Curlew Sandpiper Calidris ferruginea

Wing 126–136 mm Bill 34–44 mm WT 55–93 g Smallish, slim sandpiper with long blackish legs, Long, fine-tipped, down-curved black bill (~15% longer in ♂). In flight, our only regularly occurring small sandpiper with white rump-patch. Ad br mainly chestnut. Confusion only possible with larger, stockier, short-billed Ad br Red Knot. Ad non-br paler grey above than most Aus shorebirds, with clear white supercilium; white below; grey-brown streaking on sides of breast varies but paler and less extensive than Sharp-tailed. Juv peach-buff wash across breast when fresh, and white-scalloped uppersparts with anchor-shaped markings within feathers. When worn, white fringes and buff wash are lost, and uppersparts look darker and more ‘oily’ than Ad non-br. Imm non-br like Ad non-br but retains Juv primaries wing-coverts and sometimes some Juv tertials. Remain in Aus for initial austral winter (first migrate n when 2 yr old); develop 1st Imm br like Ad non-br, but often with coarser dark centres to some feathers of uppersparts; some develop varying traces of reddish colouration. Voice: Pleaseing short trill chrip or chrep given in flight and as contact call. Notes: Migrant from Arctic Siberian breeding grounds. Usually found in flocks, often with other species. Largest numbers occur in tidal flat systems, but also use freshwater and brackish wetlands; open muddy shores where birds forage in shallow water (often up to belly-deep); occasionally swim with buoyant carriage, tail and wing-tips raised well clear of water. Formerly one of our most common shorebirds, but has declined sharply since 1980s.

Hybrid Sandpipers

In Aus, rare hybrids between ♂ Pectoral and ♀ Curlew Sandpipers were initially considered aberrant Dunlin or a new species ‘Cox’s Sandpiper’ before hybrid ID was confirmed through plumage and genetic studies. They are most likely to be found with Curlew Sandpiper, differing in non-br plumage by more coarsely patterned uppersparts, more heavily streaked breast sharply demarcated from white belly, and greenish legs (much variation in darkness). Appearance thus approaches Pectoral but ‘Cox’s’ has greyer uppersparts; longer, finer and more down-curved black bill; slightly longer wings and legs also contribute to structural appearance more like Curlew Sandpiper (though ‘Cox’s’ is often shorter billed). Even more rare hybrid sandpipers of different parentage have now been recorded (including probable hybrids of Sharp-tailed and Curlew Sandpiper).

Pectoral Sandpiper Calidris melanotos

Wing 125–149 mm Bill 25–31 mm WT non-br 52–70 g Uncommon, often overlooked among similar non-br Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. Pectoral has longer bill, usually with extensively yellowish base, yellowish legs, generally browner and darker cap and uppersparts; smaller white orbital ring. Most reliably distinguished by coarsely streaked breast; sharp demarcation from clean white belly looks ‘spiky’ and cuts straight across breast save for downward point in mid-line of body. Vent and undertail-coverts clean white, occasionally with sparse inconspicuous dark streaks (Sharp-tailed has distinct streaking on undertail-coverts, often a helpful ID cue from behind). ♂ ~10% taller than ♀. All plumages quite similar to one another, unlike Sharp-tailed Sandpiper in which Ad br and Juv plumages distinctive. In flight rarely separable from Sharp-tailed except on call, but has brown (not white) shafts to inner primaries. Ad br bright rufous edges to uppersparts feathers, strongly marked breast; little yellow at base of bill. Ad non-br bare parts brighter than Ad br, but plumage duller with lighter breast streaking; rufous edging to feathers of uppersparts much reduced or absent. Juv differs from Ad br in slightly paler breast and uniform wear of plumage. Imm difficult to distinguish from Ad unless retained Juv flight feathers detected; moults to breeding plumage and migrates n at end of 1st yr. Voice: In flight (especially when flushed) gives variations of a low trill chrip, deeper and hoarser than Sharp-tailed Sandpiper; call harsher when alarmed, recalling Budgerigar. Notes: Nests in near-Arctic Siberia and N America; most migrate to S America. Uncommon but regular visitor to Aus, seen singly or rarely in small loose groups in shallows or grassy edges of freshwater wetlands; also brackish wetlands with short saltmarsh fringes when non fresh water available. Seldom forages on tidal flats: a good way to find Pectorals can be to search near-coastal freshwa ter wetlands at low tide in Apr when distracting Sharp-taileds have mostly moved to tidal flats, or migrated n.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper Calidris acuminata

