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Spring migration of Black-tailed Godwits in Iberia 2014

Mission Report Sado, Tejo and Extremadura



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Groningen, December 2014

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Summary 2014

Introduction and aims

In 2004 the University of Groningen has started a long-term demographic project on a partly colour-ringed breeding population of Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* in SW Friesland, The Netherlands (read more on <http://www.rug.nl/research/animal-ecology/research/piersma-lab/meadow-birds>). From half December onwards, Black-tailed Godwits leave their wintering areas in West-Africa to their stopover areas in southern Iberia. Here they are confined to three main areas: Doñana NP and Extremadura in Spain and the rice fields surrounding the Tejo and Sado estuaries near Lisbon in Portugal. Resighting color marked birds during the stopover period is necessary for several reasons. Firstly, if a godwit disperses outside our study area, the chance that it will be resighted elsewhere in The Netherlands is small. Without the resightings in the stopover area, we would assume that this individual is dead and therefore underestimate annual survival. Secondly, with enough resightings in the Iberian Peninsula we can calculate seasonal survival. In other words, we can calculate in which period mortalities occur more often. Thirdly, by measuring the density of individuals with colour marks, we can monitor the population size of the western European part of the Black-tailed Godwit population. Below you will find a summary and detailed day-to-day trip report of our work in Portugal and Extremadura in 2014.

Overview Sado and Tejo estuaries

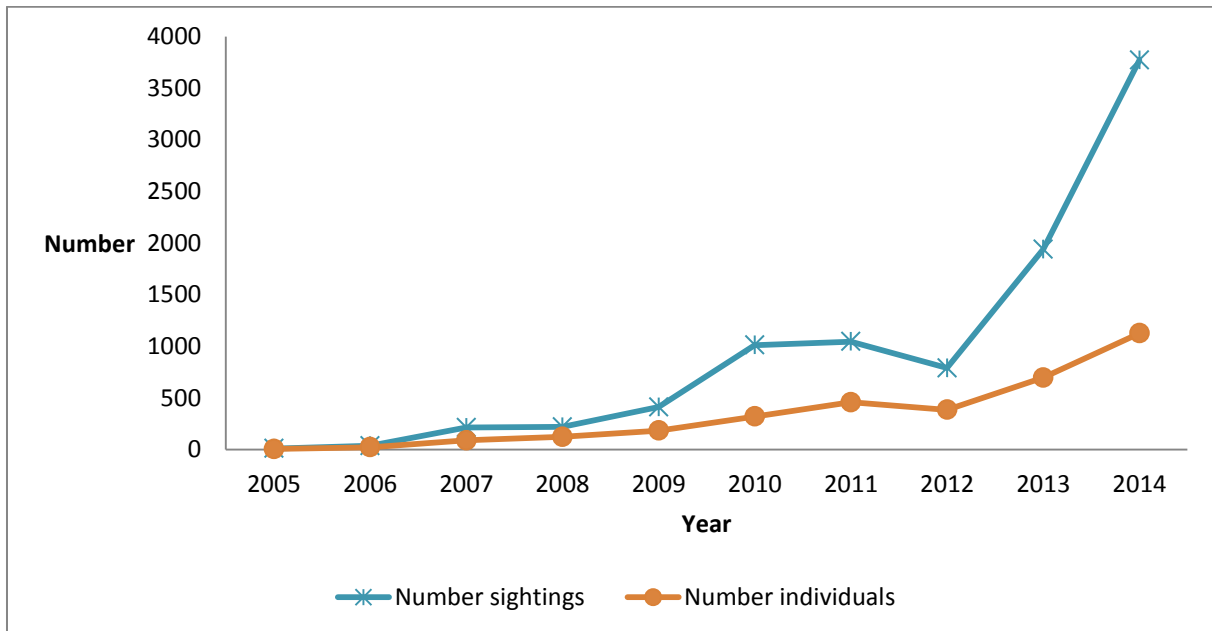
The spring migration period in 2014 was one of extremes in the Lisbon area. After an average January the weather turned really bad in the first two weeks of February. Heavy rains and strong winds resulted in flooding of ricefields and roads and sometimes disadvantageous resighting conditions. Nevertheless we established a new day-record of 256 resighted individuals! This was partly allowed by the fact that godwits were present in unprecedented high concentrations. In the last days of January a flock of 52.000 birds was present in only one field at Ponta da Erva/ Giganta ricefields and this number grew to more than 70.000 individuals by mid February. Even in late February around 35.000 individuals were still there and the sighting of new individuals every day strongly suggests a considerable turnover. In contrast to these high concentrations, the Sado estuary was for the 3rd year in a row almost vacant. Foraging conditions in the Ponta da Erva/ Giganta area were optimal with new fields being ploughed regularly whereas in the Sado almost no fields had been ploughed yet. There seems to be an ongoing trend of godwits concentrating in this particular part of the Tejo area and it might even start to affect the numbers in Extremadura (see below). In total 2232 resightings were made of 660 individuals with a full colour ring combination of the RUG-program.

