

General Field Notes

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Bar-tailed Godwit Found at Portsmouth Island, N.C.

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On 22 September 1982, at approximately 1600, I discovered a Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) feeding on the sand flats (locally called "The Flats") at Portsmouth Island, Carteret County, N.C., adjacent to Ocracoke Inlet. On this afternoon and the next, I studied the bird for a total of more than 2 hours. Fortunately, I had in hand for immediate reference the very helpful *Guide to the Identification and Ageing of Holarctic Waders* (A.J. Prater, J.H. Marchant, and J. Vuorinen, 1977, British Trust for Ornithology Field Guide No. 17).

I was using 10X binoculars and often approached within 50 feet of the godwit. Thus, I had excellent views of it. It associated primarily with Willets (*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*) and Short-billed Dowitchers (*Limnodromus griseus*), but also sometimes stood next to Marbled Godwits (*Limosa fedoa*), a Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*), and other species, affording excellent size comparisons. The Bar-tailed Godwit could be picked out at a long distance because of its distinctive silhouette—long, very slightly recurved bill and slender body but relatively short, stocky legs. The bird "stood shorter" than a Willet. It was in winter plumage and its general coloration was similar to that of the Willets, not at all like that of a Marbled Godwit. The basal half of the bill was pink; the distal half was black. The legs were black or blackish. The lower back, rump, and upper tail coverts were white with dark barring visible on the rump and upper tail coverts. The rectrices were largely brownish, tipped with white. The axillars were whitish with a sparse amount of dark barring or speckling. The presence of the largely whitish lower back, rump and axillars is consistent with the bird being of European origin, rather than of Asian or Alaskan origin (see Prater et al., 1977). The godwit called once. That call was tripled, and in quality was similar to a Willet's call.

The Bar-tailed Godwit is very rare but regular along the East Coast of the United States. There are three previous records for North Carolina, all of which were made at Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge: 31 August to 1 September 1971, 14 October 1974, and 21 September 1975 (Chat 41:48,49; Amer. Birds 29:41). I photographed the

Portsmouth Island godwit, and several color slide duplicates have been deposited in the North Carolina State Museum of Natural History.

The godwit was also seen on 23 September by Pam Stuart. Wayne and Fran Irvin found the bird on 2 October, 1.5 miles SW of the September sightings. On 10 October, at midday, the godwit was again adjacent to Ocracoke Inlet, and was seen by Bill and Pat Brokaw, Larry Crawford, John Fussell, Bob Holmes, and Heathy Walker. Later, that afternoon, Derb Carter and Lance Peacock found the bird in the same area. As far as I know, these were the only observations, although others searched for the bird in early October. I covered the flats thoroughly on 24 November, and did not see the godwit. Prior to the initial observation, I had censused the shorebirds on the flats on 6 and 8 September. If the bird did arrive at Portsmouth between 8 September and 22 September, it may be of interest that no extreme weather occurred during that period, although there were several days with moderate northeasterly winds.

The location of the sightings, the Portsmouth Flats, is a significant natural area within Cape Lookout National Seashore. These flats are vast (ca. 3 square miles), and consist of sections that are primarily sand flats and sections that are primarily mud flats. They provide a major feeding area for migrating shorebirds. Unfortunately, this rich shorebird area has been generally inaccessible to bird students. However, recently a transportation service (for tourists wanting to visit the historic Portsmouth village) from Ocracoke has been developed.

Observation of the Bar-tailed Godwit was made while I was conducting, for the Cape Lookout National Seashore, censuses of fall shorebirds using the Portsmouth Island flats. This work was supported by the Volunteer in Park Program. Appreciation is extended to Claudia Wilds for reviewing the manuscript.

Savannah Sparrows on Territory in Alleghany County, N.C.

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The Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) has been slowly expanding its breeding range southward in recent decades, and in the 1970s they had been recorded in summer in a number of localities in the Virginia mountains. By 1980, the species had been noted in Virginia south to Carroll County (Scott 1979), Washington County (Scott 1975), and Smyth County (Scott 1975); and in Hawkins County, Tennessee (Alsop 1977). Hawkins County is at the same latitude as the northern tier of counties in North Carolina, whereas the southern locations in Virginia are only 15 to 20 miles from the North Carolina border. Thus, the possibility existed that Savannah Sparrows occur in summer in the mountains of northern North Carolina. Nonetheless, the species was not detected on the Ashe County, N.C., Breeding Bird Foray in 1979 (LeGrand and Potter 1980), nor had it ever been detected in the breeding season in the Carolinas.

On 14 June 1983, I surveyed roadside habitats in the northeastern portion of Alleghany County, N.C., looking specifically for open country birds, as the county