



Black-tailed Godwit

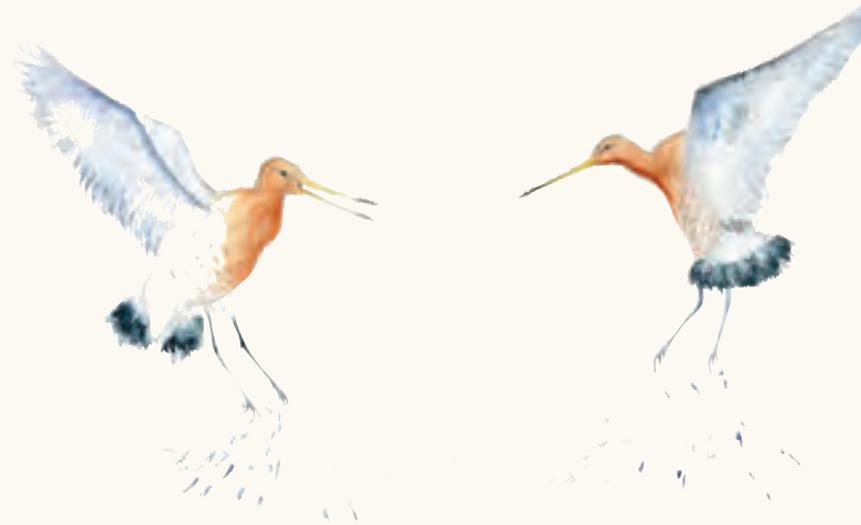
– the journey of a bird under threat

Paintings by Yves Fagniard

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Foreword

Anyone who has ever spent time watching birds will have experienced how difficult it is to catch more than a furtive moment of a bird's life before it opens its wings and flies away, escaping from sight into the sky or trees. Birds are always on the move, some even over very long distances, migrating from country to country or even continent to continent in order to find suitable habitats to breed or overwinter.



Bird migration has always been a source of inspiration for humans, expressed in poetry, art and culture. This phenomenon also represents the biggest challenge for the work of conservationists. Conservation efforts for migratory birds cannot be reduced to a certain area, but always require that people living along the entire length of the flyway of a given bird species should work together and coordinate their efforts if they wish to conserve these magical creatures for future generations. This has been the mission of AEWA for the last 15 years.

The Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) is one example of a bird on the move, for which AEWA has been providing the necessary framework for international cooperation along the African-Eurasian Flyways since its conclusion in 1995.

The year 2010 is a very special year for AEWA as it marks 15 years of conservation efforts for migratory birds. This book has been developed to celebrate this important anniversary and I hope that it will help to raise awareness of one of the AEWA species which urgently needs our support in order to survive.

I hope that the book will also serve as inspiration, providing the reader with pleasurable moments and taking him or her on a journey into the delightful world of one of the fascinating and enchanting creatures that have always been around to inspire us, although we, as humans, represent the biggest threat that migratory birds face. Enjoy the journey of the Black-tailed Godwit!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bert Lenten', written in a cursive style.

Bert Lenten
Executive Secretary of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA)

About AEWA



The African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) was concluded on 16 June 1995 in The Hague, with the aim of supporting the long-term conservation of 170 species of migratory waterbirds, ranging from waders - such as the Black-tailed Godwit - to waterfowl, flamingos and even the South African penguin; the number of species covered by AEWA has since been extended twice and currently amounts to 255.

All these species have one thing in common: they migrate. While crossing different countries and continents to find safe habitats for breeding, wintering or resting, they not only have to contend with natural hazards, but also man-made obstacles. Migration is an awe-inspiring natural phenomenon, often hampered by political barriers. This makes close cooperation between countries along migratory flyways indispensable.

AEWA covers 118 countries with the aim of supporting coordinated conservation actions throughout the migration systems to which it applies. Human activities – whether direct or indirect – can not only pose the greatest threat to migratory birds, but are also necessary for their protection and that of their habitats. The Agreement Secretariat supports a wide range of activities with the aim to increase knowledge and apply it to educational measures for all stakeholders and local inhabitants along the flyway.

Since the conclusion of AEWA, over half of the 118 Range States have signed and ratified the Agreement, thereby committing themselves to implementing the Agreement's provisions. The close cooperation achieved in many sectors over the last fifteen years has proven very successful and will be built upon to continue tackling the problems migratory waterbirds face when on the move.



About the artist

The Belgian wildlife painter, Yves Fagniard, born in 1959, has been producing naturalistic art for many years, inspired by his passion for nature since his childhood. Yves Fagniard's preferred medium of expression is watercolour. His naturalistic approach and his way of reproducing ambiances in nature are what make his work so original. His watercolours are a fusion of light, atmosphere and love for wild animals, equal weight being given to the animals and their natural habitats. For over 10 years, Yves Fagniard has journeyed to different natural habitats in Europe and Africa to paint wild animals and their surroundings.