Overview Extremadura

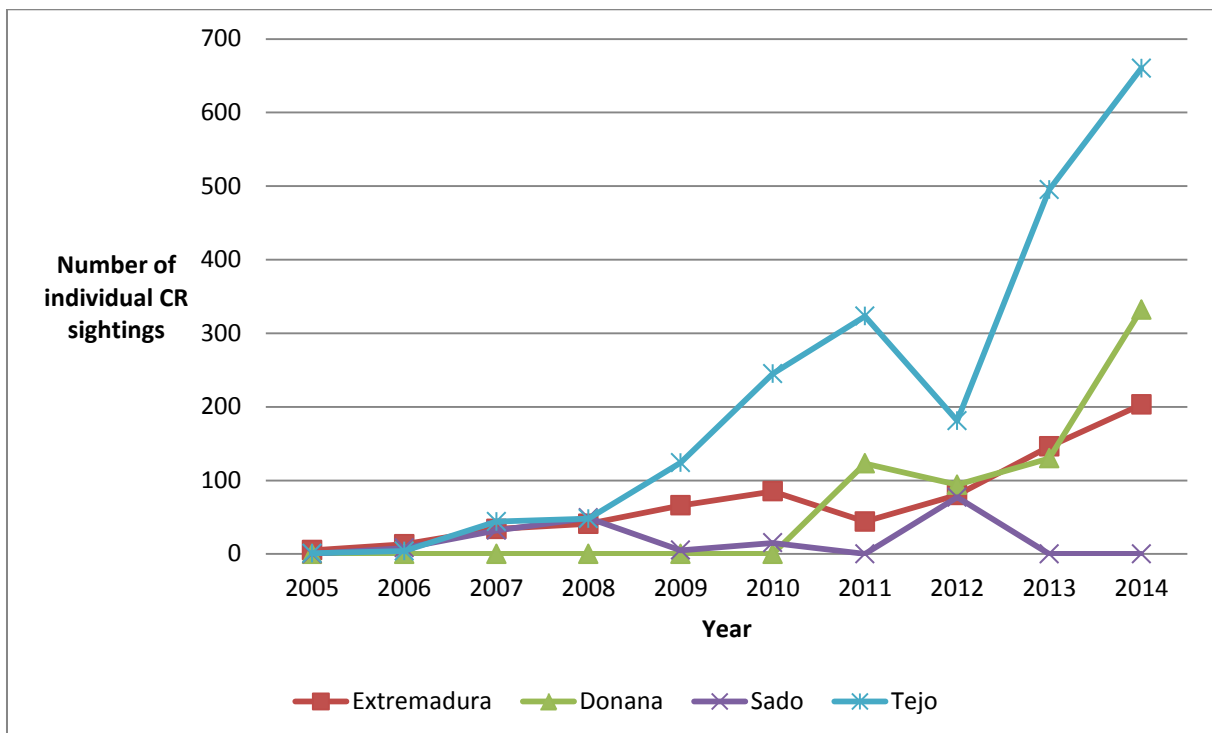
This year was much wetter than 2013, both before we arrived and during our trip. Many more rice fields had water and habitat did not seem to be limiting at all. Then, during the middle two weeks of our trip, it rained most every day. By the end of that period, many of the local rivers were flooding or near-flooding and water levels in the rice fields were quite high. Interestingly, instead of dispersing the godwits across a much larger area, they were very concentrated this year and almost entirely focused on the area immediately surrounding Hernan Cortes. Whether because of the weather, conditions crossing the Sahara, or something else entirely, numbers were much lower this year than in years passed. Our counts peaked at around 7,000 birds in the third week of February. Last year we noticed successive waves of migrants arriving, with noticeably different cohorts of colour-marked individuals. This year, there was more of a trickle of new birds and no large waves. These observations were corroborated by the fact that numbers peaked at 70,000 individuals in Portugal during the time that we were in Extremadura. The weather seemed to hinder our catching efforts as well and likely caused the birds to make use of multiple roost sites each night and to change the location of those roost sites between nights. Nonetheless, as with last year, all of the roosts were near Valdehornillos and Vivares, with one site being used just to the south of Alonsa de Ojeda. In