Wing 122–143 mm Bill 22–27 mm WT 57–100 g Common summer visitor. Note small-medium size, shortish bill, greenish legs, rusty cap and coarsely streaked dark underparts (better concealed in grass than on open mud). ♂ ~7% taller than ♀. Similar to Pectoral Sandpiper. Long-toed Stint Ad non-br is much smaller, finer-billed and lacks dark streaking on flanks and undertail-coverts. Ruff much larger, with plainer face, less streaked undertails. In flight has narrow white wing-bar, dark centre to rump. Ad br brightly coloured above; coarse black chevrons on breast and flanks. Ad non-br varies (some with narrow rufous edging to some scapulars and tertials), but usually looks greyer above than Pectoral; breast streaking most extensive at sides, faint in midline of body. Juv handsome; brightly coloured uppersparts like Ad br and apricot band across breast. After post-Juv moult begins, broad rufous fringes to retained Juv tertials often the best distinction from Ad. Imm difficult to distinguish from Ad unless retained Juv flight feathers detected; moults to br plumage and migrates n with Ads about Mar–Apr; hence rarely recorded in Aus winter. Voice: Soft flight-note pleep or piep and short trill tert often repeated or given in jumbled succession. Notes: Nests in n Siberian tundra. Usually in flocks, often with other shorebird species. Probably the most numerous migratory shorebird in fresh to saline inland wetlands of Aus; also forages in nearby damp grasslands, and coastal populations routinely use tidal flats, preferring relatively sheltered flats within reach of wetlands where they can also forage at high tide.
**Red-backed Kingfisher**  
*Todiramphus pyrrhopygius*

**Wing** 95–109 mm  
**Bill** 43–48 mm  
**Wt** 43–70 g

Medium-small inland kingfisher, mostly dark green above and white below. Confusion most likely with Sacred Kingfisher but Red-backed has unique combination of long broad whitish supercilium, white streaking on crown, and rufous back, rump and upper tail coverts, variably concealed when perched, but conspicuous in flight. White edges to bases of scapulars sometimes exposed as diagnostic streaking. Ad ♀ mantle and scapulars dark bluish green; bill black with whitish basal half to lower mandible. Ad ♂ greens and blues of cap and upperparts duller than ♀, washed grey or brown; white streaking of crown usually narrow. Juv similar to Ad, but bill initially has small white tip and pink tinge to basal half of lower mandible; sides of breast and neck scalloped by blackish fringes to feathers. Secondary coverts narrowly fringed buff. Buff and blackish fringes are reduced with wear but remainns usually discernable until 1 yr old.

**Voice:** Main (probably territorial) call a down-slurred mournful whistle *chiwy*, steadily repeated at ~3 sec intervals. Also gives harsh chattering call, especially after take-off. **Notes:** Widespread in open, lightly wooded habitats of arid and semi-arid zones, and seasonally dry tropics, including open eucalypt and mulga woodlands, grasslands and saltbush plains with scattered trees. Summer visitor in n of range, can be seen year-round in n. Usually seen singly or in pairs; quite unobtrusive, but calls from high bare branches and often perches on overhead wires in open country. Exchanges nest burrows in steep banks, including roadside cuttings, quarries.

**Azure Kingfisher**  
*Ceyx azureus*

**Wing** 70–82 mm  
**Bill** 45–55 mm  
**Wt** 25–51 g

Distinctive small waterside kingfisher, with brilliant glossy violet-blue upperparts, rufous underparts, white blaze on sides of neck, long black bill and red feet. Ad ♀ blue of upperparts even and glossy; faint purplish wash on sides of flanks (often concealed by wings). Some have tiny white tip to bill. Ad ♀ looks subtly duller than ♀ when pair seen together. Juv duller than Ad, with larger white tip to bill. Crown and ear-coverts have fine blackish barring or mottling, mantle and scapulars less glossy than Ad, often contrasting with lighter, glossy blue rump and uppertail; underparts slightly paler, with blackish-olive rather than deep blue tinge at extreme sides.

**Voice:** High-pitched penetrating *peeet* repeated several times, mainly in flight but sometimes from perch. **Notes:** A true kingfisher, perching above water and plunging-diving headfirst for fish and other swimming prey. Found mainly along well-vegetated rivers and creeks, and shadily vegetated beside lakes, dams, billabongs and swamps. Nests in burrow, usually in steep bank near water. Rather shy and easily overlooked when perched quietly in shade, though it often bobs head and cocks tail before diving for prey. Often first detected by flight call when dashing low over water, or by splash when plunging for prey. Ssp azurae occurs on e coast of mainland; slightly smaller *ruficollaris* of n Aus has slightly darker underparts. Largest ssp *diemenicus* of Tas is VU.