Yves Fagniard's paintings are internationally recognized and regularly exhibited in different countries. They are a tribute to his commitment and work, reflecting his personality and approach to the protection of nature: "original and dedicated".

www.yvesfagniard.com

Yves Fagniard



About this book

The UNEP/AEWA Secretariat and the Belgian wildlife painter Yves Fagniard worked together to create this book, to commemorate the 15th Anniversary of AEWA, on 16 June 2010. It tells the story of the AEWA species,

the Black-tailed Godwit,

a migratory wader.

Particular attention is paid to the Black-tailed Godwit because the population of the nominate race is declining dramatically. An International Single Species Action Plan, outlining the conservation of the Black-tailed Godwit was adopted under AEWA, in 2008. The long-term goal was to combat the threats the Black-tailed Godwit is confronted with in the different countries where it is found and to restore the species to a favourable conservation status.

This book depicts a diverse selection of habitats and threats in a choice of the 62 countries hosting Black-tailed Godwits along the birds' migration route.

The paintings presented are the result of Yves Fagniard's observations on his journey along parts of the Black-tailed Godwit's flyway; he focused on the Icelandic population and the East Atlantic population of the nominate race, rather than the Central European one. The artist followed the birds to their habitats during their migration and, through his drawings and paintings, documented the unique beauty of this species in its different settings. The paintings, which originated in several countries such as Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain, Morocco and Senegal, represent the birds at some of their breeding, staging and wintering sites. In this book, the artist captures the beauty of the birds' wetland habitats in the countries he visited. These habitats include secluded marshes, lush grasslands, coastal lagoons and flooded rice fields. He also portrays the threats the birds face during the various stages of migration.





This book will accompany you on the Black-tailed Godwit's journey! Learn more about this enchanting, graceful bird, about its annual cycle and about the threats it faces and not least enjoy the original and fascinating watercolours and drawings!





How can you recognize a Black-tailed Godwit?

The Black-tailed variety is a tall and elegant godwit about 40 - 44 cm high. The bird has a long bill on a relatively small head, a long neck and long legs, fully adapted to roam wet grasslands and other wetland habitats. The colour of its fore-body is dull pink-chestnut in summer, especially the male, and paler grey-brown in winter. A variable number of brownish and grey feathers on the upper parts give the bird an untidy and half-moulted look.



In flight the Black-tailed Godwit shows a striking white wing-bar and rump. The outward appearance of both sexes is similar, but, during breeding, they can be distinguished by the male's brighter, more extensive orange breast, neck and head plumage.

The Black-tailed Godwit of the Icelandic subspecies is smaller than that of the nominate subspecies and has a darker red colour and a shorter bill.

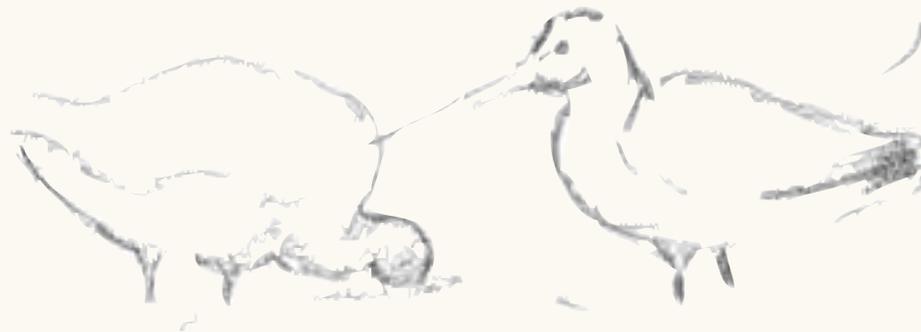
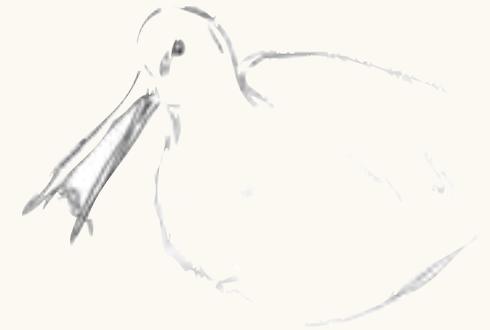




What does the Black-tailed Godwit feed on?



The Black-tailed Godwit feeds primarily on a variety of small insects and their larvae, annelids, molluscs, ragworms, crustaceans, spiders, fish eggs, frogspawn and tadpoles. It also takes plant material such as berries and seeds, but this occurs mainly during migration and winter. In the coastal plains of West Africa, where the bulk of the nominate subspecies overwinters, as well as on the main staging sites during migration in Portugal and Spain, it feeds almost exclusively on rice.