total 772 resightings were made of 203 individually marked birds with a full colour ring combination from the RUG-program.

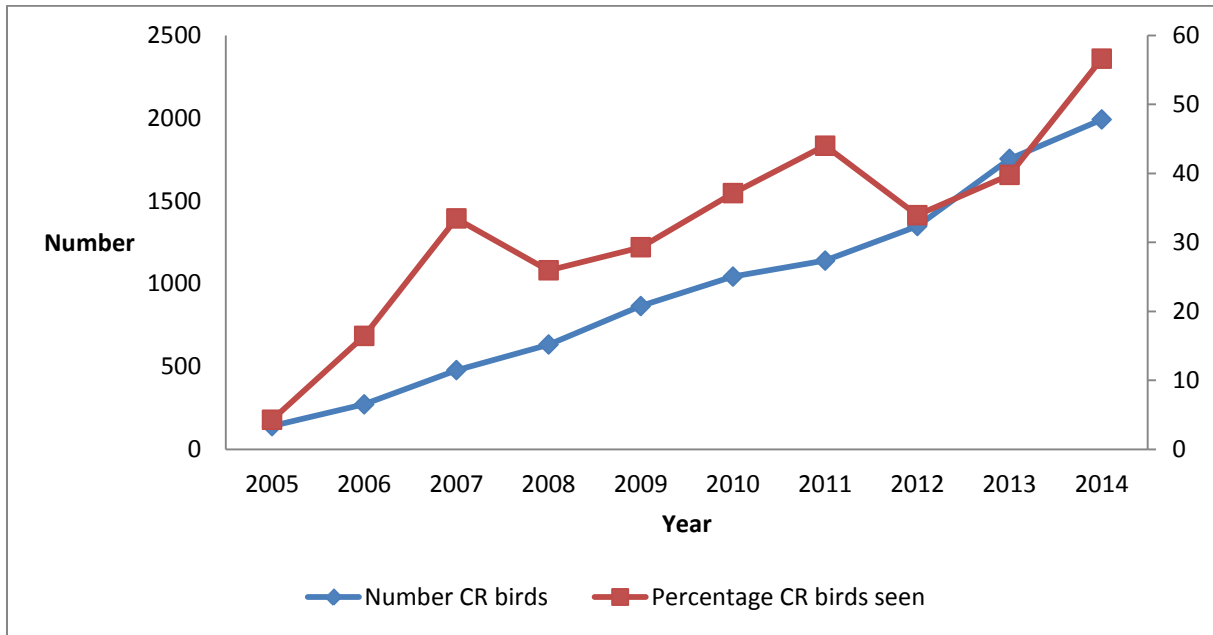
In 2014 we were, despite the bad weather, extremely successful as can be seen in the figures below: more resightings, more individuals seen and again even a higher proportion of the entire proportion of the entire colour ringed population has been observed.



Total number of sightings and observed individuals in Extremadura, Doñana, Sado and Tejo Estuary in January-February of each year (no code flags).



Number of observed individuals in Extremadura, Doñana, Sado and Tejo Estuary in January-February of each year with a full colour ring combination (no code flags).



