



2017 APPLICATION FORM

Small Grants Fund for Working Groups & Task Forces

PERSONAL DETAILS

Title: Warren Connie
Family name **Given Name/s**

Institution: BirdLife Australia

PROJECT DETAILS

Project Title: Supporting for the funds for survey (Far Eastern Curlew Task Force)

Part A. Project Proposal

The Far Eastern Curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*) is a coastal obligate endemic to the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF). Count data for the species indicates that the population is declining by as much as 6% a year and that the species has declined by 81% over the past 30 years. This ongoing and dramatic decline prompted stakeholders in the EAAF to develop an International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of Far Eastern Curlew under the auspices of the East Asian Australian Flyway Partnership. The development of this Plan was led by the Australian Government, who also chairs the Far Eastern Curlew Task Force.

The global population of Eastern Curlew is estimated to be between 32,000 and 35,000 (Wetlands International 2017, Hansen et al 2016). About 25% of the population is thought to spend the non-breeding season in the Philippines, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea but most (estimated at 26,000 individuals) spend the non-breeding season in Australia.

The Northern Territory coastline not only acts as a critical staging site for the species on northern and southern migration but also supports a significant proportion of longer term non-breeding birds and overwintering population (Chatto 2004). However, due to the sparse human population and logistical difficulty in surveying the northern coast only 31% of 2,214km² of intertidal habitat in the Northern Territory has been sufficiently surveyed for shorebirds. The stretch of coast east of the Adelaide River to the Gulf of Carpentaria is particularly data poor and remains one of the most under-surveyed coastal shorebird habitats in Australia (Chatto 2003, Hansen et al 2016.)

Recent surveys confirm the persistence of significant populations of Eastern Curlew in the Darwin Region, including the coastline immediately to the east and west (BirdLife Australia data, Lillyman et al 2014) and further east in the Crocodile Islands, Millingimbi where BirdLife Australia and Crocodile Island Rangers recorded >480 Eastern Curlew including a single roost of 289 birds in November 2015. However, the coastline connecting these habitats has not been consistently surveyed since 1992.

The proposed project seeks to partially address this knowledge gap by conducting aerial surveys of three major estuaries, associated coastline and islands along the Northern Territory's, Kakadu Coast and neighbouring Arnhem Land. In doing so addressing 2 key actions identified within the FEC SSAP:

- Identification, protection and management of remaining sites used by the species during its annual cycle
- (to) Robustly monitor the species' population trend

Chatto 2003 lists the coast between South Alligator River (Kakadu National Park) and the Minimini Creek (Arnhem Land) as highly significant however notes that the 1992 survey coverage only accounted for 50-75% of potential habitat. Aerial surveys conducted by BirdLife Australia and Parks Australia in 2015 identified 3 roosts comprising >170 Eastern Curlew between the West Alligator and East Alligator (including Field Island) however access beyond the East Alligator was not granted for cultural reasons.

The 2017 survey seeks build upon the 2015 surveys by providing additional surveys from the East Alligator River mouth north to Minimini Creek. Permission has been granted by the indigenous Traditional Owners via the Northern Land Council for 2017 field work. Complete shorebird counts will be conducted and shorebird habitat mapped and stored in the Shorebird 2020 database. A summary report will be provided to the EAAFP Secretariat and FEC Taskforce and data made freely available to stakeholders in the flyway.

PROJECT BUDGET (please outline your entire project, not just the component for which funds are being sought)

Total required budget: AUD 5,000

Item: Helicopter Hire and Fuel to conduct survey

PAYMENT DETAILS

PREFERRED PAYMENT METHOD

Electronic funds transfer (EFT)