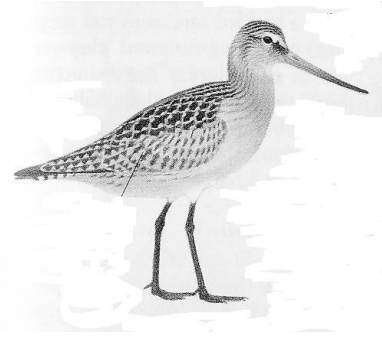


Godwits

At this time of year a number of migratory shorebirds call in at The Gann on their way south from their breeding grounds in the far north. Most people are familiar with the Curlew, and perhaps its smaller relative, the Whimbrel, and we also see parties of small waders such as Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Turnstone. Also passing through at this time are two varieties of Godwit - Bar-Tailed and Black-Tailed. At a distance they can easily be mistaken for a Curlew as they are quite large and rather a dull brownish grey, though earlier in the year when they still have traces of their summer plumage they can be quite reddish in colour.



These two Godwits are both large long legged waders with long, just slightly upturned bills. There are ways of telling them apart which I won't go into here – but the simplest distinction is that the Black-Tailed Godwit has large white bars along the wings in flight.

Bar-Tailed Godwits are circumpolar birds – there are populations which breed in Alaska and Siberia and migrate south to Australasia. It is one of these birds – a female known as E7 – which currently holds the record for the longest non-stop flight by a bird. She flew 7,200 miles directly from Alaska to New Zealand, right across the Pacific, and made no attempt to stop off at islands en route. The journey took about 9 days and she arrived having lost half her body weight. This flight was one of the first exciting results from the use of satellite tracking transmitters – the results stunned scientists who had no idea that such long flights were possible. So next time you see a rather dull Bar-Tailed Godwit, just think about the amazing feats of which these birds are capable!

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