

## Wildlife of the Gold Coast wetlands

S. Burgin and D. McPhee

### Local wetland types

Water in the landscape of the Gold Coast is dominated by marine and marine-influenced systems. The most obvious are the in-shore waters abutting the Gold Coast's world-famous beaches and estuaries. Little more than a glance at a map of the city also reveals the extensive canal estates built to take advantage of the marine waters, and indeed expand them. The waters of the rivers mix with the ocean's waters in the estuaries. These ecosystems are valuable nursery areas for marine wildlife, particularly, but not restricted to, fishes of commercial and recreational value.

Within the Gold Coast there are natural and man-made freshwater wetlands that support a variety of fauna. No matter what their origin, many wetlands have been constructed or modified as a direct result of the rush to satisfy an increasing Gold Coast urban population, underpinned by an upward trend in tourism. These wetland ecosystems show a gradation in salinity from seawater to fresh water, and from natural to man-made or man-modified systems. The previous chapter was confined to the marine systems of the Gold Coast. In this chapter we focus more generally on the 'freshwater' wetlands without discrimination based on origin. This is because all of these impoundments form important habitat for aquatic wildlife and the animals that depend on them.

### Protection of the Gold Coast's wetlands

The most common image of the Gold Coast is that of sand, surf and to some extent sex and/or 'schoolies' week'. Very few residents and visitors consider the wetlands of the city a major attraction. However, many of these wetlands are important ecologically and culturally. For example, the indigenous people of the area view many of the Gold Coast's wetlands as culturally significant because they were important traditional sites for food and ceremonies.

Various aspects of Gold Coast biodiversity are protected under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. This legislation includes provisions for the protection and conservation of migratory species and gives effect to Australia's obligations under five international agreements:

- Ramsar Convention 1971;
- Convention of Migratory Species of Wild Animals 1979 (Bonn Convention);