**Little Kingfisher**  
*Ceyx pusillus*

**Wing** 51–58 mm  
**Bill** 28–35 mm  
**Wt** 10–16 g

Small inland kingfisher. Slightly smaller than Azure Kingfisher with light greenish blue upperparts and cap contrasting with rufous ear-coverts and underparts, white chin and throat, white plaque behind eyes. In flight rump and back contrasting palely and bluer than rest of upperparts. ID easy in our region, but vagrant Blue-eared Kingfisher (not yet recorded here) is similar, differing by blue ear-coverts (in Ad only) and darker blue upperparts without turquoise tinge. Ad ♂ bill black, sometimes with dull orange smudges at base of lower mandible. Ad ♀ lower mandible extensively orange. Juv upperparts duller and greener than Ad, fine dusky motting on breast. Bill black with small white tip in ♀ and ♀, developing Ad coloration between 6 and 12 months of age. **Voice:** In flight gives short shrill whistle *cheer*, often rapidly repeated 2 or 3 times, eg chi-ker. **Notes:** A true kingfisher, occurring by still or clear open waters, especially those fringed by thick vegetation with perches 1–2 m above water surface, also intertidal rock pools. Widespread from Indonesia to Europe. Vagrant here; several Aus records from coastal coves and ornamental fish ponds on Christmas I and coastline and wetlands on Cocos (Keeling) I.

**Common Kingfisher**  
*Alcedo atthis*

**Wing** 69–76 mm  
**Bill** 31–35 mm  
**Wt** 20–30 g

Small water kingfisher. Slightly smaller than Azure Kingfisher with light greenish blue upperparts and cap contrasting with rufous ear-coverts and underparts; white chin and throat, white plaque behind eyes. In flight rump and back contrasting palely and bluer than rest of upperparts. ID easy in our region, but vagrant Blue-eared Kingfisher (not yet recorded here) is similar, differing by blue ear-coverts (in Ad only) and darker blue upperparts without turquoise tinge. Ad ♂ bill black, sometimes with dull orange smudges at base of lower mandible. Ad ♀ lower mandible extensively orange. Juv upperparts duller and greener than Ad, fine dusky motting on breast. Bill black with small white tip in ♀ and ♀, developing Ad coloration between 6 and 12 months of age. **Voice:** In flight gives short shrill whistle *cheer*, often rapidly repeated 2 or 3 times, eg chi-ker. **Notes:** A true kingfisher, occurring by still or clear open waters, especially those fringed by thick vegetation with perches 1–2 m above water surface, also intertidal rock pools. Widespread from Indonesia to Europe. Vagrant here; several Aus records from coastal coves and ornamental fish ponds on Christmas I and coastline and wetlands on Cocos (Keeling) I.
New Holland Honeyeater

**Phylidonyris novaehollandiae**

**Wing** 70–85 mm **Bill** 16.5–22.0 mm **Wt** 18–28 g

Common, distinctive and well-known bird of heath, heathy forest and gardens in coastal and subcoastal se and sw Aus, including Tas. Geographic variation in size, bill length and density of black streaks on breast; larger, longer billed and more heavily streaked in, particularly Tas. **Ad** boldly patterned black and white with bright yellow panel in folded wing and yellow edges to uppertail; white eye; smallish white cheek plume; white malar-patch; clear white iris. **Juv** with brownish tone to plumage with indistinct off-white streaks; malar-patch vestigial; iris grey; bill yellow-grey gradually turning black, gape yellow and puffy. **Imm** distinguished by retained brown primary-coverts, often with slight yellow edging. **Voice**: Loud, single *tchik*, repeated often; whistled *tseee* in flight, rapid *chwiep chwiep chwiep*; scolding notes. **Notes**: Active and conspicuous in small groups. Darts from shrub to shrub, diving into cover, constantlyickering and chasing. Reliant on nectar: numbers fluctuate in accord with flowering patterns of dominant nectar-producing shrubs. Also sallys for insects. Readily adapts to gardens.

White-fronted Honeyeater

**Pernis melanotus**

**Wing** 70–80 mm **Bill** 16.5–22.0 mm **Wt** 18–25 g

Distinctive, somewhat plump, black and white honeyeater with a bright *pink* bill and short, square-cut tail. **Ad** of *nigra* (face forward of eye white except for brown-toned upperparts; upperparts; head pattern) looks much like a white-browed honeyeater, but with a much smaller head relative to the body size. The face is white with a black line across the eyes and a black cap behind the eye. The tail is short and square, with white tips, and the wings are long and pointed. **Voice**: A variety of loud, metallic calls often given from a perch atop a tall shrub: musical *tchik-chwik-chwik*; trilling *peter-pete-pete*; rapid, ringing, metallic *kzip*.

Notes: A widely nomadic, highly nectarivorous, arid and semi-arid species that occasionally reaches subcoastal sw and e. Blossom nomad, irruptive when desert shrubs or swampy eucalypt woodland in coastal lowlands, but in ne Qld mostly confined to high altitudes: in tall eucalypt forest or riparian thickets. Sedentary or local blossom nomad, highly nectarivorous, also catches insects by sallying. Gregarious, noisy, pugnacious and conspicuous.