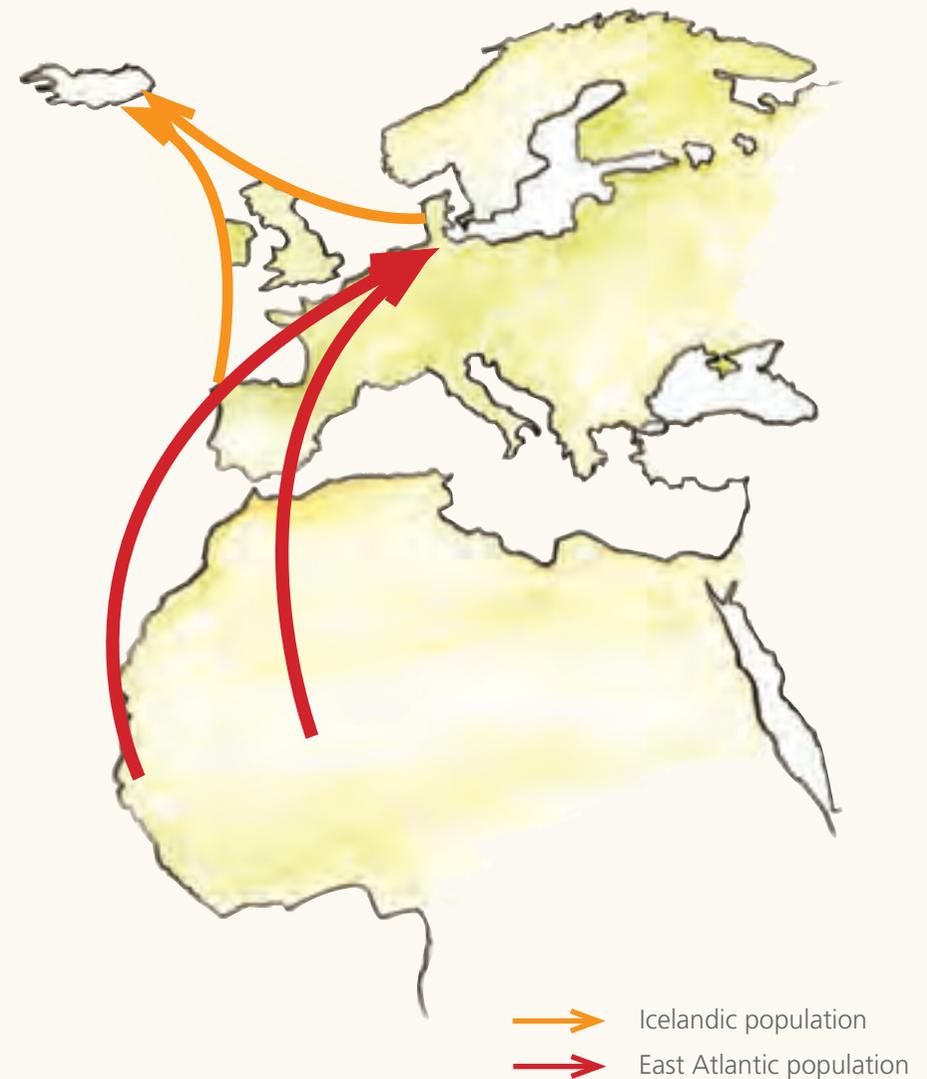
Where can you find the Black-tailed Godwit?

The Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) is a large wader species, which belongs to the family of sandpipers and allies (Scolopacidae).

In the Western Palearctic two subspecies occur: the nominate race (*Limosa limosa limosa*) and the Icelandic population (*Limosa limosa islandica*).

The nominate race breeds in Western and Central Europe and winters in the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa; it can be divided into the East Atlantic and Central European population.

The Icelandic population mainly breeds in Iceland, the Faeroe and Shetland Islands and winters in Ireland, Great Britain, western France, Spain, Portugal, and sporadically in Morocco.



The annual journey of the Black-tailed Godwit



Breeding season

The Black-tailed Godwit breeds from April to mid-June in loose, semi-colonial groups of up to three pairs per hectare. The nests are placed in short vegetation, which can be open or concealed and are lined with a thick mat of vegetation.





The breeding sites favoured by the nominate subspecies include moist to wet lowland grasslands, grassy marshlands, raised bogs, moorland, lake margins and damp grassy depressions in steppe. Farmland habitats are of critical importance for western European breeding populations.

Iceland





The Icelandic subspecies shows a distinct preference for large patches of dwarf-birch bog and marsh, particularly with abundant sedge pools.





