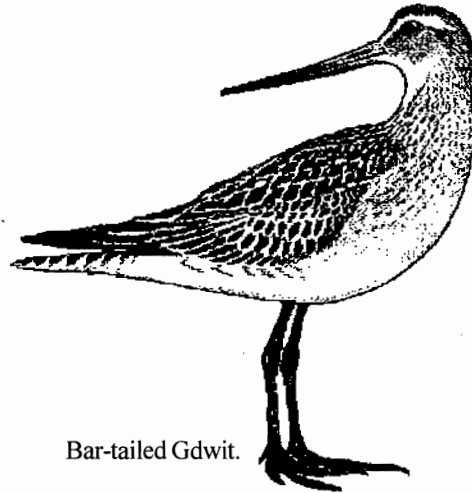


The Incredible Journeys of Waders

Looking at the small brown bird feeding on the edge of the lake you would probably not imagine that this nonchalant wader, known as the Temminck's Stint, has arrived from its far-away nesting grounds on the tundra of arctic Russia. Nearby, another larger wader, a Wood Sandpiper, has migrated southward from a wetland breeding territory in the forested Russian taiga. Waders — sandpipers, plovers, shanks, curlews, godwits, snipes, stints, and the like — are a highly migratory group of birds. Waders breeding in northern regions of North America (where they are called shorebirds) travel to wintering grounds in eastern Asia, Australia, Polynesia, South America, and western Europe. Similarly, waders breeding in northern Europe and Russia migrate south to spend their winters in Africa, India, Southeast Asia, and Australia. Many waders form large flocks during migration and congregate in tidal estuaries and freshwater wetlands. Survival of these wader populations depends on an abundance of high-energy food resources at migratory stopovers, such as worms, clams, and other invertebrates. Because shorebirds concentrate in large numbers during migration, they are extremely vulnerable to oil spills, habitat destruction, disturbance, and changes in water management. Across the globe, conservation networks have been formed to identify, manage, and protect wader concentration areas, or flyways, throughout the entire range of these migratory birds. The Asia-Pacific Waterbird Strategy was developed to provide a flyway conservation framework for migratory waterbirds (waterfowl, cranes, and shorebirds) throughout eastern Asia. Conservationists have also worked cooperatively to conserve flyway populations of other waterbirds such as cranes.

The Bar-tailed Godwit is one of the wader champions of long-distance, non-stop migration. This large, rusty-orange shorebird, with a long up-turned bill, breeds across northern Eurasian and northwestern

Alaska. In the fall, Alaska-breeding godwits aggregate in tidal lagoons of southwestern Alaska where they add fat reserves. When they store enough fat reserves to make the journey, the godwits take off over the Pacific Ocean and don't land until they reach New-Zealand a 10,600 kilometer trek. This may be the longest non-stop migration of any bird. What makes this feat even more spectacular is the realization that the young godwits, at only 4-5 months old, will make this long journey for the first time with no assistants from their parents!



Bar-tailed Godwit.

Throughout the world, people value waders. They are fascinated by the remarkable accounts of their annual migrations and realize that the presence of waders indicates healthy wetland and grassland environments. The fact that waders concentrate in spectacular numbers during migration provides excellent opportunities for education about the conservation of birds and their

habitats. The growth of bird festivals at migration stopovers throughout the world attests to the interest in waders. The unique traits of waders make them compelling material to teach children, and adults, about the natural world. The migration of waders links communities, countries, and continents in conservation. Despite the interest in waders, much is still unknown about their population status and migration biology in the Central Asian-Indian Flyway. Scant evidence suggests that many populations are stable or declining and very few are increasing. Results of a recent workshop in Spain concluded that many wader populations throughout all of the global flyways are suffering declines. Immediate actions are needed to conserve the wetland and grassland environments that these birds depend on. By sharing research, education, and management ideas, we can work together to maintain sustainable natural environments for communities world-wide.

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