



## Australian Government

Department of Sustainability, Environment,  
Water, Population and Communities



# ARID WETLANDS

- Many arid wetlands are dry for most of the time and then fill with water after rain and often remain wet for long periods afterwards.
- Arid wetlands include swamps, salt pans, clay pans, lakes and springs.
- The water and plants of arid wetlands provide habitat for many animals and birds.
- Arid wetlands support animals that have adapted to survive through dry times.

### Arid wetlands in Australia

- Arid wetlands occur in outback Australia where it is very dry.
- These wetlands attract many local waterbirds as well as birds that fly here every year from places as far away as China, Japan and Russia.
- There are many salt lakes and mound springs in the arid zones of Australia.

### Lake Eyre in South Australia:

- Lake Eyre is the world's largest salt-lake, covering about 9690 square kilometres.
- When it fills, it supports many native fish like bony bream and golden perch
- When filled with water, it becomes a breeding site for enormous numbers of waterbirds, including Australian pelicans.

### Did you know?

The salt crust found at Lake Eyre weighs about 400 million tonnes.

### Mound Springs:

- Mound Springs are unique arid wetlands, formed by water from underground when it finds a weak spot in the ground and pushes upward.
- The water dissolves minerals out of the rocks to form salts. These salts collect around the edge of the spring, forming a mound with water in the centre.
- There are over 700 mound springs in Australia
- Many are found in the Great Artesian Basin, the world's largest and oldest underground water storage. The Great Artesian Basin extends from Cape York Peninsula in Queensland to Dubbo in New South Wales.
- The largest group of mound springs are the Witjira-Dalhousie Springs in South Australia.



## Plants and animals

- Plants growing in arid wetlands include saltbush and bluebush.
- River red gum and coolibah trees grow around the edges of freshwater lakes and claypans.
- Many plants were important for food, shelter, bags, nets, and medicines used by Indigenous Australians.
- The burrowing frog survives long dry periods by burrowing deep in the mud.

### Did you know?

In many arid areas, mound springs are the only permanent water source. As a result, mound springs are often sites of significant cultural heritage to Indigenous Australians. Many include painted and engraved rock art, scarred trees, stone artefacts, wells, grinding grooves, and food and fibre resource sites.

## Threats facing arid wetlands

Arid wetlands are vulnerable to numerous threats.

Threat	Impact
Introduced grasses and other weeds.	Displace native species and create a greatly increased fuel load for wildfires.
Unsustainable water extraction.	Removes water available to sustain the specialised ecosystems.
Grazing by domestic and introduced animals.	Damages soil structure and vegetation and causes erosion.
Unsustainable tourism.	Compacts soil and causes erosion.

## What can you do?

- Investigate what AuSSI (Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative) schools are doing to become more sustainable with their water use. Many of these schools are implementing actions such as installing rainwater tanks that have been connected to the school toilets or gardens or working with their communities to reduce pollution entering stormwater drains and impacting on local waterways. Some schools are partnering with their local communities to conserve local wetlands. See <http://www.environment.gov.au/education/aussi/>.
- Investigate Lake Eyre on Google Earth (<http://www.google.com/earth/index.html>).

