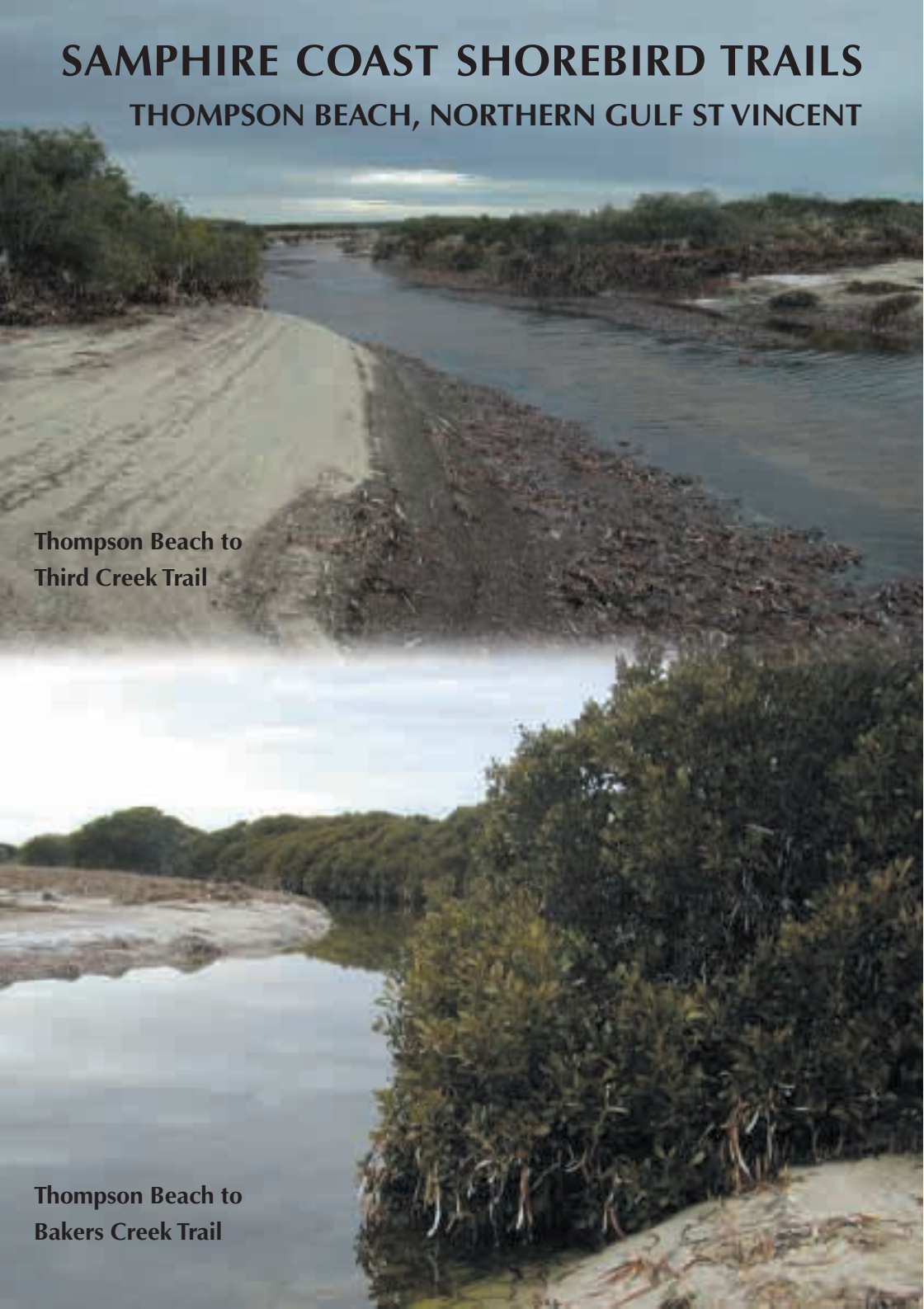
SAMPHIRE COAST SHOREBIRD TRAILS

THOMPSON BEACH, NORTHERN GULF ST VINCENT



Thompson Beach to
Third Creek Trail

Thompson Beach to
Bakers Creek Trail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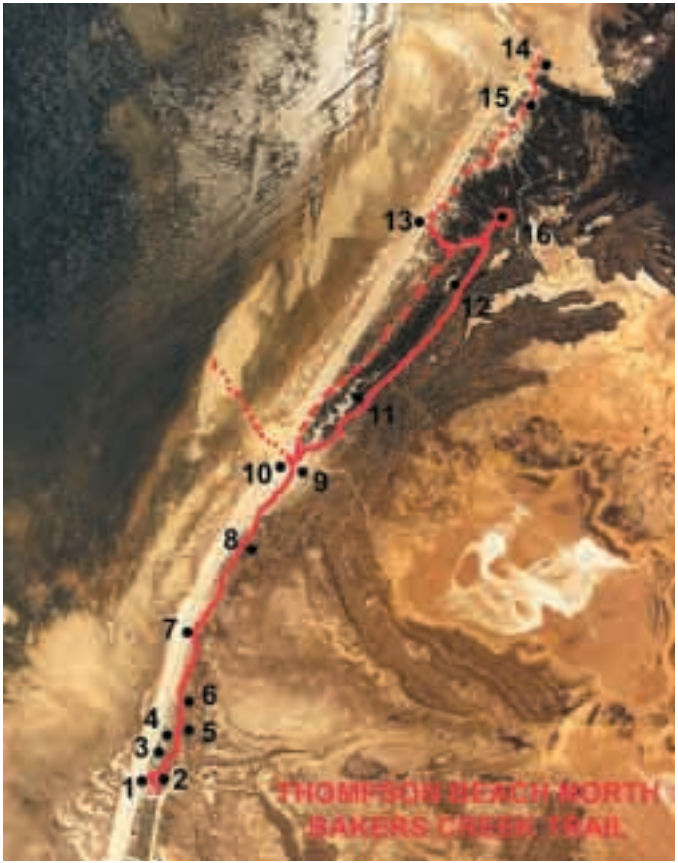
THOMPSON BEACH SOUTH
THIRD CREEK TRAIL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THOMPSON BEACH NORTH
BAKERS CREEK TRAIL

SAMPHIRE COAST SHOREBIRD TRAILS

Shorebirds, Seagrass and Samphire

Welcome to the Samphire Coast, a prime tourist destination for thousands of shorebirds who visit every summer to enjoy the warm climate and the smorgasbord of food. Some of these special visitors are stocking up for the long trip to their northern Asian breeding grounds in our winter.

Share the Secrets of the Samphire Coast

Follow these trails to learn more about the secret lives of shorebirds and the samphire smorgasbord. Look for up to 40 species of shorebirds and waterbirds, including 19 species of shorebirds, and over 90 species of inland birds. The numbers and variety will vary with the seasons and available food.

North Trail	**Thompson Beach to Bakers Creek (5 km return)**
South Trail	**Thompson Beach to Third Creek (3.6 km return)**

Northern Gulf St Vincent, from Ardrossan to Port Gawler, is important to Australia and to the rest of the world as a key feeding and resting place for shorebirds.

Gulf St Vincent is one of the top 5 Australian sites for sooty oystercatcher, red-capped plover, red-necked stint, sharp-tailed sandpiper and greenshank. This is a popular summer destination for several species, with significant international populations of sharp-tailed sandpiper, red-capped plover and sooty oystercatcher visiting the region. The region also has significant national populations of Grey plover and Curlew sandpiper.

The variety of landscapes support a smorgasbord of food and shelter for a wide variety of animals and plants.

This region caters particularly well for birds, with mangrove stands, tidal flats, seagrass meadows, samphire swamps, tidal channels, estuarine mudflats, dunes and chenier (shellgrit) ridges, salt ponds and lakes, seasonal freshwater lakes and small limestone ridges.

What are Shorebirds

Shorebirds include plovers, sandpipers, stints, curlews, knots, snipes, godwits, avocets, stilts, oystercatchers, pratincoles. The smallest is the red-necked stint at 30g and the largest is the eastern curlew, which weighs up to 1.3kg.

