This wetland system provides habitat for migratory and resident birds and is an important estuarine ecosystem for marine life and commercial ventures such as oyster farming. A number of threatened birds, animals and plants including some unusual and unique species call this home.

These values were recognised internationally when the whole wetland was declared a Ramsar Site in 1994. It covers an area of 3 334 hectares and includes all of the Pitt Water and Orielton Lagoon. The Pitt Water Nature Reserve is a part of the Ramsar Site and covers an area of 776 hectares comprising five discrete areas: Orielton Lagoon, Barilla Bay, upper Pitt Water, Woody and Barren islands.

**Location**

The wetland, located about 20 km north-east of Hobart, is bordered by the rural surrounds of Cambridge, Richmond, Penna and Orielton. The townships of Midway Point and Sorell sit on the shore of the wetland. Two causeways cross the waterway providing stunning water views for people travelling to the East Coast or Tasman Peninsula.

**Resident birds**

Orielton Lagoon and the Pitt Water provide year-round habitat for many Tasmanian shorebirds. The foreshore and islands are important feeding and breeding sites for pied oystercatchers (Haematopus longirostris) and many seabirds, including terns and gulls.

It is one of the only areas in Tasmania where the rare great crested grebe (Podiceps cristatus) is regularly seen.

**Migratory shorebirds**

Migratory shorebirds escape the harsh northern winter in the Arctic to feed and rest in Australia and New Zealand. Birds make an amazing annual round-trip migration of some 25 000 km on the East Asian – Australasian Flyway. Some fly for more than 10 000 km non-stop from areas in Siberia and Alaska. This area is a critical feeding site for weary travellers to replenish fat reserves for the long journey home to their breeding grounds.

A total of 32 species of migratory birds visiting this site are listed on the Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA), the China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (CAMBA) or the Republic of Korean-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (ROKAMBA). Australia is a signatory on these agreements which protect the passage of migratory birds between countries and the maintenance of their habitats.

Annual international visitors such as the eastern curlew (Numenius madagascariensis), bar-tailed godwit (Limosa lapponica), and red-necked stint (Calidris ruficollis) can often be seen foraging on the mud and sand flats during the summer months alongside the causeway.

**Rare species**

The Pitt Water supports some of the most significant salt marshes in Tasmania and is one of the only places where the rare chequered blue butterfly (Theclinesthes serpentata) can be found.
The salt marshes and surrounds are home to threatened plants like the slender water mat (*Lepilaena preissii*), silky wilsonia (*Wilsonia humilis*) and lemon beauty head (*Calocephalus citreus*).

The waters are a breeding ground for many fish species and are officially recognised as an important shark nursery for both gummy (*Mustelus antarcticus*) and school shark (*Galeorhinus galeus*). Shark are not allowed to be fished from this area.

The small threatened seastar (*Parvulastra vivipara*) (formerly known as *Patiriella vivipara*), lives on the rocky shore in the inter-tidal zone. It is one of only three seastar species in the world to give birth to live young rather than eggs. The tiny babies, which look just like their parent, emerge from an opening on the top of the seastar.

**Aboriginal heritage**

The area was traditionally used by the Oyster Bay Tribe who occupied both coastal and inland territory and used the coastal areas to collect shellfish and other marine foods. The Oyster Bay Tribe consisted of up to 10 bands with a total population of 700-800 people.

The Tasmanian Aboriginal community have a strong and ongoing connection to the Aboriginal sites and landscapes within this area and have provided guidance for the management of this area and protection of their values.

**Causeways cause trouble**

The construction of the causeways began in the 1860s and 1870s. Modifications in the 1950s severely restricted the water flow of Orielton Lagoon. It is likely that this caused nutrient levels to rise and sediments to gather in the lagoon. The result was foul smelling algal blooms and a catastrophic decline in sea grass habitat.

Changes to the causeway in 1995 to increase the flow of water into and out of the lagoon have eliminated the algal blooms. It is hoped that the sea grass may begin to regenerate in some areas of the lagoon.

