

WESTERN NORTH AMERICAN RECORDS OF EURASIAN BAR-TAILED GODWITS

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The Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) breeds discontinuously across a vast expanse of tundra from Alaska west to Scandinavia and spends the nonbreeding season in coastal areas of the Eastern Hemisphere from New Zealand to western Africa (Cramp and Simmons 1983, Higgins and Davies 1996). Recent authorities recognize three to five subspecies of the Bar-tailed Godwit (Higgins and Davies 1996, Piersma et al. 1996, Engelmoer and Roselaar 1998, Dickinson 2003, Clements et al. 2013, Dickinson and Remsen 2013). Here we follow Dickinson and Remsen (2013) in recognizing five subspecies (listed from west to east by breeding distribution): *L. l. lapponica* (Linnaeus, 1758; type locality Swedish Lapland), *L. l. taymyrensis* Engelmoer and Roselaar, 1998 (near Lake Taymyr, central Siberia), *L. l. menzibieri* Portenko, 1936 (Indigirka River delta, eastern Siberia), *L. l. anadyrensis* Engelmoer and Roselaar, 1998 (Markovo, Russian Far East), and *L. l. baueri* Naumann, 1836 (Norfolk Island, Tasman Sea). These differ in size (e.g., bill and wing length; Portenko 1936, Higgins and Davies 1996, Engelmoer and Roselaar 1998, Tomkovich 2010) and plumage (e.g., extent of ventral red feathering in breeding plumage and extent of red breeding feathers on the mantle and scapulars; Rynn 1982). However, given the difficulties in distinguishing subtle differences among these characteristics in the field, we focus on the more discernible variation of the rump, lower back, and axillaries (Cramp and Simmons 1983, Engelmoer and Roselaar 1998, McCaffery and Gill 2001, Tomkovich 2010). At the western end of the species' breeding distribution—from Fennoscandia to the Kanin Peninsula in Russia—nominate *lapponica* shows an unpatterned white rump and lower back with a few dark thin streaks (the rump contrasting greatly with the dark of the rest of the dorsal surface) and axillaries with minimal dark barring (Nieboer et al. 1985, Higgins and Davies 1996, Engelmoer and Roselaar 1998). At the other extreme, the Alaska-breeding subspecies *baueri* has a uniformly dark dorsum, including the rump and lower back, and axillaries extensively barred dark (Higgins and Davies 1996, Engelmoer and Roselaar 1998, Tomkovich 2010). Subspecies *menzibieri*, *taymyrensis*, and *anadyrensis* represent steps of clinal variation in plumage between *lapponica* and *baueri*, most notably in the rump and lower back (Figure 1; Engelmoer and Roselaar 1998, Tomkovich 2010). Subspecific limits of the populations of Siberia and the Russian Far East are in need of further study and clarification (McCaffery and Gill 2001, Mlodinow and Aanerud 2006, Tomkovich 2008, 2010).

On 5 June 2010, at Tasaychek Lagoon (67.2725° N, 163.7606° W) near Cape Krusenstern in northwestern Alaska, while observing a foraging flock of about 60 Bar-tailed Godwits, Hajdukovich and DeCicco photographed a male that had a light lower back and rump contrasting greatly with the rest of the dark dorsum, differing noticeably from the other birds in the flock (Figure 2). After reviewing additional photos in various stages of flight, we noted finer details of its plumage; it was obvious that it had significantly less dark barring in the rump and lower back than *baueri* (Figures 2 and 3). This amount of barring in the rump and lower back—equivalent to a score of 3 (Tomkovich 2010: Figure 2)—is outside the known variation of *baueri* but falls within the variation of both *menzibieri* and *taymyrensis* (Engelmoer and Roselaar

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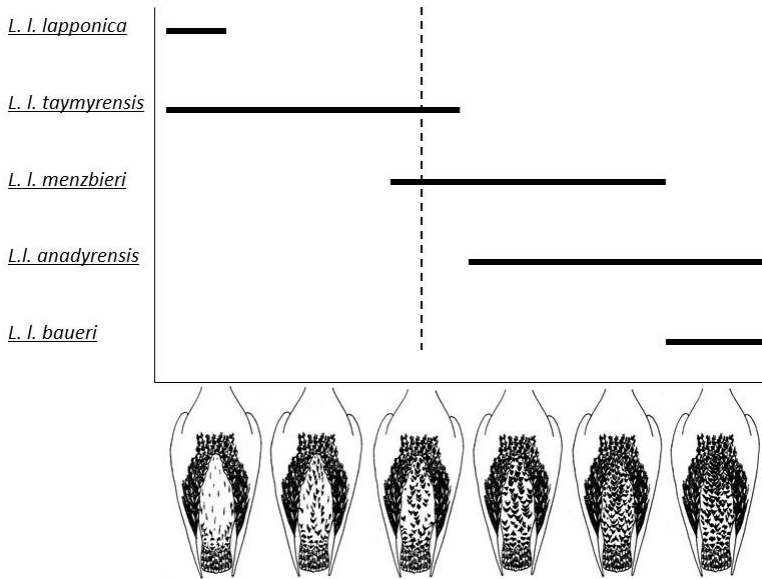


Figure 1. Geographic variation in the back and lower rump of the five subspecies of the Bar-tailed Godwit, *Limosa lapponica*. Figure based on Figure 2 of Tomkovich (2010).