Migratory shorebirds fly from their breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere to the warmth of the southern hemisphere. The routes they travel are called flyways. The East Asian-Australasian Flyway extends from the Arctic Circle through eastern and south-east Asia to Australia and New Zealand. Over 30 species and 5 million birds use regular staging points along the flyway every year.

Most migratory birds visiting Australia spend the summer at Roebuck Bay in northern Western Australia, the Gulf of Carpentaria in Queensland, or along the southern coast from Spencer Gulf in South Australia to Corner Inlet east of Melbourne in Victoria.

These birds, many smaller than a child's hand, forage busily on the mudflats for worms and small crustaceans with rapid pecking motions as they stride or run across the surface. It is a race against the clock for the migrants, who need to gain condition ahead of the long trek to northern Asia.

Shorebird Values of Northern Gulf St Vincent

Northern Gulf St Vincent hosts significant numbers of shorebirds, in particular as a migratory stop-over for 20 species of migratory waders - grey plover, pacific golden plover, ruddy turnstone, eastern curlew, whimbrel, wood sandpiper, common sandpiper, common greenshank, marsh sandpiper, grey-tailed tattler, black-tailed godwit, bar-tailed godwit, red knot, great knot, sharp-tailed sandpiper, curlew sandpiper, terek sandpiper, red-necked stint, mongolian plover and large sand plover.

The Northern Gulf St Vincent region is particularly important in providing food and shelter for at least 1% of the populations of banded stilt, red-necked avocet, red-capped plover, red-necked stint, red knot, sharp-tailed sandpiper and curlew sandpiper.

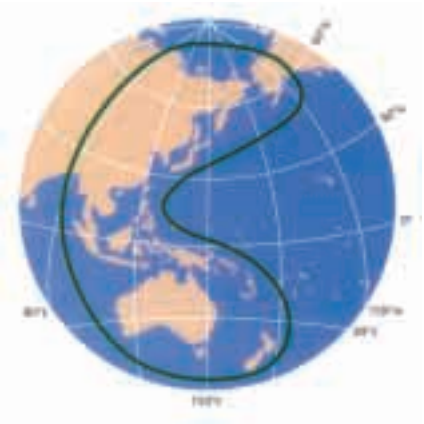
Resident shorebirds include pied oystercatchers, sooty oystercatchers, hooded plovers, banded stilts and red-capped plovers.

Habitat Variety

The landscape variety is an important ingredient, with mangrove stands and isolated 'island' mangroves, tidal flats, seagrass meadows, sand beaches, samphire saltmarsh, tidal channels, estuarine mudflats, dunes and chenier (shellgrit) ridges, salt ponds and lakes, seasonal freshwater lakes and small limestone ridges.

Tides are the Key

The tides in Gulf St Vincent feature regular 'dodge' tides when the waters are relatively stationary for 1-2 days per fortnight. Waves are very small because of the flat beaches and on calm days the tide simply progresses across the flats at walking pace without wave action. The calm shallow waters are important nursery, feeding and breeding areas for fish and marine animals.



East Asian-Australasian Flyway

VIP Bird Visitors

Northern Gulf St Vincent, from Ardrossan to Port Gawler, is in the top 5 Australian sites for:

Red-capped plover 

Red-necked stint 

Sharp-tailed sandpiper 

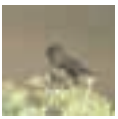
Greenshank 

Sooty oystercatcher 

Check the tide

More waterbirds and waders will be seen on the falling tide, following their food as the water retreats.

Some sections of these trails are accessible only at low tide, following sections of the beach. Be aware of where the water is, and if the tide is coming in or going out.
It moves faster than you think!



Waterbirds
The most common waterbirds seen in the Northern Gulf St Vincent region are:

Pelican

Little pied cormorant

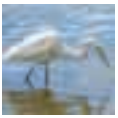
Pied cormorant

Black swan

Grey teal

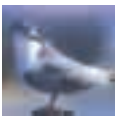
White-faced heron

Great egret



Caspian tern

Crested tern



Whiskered tern

Help protect our visiting birds
The greatest danger to these winged visitors is disturbance and destruction of nesting sites, repeated disturbance of roosting sites, and disruption of feeding sessions.

