The ***Hudsonian Godwit*** *(Limosa haemastica)* is a large shorebird, but the smallest of the four godwit species. This incredible long-distance migrant flies from the Canadian and Alaskan arctic to southernmost South America. Notable stopover sites among the few that are known include rice fields and other flooded areas in the U.S. Central Flyway and intertidal estuaries in southern Brazil and northern Argentina. The total estimated population is 70,000 birds. Hudsonian Godwits are one of the least-studied species of shorebirds breeding in North America. Trend data, although sparse, indicate some breeding populations have declined. The Hudsonian Godwit is listed as a species of **High Concern** in both the U.S. and Canadian Shorebird Conservation Plans.

Photo: © Blair Nikula

SHOREBIRD RECOVERY
HUDSONIAN GODWIT
~ACTION PLAN SUMMARY~

Species Description

The Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*) is the smallest and least well known of the four godwit species (*others are Marbled, Bar-tailed, Black-tailed*). There are no recognized subspecies or races. Despite the high degree of genetic variation within each breeding population, no morphological or behavioral differences are noted. In breeding season, males have much brighter dark-red plumage than females, who are brown overall with some red on the breast.

Population Outlook

No systematic breeding surveys of the Hudsonian Godwit have been conducted. Limited data from population counts at migration stopover sites and wintering areas have indicated annual declines; more current winter survey estimates suggest a more stable population. Low population numbers (approximately 70,000 birds), a long migration with variable stops, and a reliance on a few very important wintering and staging sites make Hudsonian Godwits particularly vulnerable to threats.

Threats

Habitat loss and degradation in breeding and staging areas of Alaska and at Canada's Mackenzie Delta is a growing concern, as is urban sprawl at stopover sites, particularly in Texas. **Contamination** of habitat by agricultural runoff is an issue at several stopover and wintering sites. The discharge of petroleum-based contaminants into bays and the risk of oil spills in shipping lanes are of particular concern in southern South America. **Disturbance** by people and dogs to roosting and feeding godwits at stopover and wintering sites, particularly by algae collectors at Isla Chiloé, Chile, incurs a high energetic cost for the birds. **Global climate change** is affecting composition, quality, and availability of godwit habitats, as well as wind and weather patterns important to migration strategies.

This fact sheet is a summary of: Senner, N.R. 2007. **Conservation Plan for the Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*)**. Version 1.0. Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, Manomet, Massachusetts.

Recommended citation: Senner, N.R. 2009. **Summary sheet for the Conservation Plan for the Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*).** (Gutowski, M., D. Frank, and T. Fish, Eds). Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, Manomet, Massachusetts, USA.

For a copy of this and other species plans and summaries, please visit http://www.whsrn.org/conservation-plans.

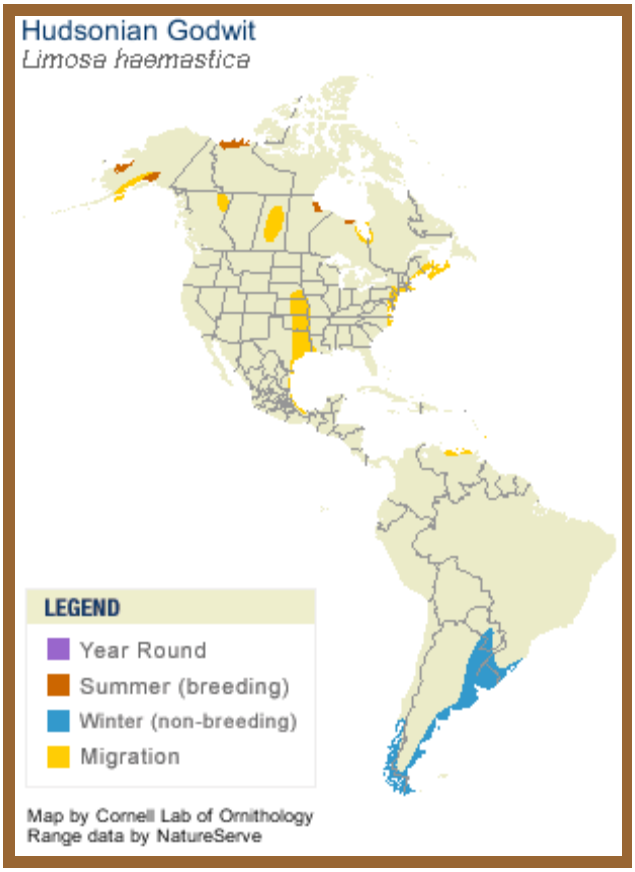
WHSRN
WESTERN HEMISPHERE SHOREBIRD RESERVE NETWORK

Migration

Migration pattern is thought to be elliptical: southbound birds leave Canada, fly over the Atlantic Ocean, stop at sites along the Amazon Basin, then proceed to coastal sites in southern Brazil, Argentina, and southern Chile. Northbound birds stay to the west after leaving South America and make landfall in coastal northern Mexico and Texas. Since publishing this plan, researchers have tracked Hudsonian Godwits making 6,000-mile nonstop flights. Previously, only shorter flights of a few hundred to a thousand miles were known, particularly in central North America.

Southbound migration from Alaska begins in late June for some males, followed by females then juveniles in mid-July and early August. By mid-October, all individuals are gone from northern staging areas. The majority of birds begin arriving in South America in September.

Usually, the majority of northbound birds leave South American sites by late February and early March; however, new data show later departures of mid-March through late April.



Conservation Strategies and Actions

To conserve the Hudsonian Godwit, the recommended high-priority actions are:

By 2007, create a Hudsonian Godwit Working Group; designate Isla Chiloé, Chile, as a WHSRN Site of Hemispheric Importance; create a cohort of color-banded and flagged godwits; and identify and protect important breeding areas.

By 2008, establish a cohort of Hudsonian Godwits using satellite trackers or data loggers, and designate additional important areas for godwits in South America as WHSRN and Ramsar sites.

By 2009, initiate a godwit monitoring program in the Southern Hemisphere; resume surveying of all boreal winter sites; initiate regular surveys of North American staging areas during southbound migration; initiate more intensive conservation efforts at focal sites in South America, particularly Bahía Blanca, Tierra del Fuego, and Isla Chiloé.

By 2010-2015, complete satellite-transmitter/data-logger tracking project; complete study of godwit breeding/nonbreeding habits; initiate citizen science monitoring programs and Migratory Bird Days/Festivals across the Southern Hemisphere.

- **Natural History:** Hudsonian Godwits breed in Alaska and Canada, and winter in southern South America. Little is known about most aspects of the godwit's annual cycle.

- **Nesting Habitat**: Breeding godwits prefer open sedge meadows with small ponds. Nests are usually in small upland areas or hummocks within the marsh. Close proximity to tidal mudflats is characteristic, which allows the non-incubating member of a pair to feed.

- **Foraging Habitat:** In South America, godwits use large intertidal estuaries characterized by strong tidal fluctuations and deep, soft mud. In North America, they forage more inland, in flooded agricultural fields or lake and reservoir beds with low water levels (freshwater and saline). There is inter-annual variation in the use of some sites, driven by need.

- **Important Foods**: Hudsonian Godwits forage for a wide variety of prey and plant items, but the type and seasonal importance of these foods remains unknown.

The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) is a partnership-driven, hemisphere-wide, site-based shorebird conservation initiative that began in 1985. It is facilitated by the WHSRN Executive Office, a program of the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences located in Manomet, Massachusetts, USA. Learn more at http://www.whsrn.org.