

Threatened species of the Northern Territory

Bar-tailed godwit (northern Siberian)

Limosa lapponica menzbieri

Conservation status

Australia: Critically Endangered

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

Northern Territory: Critically Endangered

Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976

Description

The Bar-tailed Godwit is a large migratory shorebird with a long slightly upturned bill, which is pink at the base and darker towards the tip. The legs are long and dark. In non-breeding plumage (typical of Australian visitors) it has a streaked brown forehead, crown and nape, a dark line from the base of the bill through the eye and a white eyebrow. The upperparts are scalloped in browns and the underparts are white with fine brown streaking on the breast and flanks. The tail is white with strong grey-brown barring.

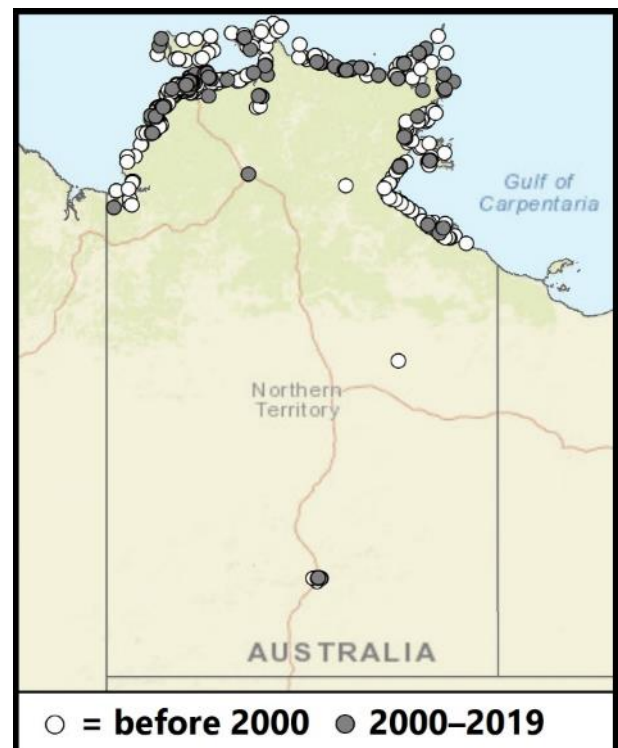
Distribution

Two subspecies of the Bar-tailed Godwit, which breed in separate breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere, overwinter in Australia¹. *Limosa lapponica menzbieri* breeds in northern Siberia and overwinters mostly in north-western Australia and in Southeast Asia. *Limosa l. baueri* breeds in west Alaska and north-east Siberia and overwinters mostly in northern and eastern Australia and New Zealand.



Credit: R. Else

Both subspecies likely migrate to the Northern Territory (NT), but records of Bar-tailed Godwits rarely identify the subspecies as they are usually only distinguishable in the field when in flight.



Caption: Known localities of the Bar-tailed Godwit (both subspecies) in the NT (nrmmaps.nt.gov.au)

In the NT, Bar-tailed Godwits have been reported along almost the entire coastline, including all major islands. The species is one of the more frequently recorded and abundant shorebird species².

In the 1990s, counts of more than 1,000 Bar-tailed Godwits in a flock were not uncommon². There are also records from Alice Springs, presumably of transitory birds.

NT conservation reserves where reported: Barranyi National Park, Casuarina Coastal Reserve, Charles Darwin National Park, Garig Gunak Barlu National Park, Kakadu National Park and Limmen National Park.

Ecology and life-history

After breeding during the northern summer on the arctic tundras of northern Siberia, Bar-tailed Godwits (northern Siberian) migrate southwards along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway to overwinter in Australasia and Asia. During this non-breeding season (the austral summer), godwits in the NT usually congregate in flocks, rarely far from the coast. They forage on intertidal mudflats or in shallow water, feeding on worms, molluscs and crustaceans. Bar-tailed Godwits are long-lived with an estimated generation length of 9.7 years¹.

Threatening processes

The main acute causes of decline for godwits migrating to Australia are habitat loss, pollution and human disturbance at migratory staging grounds in the Yellow Sea region^{3,4,6}. Habitat degradation has also occurred gradually across most of the range of this subspecies.

The non-breeding grounds of the Bar-tailed Godwit, particularly those in eastern and southern Australia, are threatened by habitat degradation and loss and human disturbance^{1,4}. Other significant threats include pollution and changes to hydrological processes^{1,4}.

Anthropogenic climate change is likely to have a long-term negative impact on the Bar-tailed Godwit, particularly through loss of intertidal habitats due to sea-level rise⁴.

Conservation objectives and management

In the NT, the primary conservation objective is to maintain a stable or increasing number of non-breeding Bar-tailed Godwits by: retaining healthy intertidal mudflat habitats; improving protection of roosting sites; managing anthropogenic disturbance at important sites when godwits are present; and incorporating requirements for the Bar-tailed Godwit into coastal planning and management.

Secondarily, the Australian Government should be supported in its international endeavours to promote conservation of shorebirds along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

References

- ¹ Garnett, S.T., Szabo, J.K., Dutson, G., 2011. The action plan for Australian Birds 2010. CSIRO Publishing, Canberra.
- ² Chatto, R., 2003. The distribution and status of shorebirds around the coast and coastal wetlands of the Northern Territory. Technical Report 73. Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory, Darwin NT.
- ³ Barter, M.A., 2002. Shorebirds of the Yellow Sea: importance, threats and conservation status. Wetlands International Global Series 9, International Wader Studies 12. Canberra, Australia.
- ⁴ Threatened Species Scientific Committee, 2016. Conservation Advice *Limosa lapponica menzbieri* Bar-tailed Godwit (northern Siberian). Department of the Environment, Canberra.
- ⁵ Rogers, D., Hassell, C. Oldland, J. Clemens, R., Boyle, A. Rogers, K., 2010. Monitoring Yellow Sea Migrants in Australia (MYSMA): North-western Australian shorebird surveys and workshops, December 2008. Birds Australia; Department of Water and the Arts, Victoria.
- ⁶ Studds, C.E., Kendall, B.E., Murray, N.J., Wilson, H.B., Rogers, D.I., Clemens, R.S., Gosbell, K., Hassell, C.J., Jessop, R., Melville, D.S. and Milton, D.A., 2017. Rapid population decline in migratory shorebirds relying on Yellow Sea tidal mudflats as stopover sites. Nat. Commun. 8, 1–7.