- Take time to wait quietly to see the birds
- Stay on the trail to minimise damage to plants and ground covers, and to avoid disturbing feeding birds on the tidal flats
- Avoid disturbing birds by walking quietly, by keeping your dog on a lead near the birds, and by leaving your vehicle at the car park
- Protect their habitat by driving on tracks and by taking your rubbish home

A thriving healthy coast means more fish, more birds and a more enjoyable visit for you

THOMPSON BEACH NORTH TO BAKERS CREEK TRAIL

Site Number N1 *a smorgasbord of habitats*

What is there to see
A smorgasbord of choices for food and shelter is on offer to shorebirds in this rich landscape of habitats, ranging from tidal mudflats, seagrass meadows and sandy beach, to exposed dune tops, sheltered swales, and samphire-fringed salt lagoons, offering something for every size and shape of shorebird, waterbird and coastal bush bird.

Site Number N2 *a smorgasbord of plants*

What is there to see
Sheltered from the sea wind and salt, the swale is home to a miniature woodland, with shrubs, low bushes, mosses and grasses, providing food and shelter for many birds.

Site Number N3 *a salad of seagrass*

What is there to see
Seagrass meadows in the warm shallow tidal waters provide valuable fish nursery areas, with shelter and food from micro-organisms on the ribbon-like leaves, and then finish their life as mulch, blown onto the beach to form soft mats of decomposing leaf mulch which provides moist niches for worms and returns nutrients to the biocycle. Seagrass in the dunes is abnormal, and indicates a breach in the defence lie of the front dunes.

Site Number N4 *beware the invaders!*

What is there to see
Sand dunes are easily disturbed, allowing weed species to gain a hold, like South African boxthorn, thistles and plantain, displacing the native plants and their food sources for shorebirds and coastal bush birds.

THOMPSON BEACH NORTH TO BAKERS CREEK TRAIL

Site Number N5 *every plant is on the menu*

What is there to see
In this salty landscape, saltbush and other salt-tolerant plants thrive, producing seeds and fruits for hungry birds. Look for ruby saltbush with its distinctive ruby red berries in winter and spring, and coastal saltbush with its wide flat leaves - taste the leaves to find the salt stored there, add some to your next salad!

Site Number N6 *salt is not always bad*

What is there to see
A salt lagoon or salina is a very specialised place, with animals and plants that have evolved to live with salt, including brine shrimps and samphire. Salinity in this lagoon starts fresh with winter rainfall but can be higher than seawater by the end of the summer due to evaporation.

Site Number N7 *plenty of food for everyone*

What is there to see
The ebb and flow of tides carries a rich load of nutrients and food for many species, serving the seagrass meadows in the warm shallow waters where whiting, prawn and mullet nurseries are active and blue swimmer crabs thrive, and shorebirds find a ready selection of choice foods like worms and small crustaceans.

Site Number N8 *taller trees on higher ground*

What is there to see
On the slightly higher secondary dune a small pocket of woodland has reached about 2 metres in height, large enough to be called small trees, with different fruits and flowers to offer the shorebirds and inland birds too.

Site Number N9 *swamps and wetlands are too valuable to rubbish*

What is there to see
Swamps and wetlands are not worthless places to dump rubbish, but natural resources of great value to the community in providing nurseries and food for the fish we catch, and filtering water to improve its quality and remove sediment. These areas are too valuable to be used as rubbish dumps or filled in for building projects.

Site Number N10 *explore secrets of low tide sands*

What is there to see
At low tide, explore the beach of powdered shellgrit, read the rings of seagrass stranded by the retreating tide and visit the ancient stumps of mangroves which disappeared more than 80 years ago. They were chopped down, for their valuable timber, and replacement seedlings have not been able to re-establish without shelter from older trees.

