

General Field Notes

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Bar-tailed Godwit at Portsmouth Island, Carteret Co., N.C.

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At 0855 on 8 May 1992, while surveying thousands of shorebirds on the flats at Portsmouth I., Jose Colon and I observed a Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) in basic plumage. Recent stormy weather had flooded the flats with up to a foot of water, concentrating many of the shorebirds along the west side of the flats. The godwit spent about half of its time feeding with loose flocks of Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) and the remainder of its time feeding alone.

When I initially spotted the bird, it was clear I was not looking at a Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*), several of which were present nearby. Compared to a Marbled Godwit, the bird in question appeared smaller, shorter legged, shorter-billed, and had a paler, less buffy appearance. Knowing that any godwit other than Marbled would be unusual in spring, I decided to flush the bird. When flushed, the white rump and upper tail, barred distal portion of the tail, and white underwings identified the bird as a Bar-tailed Godwit (Hayman et al. 1986). Over the next 1 1/2 hours I studied and photographed the bird as it frequented the northwest end of the flats.

The following detailed description of the bird was written with the bird under observation. Although not compared directly, I estimated the bird to be about 20% smaller than a Marbled Godwit. When compared directly with a

Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*), the godwit was roughly 50% larger by body size. The bill was roughly 2 1/2 times the length of the head and distinctly upturned. The distal two thirds of the bill were dark, becoming pinkish near the base. The long legs were black. Proportionately, the legs were not as long as those of a Marbled Godwit. In flight, the legs extended about an inch beyond the tip of the tail. The head, neck, upper breast, mantle, and wings were dull gray-brown. The scapulars and especially the wing coverts were fringed with pale buff/white, giving the bird a scaly appearance. There was a dark area between the eye and the base of the bill, and a prominent white supercilium. The upperwing pattern, studied while the bird was in flight, was as follows: inner wing slightly darker brown than mantle, primary coverts appearing very dark brown or blackish, primaries (especially outermost ones) showing white at the base of each primary shaft and becoming darker towards the tips. Later, after looking at photos of the bird, it was clear that the white color was most evident in the outer primaries, gradually becoming less evident on the inner primaries. The underwing was entirely white. The axillars were also white, narrowly barred with dark brown. Although the upper breast was mostly a solid gray-brown, the lower breast and flanks were paler with obvious dark brown streaking. The belly and vent were white and unmarked. The tail pattern was similar to that of a dowitcher (*Limnodromus* spp.), with the white color on the lower back and rump forming a distinct inverted "V". The tail was white, with narrow, dark brown bars on the distal half. Barring was most obvious on the upper tail, though there appeared to be some barring on the under tail. The tip of the tail was white. The bird did not vocalize during any of our observations. Based on the white underwings, brown-barrred axillars, and white lower band and rump, I identified the bird as belonging to the nominate race *lapponica* (Hayman et al 1986).

I observed the Bar-tailed Godwit again on 9 May from 0953–1050 at the northwest corner of Portsmouth Flats, but could not relocate the bird on later dates. This is the fifth record of a Bar-tailed Godwit from North Carolina, and the first spring record. Other records are of single birds at Pea Island Nation Wildlife Refuge, Dare County on 31 August–1 September (Browne 1976), 14 October 1974, and 21 September 1975 (Carlson 1976), and from Portsmouth I. on 22 September–10 October 1982 (Fussell 1983). Bar-tailed Godwits are very rare but regular vagrants along the Atlantic Coast, with most records occurring in fall (August-October). The few spring records are from May. Thus, this bird fits the pattern of the few spring occurrences along the Atlantic Coast.

LITERATURE CITED

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