wetlands where reeds, rushes or cumbungi grow.

**Note:** Summer migrant to south west Victoria

### Preferred Breeding Months

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Photo supplied by Rob Drummond

## Golden-headed Cisticola - (*Cisticola exilis*)

### Description:

Small bird, to 10 cm long. Males - breeding plumage predominantly light rusty brown on neck, flanks, back and upper wings with broad, black streaks on back and wings. Breast and belly pale grey-cream to white. Crown and rump golden yellow-brown. Voice is a metallic buzz followed by a brief chirrup.

### Ecology:

**Nest:** A small dome-shaped structure woven from grass, or grass-like plants. Usually built amongst dense clumps of grass or rushes.

**Diet:** Insects and other invertebrates.

### Habitat:

A range of lowland wetlands and grasslands where there is dense cover of grasses, sedges or other grass-like plants.



### Preferred Breeding Months

jan	feb	mar	apr	may	jun	jul	aug	sep	oct	nov	dec
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Photo supplied by Rob Drummond



Australian Government



## References and Further Reading

**Field Guide to Australian Birds**, Morecombe, M. (2000) - Steve Parish Publishing

**Field Guide to the Birds of Australia**, Pizzey, G. and Knight, F. (2000) - Angus & Robertson

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## Acknowledgements

**Funding:** Glenelg Hopkins CMA

**Photographs:** Rob Drummond, Bob McPherson & Viridans Biological Databases.

**Text and Layout:** Doug Phillips & Dave Warne  
Greening Australia