The Icelandic subspecies breeds mainly in Iceland, with much smaller numbers breeding in the Faeroe, Shetland and the Lofoten Islands. In contrast to the nominate subspecies, it has continuously increased in numbers and expanded its breeding range over the last 100 years. Today the Icelandic population numbers approximately 25,000 pairs.

Lakes and glaciers are characteristic of the landscape of Iceland. Iceland's climate is temperate, despite its high latitude and its proximity to the Arctic, and the island's coasts remain ice-free throughout the winter due to the Gulf Stream.

Birds are a very important part of Iceland's fauna; however, wild mammals such as the Arctic fox and the reindeer are also at home here.





Permanent human settlement has, over the years, led to a heavy exploitation of forests for firewood and timber. Today, only a few small birch stands exist in isolated reserves. The planting of new forests has increased the number of trees, but these do not compare with the expanse of original forests. As a result, the Icelandic Government strongly encourages afforestation, which could pose a potential risk for the Icelandic population, if the lowland habitats, where godwits breed, were to be affected by these measures.





Sweden

In Sweden, Black-tailed Godwits can mostly be found in the southern part of the country, in regions adjacent to the sea.

The Swedish island Öland, located in the Baltic Sea, constitutes one of Sweden's most important birding areas. The nature reserve Ottenby, on the southern tip of the island, offers excellent breeding grounds for the Black-tailed Godwit, as well as for other bird species, which nest or stage there.

Ottenby's landscape is characterized by its beautiful coastline of small bays, sand and shingle beaches, sandpits and extensive areas of seaweed-covered shoreline.



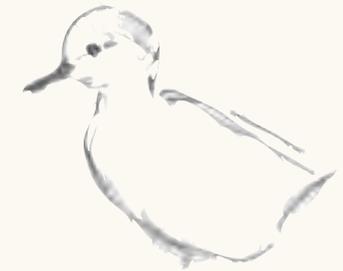


In spring and early summer, accumulated red algae decorate the shoreline. At low tide, Black-tailed Godwits gather to search for food on the exposed flats, where food is abundant. Their long beak is the ideal tool for finding molluscs, ragworms, crustaceans or fish eggs.



Godwits prefer nesting sites in relatively short vegetation in coastal marshes, such as those in Ottenby. The nests consist of a shallow scrape or depression, which is lined with a thick mat of plant materials that the birds gather.

The first eggs are usually laid at the beginning of April. Both parents incubate the eggs alternately, for about three weeks. Like all wader chicks, godwits leave the nest within a day of hatching.



The chicks' down is pinkish-buff with black and brown patches. Their light weight and huge toes enable them to cross rank vegetation by simply walking over the top. Within hours of birth, the parents begin walking their nestlings, seeking shallow water surfaces where the mud is soft.





While out with their chicks, godwit parents are extremely protective and cautious. All potential predators such as large gulls, hawks and herons are attacked and furiously pursued.

○ttenby, besides being an important breeding ground for Black-tailed Godwits, also offers diverse habitats for several other bird species and wild animals, such as the Common Redshank, the Short-eared Owl, the Northern Wheatear as well as wild hares.





Denmark

Freshwater and coastal wetlands are abundant in Denmark. The breeding areas of the Black-tailed Godwit are mainly located along the northwestern coast.





The coastal area of the former municipality Højer, which is situated on the west coast of the Jutland peninsula in southern Denmark, is designated as a nature reserve. This zone represents an important stop-over site for migratory waterbirds and the Black-tailed Godwit uses this area for breeding.

The Peninsula Tipperne, which is situated at the southern end of the Ringkøbing Fjords, is a bird protection area of international importance. This area, which was created by sand deposits, provides habitats for several migratory waterbird species.





The number of wetlands in Denmark has decreased significantly over the last century, which is similar to other north-western European countries. It is estimated that since 1870 more than half of all shallow wetlands such as lakes, marshes, wet meadows and coastal lagoons, have disappeared completely. These developments have had a detrimental effect on the resident population of Black-tailed Godwits because of the resulting drastic reduction in their potential breeding habitats.

This radical decline in wetlands was mainly caused by drainage, land reclamation and the subsequent changes in land use patterns. Human interference and the resulting changes in prevailing environmental factors, such as air, water and soil led to changes in the local flora and fauna. Changes in vegetation patterns were also caused by the abandonment of former pastures which had been used for cattle grazing.



Current legislation in Denmark prohibits further subsidies for drainage activities. In addition, certain management plans were adopted which specifically address the problem of drainage and the decline of wetland ecosystems. In Southern Denmark, projects were carried out which focused on managing freshwater and salt meadows for waders including the Black-tailed Godwit, by monitoring the water levels as well as controlling grassing and mowing activities.

However, further changes in the water levels of wetland ecosystems can be expected in the future, particularly in the context of climate change.



