

First record of Hudsonian Godwit in Panama

This juvenile bird was likely displaced by gale-force winds over the Caribbean.

R. C. Brown and Dodge Engleman

ON THE AFTERNOON OF OCTOBER 7, 1983, Brown was looking for passage waders at Coco Solo Meadows, Coco Solo, Colon Province, on the Caribbean coast of central Panama. He noticed a godwit (*Limosa* sp.) that was clearly not a Marbled Godwit (*L. fedoa*), the only godwit species recorded from Panama. The bird was feeding in a field of short grass next to the sea, in the company of a number of other waders. It was judged a godwit owing to its long, slightly upturned bill, long legs, and large size. Flight views showed a prominent white wing bar and white tail-base, which were considerably less extensive than in the Black-tailed Godwit (*L. limosa*). Diagnostic black wing-linings confirmed the initial identification of this species as an Hudsonian Godwit (*L. haemastica*). Brown, through previous experience, is familiar with all four species of godwit. A series of photographs, although not published here, was obtained.

The scapulars of the godwit were pale brown with a dark center streak expanded apically to form a dark apical 'anchor' marking with a narrow buff fringe. The larger scapulars and some tertials also showed a buff mark basal to the dark 'anchor', giving the feather a barred appearance. On the basis of these characters and the generally brownish underparts the bird was aged as juvenile (Prater *et al.*, 1977). The presence of a few entirely gray scapulars indicated that the bird was beginning to molt into first-winter plumage. It was subsequently seen at the same locality by various observers, being last seen

November 1, 1983, by Engleman. During this time no change in plumage was observed.

This sighting appears to represent the first record of *Limosa haemastica* from Panama. Ridgely (1976) contains no records of the species, although he commented that it was a likely candidate for vagrancy. Ridgely (*pers. comm.*) also confirmed that he knows of no subsequent record. The Panama Audubon Society has no records of any occurrences either.

The migration route of the Hudsonian Godwit is poorly documented with very few sightings recorded between North America and the South American wintering grounds. Migrants seem to occur most frequently in the West Indies (Blake 1977). Within Central America there are four known records: 17 birds from Guatemala (Dickerman 1975); two birds from Costa Rica (Stiles and Smith 1977); and, two different records from Mexico (Blake 1977). All of these records are from the Pacific coast and have been implicated (Stiles and Smith 1977) as evidence for the presence of a trans-Pacific migration route for the Alaska population (Palmer 1969). It seems more likely, however, that this first record from the Caribbean coast is owing to westerly displacement from the trans-Caribbean migration route of the Canadian population. An inexperienced bird (such as the juvenile reported here) would be a likely candidate for such vagrancy. Examination of the weather conditions at the time (Case and Gerrish 1984) showed no conditions suitable for westerly displacement in early October.

However, in late September, Tropical Storm *Dean* led to gale-force northeast winds over the northern Caribbean, with wind speeds of 55 knots recorded from ships in the area, September 29. It seems probable that the bird was displaced by these winds, then remained undiscovered until October 9. These weather conditions may support the hypothesis that the bird was displaced from the trans-Caribbean migration route.

One might conclude therefore, that this species probably occurs more frequently along the Caribbean coast than records suggest and it should be looked for here in the future.

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