

HUDSONIAN GODWIT MIGRATION AT CARTER SPIT, ALASKA

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During shorebird surveys from 2 July to 12 August 1994 at Carter Spit (59°15' N, 162°00' W), along the southeastern shore of Kuskokwim Bay, western Alaska, I observed relatively large numbers of Hudsonian Godwits (*Limosa haemastica*) staging and in migration. The Carter Spit area comprises four spits and tidal mudflats along 35 km of coastline. Inland, wet tundra with numerous brackish and freshwater ponds extends for 8 km to the upland tundra and bare gravel ridges of the coastal Ahklun mountains (307–730 m). Thickets of willow (*Salix* spp.) and alder (*Alnus* spp.) line the banks of four creeks that originate in the mountains and drain into Kuskokwim Bay.

From the sum of daily counts over the 6 weeks, I saw 1204 Hudsonian Godwits. Daily counts of 100+ birds were recorded in coastal areas seven times from 6 to 26 July, with a maximum single daily count of 230 birds on 13 July. Most birds were in breeding plumage, but 18 were in general body molt and 8 were juvenal plumage. Hudsonian Godwits breed in coastal and inland areas of Kotzebue Sound, Norton Bay (Kessel and Gibson 1978), and Cook Inlet (Williamson and Smith 1964), and are rare breeders on the interior Yukon–Kuskokwim delta (B. McCaffery, U. S. Fish Wildlife Service, pers. comm.). In fall migration, the species is known on tide flats in the northern Yukon delta in mid-July in flocks of 200 or more (Jones and Kirchoff 1977) and in Cook Inlet in August with a maximum count of 106 birds along 5 km of mudflats (Kessel and Gibson 1978). These are the only places in the state where Hudsonian Godwits are known in numbers greater than a few individuals during fall migration. Therefore, my sightings of hundreds of birds over an extended period are noteworthy and suggest that the Carter Spit area is an important staging site for the species. These birds are likely from breeding areas in western Alaska (Kessel and Gibson 1978, Kessel 1989). A fall migration route from Alaska is not known, but the absence of Hudsonian Godwits along the Pacific coast implies long nonstop flights to wintering grounds in South America.

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