The Netherlands



The Netherlands forms the stronghold for half of the continental Black-tailed Godwit population and more than three quarters of the Western continental population.

Man-made habitats, like semi-natural grassland and meadowland, represent the most common breeding grounds for Black-tailed Godwits. In the Netherlands and its neighbours Germany and Belgium, the majority of godwits create their nests in, to a greater or lesser extent, intensively managed, moist to wet grasslands used for dairy farming.



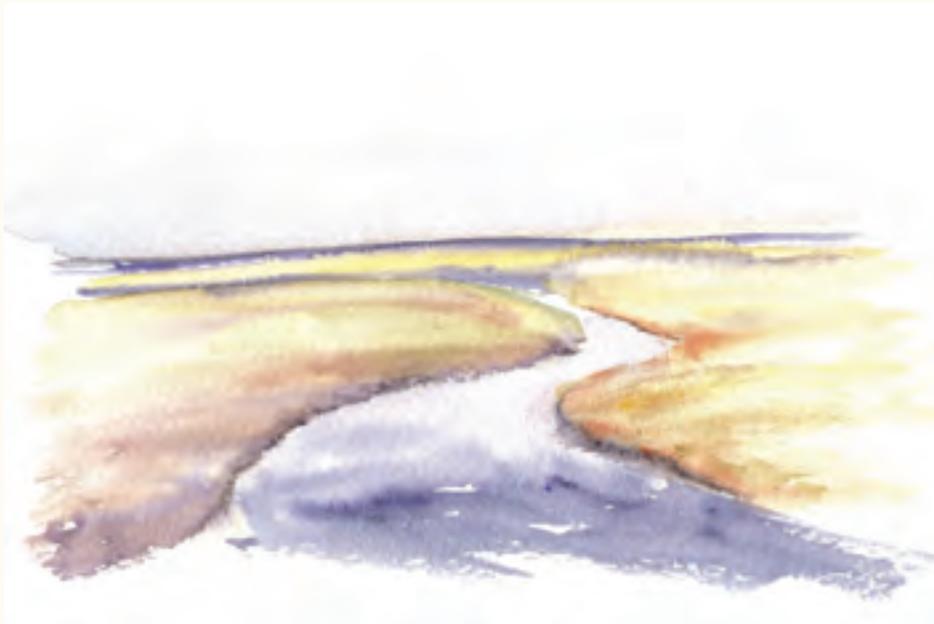
Black-tailed Godwit populations can be found mostly on low-lying peat and clay soils in the western and northern part of the country. The core areas are located in the province of Fryslân, in the northern part of the country, Northwest Overijssel and in the peat district of the provinces North Holland, South Holland and Utrecht.



The wet polders (for example in the municipality Waterland) in North Holland and the western parts of Fryslân can be considered to be the most popular Dutch breeding grounds. Both areas are situated on the shores of the Lake IJssel (IJsselmeer) and constitute a flat and highly open landscape with a mosaic of intensively and more extensively used grasslands. After spring migration, in early April, many Black-tailed Godwits return to these serene, pastoral areas to breed. In these areas Black-tailed Godwits can be observed close-up. This is also the case on four of the Dutch Wadden Isles – Texel, Terschelling, Schiermonnikoog and Ameland – which can be reached by boat.



The numbers of Black-tailed Godwits have declined dramatically over the last decades, although, nowadays, a relatively high number of them can still be found in the Netherlands. Several factors have contributed to the dramatic decrease in the Dutch population.







Godwit. However, drainage, lowering of water levels, an increase in the use of fertilizers and reseeding have resulted in a higher production of the grassland. Today grasslands are mowed several times a year instead of only twice (or once in the past). The first mowing of the year coincides with the Black-tailed Godwit's breeding season, which causes the destruction of nests and a high chick mortality among chicks. The breeding season nowadays is being pressed into a narrow time frame between arrival in the Netherlands and first mowing. The continuing lack of good breeding seasons has resulted in an ageing of the Black-tailed Godwit population in the Netherlands.

Reproduction rates have significantly decreased over the last decades mainly due to intensive mowing practices in combination with the lack of suitable habitat for chicks to grow. The survival of chicks is usually very low in the intensively managed grassland areas which, these days, are mowed very early in the season (late April). Additionally, a change in landscape, induced by falling water tables and the reconstruction of open polder areas, have led to a more unfavourable environment for meadow birds with an increased predation risk.

