

Coorong waterbirds populations



Biodiversity | Inland waters

South Australia's environmental trend and condition report cards 2023



Trend
Getting worse



Condition
Poor

★ ★ ★ Reliability
★ ☆ Very good

STATE

Trend

The abundance of waterbirds in the Coorong is declining, but with variations between different groups.

Coorong waterbird species are grouped into 'guilds' based on their diet, the way they search for food and their life history.

Representative species within each guild include silver gull (generalist), black swan (herbivore), red-necked stint (migratory shorebird), Australian pelican (piscivore) and red-capped plover (resident shorebird).

Trends in abundance differ between guilds in the waterbird community, with generalists and herbivores assessed as stable or improved, and resident and migratory shorebirds and piscivores declining (figure).

Abundance declines were most severe for migratory shorebirds. These declines can be due to a number of factors, including local habitat conditions in the Coorong and the loss and decline of sites along their migratory flyways. This in turn affects habitat quality and availability for feeding and breeding.

Condition

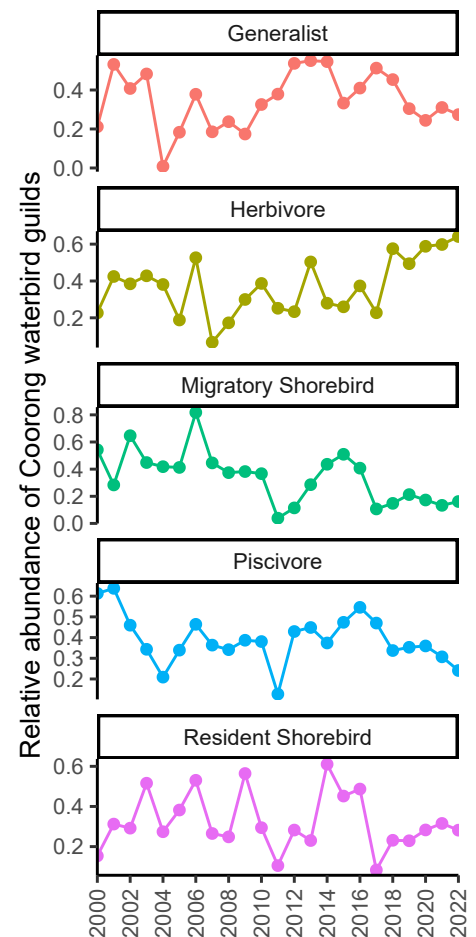
The condition of Coorong waterbird populations is rated as poor.

The condition of waterbird populations in the Coorong is determined by the proportion of species in each guild that met their respective long-term median abundance targets from 2020 to 2022.

Habitat quality for waterbirds in the Coorong has been impacted by prolonged high nutrient and salt loads, the presence of filamentous algae and limited food resource availability.

National and international declines in waterbird populations, habitat changes and the increase in alternative wetland habitats across Australia from back-to-back La Niña years have also influenced the achievement of abundance targets for waterbirds in the Coorong in recent years.

Abundances of Coorong waterbird populations are getting worse, with some exceptions.



Why are Coorong waterbirds important?

The Coorong is recognised as a wetland of international importance. It supports nationally and internationally threatened species, and species listed on international migratory bird agreements.

Waterbirds are sensitive to changes in environmental conditions, as well as the quality and availability of habitat and food resources. Therefore, waterbirds are an important indicator of ecosystem health. Many waterbirds are also culturally and recreationally significant.

What are the drivers?

Habitat quality for waterbirds in the Coorong is affected by flow, water levels, salinity and algae, which influence the availability and accessibility of habitat and food resources. Coorong waterbird populations are also affected by national and international population declines and habitat changes, including the availability of wetland habitat across Australia.

What is being done?

Delivery of water for the environment benefits food and habitat availability for waterbirds in the Coorong.

The Healthy Coorong, Healthy Basin program is investigating ecological restoration options to improve waterbird habitats in the Coorong. A healthy Coorong will provide diverse habitats and food for waterbirds.

For further information see: [technical information](#)



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Government of South Australia