1998, Tomkovich 2010; R. E. Gill, Jr., and B. J. McCaffery, in litt., 2011). Tomkovich noted that the axillary pattern of the bird in question was equivalent to a score of D of Engelmoer and Roselaar (1998; Figure 13). Godwits with an axillary score of D and a back pattern analogous to the individual in question (score 3) have not been found among *anadyrensis* or *baueri* but have been found in both *menzbieri* and *taymyrensis* (Engelmoer and Roselaar 1998, Tomkovich 2010).

Although not conclusive, migration strategy may be useful in estimating the origin of the bird we observed. For example, during northbound migration *menzbieri* and presumably *anadyrensis* migrate along the East Asian–Australasian Flyway and likely, on the basis of timing, mix with *baueri* at the Yellow Sea (Wilson et al. 2007, Batley et al. 2012, Lappo et al. 2012). On the other hand, *taymyrensis* uses the West Asian–East African and East Atlantic flyways and presumably mixes only occasionally with populations using the East Asian–Australasian Flyway, in particular with *baueri* (Cramp and Simmons 1983, Tomkovich 2008). Mixing of *baueri*, *menzbieri*, and *anadyrensis* also likely occurs on the nonbreeding grounds in Australia (J. R. Conklin, Univ. of Groningen, in litt., 2014). Although the individual in question cannot be assigned to subspecies definitively, it is clearly not *baueri* and, on the basis of plumage characteristics and migratory patterns, most likely originated from the breeding range of *menzbieri*. Without a specimen, and because of the overlap in plumage of *menzbieri*, *taymyrensis*, and *anadyrensis*, it is not possible for us to be any more confident in the bird's identity.

There are three previous reports from western North America of Bar-tailed Godwits that were not *baueri*. All were in fall: one in Washington, a juvenile at Blaine, Whatcom Co., 28 August–1 September 2002 (Mlodinow and Aanerud 2006) and two in Califor-

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Figure 3. Four Bar-tailed Godwits with the light-backed male that is not *baueri* in the center flanked by two female *baueri* and a male *baueri* to the far right, at Tasaycheck Lagoon near Cape Krusenstern, northwestern Alaska, 5 June 2010. Note the very pale rump and uppertail coverts of the center bird in comparison to the typical example of *baueri* on the left.

Photo by Lucas H. DeCicco



Figure 2. Flock of Bar-tailed Godwits with the male light-backed bird, representing a subspecies other than *baueri* (center left) in comparison to dark-backed *baueri* at Tasaycheck Lagoon near Cape Krusenstern, northwestern Alaska, 5 June 2010.

Photo by Nicholas R. Hajdukovich

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nia, an adult at Point Mugu, Ventura Co., 30 August 1990 (Patten and Erickson 1994, Hamilton et al. 2007) and a juvenile at Bolinas Lagoon, Marin Co., 20 September 1988 (Hamilton et al. 2007). These three records do not include photographs but are accompanied by written descriptions. The Washington bird was said to show an extensive white rump and sparsely marked axillaries that “indicate[d] *lapponica*, though *menzbieri* could not be eliminated” (Mlodinow and Aanerud 2006:44). Both California birds were described as showing “mostly white rumps that exhibited other marks typical of *menzbieri* or *lapponica*” (Hamilton et al. 2007:172); *taymyrensis* and *andaryensis* were not explicitly considered in the discussion of these three records. The individual that we photographed represents the first photo-documented record of a Bar-tailed Godwit other than *baueri* in western North America.

We thank Jim Johnson and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Migratory Bird Management, for the opportunity to work in this remote area of western Alaska. Tina Moran, Lee Anne Ayres, and Eric Sieh, Selawik National Wildlife Refuge, were extremely helpful in facilitating our field work. The extensive identification comments provided by Phil Battley, Adrian Boyle, Jesse Conklin, Daniel Gibson, Robert Gill, Jr., Chris Hassell, Steven Heinl, Aaron Lang, Brian McCaffery, Theodore Tobish, Jr., and Jack Withrow were greatly appreciated and integral in the development of this note. We appreciate the editorial comments of Steve Matsuoka, Jim Johnson, Jesse Conklin, Nils Warnock, Daniel D. Gibson, and Robert Gill, Jr. Funding for the field work from which this observation stemmed was provided by the Survey Monitoring and Assessment program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The findings and conclusions in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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Accepted 18 November 2014