The change in mowing practices as part of the intensification of the farming practices has had severe negative effects on the Black-tailed Godwit's breeding grounds. Traditional cultivation methods did not have a significant effect on the breeding habitats of the Black-tailed



Organizations such as the Dutch Society for the Protection of Birds, Vogelbescherming, and Landschapsbeheer Nederland, representing most of the local and regional conservationists, are putting a great deal of effort into the concrete protection of the species, as are the government-implemented agro-environmental schemes; these are set up to improve breeding grounds by adjusting mowing activities and creating a mosaic of mown and unmown grassland. Annually, a few thousand volunteers are involved in marking and locating nests, in order to protect them in close co-operation with the farmers. Furthermore, migration studies were carried out to unravel the whereabouts of the Dutch Black-tailed Godwit populations. Although some of the projects have been successful, these efforts could not prevent the decline of the species, which essentially can be attributed to reproduction rates which are, overall, too low.





Besides the intensification of grassland management, other factors pose an additional threat to the godwit populations and their habitats: landscape changes (loss of open landscapes), urbanization and fragmentation of remaining grasslands by the construction of roads or cycling paths. As in Denmark and other European countries, the surface area of suitable breeding habitat has been drastically reduced. In this context the large-scale conversion from pastoral into arable land, notably for the growth of maize, constitutes a bottleneck. An increased risk of predation goes hand in hand with these landscape changes.





Belgium





The breeding habits of Black-tailed Godwits in Belgium and the Netherlands are similar. Threats such as the intensification of agricultural systems, the decline in suitable habitats due to urbanization, and land reclamation, hamper breeding success.

The area around the small village Uitkerke, which is located in West Flanders, is often frequented by Black-tailed Godwits.

One site of ornithological importance includes the most interesting parts of the coastal polders to the north of Brugge, which consist of grasslands, extensively used ditches and canals as well as small parts of the coastal dunes near Blankenberge.





Post-breeding migration

Black-tailed Godwits migrate southward towards their winter quarters after breeding, from late June onwards, adults preceding juveniles.

The nominate race and the Icelandic subspecies have clearly separate migration systems:

While the East Atlantic Godwits migrate down the Atlantic coast to Western Africa and the southern part of the Sahara, individuals from the Icelandic subspecies spend the winter in Great Britain and Ireland, and along the Atlantic coast of Western Europe from the Netherlands, to Spain and Portugal, with some birds reaching Morocco.

Recent migration studies of Dutch Black-tailed Godwits with satellite transmitters unravelled the mystery of the migratory routes used by several individuals. Amazingly one bird managed to cover a distance between the breeding grounds in the Netherlands to the wintering grounds in Guinea-Bissau in about 90 hours. Also some of the birds left Guinea-Bissau and Senegal in the course of December to spend the remaining time in the Inner Niger Delta in Mali, where they congregated with their congeners from the Central European breeding population.



Wintering season

The Black-tailed Godwits usually arrive at their winter quarters during the course of July-September while unsuccessful breeders may already start to arrive in the course of June or early July.

The nominate subspecies tends to winter in open freshwater habitats south of the Sahara. The main wintering areas of the East Atlantic population are situated in coastal plains of southern Senegal and Guinea Bissau, where they frequent flooded rice fields, and to a lesser extent in the Saharan flood-plains of the Senegal River Delta and the Inner Niger Delta. The Inner Niger Delta is also a core wintering area for the breeding populations from Central Europe and further east.

The Icelandic subspecies prefers to winter in estuarine habitats along the Atlantic coast from Great Britain down to Morocco, with major strongholds in the Iberian Peninsula.



Senegal



Rice fields are important habitats in all the Western African countries where the nominate race overwinters such as the rice field complexes of the Casamance in southern Senegal, which are the most important wintering area for godwits in the country. Here they feed almost exclusively on rice.



Smaller numbers are found in the middle valley and the Senegal Delta, notably in and around the Djoudj National Park. This Park also serves as habitat to a host of other species, such as crocodiles, jackals, warthogs, the Black Stork and pelicans. Also the Diawling National Park on the north bank of the Senegal River in Mauritania serves as a wintering area.







