

Interim report of "WIWO - Icelandic Black-tailed Godwit Project 1993"

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INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

The Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* is divided into three subspecies: *L. l. limosa*, *L. l. islandica* and *L. l. melanuroides*. Approximately 85% of the subspecies *L. l. limosa* breeds in the Netherlands, around 90% of the subspecies *L. l. islandica* breeds in Iceland, and the subspecies *L. l. melanuroides* breeds in Russia, east of the river Jennisej (Cramp *et al.* 1983).

The Black-tailed Godwit is one of the most threatened waders in Europe (Piersma 1986), largely due to the draining of natural grasslands and agricultural intensification in the Netherlands.

The subspecies *L. l. limosa* has been studied intensively but the information about *L. l. islandica* is scarce. The threatened status of *L. limosa* was the main reason for the Dutch Foundation Working Group International Wader and Waterfowl Research (WIWO) to organise this project to improve knowledge of the breeding habitats and breeding densities, staging areas on migration and in winter, and the biometrics of breeding *Limosa l. islandica*.

STUDY AREA

From May 25 to June 15 1993, two colonies were studied in two swampy river deltas in Iceland. In the southwest a colony was studied close to Selfoss and in the Skagafjord on the north coast a colony was studied in the Skogar reserve.

METHODS

Data were collected on breeding densities, habitat and nest descriptions, clutch and egg sizes, timing of breeding, and biometrics. Blood samples of breeding birds were taken. In total, 37 birds were (colour) ringed and dyed. Information was also collected about predators and other breeding birds in Godwit habitats.

RESULTS

In the Skogar reserve the density was almost the same (12 prs/km²) as had been found in 1987 (13 prs/km²) (Skarphedinsson & Gudmundsson 1987).

In a plot of 35 ha near Selfoss, a colony of 15 nests was found; there are no previous surveys available of this colony. Both colonies were found in wet vegetation, predominantly dominated by *Carex* species. In total, 43 nests were found and described.

Mean clutch size was 3.9; two nests contained five eggs. The breeding season seemed rather late, the first chick hatched on June 14.

Biometrics	males	n	females	n
wing	207-221	13	218	22
bill	73-85	15	88-102	22
tarsus	61-72	15	71-83	22
mass	232-295	15	307-357	20

As at 13/12/1993, there have been four recoveries of ringed birds:

- 23/7/1993 Thames Estuary, Great Britain
by M. May
- 22/8/1993 The Wash, Great Britain
by the Wash Wader Ringing Group
- 24/8/1993 Baie de l'Aguillon, France
by G. J. Gerritsen & B. Trolliet
- 6/11/1993 Tagus Estuary, Portugal
by Nuno Cidraes Vieira

Wintering in Great Britain and France was already known but the recovery from Portugal proves that breeding godwits from Iceland winter at least as far as south as Lisbon.

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EXPEDITION MEMBERS

Gerrit J. Gerritsen, Niko M. Groen & Wil G. Gerritsen (The Netherlands) and J.O. Hilmarsson & E.O. Porleifsson (Icelandic counterparts).

In 1994 a full report of this expedition will be published by WIWO, and announced in this *Bulletin*.

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Little Terns *Sterna albifrons* hatch Collared Pratincoles' *Glareola pratincola* clutches

B.A. Garmash

Garmash, B.A. 1994. Little Terns *Sterna albifrons* hatch Collared Pratincoles' *Glareola pratincola* clutches. *Wader Study Group Bull.* 73: 28.

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In May-June 1993 near Botievo village (the Zaporozhe region, northern Ukrainian coast of Azov Sea), observations were made of a mixed colony of waders (*Avocet Recurvirostra avosetta*, Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*) and terns (Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*). The Collared Pratincole was the main object of study. Individual marking with picric acid was used to recognize the study pairs. Birds were watched from a small tent 30 metres from the nests. The colony was located on a small island among shallow water left after rising sea level in spring.

The incubation of two Collared Pratincole nests by Little Tern was recorded. In the first case it was observed infrequently and was of short duration (from 2-15 minutes).

Another nest with three eggs was regularly incubated during the last four days of the incubation period. The pair of Little Terns both incubated their own nest and the Pratincole's each relieving the other on the nests. The distance between nests in this case was 9 m. The Little Terns were very aggressive towards Collared Pratincoles as well as to Avocets from a neighbouring nest. Several attempts by the Pratincoles to defend their nest were unsuccessful. After the first chick in the Pratincole's nest had hatched the terns tried to feed it with small fish. The next day the chick was found dead with its neck pecked

out. Soon after that both the Pratincoles and Little Terns left the nest showing no more interest in it.

Fully developed embryos in the two remaining Pratincole eggs perished from cooling. In two following days all three Little Tern chicks hatched successfully. The pair of Collared Pratincoles left the study area and was never seen again.

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