First record of Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* for South America

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Se describe el primer registro de *Limosa limosa*, un migrante del Paleártico, para América del Sur. El ave, un adulto en plumaje básico, probablemente de la raza nominal, fue observado y fotografiado en los arrozales de Caroni y luego en las playas barrosas entre Orange Valley y Waterloo, Trinidad, desde el 14 de septiembre de 2000 hasta el 21 de enero de 2001. El registro previo más cercano es de St. Christopher, en las Antillas Menores, en 1988.

Introduction

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* is a Palearctic species that nests at temperate latitudes between Iceland and Siberia, and winters from the UK south to tropical Africa, India and Australia[2,5]. Though there are many records of vagrants in North America, mostly from Alaska and the Atlantic coast[1], the only valid record from the Caribbean was one at St. Christopher, Lesser Antilles, on 24 September 1988[8]. Reports from Barbados[7] are apparently erroneous (M. Frost and E. Massiah pers. comm.). Here we report the first record of the species for South America, on Trinidad.

Observations

On 14 September 2000, FEH found a godwit in a flooded rice field at Caroni at 11h10 and casually flushed it five minutes later from 20 m. Having noted the diagnostic field marks of a Black-tailed Godwit, FEH notified MK, who observed the godwit at 14h15 and studied it from as close as 30 m until it flew off at 14h30. It was not relocated until 16 September, when FEH *et al.* studied it from 80 m in rice fields from 07h55 until it was flushed at 18h10.

The following day, 17 September, it was relocated by FEH *et al.* on a coastal mudflat at Orange Valley, c.20 km south-southwest of the rice fields,

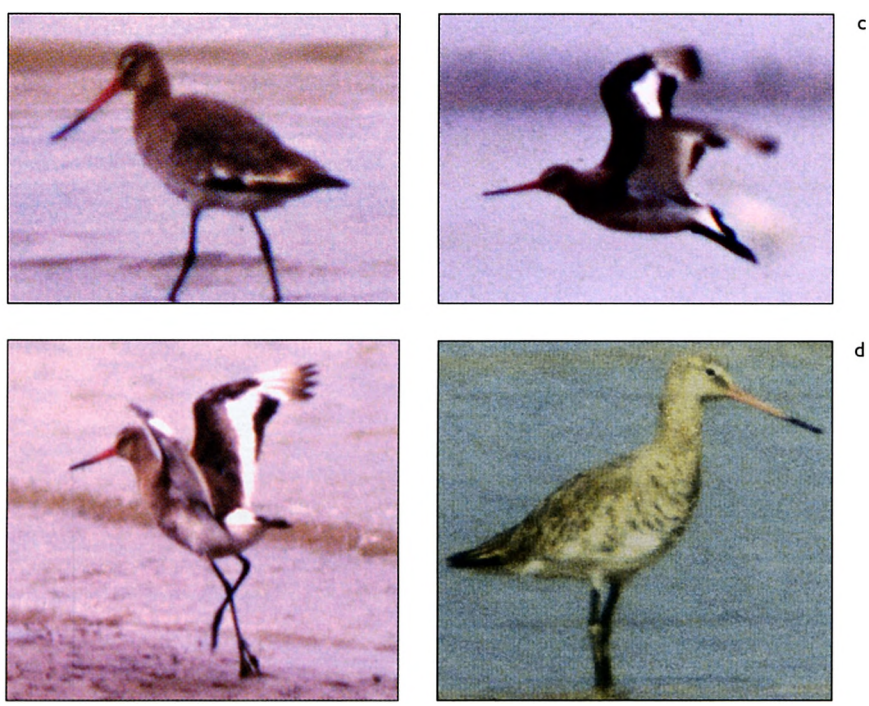

Fig. 1. Adult Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* at Orange Valley, Trinidad, at rest (a), lifting wings (b) and flying (c) on 24 September 2000, and at rest (d) on 21 January 2001 (Floyd E. Hayes)

where it was studied during 11h55 to 12h12, at 150 m, and seen once in flight. It was seen again at Orange Valley on 24 September, when photographed (Fig. 1a–c) by FEH *et al.* from 20 m, at 09h29–10h05, and observed in flight on three occasions. Subsequent observations were at Waterloo (just north of Orange Valley), on 30 September by MK and at Orange Valley, on 1 October by G. White.

