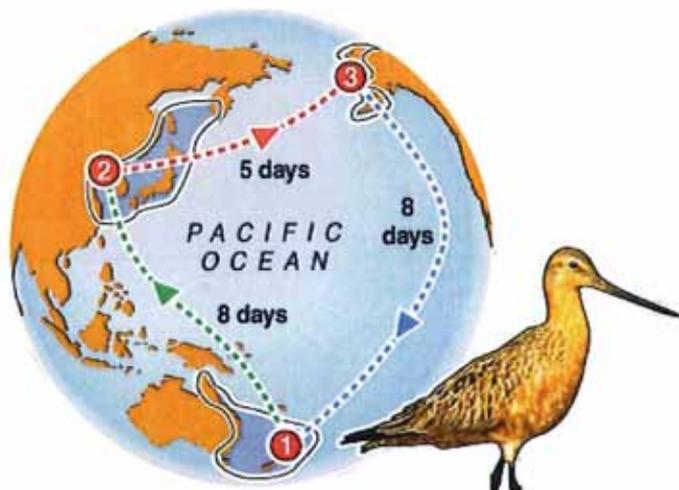


Fact Sheet

The Eastern Bar-Tailed Godwits are a much loved part of the Canterbury coast. Godwits (Kuaka) are large brown wading birds that visit our shores every year travelling long distances to get here in time for our summer. Godwits breed and feed in the 24hour daylight of the Alaskan summer before undertaking a record non-stop migratory flight south to New Zealand's coastline.



Migration - across the world in 8 days!

Rather than putting up with the cold during the winter, many birds migrate to warmer climates for several months each year. In terms of migrating birds, godwits are ultra-long-distance marathon runners!

- Godwits leave Alaska when it starts to cool off. They arrive in New Zealand in September and leave in late February/early March. They leave Alaska when it starts to cool off.
- Their non-stop flight from Alaska to the Avon/Heathcote Estuary in Christchurch covers over 11,000 km in just 8 days.
- The godwits feed and roost here from September to the end of February.
- The juveniles (teenagers) stay on in Christchurch for the following winter as they are too young to breed.
- The godwits' return flight takes them to the Yellow Sea region of Korea/China for a stopover. These stopovers are called staging grounds and are places for the birds to further refuel/rest. The flight from Christchurch to the Yellow Sea covers another 10,000 km in 8 days.
- After a rest and more feeding, the godwits continue their journey back to their Alaskan breeding grounds with a further 5 day, 7,000 km flight.



GODWITS

The world-famous
record-breaking birds!

Activity ideas

- **READ**
"Skalaska's New Home" by Marlene J Bennetts.
- **WRITE**
A newspaper article, a radio script or a story board for a news report outlining the challenges faced by the godwits during their time here and how we can help.
- **ATTEND**
The farewell ceremony at Southshore Spit- see the Christchurch City Council (CCC) website for details www.ccc.govt.nz
- **TAKE ACTION!**
Organise or participate in an estuary/ waterway clean up.
- **TRACE**
Trace their route in an atlas.
- **DESIGN**
A sign that would show people where to walk on the beach so the godwits can stay safe and rested.
- **CONSTRUCT**
A crossword puzzle using the definitions of the words in the lingo box.
- **CALCULATE**
During their flight here, on average, how far does a godwit travel
 - every hour?
 - every minute?

How many times would you have to travel to and from school before you had travelled the same distance a godwit covers on its flight from Alaska to New Zealand?

Find the percentage of godwits that fly to: - Fiji

 - Australia
 - New Zealand

Fact Sheet

GODWITS

Feeding



During the Arctic summer (our winter) godwits breed and feed their chicks on insects and other arthropods. During their time at the estuary they feed mostly on sea worms (polychaete), mud crabs and small shellfish (swallowed whole).



Godwits feed at low tide. An abundance of food is necessary to ensure the godwit is in peak physical form for its flight home. The quality of water in the estuary has a huge impact on the quantity of food available.



Godwits will be up to 55% fat by the time they are ready to leave (that's over half their body weight). They will lose almost half of their weight during their migratory flight.

Local Information

The Christchurch Cathedral bell peals out for 30 minutes when the first godwits are spied by the park rangers on their arrival at the Avon/Heathcote Estuary. Approximately 300 juvenile godwits will not make the flight back to Alaska, staying instead in Christchurch for winter as they are not yet old enough to breed. The best viewing can be done an hour either side of high tide at the end of Southshore Spit - PLEASE take care not to disturb these amazing birds. Other areas in Canterbury that godwits often roost and feed include Lyttelton Harbour, Brooklands Lagoon, Lake Ellesmere and the Ashley Estuary. A farewell ceremony open to all is conducted at Southshore Spit at the time of their departure (early March).

It's up to us because of the continuing challenges faced by these little travellers we must ensure that they are able to get into peak condition before leaving. It is becoming more and more difficult for them to get what they need along the way.



Issues godwits face!

Disturbance

- Godwits roost on the beach at high tide.
- Walkers and dogs can easily distress these birds at these times.
- Godwits must be well rested and in peak condition in order to survive their return flight. If not they will die from exhaustion at sea.
- Kayakers often land on the roosting islands or paddle too close, and this is an increasing problem.

Water quality

- The quality of the water flowing through our estuary affects the amount of good food available for the godwits to refuel on. It is essential that the rivers and waterways are healthy to maintain water quality in the estuary.

Loss of habitat/staging grounds

- Godwits must have access to feeding grounds so they can build up fat reserves to keep them fuelled for their long-haul flights. Staging grounds (the stop-over points such as the Yellow Sea region of China and Korea) are increasingly being reclaimed for human use. The building of sea walls and the reclamation of estuary land destroys tidal feeding/roosting grounds essential for godwits to continue their journey.

Phenomenal figures:

Non-stop flight from Alaska to
Christchurch = 11,000 km in 8 days

Flight from Christchurch to Yellow Sea =
10,000 km in 8 days

Yellow Sea to Alaska =
7,000 km in 5 days

Number of godwits making the trip to:

Fiji = 200
Australia = 15,000
New Zealand = 80,000

Godwits can fly at average speeds of
80 km/hr

Before they leave on their flights, up to
55% of their body weight can be fat.

Learn the lingo:

Find the meaning of these words:

Migration

Staging grounds

Tundra

Estuary

Flyway

Reclamation



Think global, act local

We must be pro-active in reducing disturbance to the resting birds... the way we treat these birds will help them to survive the next leg of their journey.

What should we do....?

- Make sure dogs are on leashes around the areas the godwits are roosting.
- If you are walking in these areas, give the godwits lots of room to feel safe. Walk between them and the dunes, NOT between them and the sea, because this can frighten them.
- If you see a dog chasing a godwit, report it to the CCC animal controls team.
- Consider whether your actions could affect the health of our estuary, and the creatures that depend on it. Make efforts to leave a positive impact on the Ihutai.