

**FIRST RECORD OF BLACK-TAILED GODWIT
(*Limosa limosa*) FOR NEW YORK STATE**

Seatuck Creek , Eastport , Suffolk County, NY April 5-18 2001

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At about 3:00 PM on 5 Apr 2001, I stopped in the hamlet of Eastport in Long Island's Suffolk County to look at Seatuck Creek, a regularly visited birding site. This is a tidal creek, with a large lake-like body of water on the north side of Rte 27A, a favorite viewing spot for waterfowl, which drains into a smaller marshy area on the south side of the road. I walked over to the west bank of the smaller body of water to scan for Common Snipe that I hoped to see there. In a matter of seconds, I was focused on a large shorebird feeding in the middle of the creek. It had a bright orange bill, head, neck, and breast. With trembling fingers, I started taking some notes.

It was obviously a godwit, the orange-red head and breast color eliminating Marbled and Hudsonian. That left Bar-tailed and Black-tailed to consider. Bar-tailed does not have the strong black barring on breast and flanks dis-

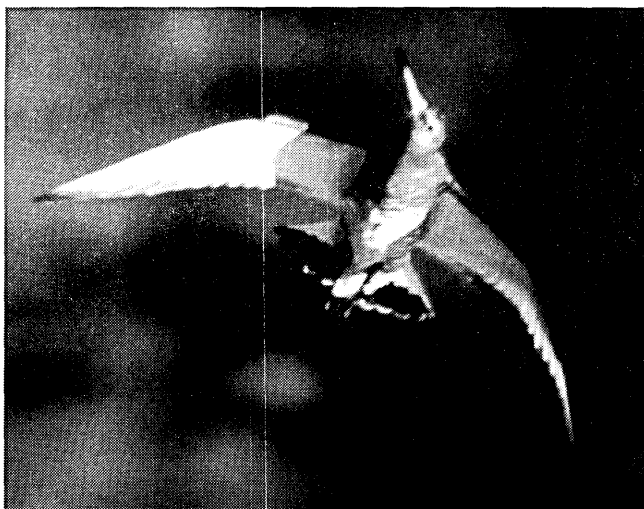


Figure 1: Black-tailed Godwit Eastport, NY 5 April 2001
Note totally diagnostic white underwings distinguishing the species from all other godwits.

Photo by Sean Sime

played by this bird. Then in flight, the bird showed its unmistakable white underwing, along with a prominent white wing bar on the upperwing and its white rump and black tail band. Later, when my brain started cooling off, I observed the bill with no pronounced upturn. It all added up to Black-tailed Godwit!

I immediately phoned Tony Lauro in Cutchogue, who in turn called several other birders before setting out himself. Both he and John Fritz arrived in time to see the bird before the rising tide forced it from its feeding and it departed in a southerly direction. John was able to take some photographs before it left. At least, if it did not reappear, the state's first Black-tailed Godwit was confirmed and documented !

The birding world was further alerted by Angus Wilson who, after getting Lauro's call , immediately relayed the news to NYSBirds-listserve and this was subsequently cross-posted to Birdchat. When I returned with Paul Stoutenburgh the next morning , 6 Apr, there were already thirty plus birders feasting their eyes on this striking and unusual visitor. Several birding friends greeted me with "congratulations", "thank you" and the like. The attention did not damage my ego.