Sea grass is an important habitat for many juvenile fish species and is also the food source of the black swan. These graceful birds were once seen more frequently on the lagoon than they are today.

**Access**

To minimise disturbance to the birds, access to the foreshore immediately adjacent to the water’s edge should be avoided.

While private property limits access around much of the Ramsar site, a number of areas provide a good vantage point for viewing or photographing the lagoon and the remarkable birds that live and visit there. Be sure to stay on the tracks and behind the fences.

There are public access points at each end of the Sorell causeway; Henry Street, Sorell; Stores Lane, (the Waterview Bird Sanctuary), Sorell; and at Frogmore and Orielton rivulets where they cross Shark Point Road. The walkway and cycleway along the causeways also provide an easy way to enjoy the views and to see the interesting looking musk duck (see map).

**Threats**

Wetlands are among the Earth’s most significant life support systems providing shelter and food for many aquatic animals and plants.

The water quality of this wetland and the animals and plants that depend upon it are at risk from contamination entering via storm-water drains and from removal of native coastal vegetation.

Disturbance of birds by people and dogs reduces the ability of migratory birds to feed and restore energy, and causes the resident birds to leave their eggs unattended and vulnerable to predation or extremes in temperature.
Eggs and chicks of resident shorebirds are also at risk from predation by dogs and cats, and from trampling by people or crushing by horse’s hooves, bikes and vehicles.

You can help

• Leave the birds alone. Watch them from a distance—at least 50m—the farther the better.
• Don’t allow your dog to disturb the birds—do not allow them to roam when walking. Keep them on a leash at all times. Dogs are not permitted in the nature reserve.
• Keep to designated tracks.
• Do not take your horse, dog or bike onto the foreshore of the Ramsar site.
• Dispose of rubbish thoughtfully and pick up any litter or fishing line.
• Do not remove gummy or school shark from the area. If you accidentally hook one then return it to the water immediately.
• If you live locally ‘think of the link—the sea and your sink’. Don’t let solid material, oils, poisons or paints go down your drain.
• De-sex cats and keep them inside at night.
• Care for the native vegetation on the foreshore. Remove weeds.
• Join a Coastcare group and help look after this area.

Parks and Places – Pitt Water Nature Reserve

Ramsar Convention

Pitt Water-Orielton Lagoon Ramsar Site is one of 10 Ramsar wetlands in Tasmania.

Ramsar wetlands are recognised as Wetlands of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention, an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands.

The treaty, signed in Ramsar Iran in 1971, promotes the conservation of wetlands worldwide.

Further information

Parks and Wildlife Service, Southern Region, Seven Mile Beach Office Ph: 03 6214 8100

Birds Tasmania, GPO Box 68 Hobart TAS 7001 Ph: 0419 138 054 batas@birdsaustralia.com.au

Sorell Council, PO Box 126 Sorell TAS 7172 Ph: 03 6265 6400

Biodiversity Conservation Branch, DPIW Ph: 03 6233 6556

South East Coastal Management Project

In 2006, the Australian Government through NRM South provided funds for a collaborative project among the Parks and Wildlife Service, NRM South, Birds Tasmania, Tasmanian Conservation Trust, Coastal and Marine Branch, Sorell, Clarence, Tasman and Glamorgan-Spring Bay councils and the Southern Coastcare Association of Tasmania. The project aimed to implement some of the recommendations of the South East Coastal Management Strategy. In 2007-08 a number of activities were undertaken, including fencing off areas of Orielton Lagoon to protect birds from disturbance, installation of shorebird signs, assessment of Aboriginal heritage values, weed mapping and weed removal.
Places to view birds

1. Shark Point Road, Penna
2. Forcett Street, Sorell
3. ‘Waterview’ Bird Sanctuary, Stores Lane, Sorell

Internet: www.parks.tas.gov.au