

Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher,
Jim Butler



EARLY BIRD ETC!

This photo of the Latham's Snipe (30cm) was taken on 16 August. It is the first record of the arrival in Brookfield of this long distance migrant. Latham's Snipe fly annually from Hokkaido (Japan) to enjoy summer around the dams and ponds along the entire Australian East Coast. Coincidentally, I am flying to Hokkaido on 30 August to study birds! I'm sure as I am flying north that there will be many Latham's Snipes flying south below me.

Birds that migrate internationally use regular routes called flyways. The East Asian-Australasian Flyway is one of the world's great flyways and is used by Latham's Snipes. The Snipe flocks rest at three or four wetland stopovers on their 7200km journey. Drainage of just one of these wetlands can spell disaster for the whole migration. The Japan Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA) is a treaty between Australia and Japan to minimise harm to the major areas used by birds which migrate between the two countries. JAMBA



was founded in 1981 and meets every 2 years.

Latham's Snipes forage by probing the soft wet grassy ground for seeds, worms, spiders and insects. Extracting a whole worm out of its burrow is a tricky business involving some complex physics and neuromuscular control. The force of the bird's pull has to exceed the frictional drag of the worm in its burrow. When attacked worms are known to increase this friction by expanding their body in the burrow. But the ensuing tension in the worm's body must not exceed the breaking point of the worm or some will be left in the ground. This intricate extraction requires the Snipe to exert a controlled force at the tip of the beak and this complex self-regulation is clearly evident in the bird's posture and concentration.

Happy birding with Physics

~ Jim

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Image: Latham's Snipe by Ed Frazer at Brookfield