

# General Field Notes

DAVID S. LEE, Department Editor  
North Carolina State Museum, P.O. Box 27647  
Raleigh, N.C. 27611

JULIAN R. HARRISON, Associate Editor  
Department of Biology, The College of Charleston, Charleston, S.C. 29401

## First Record of Black-tailed Godwit from North Carolina

MICHAEL TOVE  
Department of Zoology, University of North Carolina  
Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514

DAVID HUGHES  
4729 Camelia Drive  
Suffolk, Virginia 23435

On 26 December 1979, during the annual Bodie-Pea Island, N.C., Christmas Bird Count, a Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) was found by Hughes on the Bodie Island Lighthouse pond. The bird was subsequently seen and photographed by many observers until 12 January 1980 when the pond was flooded, apparently causing most of the shorebirds to move elsewhere. The godwit was not relocated.

Later on the count day Tove, accompanied by Kevin Hintsa, John Fussell, and Bill Moffitt, went to the pond and slowly worked toward the back side. At approximately 1530, they found a godwit feeding near some American Avocets. The bird was studied



Fig. 1. A Black-tailed Godwit was photographed from above at Bodie Island, N.C., 27 December 1979. Note the black tail, white rump, broad white wing stripe, and black wrists.



Fig. 2. In another view of the same Black-tailed Godwit shown at left, note the white under wing and axillars. (Both photos by Michael Tove, 27 December 1979, Bodie Island, N.C.).

through a scope until it flew, whereupon it was identified as a Black-tailed Godwit. Identification was made on the basis of the black tail and white rump (Fig. 1) and the white axillars and wing linings (Fig. 2).

Lewis (1978) described some of the major differences in plumage between Black-tailed and Hudsonian Godwits. Having had prior (and subsequent) experience with both species, we wish to elaborate a bit more the differences between them. There are two major differences in plumage: (1) Wing lining and axillars are white in Black-tailed, black in Hudsonian. (2) Upper wing of Black-tailed has a broad, bold white (Willet-like) stripe along the basal portion of the primaries and secondaries; primary coverts are blackish and contrast with lighter, brownish-gray secondary coverts. Upper wing of Hudsonian has a narrow, sometimes indistinct, grayish-white wing stripe at the very base of the primaries and secondaries; upper wing coverts are uniformly colored.

Unfortunately, these differences are of little help unless the bird is seen in flight. However, there are other, albeit subtler, differences between the species. Hudsonians have bills that are slightly to moderately upturned. Conversely, Black-taileds have nearly or completely straight bills. However, females of both species have longer bills with a little more curvature than males. Thus, a female Black-tailed Godwit may exhibit some bill curvature, but generally less than that of a male Hudsonian.

Baird (1967) noted that Black-tailed Godwits have blackish legs and Hudsonians have blue. He also described breeding plumages as "rusty orange on chin, neck and upper breast; whitish unmarked belly, flank and undertail coverts" for the Black-tailed and "extensive chestnut underparts; barred undertail coverts" for the Hudsonian. We cannot wholly support these distinctions as good criteria for field identification. Reliably differentiating (dark) blue from black legs in the field is a risky task. Also, Black-taileds in breeding plumage are heavily barred on the flanks, and the white of the belly and under tail is narrow and obscure, making it hard to see in the field. Hudsonian Godwits have completely, or almost completely rust-orange underparts, which are more brick-colored than in the Black-tailed. The breast and upper breast of a Black-tailed Godwit are cinnamon-orange, which gives way to dark barring on the flanks and sides of the belly. In addition, the back of a Hudsonian Godwit is blacker than that of the Black-tailed.

This sighting constitutes the fifth record of Black-tailed Godwit from the contiguous United States. Previous records include: one in Massachusetts, April 1967 (Baird 1968); one in New Jersey, May-June 1971 (*Am. Birds* 25:717); one in Pennsylvania, October 1979 (*Am. Birds* 34:146, *Cassinia* 58:22-23); and one seen by Hughes 27 February 1971 at Pea Island and originally misidentified as a Hudsonian. Although all the appropriate field marks had been noted, none of the observers of the February 1971 bird considered Black-tailed a possibility because it was not listed in any of the North American field guides. Recently, this record was mentioned in *American Birds* (34:264). The 1979 North Carolina and Pennsylvania records are likely to be of the same individual.

Fortunately, the Black-tailed Godwit is illustrated, along with several other Eurasian shorebirds that may eventually occur in the Carolinas, in the newly released Peterson bird guide for eastern North America. Nonetheless, one still must consult European guides for flight patterns and discussion of field marks.

#### LITERATURE CITED

- Baird, J. 1968. A United States record of the Black-tailed Godwit. *Auk* 85:500-501.  
Lewis, B. 1978. A record of the Hudsonian Godwit in South Carolina and a comparison with the Black-tailed Godwit. *Chat* 42:82-83.