Estimated number of colour ringed birds that are still alive and the observed percentage in Extremadura, Doñana, Sado and Tejo Estuary all together in January-February of each year (no code flags).

Acknowledgements

These colour ring reading trips would not be possible without the help of all co-authors that spent their free time scanning godwit legs: many thanks for that!

Thanks to Jose Masero (University of Extremadura) for organizing the apartment in Santa Amalia again!

Thanks to Rui Alves and Livia Ala of the Companhia das Lezírias and Helena Silva Pinto of Reserva Natural do Estuário do Tejo that we could use the field station; it was very convenient and we hope to come back in 2015!

Team 1: Maarten Hotting and Wim Tijssen 31-1 till 9-2-1014

30 January 2014

After giving an evening presentation in Fryslân about WimTijssen's redshank research project on the former island of Wieringen(North-Holland) he picks up Jos Hooijmeijer in Koudum on the way back home. I ended my presentation this evening with a slide of colour ringed redshank White H19. Which is always at the same spot in Tavira, Portugal in a saltpan, the place we will shortly pass on our way from Sevilla to Lisbon. His prediction for this evening is that he will see his own ringed Redshank tomorrow in Portugal... It will be a very short night for us, we have to leave at 04.30 and pick up team-mate Maarten Hotting in Purmerend on our way to Schiphol-airport.

31 January 2014

And indeed it was a very short night, but we have a nice forecast, today we will hopefully end up between some godwits in the Tagus-estuary near Porto Alto, Portugal. After a good flight we arrive in Sevilla mid-morning. Rocio Marquez-Ferrando is waiting for us at the airport and in her very small car, three man in narrow positions and the same amount of big suite cases..., we drive through Sevilla to get our big 4x4 car(Mitsubishi Montero) at the car-rental. Jos also get's his 4x4 car and will drive to the Cota Donâna to look for the godwits over there. While Maarten and Wim will count and check all godwits with rings in the Tagus estuary and surrounding rice fields the next 10 days. But on our way we pass Tavira very close, so why not jump off the highroad and try to find my own redshank White H19? As I have been earlier in the Algarve it is easy to lead chauffeur Maarten trough the streets of Tavira and find the salt pans between Tavira and Santa Lucia. Second path on the left behind a reed bed, turn to the right and the second saltpan on the left, which is mostly his favourite, and... YES there he is! H19 is the one and only redshank in the saltpan just 25 meters from our car!! We cannot have a better start of our godwit expedition, so HIGH Five!



H19 in it's favourite saltpan, between Tavira and Santa Lucia, Algarve, Portugal

Some pictures has been taken off course and then up to area around Lisbon. We have to be there at 17.30, and give Livia Ala a call just one hour before we arrive and... we make it just before dark! Livia shows us our 'home' for the next ten days, just 1 km from the high-road and close to the rice fields between Porto Alto and Vila Franca de Xira. She handles over the card to get through the electric gate, some explanation about the house, what we have to share with people from the University of Lisbon and so on. But first off all we deserve a nice diner, buy some food for the rest of

the week, and have a good tight sleep after such a short night and 4,5 hour's drive from Sevilla to Porto Alto.

1 February 2014

A sunny and dry start, temperatures 12 to 17C in the afternoon. First and most important thing to do in the morning is get a access-card for all the gates in the rice fields around Porto Alto where previous year 30.000 godwits were seen. But it's Saturday, so no one to help us at the office to get that card, but one gate is open... and we drive into the flat fields of the delta. Beautiful weather and nice birds, lots of Lapwings, but NO godwits in the area where last year 30 to 40.000 were seen. And we are lucky that another car is opening a closed iron gate for us, so we can 'escape' the closed road and fields! We try the normal open road to the north, to get a view on Porto Alto fields Ruivo, Toneca and Cara Larga. A marsh harrier causes big flocks of lapwings in the sky, but no sign of godwits. Then the area northwest of Samora Correia, also empty, despite the great overview we have on the dike. So we decide to have a look at the Sado area near Setubal where we have much open access to rice fields. Close to Aquas de Moura, in the Ribeira da Marateca delta, we see 2.000 Glossy Ibis in the early afternoon.



