

# BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee

## Unusual Record Report Form

<b>Full Name:</b> Chris Rehberg	Office Use
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	<b>Phone No:</b>
	<b>Email:</b>

<b>Species Name:</b> Hudsonian Godwit	<b>Scientific Name:</b>
Date(s) and time(s) of observation:	25 Sep 2019, 07:50 to 08:20AM
How long did you watch the bird(s)?	30 minutes
First and last date of occurrence:	25 Sep 2019
Distance to bird:	10 metres

**Site Location** Private beach behind properties adjacent to Dover Park (East), Blakehurst, Sydney, NSW. (Note – birds on this beach are observable from Dover Park (East), which is public land. However I have permission from the landholder adjacent to that park, to cross his land, to access that beach for birdwatching – which is how I was able to come within 10 metres of the bird).

**Habitat** (describe habitat in which the bird was seen):  
Sandy beach approx. 100 to 150 metres long with multiple houses adjacent to beach, a single jetty at southern end, multiple jetties at northern end. The beach is in Kogarah Bay just inside the mouth of the Georges River where it flows into Botany Bay.

**Sighting conditions** (weather, visibility, light conditions etc.):  
Early morning, bright, sunny, calm weather conditions.

**To your knowledge, is the species seen frequently at this site?**  
No. I have checked eBird records and can find no Sydney records for this species. Nearest record to the north is near Newcastle, NSW (Jan 1983) and nearest record south is Lake Wolumboola near Culburra Beach (near Nowra), NSW (apparently three birds: Dec 2015 to Jan 2016; Jun 2018 to Aug 2018; Mar 2019). The NSW BioNet wildlife atlas has 3 records from separate months in 1984 – all from Kooragang Island, also near Newcastle, NSW.

**Were other observers present Do any of the other observers disagree with your identification, if so, who?** (please give names, addresses and phone numbers)? **No.**

**How confident are you of your identification?**, e.g. 70%, 100%. If not 100%, why not?  
100%

**Please confirm that you are willing for BARC to display your images** (fully credited with your name) electronically  
YES or NO  
Yes

**Other details:** e.g. Do you have historical and or anecdotal information/comments relating to the prior occurrence/status of the species within or near this location?

There was a Hudsonian Godwit at Lake Wolumboola in March this year – which I observed in photographs I took on 30 March. That date appears to be the last occurrence of the species at that site this year and there are records there from several prior years.

**Physical Description of Bird - *Please describe only what you saw:*** (1) No. of individuals present (living or dead); (2) age (adult, juvenile, immature) and sex; (3) size and shape; (4) plumage colour and pattern (including any details of moult); (5) colour of bill, eyes and legs/feet; (6) calls; (7) behaviour, movements, flight pattern, and anything else that might help to identify the bird e.g. feeding, interactions with other birds, describe where the bird was – on ground, in canopy, flying etc. Were comparisons made with other species?

- 1) Single living Hudsonian Godwit (plus two Silver Gulls, one White-faced Heron)
- 2) I don't have knowledge on discerning age stages for this species
- 3) Godwit shape – I'm familiar with Bar-tailed Godwits from regular observations. I can only compare this bird with the Silver Gulls and it was smaller than those. There were no other Godwits present with which to get a relative sizing.
- 4) Plumage greyish-brown on dorsal surfaces; white on underside. Photographs taken of bird during short flight. These show white rump with black tail. Also show the underside of wing, that being blackish on forward half, and pale silver-grey on rear half – matching the illustration in my Morcombe app for Hudsonian Godwit and clearly different to Black-tailed Godwit in the same app. Tail feathers appeared worn, but I am unclear whether they are simply spread out (without overlap from one feather to next) or whether that is a sign of being worn. Small white mark ahead of upper half of eye but otherwise the feathers around the eye appear similar in colour to the remainder of face – in particular not a prominent eyebrow. (This observation made from photograph).
- 5) Distal 50-55% of bill blackish; proximal 45-50% pink. Bill slightly upcurved. Eye dark/black. Legs greyish / slate grey.
- 6) No calls heard.
- 7) Feeding in shallows. Tide was half way from high to low. Slowly walking back and forth through shallows, dipping bill into substrate. At one point it flew some 10 to 20 metres before continuing to feed.

**Please indicate other species with which you think it might be confused and how these were eliminated?**

**Bar-tailed Godwit** – on first observing the bird from a distance I was taking photos and checking those, hoping for a glimpse of the tail, in order to check whether it might be a Bar-tailed Godwit (which is a regular bird here). At that distance I got the impression that the tail might not be barred, and might actually be black. The bird did not lift wings for observation of wing features. Given the above observation I approached closer to the bird (note: I do have prior permission from the land owner to cross over to the beach – this approach requires permission of the land owner). The bird began walking away but in no great hurry. Bar-tailed Godwits I have seen at this location tend to flee more quickly and/or even fly off pretty quickly. I was able to take better photographs much nearer the bird. At one point it did fly some 10 to 20m to circle back behind me where it landed and continued feeding. During that flight sequence I managed some photos of the tail/rump (excluding Bar-tailed Godwit) and a single photo of the under-wing.

**Black-tailed Godwit** – per above, the single photo of the underwing matches Hudsonian Godwit and does not match Black-tailed Godwit. I would not be confident enough to authoritatively remark on head/bill/eye/plumage features that might also distinguish the bird, but have photographs which I have shown to online identification groups where the consensus is agreement with Hudsonian Godwit.

**Was the description written from memory?** Some aspects from memory (black tail, white rump, curvature and length of bill) – with the first two features checked against Morcombe app during my observations of the bird, in order to exclude Bar-tailed Godwit, and some from photographs (under wing) checked 30 minutes after leaving the site to double check whether it might be a Hudsonian Godwit, which I did not expect so much as a possible Black-

tailed Godwit). Other features (bill colour, eye, legs) described from photographs (back of camera view).

**Were photographs taken? (please include where possible)**

Yes

**What experience have you had with the species in question?** (Did you know it was a Rare bird when you first saw it?)

I was aware of three species of Godwit possible at that location. I was aware that Hudsonian Godwit was the most rare. I travelled to the south coast to search for a Hudsonian Godwit in March. Although I did not identify it in the field, it was visible in a photograph taken of a flock of some 60-100 birds. At that time I noted that its white wing bars on the dorsal surface help distinguish it from Black-tailed Godwit, and the black tail / white rump distinguish both (Black-tailed and Hudsonian) from Bar-tailed.

Whenever I see Godwits I make an attempt to discern a black tail – as I have never identified a Black-tailed Godwit. In my observations of this bird I first believed its tail may well be black, from the distant observations. This led me to approach closer and hope to observe additional features – especially regarding the rump/tail and dorsal wing pattern. I did not, at the time, recall that the under-wing pattern can be used to discern Black-tailed from Hudsonian however fortunately I managed a photo of the underwing.

On confirming the black tail in the field I believed I had found a Black-tailed Godwit and didn't really expect the rarer Hudsonian Godwit. It was only after leaving the site that I thought I should double-check in case this actually is a Hudsonian instead of Black-tailed. At that point I referred to my app to learn that the under wing can distinguish the two, checked my photographs, found that underwing photograph and realized this was a Hudsonian. (For what it's worth, it means that while I have now twice observed Hudsonian Godwit in NSW, I have yet to record a single Black-tailed! And not for lack of traveling to their regular haunts either!)

**Name:** Chris Rehberg





