

## Waders at Boat Harbour, near Sydney

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Boat Harbour and its immediate surroundings, at the northern end of Cronulla Beach, a few miles south of Sydney, contains within its rather small compass, an ocean beach, a sand-spit, rock flats and an almost lilliputian harbour—habitats that attract a variety of birds, particularly waders.

Sydney ornithologists often visit the locality and seldom fail to make interesting observations. On a recent trip (March, 27, 1948), four of us (T. A. Everitt, G. Marshall, W. R. Moore and K. A. Hindwood) reached the spot during mid-morning. The tide was then almost full, with the result that most of the waders present were gathered on the sand-spit between the ocean and Boat Harbour. The birds had been feeding on a rising tide since early morning and, except for a few Sanderlings which like to feed on a stretch of flat ocean beach nearby, and some dotterels, all were resting. They allowed a fairly close approach and it was possible to stand in one place and observe nine species of waders, some in considerable numbers and many of them in interesting plumage phases.

A high tide about mid-day is a good time for observation at Boat Harbour. The birds are then resting or just pottering about waiting for their feeding grounds to be exposed. When the tide falls they actively move about the rock pools and flats, and the beach; if disturbed too much they are inclined to fly to a low rocky islet (covered at high tide) lying a few hundred yards off shore, to the chagrin of observers.

The most interesting bird seen by us on March 27 was a Broad-billed Sandpiper (*Limicola falcinellus*) of which detailed notes have appeared in *The Emu*, vol. 48, p. 155. Other waders noted at the time were the following. I have departed from *Checklist* nomenclature in a few instances.

Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*). Twelve; they all seemed to be in breeding plumage.

Golden Plover (*Pluvialis dominicus*). Approximately twenty; one in breeding plumage, others partly so, several in eclipse.

Mongolian Dotterel (*Charadrius mongolus*). Eighty-three were counted from the one spot; more were seen nearby a little later; approximately one hundred in all. A few were in full breeding plumage, many partly so, others in eclipse.

Double-banded Dotterel (*C. bicinctus*). About twenty in all; only one showed traces of colour, the rest were in eclipse plumage.

Red-capped Dotterel (*C. alexandrinus*). Numbers present. This is a resident species with us, at least birds are present throughout the year. They breed from August to March. I

once caught a young bird, recently out of the egg, as late as April (3/4/48, Boat Harbour). There seems to be an influx of Red-capped Dotterels to the Sydney district, perhaps from areas to the south, during the autumn and winter months.

Curlew Sandpiper (*Erolia testacea*). Between forty and fifty; a few in what seemed to be full breeding plumage, others acquiring nuptial plumage, and numbers still in eclipse.

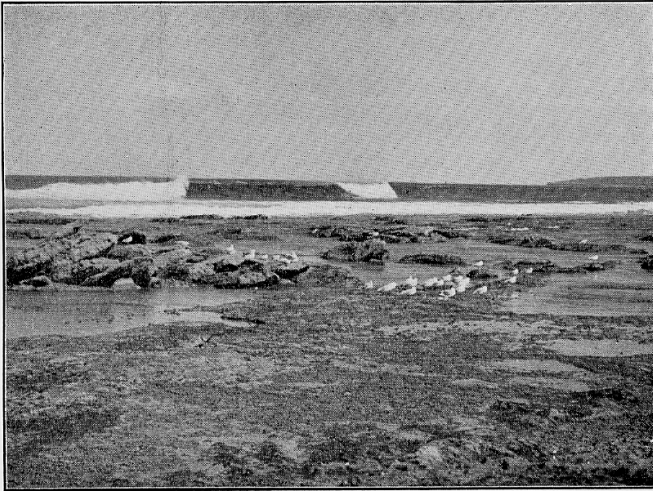
Little Stint (*E. ruficollis*). About twenty; feathers on the upper parts well marked in all birds; a few with a reddish wash on the neck.

Sanderling (*Crocethia alba*). Eight. Boat Harbour is one place near Sydney where it is always possible to observe Sanderlings in season, and our season for Sanderlings extends from September to April. There is an almost mechanical precision in the movements of a party of Sanderlings feeding on an ocean beach. They rush into the shallow surge with quick jabbings of their black, shiny bills in the moist sand and then retreat just ahead of the next incoming wave; a continuous advance and retreat governed by the wash of the waves. The flatter the beach, the shallower and more extensive, though less turbulent, is the water in which to feed, hence the preference Sanderlings show for such places as north Cronulla Beach, one of the few unfrequented flat ocean beaches near Sydney.

In their hunched appearance and intentness they are rather like little old men of the bird world, very serious in their apparent preoccupation with the business of eating, but, to the observer, slightly comical. We use the name *canutus* for the Knot—it is the law—though surely it belongs to the Sanderling by virtue of its habits.

A. R. McGill and J. A. Keast visited Boat Harbour a few days later (March 31), but did not see the Broad-billed Sandpiper. However, they observed all the species previously noted by us, and in much the same numbers. A third visit by several enthusiasts on April 3 again failed to reveal the presence of the Broad-billed Sandpiper, whilst only about half the waders recorded on the two previous trips were listed. No doubt many had left on their long northward migration. Weather conditions were bad for observation—a strong wind, flying sand, heavy clouds, and cold.

The following species complete the list of waders recorded from, or near Boat Harbour. Hooded Dotterel (*Charadrius cucullatus*)—see D. L. Serventy, *The Emu*, vol. 43, pt. 1, July, 1943, p. 72; Curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*); Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*); a Tattler, presumably the Grey-rumped (*Tringa brevipes*); Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Erolia acuminata*); and the Knot (*Calidris canutus*); making a grand total of fifteen species for the area. An interesting spot, Boat Harbour!



Rock flats at Boat Harbour, a haunt of waders.



North Cronulla beach, a feeding ground of Sanderlings

Photos. by K. A. Hindwood.