

Teenage Hudsonian Godwits: a conservation priority

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In an article adapted from one of his WaderTales blogposts, the author examines surprising recent discoveries for Hudsonian Godwit and considers what these might mean for the conservation of this migratory shorebird.

A recent paper by Juan Navedo and Jorge Ruiz (Navedo & Ruiz 2020), focusing on Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica*, shone an unexpected light on the Pampa wetlands of Argentina, an area that is attracting increased attention from conservationists. It also raised important points about the conservation of the world's larger shorebirds, the majority of which are categorized by BirdLife International/IUCN as at least Near Threatened. For Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* and Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* (both Near Threatened), the two such (Old World) shorebirds that have been studied most intensively, we know that productivity is far too low, which means that any chicks that do fledge are precious. Many curlews and godwits don't breed in their first year but, in the case of Hudsonian Godwit, what do they do instead and how quickly do these 'teenage' individuals recruit into the breeding population?

The annual cycle

Hudsonian Godwit breeds in Alaska and Canada and spends the non-breeding season in Chile and Argentina. There are three well-separated breeding populations; in southcentral and western Alaska, along the northwest coast of Canada (Mackenzie and Anderson river delta), and within the Hudson and James Bay region of northern Canada. These are indicated in Fig. 1, which is based on the map in BirdLife International's factsheet for the species (2023) and reproduced with that organisation's permission.

On migration, Hudsonian Godwit does not use coastal areas, which led to the theory that their journeys north and south might be made without a break. Satellite tracking has revealed that most staging areas are continental rather than coastal, which suggests that flocks of godwits may be less likely to be encountered by birdwatchers counting

or checking coastal shorebird congregations. Recent research shows that birds wintering in Chile stop off in the prairies of North America on the way north. On the return journey, there are key refuelling areas in Saskatchewan (Canada) and in continental wetlands between Colombia and Argentina (Senner *et al.* 2014).



1 Map of the distribution of Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica* by BirdLife International (2023), showing breeding range (yellow), main passage areas (green) and non-breeding areas (blue). This has been adapted to show (red circles) the three main breeding populations: 1 Alaska, 2 Mackenzie and Anderson river deltas, 3 Hudson Bay and James Bay. The full URL for the map is <http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/hudsonian-godwit-limosa-haemastica/distribution>