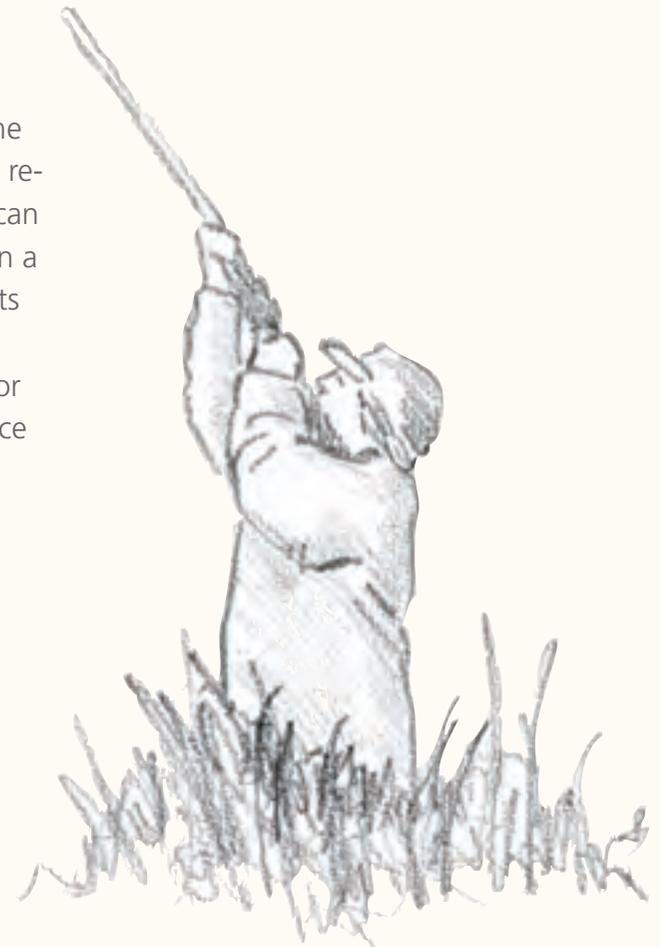


Hunting continues to pose one of the most direct threats to birds and is therefore a classical example of the pressures endangered species like the Black-tailed Godwit can face.





Today, hunting the Black-tailed Godwit is prohibited in the large majority of European countries; this has significantly reduced the pressure faced by the species. However, in African countries hunting of the Black-tailed Godwit still occurs on a certain scale. In southern Senegal, the Black-tailed Godwits may be shot by farmers to prevent alleged crop damage. This may be the case when godwits feed on newly sown or freshly-planted rice fields (trampling of plants, or eating rice kernels).



Spring migration

Spring migration and the return passage from Africa mainly take place in January to March. The first godwits from the nominate subspecies leave Guinea-Bissau and Senegal as early as the beginning of January to move to the rice fields in southern Spain and Portugal. During spring migration, Black-tailed Godwits use several staging sites in Morocco, Spain, Portugal and France to rest and to regain strength. A very large part of the population of the nominate subspecies uses staging areas in Spain and Portugal, where they gather in huge concentrations on inundated rice fields. Icelandic godwits are also present there, but usually they show a preference for coastal and brackish habitats. The birds normally reach their breeding sites between mid-March and mid-April.



Morocco





Small numbers of Icelandic godwits winter in the Moroccan wetlands. Small numbers of the nominate race also frequent Morocco on their way back from their wintering areas in West Africa.

Merja Zerga is the most important staging site for Black-tailed Godwits. This coastal lagoon harbours a diversity of habitats including brackish marshes, which are the preferred habitats of the Black-tailed Godwit in Morocco. Unfortunately, agriculture has become very intensive in this area, leading to a decrease in suitable natural habitat for staging and wintering godwits, thereby putting pressure on the species.





Spain



During the course of their spring migration, Black-tailed Godwits first touch European ground in Portugal or Spain. The initial wave of godwits arrives back at the end of December or early January. Godwits fly further inland to the rice fields in Extremadura usually after a short stopover on the west coast of Spain.

Extremadura, which hosts the most important staging region in Spain, offers large areas of inundated rice fields with shallow layers of water. In this region, large concentrations of Black-tailed Godwits can be observed feeding on rice grains.





Other migratory bird species also rest or winter in Extremadura, such as the Common Crane (*Grus grus*).

In general, the Black-tailed Godwits leave their Spanish staging grounds at the end of February or in early March.

Since the suitability of this staging site depends, to a great extent, on the cultivation of rice, the existence and maintenance of rice fields are extremely important. In years with relatively little rainfall, the area that is planted with rice may be significantly smaller. In addition, a lack of rainfall in autumn may lead to rice fields drying up, making it difficult for the Black-tailed Godwits to extract the rice grains.

Additionally, the shortage of water in combination with warm temperatures can lead to salinisation, which negatively affects rice production.

Although the Black-tailed Godwit's staging grounds are under threat, the number of godwits resting in Extremadura is still increasing. This phenomenon may, to some extent, be explained by the support provided by the European Union to revitalize the area and to promote the cultivation of rice.



France



The staging sites in France are one of the last stop-over sites during spring migration before the Black-tailed Godwits take off in all directions back to their breeding areas in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Denmark or Sweden.

In France, it is possible to spot Icelandic and continental godwits wintering together in the coastal areas.

Although the majority of adult birds from the continental population do not stop in France during post-breeding migration, juveniles or birds in a poor condition may rest there between late summer and early autumn.



