

ELEGANCE ON MUDFLATS ... Ros Gibson

Illustrations... Kaye Traynor

I marvel at the immaculate appearance of these three species—living as they do, in marshes and wetlands. They are easy to identify and make for rewarding birdwatching, especially for beginners.



The Black-winged Stilt is readily recognised by its black and white plumage, black nape and remarkably long, slender, pink legs that trail out the back in flight and also enable it to venture into deeper water in search of prey. It uses its straight fine black bill to find aquatic insects. Unlike the Banded Stilt and Avocet, this species is found beyond Australia—from the Philippines to PNG and New Zealand.

The Banded Stilt is named for the distinctive dark chestnut band across its breast in the breeding season. It has orange-pink legs, a slender black bill, white body and head and lacks the black nape of the Black-winged Stilt. In flight, a white trailing edge is visible on the black wings. The Banded Stilt is endemic to Australia. It breeds irregularly in enormous, crowded colonies, and it seems only when ephemeral inland salt lakes are in flood and teeming with brine shrimps.



The Red-necked Avocet's very distinctive and deceptively fragile-looking upswept bill makes it particularly easy to identify. Its plumage is also unmistakable with a chestnut-red head and neck that contrast with its pure white body and black wings. It is found only in Australia. They are often seen feeding in flocks along with stilts, as they wade through shallow wetlands sweeping their bills from side to side, skimming small invertebrates from the water's surface. They have shorter legs than the stilts, and in deeper water they upend like a duck to feed. Unlike the stilts, they have fully webbed feet.

References: *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* – Graham Pizzey & Frank Knight 1997
Waders: The shorebirds of Australia – David Hollands & Clive Minton 2012



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