During this period a Hudsonian Godwit *L. haemastica* was at Caroni and a Marbled Godwit *L. fedoa* at Waterloo and Orange Valley. Both are rare but regular Nearctic migrants in Trinidad[3,4]. Though the Black-tailed Godwit did not associate with either, indirect comparisons were made. Direct comparisons were made with Willet *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*, a common Nearctic migrant along the coast.

Despite numerous searches of the west coast during the subsequent winter, the Black-tailed Godwit was observed only once more, at Orange Valley on 21 January by FEH *et al.*, where it was photographed (Fig. 1d) from as close as 40 m between 09h14 and 10h01. Though it did not fly, it once lifted its wings. This observation provided evidence that it wintered in Trinidad.

Description and analysis

Body size and soft parts

It appeared equal in size to a Willet, with a bill that was notably longer and orange basally, the distal third being black. The bill was fairly straight, with the upper mandible appearing slightly upturned. The Black-tailed Godwit had a straighter bill than the distinctly upturned bill of Hudsonian Godwit[5]. The eyes were black, and the legs projected significantly beyond the tail in flight. In the longer legged Black-tailed Godwit, the legs extend farther beyond the tail than in Hudsonian Godwit[5].

Plumage

The head and face were pale greyish fawn, with a distinct white supercilium from bill to eye, bordered blackish below, a pale lower cheek patch and greyish-white throat. The neck and upper breast were greyish fawn with a slight orange-chestnut wash. Faint, dark horizontal bars were present on the upper breast. The mid- to lower breast was marked with scattered blackish chevrons and a few orangey feathers. The remaining underparts were unmarked and white. The upperparts were mostly grey, the mantle a shade darker with subdued blackish mottling. The wing-coverts and scapulars were lightly but indistinctly edged greyish white.

In flight, the upperwings were seen to have a broad, white wingbar extending the entire length of the wing, flaring at the tip. The inner primaries and secondaries appeared to be moulting. The underwing was mostly white, with a narrow black leading edge and dusky trailing edge. When at rest, a small patch of white was clearly visible just above the black outermost primaries at the bottom of both folded wings, apparently exposed by worn or moulting greater coverts. However, by 21 January the white was no longer visible. The tail was black, contrasting sharply with a broad white rump and uppertail-coverts. The combination of broad, white wingbar on the upperwings, mostly white underwings and broad white rump and uppertail-coverts distinguish Black-tailed Godwit from Hudsonian Godwit, which has a much narrower wingbar, mostly dark underwing surfaces and less extensive white on the rump and uppertail-coverts[5].

Discussion

The traces of alternate plumage, represented by scattered blackish chevrons and orangey feathers on the underparts, combined with the absence of pale edges to the wing feathers (typical of immatures), indicate that it was an adult moulting into basic plumage. The record has been accepted by the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Birds Committee.

Three races of Black-tailed Godwit are recognised: *islandica*, breeding in Iceland and wintering primarily in western Europe; nominate *limosa*, breeding in western Europe to western Asia and wintering primarily from tropical Africa to northern India; and *melanuroides*, breeding in eastern Asia and wintering from eastern India to Australasia[2,5]. The broad white wingstripe on the upperwings of the Trinidad individual probably eliminates the relatively dark-winged *melanuroides*. In basic plumage the other two races are difficult to distinguish. However, as *islandica* typically winters well north of the tropics, the St. Christopher and Trinidad birds probably pertained to the nominate race, which has been recorded at least four times in the Cape Verdes[6]. Presumably they crossed the Atlantic at tropical rather than temperate latitudes, and should be searched for elsewhere in the east Caribbean and north-east South America.

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