

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

19-94-24  
Accepted

HUDSONIAN GODWIT  
Limosa haemastica

Location: Lake Henry; Ordway; Crowley County, Colorado

Date: May 13, 1994

Setting:

Following two days of heavy rains, I was forced to park and walk to the "migrant trap" grove at Lake Henry. During my return, at approximately 3:00 p.m., I was walking south-eastward about midway along the dam. I observed a large shorebird flying directly at me, paralleling the dam face, about 30 feet off the water. The wind was blowing pretty good, about 20-30 m.p.h. and, despite its size, the bird was fighting it. I watched the bird for about 5 minutes as it flew back and forth over the dam, twice flying right over my head at about 30-40 feet height. It flapped into the wind, then would turn and soar downwind, before coursing back upwind and out over the reservoir. I observed it from the side, below and behind under good conditions for the whole period of observation. It flew out over the reservoir and a gust blew it down very close to the surface of the water so that it nearly touched the wave tops. Then it flew up high, crossed over me and continued to gain altitude, flying away from the lake, to the southwest. I observed it in my binoculars until I could no longer see it. I observed the bird with B & L 10 x 42 binoculars.

Description:

It was a large shorebird, about 16" long, including the bill. In terms of size, it initially struck me as a Willet, or a godwit or curlew of some kind. The only direct size comparison, strangely, was with Black Terns as it flew out over the lake into a small flock of them. It was much larger than the terns. It was in breeding plumage and was very striking in flight. The underparts were reddish and barred. The neck was rather long. A distinctive, long, slightly upturned bill, about 2-3 times the length of the head, and pale at the base, projected forward. The long neck and head were not as reddish as the body. From below, the flight feathers were pale grey, sharply contrasting with black wing linings (coverts and axillaries). From above, the mantle and wings were very dark, almost blackish. There was a distinct white wing stripe in the upper wing. The tail was black, bordered by a narrow band of white on the lower rump. Overall the black tail, wing and wing linings, contrasting with the white rump and wing stripe gave a distinctive, striking look, reminiscent of a Willet's flight pattern.

Similar Species:

The large size and recurved bill eliminate most other shorebirds. The American Avocet is orange above and brightly patterned. The Greater Yellowlegs and Willet are whitish, not red, underneath and have straight bills. Curlews are distinguished by downcurved bills. Of the godwits: In flight, Black-tailed Godwit is most similar, but has a stronger white wing bar and has white, not black, wing linings. Marbled Godwit is not reddish below, lacks the white rump, lacks the black tail and lacks the white wing stripe and black wing linings. Bar-tailed Godwit lacks white rump and black wing linings.

Experience with Species:

I have seen many Marbled Godwits. I have seen four previous Hudsonian Godwits in Colorado, all in breeding plumage and all in May. I saw small flocks of Hudsonian Godwits in Texas in April 1984. I have never seen Bar-tailed or Black-tailed godwits. This is the first time that I have really watched this species in flight and it is a striking and distinctive bird.

This report is prepared from notes made during and after observation.

Mark Janos  
10 Sedum Ct.  
Pueblo, CO 81001

*Mark Janos*