Site Number N11 *a changing landscape - a mossy carpet on shellgrit*

What is there to see
On the secondary dune, a little more height and a little more nutrient has created a low woodland of native apricot and native cherry over a carpet of moss and curling lichen growing on a bed of shellgrit.

Site Number N12 *red samphire and red pools - nature's signs*

What is there to see
Shades of red in samphire are common, with plants starting green and acquiring a red tinge with age. Shades of rusty red in a pool are not so good, indicating iron deposits and possible acid drainage. In large quantities, acid drainage could be lethal for fish, but it is unlikely to be a problem in this small pool.

THOMPSON BEACH NORTH TO BAKERS CREEK TRAIL

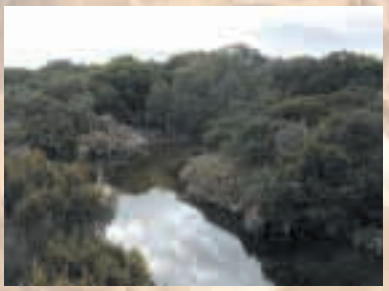
Site Number N13 *where the tide sets the scene*

What is there to see
The advance and retreat of the tide opens and closes opportunities for different species to feed or to be preyed on, in the never-ending life cycle of the rich coastal smorgasbord, with shorebirds following the retreating water to reach their preferred foods of molluscs, worms, crustaceans and small fish.

Site Number N14 *a different world at low tide*

What is there to see
LOW TIDE ONLY
Each tide leaves fresh tracks, showing the power of water to shift sand, shells and seagrass. Follow the tide tracks north to the mouth of Bakers Creek and the line of mangroves, check the stranded ribbons of seagrass left hanging on the lower branches as the tide retreats, look for small fish in the creek.

Site Number N15 *tidal water ebbs and flows to bring life*



What is there to see
Small tidal creeks provide shelter for small fish and crabs to flourish, while white-faced herons gather for lunch among the samphires, and coastal bush birds flit from the dryland shrubland to find food in the saltmarsh.

Site Number N16 *a busy intersection of tides, channels, marsh and salt lagoons is a lively place*

What is there to see
Tides rise and fall to flush through the small channels and overflow into the marshes and salt lagoons, providing shelter and food for the complex community of predators and prey which keep the samphire coast alive.

THOMPSON BEACH SOUTH TO THIRD CREEK TRAIL

Site Number S1 *food and shelter zone*

What is there to see
Step into the shrubland belt sheltering behind the dunes, where ground covers, mosses, small shrubs and taller shrubs like coastal wattle and boobialla provide nooks and crannies for birds to hide, as well as food and nesting materials.

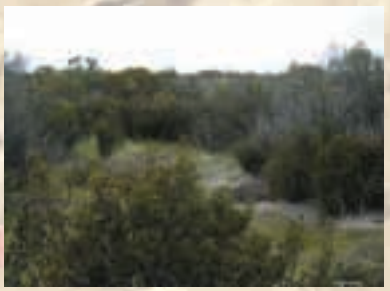
Site Number S2 *a smorgasbord of habitats*

What is there to see
A smorgasbord of choices for food and shelter is on offer to shorebirds in this rich landscape of habitats, ranging from tidal mudflats and sandy beach, island mangroves, to exposed dune tops, sheltered swales, and samphire-fringed seasonal lagoons, offering something for every size and shape of shorebird, waterbird and coastal bush birds.

Site Number S3 *saltbush variety in a salty landscape*

What is there to see
A landscape of salt-laden wind and sand supports an array of saltbush species which thrive by storing salt in their leaves and provide fruit for foraging birds.

Site Number S4 *more salt-tolerant bushes add variety*



What is there to see
Sea box and sea rosemary are more salt-tolerant hardy bushes which thrive on the sand and shellgrit soils, adding variety to the shelter and food available for coastal bush birds, but be aware that the attractive red seabox fruit is poisonous to humans.

THOMPSON BEACH SOUTH TO THIRD CREEK TRAIL

Site Number S5 *different shapes and sizes reflect different local conditions*

What is there to see
In the dune shrubland, the narrow-leafed boobialla comes in every size, from small shrubs to small trees, depending on the local conditions. Its cousin creeping boobialla stays close to the ground, covering large patches with its fresh green carpet and white flowers.