To appease our hunger for ring reading, we read almost 100 colourings of this beautiful species.

The whole river delta with rice fields and reed beds to Setubal stays empty later on. The same with the further south laying areas at the Rib. Sao Martinho and Monte Novo da Palma where we end our day without ANY godwit...

2 February 2014

Because we still have no access to the huge rice fields around Porto Alto (and we did not see any godwit over there yesterday) our goal for today will be the Sado area in the south, and make the whole tour to the Estuário do Sado by a return with the Pont from Troia to Setubal. Still beautiful weather, calm winds, sunny and temperatures between 12 to 15C. First again the river delta from Aquas de Moura to Zambujal. And now we see 12 godwits and a bit further 17, so it's a start! Wim checks all redshanks and Maarten read some colour rings of Avocets and Glossy Ibis again, and we

see some Caspian Terns. Beautiful quiet day and views, but no coloured rings on these few godwits. Also the Ribeira the S. Martinho stays empty, most rice fields are still in the 'stubble-field-modus', what is not good for foraging godwits.



Beautiful views and lot of rice fields in the Estuário do Sado, but the godwits have left this area the last years...

In the afternoon we check the whole Estuário do Sado between Alcácer do Sal and Comporta on the south bank. Many Black-headed Gulls, Spoonbills and Flamingo's, beautiful views over the estuary, but NO sign of godwits at all. Again a bit disappointing day, where are the godwits?!

3 February 2014

Weather; sunny start later on cloudy, some showers and 9 to 12C, wind ¼ B. First get our access card at the rice field-company, after some explanation's what we want to do and wherefore we need access, we get a pass for the whole month for all teams for 25 Euro's deposit. Up to the Giganta rice fields again, hope we have more luck today... The same entrance as Saturday into the fields in the south, and after ten minutes we see a huge flock far away over the fields of our beloved birds and our goal for this expedition. Wow, finally result we hope, and we don't know how fast to drive to get there in the east of the area. And at the same fields as we passed Saturday, we now count 5.800 godwits mostly foraging. After one hour almost all godwits fly to the west after several passes of Common Buzzards and Mars Harriers. So we end this morning with smaller flocks of 850 and 2.300, which tend to sleep after 11.00 hour. With our 4-wheel drive we follow flocks on their path to the west. After passing several wet-rice fields we cannot believe our eyes when we arrive at the end by the canal. A huge flock of godwits on ONE wet rice field from 100 by 500 meter. We try to estimate this flock, and count 38.600! In the next hour 1.700 birds join the group so all together 40.300 birds during midday!



Finally we find our 'friends' at the Ponta da Erva/Giganta rice fields

All birds stay during the rest of the day mostly in the sleeping and preening mode, unless there is a harrier coming over... That gives better ring reading opportunity's for a while! After 4 o'clock a part of the birds start to forage more and at 17.45, we and the light close the first day of enormous ring reading! After a good diner and a beer, we worked until 0.30 to get all results in the database. We estimate 25 to 30% of the birds being Icelandic ones. We read 190 different ring combinations from all projects. And finally we can send a good message to Jos Hooijmeijer in Spain that we found them...

4 February 2014

We start at 09.00 on a very cloudy and dark day, forecast is rain in the end of the afternoon, and more and more wind up to 6 Beaufort. Our entrance for the rest of the week will be the Ponta da Erva rice fields, where all birds stayed yesterday. But despite the sober day and the hard winds, this will turn out to be the best day of our week! The first group of 8.000 is foraging, so good ring reading opportunities during their movements. At 11.00 o'clock the flocks gather almost all on the same field near the canal. The first count-attempt ends at 30.100 when a Marsh Harrier disturbs the total count of Wim, Sh.....!



The second try shows 51.400 birds for Wim and Maarten's estimate is 52.500, so we decide to middle it at 51.950 godwits!!