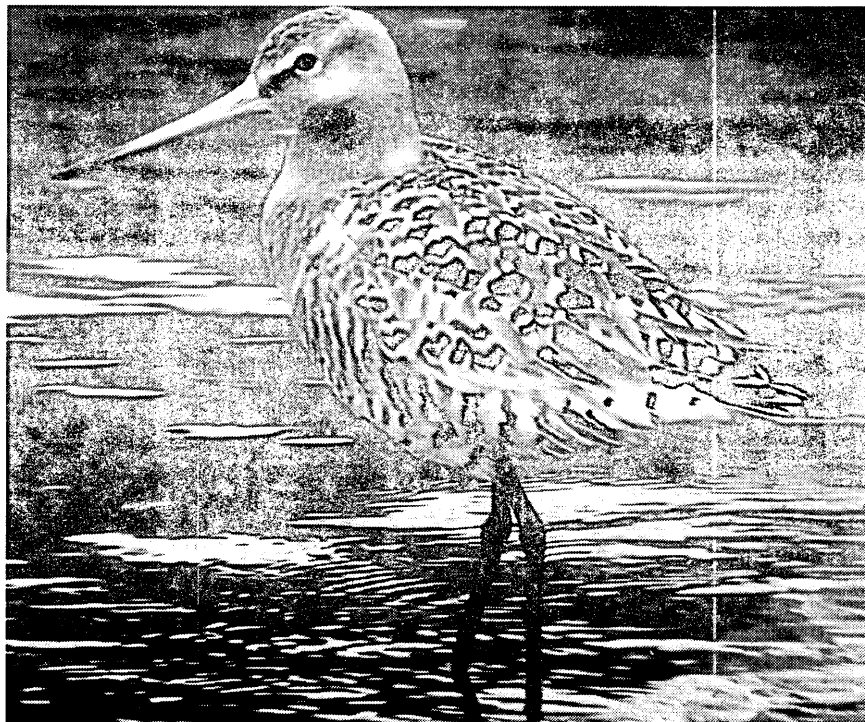


Figure 2: Black-tailed Godwit Eastport, NY 5 April 2001
Note nearly straight bill, heavily barred breast and flanks, setting this species apart
from the superficially similar Bar-tailed Godwit
Photo by Sy Schiff

The godwit continued to appear daily through 18 Apr , with its appearance being related to low tide. Fortunately , it would continue feeding well into the onset of high tide, thus giving it more "on stage" time for the many hundreds of birders who came to see this spectacular and beautiful visitor. When it left the area for the day, it usually headed south and when it reappeared it came from the south. Several people searched to the south, but to my knowledge, the bird was not observed during its two weeks stay anywhere else except the place where it was discovered.

A Black-tailed Godwit was seen on 19 Apr at Milford Point, CT, approximately 45 miles north of Eastport as the "godwit" flies , on the western Connecticut shore of the Long Island Sound. Another sighting was made in Waterford, CT on 27 or 28 Apr with confirmation as to this species on 29 Apr by Greg Hanisek. This location is about 50 miles east of Milford Pt. and again on the Long Island Sound. It is not unreasonable to conjecture , as a matter of fact it is probable, that these sightings were of the Seatuck bird.

Over the last three plus decades, the species has been sporadic in its occurrences on the eastern seaboard of North America , with some roughly sixteen reports , half being from the Maritime Provinces of Canada and the other half being scattered from Massachusetts , New Jersey, North Carolina to Florida. The specific records may be seen on Angus Wilson's web site www.oceanwanderers.com (click on the New York State Rarities link.)

Again borrowing from Angus Wilson's web site there are three recognized subspecies as follows:

The nominate (*Limosa l. limosa*) - breeds in mainland Europe and western Russia, and winters from southern Europe through sub-Saharan Africa and east to western India

The so-called "Iceland Godwit" (*L.l. islandica*) breeds in Iceland, the Faeroes, northern Scotland and the Lofoten Islands, and winters throughout western Europe.

The Asiatic form (*L.l. melanuroides*) sometimes referred to as "Eastern Black-tailed Godwit" breeds in Siberia, Mongolia and \ China, wintering in southeast Asia and into southern Australia.

There has been much discussion , none conclusive ,as to what subspecies this individual belongs .

However, as to the species, there is no identification problem. When formally accepted by the New York State Avian Records Committee (NYSARC) the Black-tailed Godwit of 5 Apr 2001, will become the 458th species on the official New York State Checklist.