

What's more

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Treaty on migratory birds

It is nearly 5000 km from the northern coast of Australia to the southern tip of Japan. Birds of at least 32 species make the journey regularly, and for many it's just a hop in a longer migration. Other species are irregular travellers between the two countries.

Early this year the governments of Australia and Japan entered into an agreement designed to ensure the conservation of their shared bird life. It is Australia's first such treaty and Japan's equal second: Japan signed a migratory birds agreement with the United States in 1972 and completed one with the Soviet Union at the same time as the Australian agreement. A similar treaty between Canada, the United States, and Mexico has been vital in the conservation of North American waterfowl and other species. The importance of such agreements is clear: the destruction of a migratory species or its habitat in one country could totally negate the conservation efforts of another.

Ornithologists from the CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research advised the Australian government during negotiation of the agreement. Sixty-six species common to the two countries are named in its annex and covered by its provisions. Some of them breed in Australia or

south of Australia and migrate to Japan or beyond.

Others breed in Japan—or as far away as Alaska or north, north-east, or central Asia—and migrate to Australia or Australian waters. The movements of others are unknown; they are found in both countries, but whether they commute between them has not been determined.

Birds of many of these species are being banded under the Australian Bird-banding Scheme, which is administered by the Division of Wildlife Research. Their recovery will help ornithologists plot their movements.

In most cases the reasons for wanting to ensure the birds' survival are purely aesthetic and scientific, but there are also economic reasons in the cases of the short-tailed shearwater (or Tasmanian mutton-bird) and the Japanese snipe.

The short-tailed shearwater breeds on islands in Bass Strait and elsewhere off the southern and south-eastern coasts of Australia.

In the Australian autumn the whole population moves to Japanese, Siberian, and Alaskan waters. In Bass Strait about one million birds are taken annually; the collection, salting, and freezing of young mutton-birds for food is an important local industry, and the stomach oil of the birds is claimed to have medicinal properties.

The Japanese snipe breeds on the islands of Honshu and Hokkaido and, in the Japanese autumn, flies to eastern Australia for the summer. It is considered a game species in Japan and in some eastern Australian States; the birds move through the eastern States to southern New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, and south-eastern South Australia, where they spend the summer.

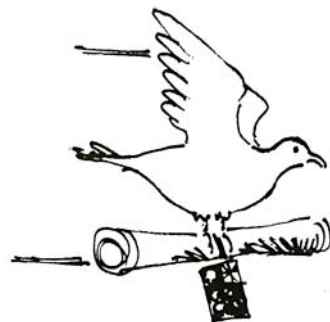
The migratory status of many birds remains uncertain, and the agreement provides that 'the competent authorities of the two governments' shall review the list of birds from time to time and,

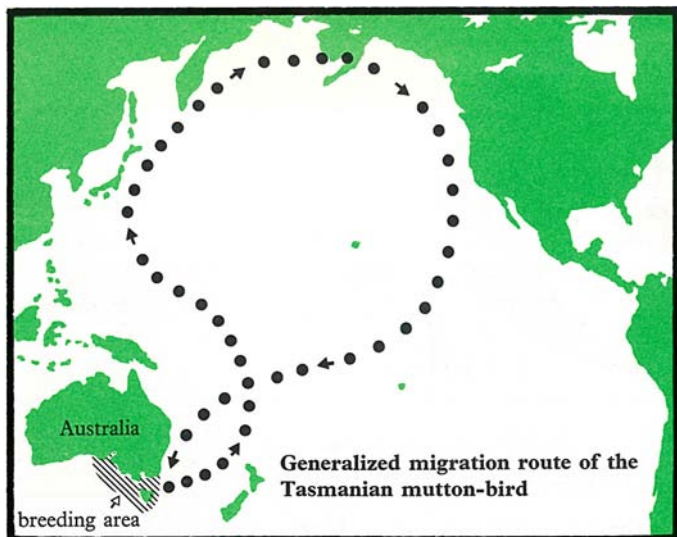
if necessary, recommend changes.

The agreement defines migratory birds as species for which there is reliable evidence of migration between the two countries and those that either have subspecies common to both countries or, in the absence of subspecies, are themselves species common to both, except those whose non-migratory nature is biologically evident.

It provides that each government shall prohibit the taking of migratory birds or their eggs, and their sale, purchase, or exchange, except where, in accordance with laws and regulations, they are taken

- ▶ for scientific, educational, propagative, or other specific purposes not inconsistent with the agreement's objectives
- ▶ for the purpose of protecting persons and property
- ▶ during hunting seasons that may be established by each government and take into account the maintenance of the birds' normal annual reproduction
- ▶ by the inhabitants of certain regions who have traditionally carried on such activities, provided that the population of each species is maintained in optimum numbers and adequate preservation of the species is not prejudiced





Knowledge of the flight paths of most migratory birds is so far very limited. The Tasmanian mutton-bird is probably the Australia-Japan migrant whose travels have been most accurately plotted.



A young Tasmanian mutton-bird being banded.

Where species or sub-species are in danger of extinction, the agreement provides that each government shall take protective measures.

Other articles in it provide for exchange of data and the encouragement of joint research programs. It commits each government to endeavouring to take appropriate

measures to preserve and enhance the environment of the birds, including, specifically, controls on the importation of potentially harmful animals and plants.

The agreement remains in force initially for 15 years. Then it can be terminated by either government giving one year's notice.