Site Number S6 *why is this a good region to fish and go crabbing*

What is there to see
The ebb and flow of tides carries a rich load of nutrients and food for many species, serving the seagrass meadows in the warm shallow waters and the mudflats and island mangroves where whiting, prawn and mullet nurseries are active and blue swimmer crabs thrive. Shorebirds can be seen following the ebbing tide to find their favourite foods.

Site Number S7 *native fruit in season*

What is there to see
Behind the dunes, small evergreen native apricot trees attract coastal bush birds with their bright orange fruit shaped like small pears, but these are not edible for humans.

Site Number S8 *food feast for birds in season*

What is there to see
This seasonal lagoon fills with rainfall in winter and spring, and dries out over summer, supporting life-cycles of water plants and animals which provide food for ducks and other waterbirds. The surrounding salt marsh of multi-coloured samphire plants provides more food options.

THOMPSON BEACH SOUTH TO THIRD CREEK TRAIL

Site Number S9 *samphires come in many colours*

What is there to see
The samphire plants of the salt marsh come from three key species come in many different colours, according to age, pigment and season. Look for green, red, orange and pink shades in this ankle-high mini-shrubland which shelters a micro-community of plants and animals, and provides a rich food source for many more visiting species.

Site Number S10 *seascape horizons*

What is there to see
As the horizon broadens, look across the habitat zones from mudflats and tidal waters to shellgrit beach, seagrass bands, low foredune across into salt marsh, to appreciate how many choices for food, shelter and rest are available for the variety of shorebirds, waterbirds and coastal bush birds seen in the region.

Site Number S11 *shells, not sand*

What is there to see
The 'sand' of this beach is shellgrit, all made of millions of shells ground so fine that it is like sand, and indicating the enormous range of food sources available in the rich gulf waters to support visiting birds and the food chain which supports many species of fish and crabs.

Site Number S12 *a channel of flowing food*

What is there to see
LOW TIDE ONLY
This tidal estuary is a rich source of food for birds, with nutrients, plants and small animals washed in on each tide - pelicans and cormorants often cruise here fishing, following the edge of the water as it moves steadily without waves across the mudflats, and pelicans gather at the high tide mark waiting for fish.

THOMPSON BEACH SOUTH TO THIRD CREEK TRAIL

Site Number S13 *lunch twice a day*

What is there to see

The best time for small shorebirds to feed is on the falling tide, in very shallow water, when they can reach molluscs and small fish within range of their short legs and short beaks. Larger birds form groups on the exposed mudflats and rocky shelves, waiting for the tide to turn and the food to start moving again.

Site Number S14 *lines in the sand*

What is there to see

The beach is an ever-changing map, waiting to be read, with signs of daily tides, storms, life cycles of plants and animals, interchange between beach and dunes, and the endless chase for food by birds and animals, in the fight to survive and reproduce.

Please fill in our visitor survey form to give us feedback (copies at the trailhead information board)

If you would like to be involved in protecting the shorebirds of Thompson Beach, contact Thompson Beach Ratepayers Ass. Inc. at PO Box 148, Dublin SA 5501

Trail Brochure prepared by Anne Jensen of Wetland Care Australia for Thompson Beach Ratepayers Association Inc.

Landscape photos by Anne Jensen and Gavin Smith, bird photos by Brian Furby.

The Trail Brochure is funded by the District Council of Mallala and the Natural Heritage Trust, and supported by WWF Australia and the Mallala Foreshore Advisory Committee.

Thanks to all of the groups and individuals who assisted with making these walking trails projects a reality with special thanks to the residents of Thompson Beach, the Thompson Beach Ratepayers Association, the Mallala Foreshore Advisory Committee, the Two Wells, Lewiston & Districts Landcare Group, the Mallala Greening Committee and the Playford Greening and Landcare Group.

WWF

District Council of Mallala

Natural Heritage Trust

Thompson Beach