Birds Fly into the Red

Title The worst fears of shorebird experts in Australia were realised recently when it became clear that reclamation of the extensive mudflats at Saemangeum in the Yellow Sea had caused alarming declines in populations of migratory waders which use the area as a stopover on their annual pilgrimage to Australia. Without these mudflats, the waders had nowhere to stop over and feed on invertebrates to refuel for their arduous journey. The sudden drop in shorebird numbers in the Yellow Sea has been mirrored by declines in the populations of migratory shorebirds occurring in Australia. Two species have been particularly hard hit: the Eastern Curlew and the Great Knot. The declines in these birds? numbers have been so dramatic that both have had their official conservation status on the IUCN?s Red List of Threatened Species (the most objective and authoritative system for classifying species in terms of the risk of extinction) upgraded to Vulnerable: they are considered to be at ?high risk of endangerment in the wild? on the basis of past and predicted future declines. They were previously classified as being of Least Concern. This upgrade in their status was only possible after much hard work by Birds Australia?s (BirdLife Partner) Shorebirds 2020 project in conjunction with the Australasian Wader Studies Group. Shorebird-population monitoring surveys conducted both in the Yellow Sea and in Australia alerted experts to the decline in the shorebirds? numbers, and subsequent surveys confirmed the dire situation. Once confirmed, these startling results were forwarded to Birds Australia?s Threatened Species Committee, who considered the population declines so drastic they immediately recommended the status upgrades by BirdLife International on behalf of the IUCN. With their conservation status upgraded, Eastern Curlews and Great Knots should now be afforded better protection from the issues that have made their populations dwindle. Click on the links to see more information about Shorebirds 2020 or the AWSG. Image: Rob Clemens