The two most important traditional staging sites for Black-tailed Godwits in France are situated along the Atlantic coast (Vendée) and in the floodplains of the Basses Vallées Angevines near Angers. Large numbers of godwits arrive in these regions between early and mid-March. Migrating godwits stay there for a relatively short time span, usually not longer than the end of March. In the past decades, the number of migrating godwits in these areas has dropped considerably; habitat changes as well as the smaller population play a role.



The Basses Vallées Angevines consist of vast floodplains located in the north and immediate south of Angers, crossed by three rivers – the Mayenne, the Sarthe, and the Loir, which come together to form the Maine before flowing into the Loire.

Since these rivers are all rain-fed and interconnected, their water level fluctuates. In March, due to winter precipitation and melting snow, large areas in the Basses Vallées Angevines are inundated and offer ideal stop-over sites for migrating Black-tailed Godwits. During this period, Black-tailed Godwits can be observed foraging for invertebrates in the flooded grasslands.

However, in the same way as in several other regions which are important for the Black-tailed Godwit, changes in land use patterns in the Basses Vallées Angevines have resulted in the decline of suitable habitats. In particular, the conversion of grassland into poplar plantations over the last three decades, has led to a decrease in suitable staging sites. Furthermore, annual changes in precipitation patterns can also have a strong impact on the number of birds being able to stage in the Basses Vallées Angevines; persistently low precipitation rates can lead to insufficient inundations, thus reducing the expanse of staging sites. On the other hand, persistently heavy rainfalls can also constitute a risk if water levels become too high.





On the Atlantic coast, areas like Marais Poitevin or the region around the Golfe du Morhiban serve as staging sites for several godwits. The Golfe du Morhiban in the Bretagne is sheltered from the Atlantic Ocean by the peninsula of Rhuis and in March its intertidal mudflats are populated by godwits searching for food.

The nature reserve of Moëze-Oléron represents an important stop-over site for a high number of Black-tailed Godwits. Located near the estuary of the Charente in the south-west of Rochefort, it is characterized by its dynamic landscape of tidal mudflats, dunes, salt marshes, large lagoons and wet grassland. Its marshes, which consist mainly of fresh water marshes and mudflats, are the birds' main feeding grounds. This site is used by many Black-tailed Godwits to rest and feed before embarking on the journey back to their breeding grounds particularly during the month of March.



Drainage and the cultivation of wet grasslands in the area around the nature reserve of Moëze-Oléron have led to a decrease in the region's suitable feeding sites, thus threatening the Black-tailed Godwits, which are dependent upon these habitats.

Conservation status of the Black-tailed Godwit

The status of the Black-tailed Godwit on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species was changed from “Least Concern” to “Near Threatened” in 2006, due to the continuing decline in the size of the population of the nominate race.

The two subspecies have experienced diverging population developments over the last decades: while the Icelandic subspecies has increased significantly in numbers and expanded its breeding range, the nominate subspecies has shown declines in population numbers, and a major loss in most key breeding areas can be seen.

Notably in the Netherlands - the traditional stronghold of the Western European nominate subspecies - drastic decreases have occurred. The breeding population has diminished from an estimated 120,000 - 135,000 pairs in 1969 to 45,000 - 50,000 pairs or fewer in the early 2000s. The main cause of this dramatic decrease in population size of the nominate subspecies is the poor breeding success.

Today it is estimated that the nominate population of the Western Palearctic totals approximately 110,000 pairs throughout its range. Although its population numbers are higher compared with the Icelandic subspecies, which numbers an estimated 25,000 pairs, the nominate subspecies has still not recovered from its dramatic decline.



The Black-tailed Godwit needs your help!

Whatever your involvement, whether on an official or private basis, the survival of this captivating species is dependent on successful conservation measures!

The International Single Species Action Plan for the Black-tailed Godwit, adopted by the Contracting Parties to AEWA in 2008, provides them with a series of activities to be implemented in the Range States of the species. These measures are necessary to address the threats facing this species. Breeding and wintering habitats, in particular, urgently need to be restored and nests and chicks protected. Gaps in knowledge on the migration routes and habitats of the species also need to be filled, in order to design effective long-term conservation measures.

Governments that have not yet joined AEWA, but wish to contribute to the conservation of the Black-tailed Godwit in all its Range States, can also benefit from the International Action Plan for the species, which is available for download or in hard copy from the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat (www.unep-awa.org).

Cooperation amongst all countries and sectors is a must in order to counteract the conflicting interests involved and to reduce the threats to the bird along its flyway, often caused by agricultural practices, urban planning and hunting.

Every initiative, however big or small, can make a difference to the chances of survival for this species. Local volunteers and conservationists are encouraged to join regional conservation programmes (for further information, please contact the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat: awa@unep.de) and to make an active contribution.

We hope that you have enjoyed the journey of the Black-tailed Godwit portrayed in this book and that this species will continue to inspire nature lovers everywhere for a long time to come!



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