

FIRST RECORD OF THE HUDSONIAN GODWIT FOR OREGON

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On 23 August 1978 Tom Lund found a lone gray-backed godwit (*Limosa* sp.), which he tentatively identified as a Hudsonian Godwit (*L. haemastica*), near the ponds at the base of the South Jetty of the Columbia River, Clatsop County, Oregon. However, he was unable to observe the coloration of the underwings and the extent of the white stripe on the upper wing surfaces required to distinguish the Hudsonian Godwit from the similar Black-tailed Godwit (*L. limosa*) of Palaearctic distribution. Lund described the bird as being in full basic plumage, with a plain gray back (pers. comm.). Tad Finnell and Brian Egger obtained brief views of what appeared to be the same bird on 24 August, but they, too, were unable to note the critical field marks. The bird could not be located after that date.

On 10 September 1978 Nancy Mesner and I found and identified with certainty a Hudsonian Godwit with a group of approximately 50 Marbled Godwits (*L. fedoa*) along the edge of the mudflats on the north spit of the Coquille River estuary, north of Bandon, Coos County, Oregon. The Coquille bird appeared to be still molting its back feathers and was noticeably mottled in that region, making it, most likely, a different bird than the one observed in Clatsop County. The Coquille bird was considerably smaller than the Marbled Godwits and was about the same size as or slightly smaller than the Willets (*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*) which were also present. The Hudsonian's bill was upcurved but shorter than those of the Marbled Godwits. The bill was dull reddish toward the base and dark in the distal portion. In flight, a broad black band near the end of the white-tipped retrices, a white rump and basal portion of the retrices, and narrow white stripes on the open wings were clearly visible. Dark underwings were noted as the bird turned in flight. Several of the above mentioned characters, especially the limited white wing stripes and dark underwings, served to distinguish the bird from the Black-tailed Godwit. The flock flushed and disappeared before photographs could be obtained.

However, on 17 September Tad and Kathy Finnell, Jeff Gilligan, David Irons and I relocated the Coquille bird. It was studied closely by all those present and was photographed extensively by Gilligan (Figure 1). Additional field marks were noted on this date, including some rusty feathers near the base of the bill and a broad white supercilary line anterior to the eye. The neck and upper chest were a dusky gray; the belly, a lighter shade. The legs were dull greenish-brown. The bird was observed for about 30 minutes feeding with up to 100 Marbled Godwits. During the week following 17 September the Coquille bird was seen by several other observers, including Tom Crabtree, who photographed it on 19 September (Figure 2).

The Hudsonian Godwit breeds in north-central Canada through extreme north-eastern Alaska and winters mostly in the southern third of South America. Its usual migration routes take it up through the Great Plains in spring and, sparingly, to the Atlantic coast in fall. Most autumn migrants pass over North America without stopping (Palmer 1967). There are a few records for this species in California, Washington and British Columbia, and the occurrence of the bird reported here constitutes the first substantiated record for Oregon. The scarcity of records for the western North American coast would seem to preclude the existence of any regular movement through the region. The Coquille godwit occurred in Oregon in the same period when unprecedented numbers of the Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Tryngites subruficollis*), a species whose usual migratory pathways are somewhat similar to the Hudsonian Godwit's routes, were being recorded all along the Pacific coast (Hunn and Mattocks 1979, McCaskie 1979, Winter and Laymon 1979).

NOTES



Figure 1. Hudsonian Godwit (right) and Willet (left), Coquille River estuary, Coos County, Oregon, 17 September 1978.

Photo by Jeff Gilligan



Figure 2. Hudsonian Godwit, Coquille River estuary, Coos County, Oregon, 19 September 1978. 300 mm lens, f8, 1/500 sec.

Photo by Tom Crabtree

NOTES

The Coquille River estuary provides excellent habitat for many migratory shorebirds, with large concentrations, especially of the larger species, gathering there. The first three Bar-tailed Godwits (*L. lapponica*) found in Oregon, one in 1976 and two in 1977, were seen in this same location (Crowell and Nehls 1977, Hunn and Mattocks 1978). The Coquille River estuary is in need of careful management to preserve it as a valuable natural area and refuge for migratory birds.

LITERATURE CITED

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