

FIELD NOTES FROM HERE AND THERE _____

SIGHTING OF A BLACK-TAILED GODWIT IN MASSACHUSETTS

On June 23, 1993, at approximately 5:30 P.M., while censusing shorebirds just east of Godwit Bar on North Monomoy Island, I noticed a flock of over one hundred shorebirds, consisting mostly of Black-bellied Plovers and a few Red Knots, that arose from the marsh about one hundred yards to the south. The flock circled to the west, flying almost directly into the sun, and approached me. As they flew over my head, I noticed a larger bird with a long bill that I immediately recognized as a godwit.

As the godwit flew overhead, I noted that it was extensively white underneath, except for the breast and neck, which were bright orange-red. My first thought was that it was an alternate-plumaged Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*), but I was puzzled that the reddish coloration did not extend further down the belly. As the birds headed away from me and banked toward the south (by now in excellent light), I noted that the tail was extensively white with a broad black terminal band, that the lower back lacked any white, that there was a broad white wing stripe, and that the underwings were almost entirely white. I quickly realized that the bird was a Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*).

The group of birds continued south and landed in an area of wet sand and mud on the south end of the island. I hastened to the general area and after a few minutes relocated the bird among some Black-bellied Plovers and knots. All of the birds were very skittish, apparently because of the vigorous, persistent alarm calls of the numerous Willets and American Oystercatchers nesting in the area.



Over the next several minutes I was able to slowly approach the bird, with the sun at my back, down to a distance of about 150 feet. I observed all the critical field marks and obtained three or four photographs with a 300 mm lens. At one point the godwit flew about seventy-five feet, and after several minutes most of the shorebirds, including the godwit, flushed, at which point I took several

more photographs of the bird in flight. The godwit flew out over Nantucket Sound and headed north, at first alone, then in the company of a Whimbrel. The godwit was a bit smaller than the Whimbrel.

Although I lost sight of the godwit, it appeared to be going down in the vicinity of Godwit Bar, so I headed in that direction and easily relocated the bird on the northeast end of the bar. I again slowly approached the bird to within about 150 feet, with the sun at my back, and took a few more photographs. After two or three minutes the bird flushed again and landed on the southern edge of

Godwit Bar, but before I could approach it, it flushed once more and flew back down to the south end of the island. Not wishing to disturb it any further, I left the island at that time (about 6:30 P.M.). My total viewing time of the bird was about ten to twelve minutes.

The Black-tailed Godwit stayed on the island at least through July 5, 1993, and was seen by about four hundred people from as far away as California and Florida. I never saw the bird in direct comparison with Hudsonian Godwits (*Limosa haemistica*). But I thought that the Black-tailed Godwit was about the same size as the Hudsonian Godwit. As previously noted, when seen in flight with a Whimbrel, the Black-tailed Godwit was somewhat smaller. The bill was thicker at the base than *L. haemistica*, was nearly straight with only a very slight upturn, and was bright pinkish throughout the basal two-thirds and black throughout the distal third. The legs were long and black.

The upper wings were an uneven, dull grayish-brown, darkening to black on the primaries, with a prominent white wing stripe extending nearly the entire length of the extended wing (broader and more conspicuous than on *L. haemistica*). The underwings were entirely white, with the exception of a dark border on both the leading and trailing edges. The breast and neck were bright orange-chestnut, this color extending up only the sides of the face and the rear of the head. The crown was rusty brownish. A conspicuous white eye stripe extended from the base of the bill, over the eye, ending just behind the eye. The upper belly was dusky white with broad, diffuse brownish barring, which extended back as far as the legs and, less conspicuously, onto the flanks. The lower belly and undertail coverts were white, with no obvious markings. The upper surface of the tail was white over the basal two-thirds, with a broad black band covering the distal third.

On the ground, the bird was separable from *L. haemistica* by the thicker bill, more orangey (versus brick red) coloration on the breast, which extended up on the face (versus the gray face of *L. haemistica*), and the lack of coloration on the belly. In flight, the underwings were almost entirely white (versus the jet black wing linings of *L. haemistica*), the wing stripe was broader and more conspicuous, and the wings appeared shorter, imparting a stockier appearance (somewhat more reminiscent of a Willet than a Hudsonian Godwit).

This occurrence is the second for Black-tailed Godwit in Massachusetts (the first sighting was in Dartmouth in April 1967), and one of only a few for the continental United States.

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