The wind speeds up and that makes the big flock in a continuous movement, with lots of foraging birds in the head wind. And we have the birds on the right side (shallow) of the car! Lucky Maarten, who stays in the car with his telescope! Wim is taking many pictures and filming when a Marsh Harrier shows up, and the godwits are 'flocking to high levels and speed', and this is a 'once in a lifetime' experience, so take your opportunity! Later on Wim sits on his bud behind his telescope on a small dike on the other side of the BIG flock. So we divide the ring reading team in two, to read as many rings we can. The hard wind from the right side, blows the water off the field so we are able to see many, many legs. The only difficulty is 'which leg belongs to which bird?'

At 16.00 hour the rain and wind is too heavy for us, so we deserve a warm cup of coffee and a nice piece of cake in Porto Alto! Loads of records to work out and at 01.00 o'clock we cannot see any godwit record..., but the total is 256 different colour rings of all ring projects on godwits. And, we already broke the record of Haije Valkema and Pieter Breeuwsma, who read 230 individuals one day last year! Must be a new world day record!???

5 February 2014

As it has been raining almost all night, we expect the raised water level in the rice fields to be not too good for ring reading. After the stormy and rainy night, it is a cloudy but quiet morning, with almost no wind and temperatures have climbed up, midges are dancing in the shelter of the car.



*The birds act the same as the weather today... They are standing still.
All resting in big flocks and showing no activity, also when the sky clears.*

Only on the edges of the flocks, birds forage a bit. Our experience with the birds is, the nicer the weather, the less activity! At two o'clock we decide to have a look at the Glossy Ibises(400+), Flamingo's(2.000?) and also 100 Spoonbills are in the eastern fields. We read many rings on Flamingo's and return to the godwits in the end of the afternoon, expecting more foraging birds. At 17.30 we call it a day, still not too many bird-movements and high water levels hide a lot of legs, but the colour of the birds seems to get more reddish day by day! In total we read today 147 different individual ringed godwits. So not bad at all if we worked out half our notebooks and memo recorder late in the evening. And we still see every day a good amount of new ringed birds, which we have not seen before...

6 February 2014

New day, new round... Today we started at 09.00 at the Ponta da Erva rice fields. The warm wind blows with 7 Beaufort, with temperatures up to 17C later on that day. The hard wind blows the water to the end of our most important rice field with 40 to 50.000 godwits, so we are able to see a lot of legs and rings. But during the morning they stay closer together today, sheltering each other. At 12 o'clock, when almost no more movements in the birds, the rain is coming. We both agree that we will have some warm coffee in the village, do some shopping and work out all our records. We have a lot of things to put in the databases, my memo recorder is full, and run's out of space in memory... And we have to get some more sleep after all these short nights. But 171 different colours on half a day is not bad at all, hearing the rain falling down on the roof.



The fields are more and more ploughed we notice, despite the bad weather. Everywhere it is the same; And the farmer plough's on...

The weather forecast for Friday is sunny with a little wind and in the weekend it will be bad. We will concentrate on tomorrow, so the bell will be ringing at 06.45 to have a full day of research and ring reading with maybe a new day record?!

7 February 2014

Today should be D-Day ring reading and we start earlier. We have a false start, two big cattle-trucks block the entrance of Ponta da Erva. We have to drive to the other side, the Giganta rice fields entrance, which cost us half an hour. And we notice that our big flock has split into three, with the biggest flock far away in a muddy field at Giganta. We first visit the flocks at Ponta da Erva which hopefully will be close by. And also the weather forecast turns out to be false... We have some heavy showers! Until 11.00 we stay at the old places at Ponta da Erva, it looks like that the birds have almost emptied these fields from all rice. Then visit a flock of 400 Spoonbills and read some rings for Dutch Spoonbill hero Otto Overdijk. Between two showers in, we travel back to the Giganta rice field for the biggest flock. The farmer is working on his fields further away, and the wind is getting stronger. We walk to the biggest group, of which a small part is foraging. But it is hard to hold the telescopes steady, especially if you need maximum magnification... But the farmer helps us a bit, when he has to fill up fuel and riding on his tractor he pushes the foraging group closer to us. For the first time we see a Peregrine Falcon try to attack the big flock, which give nice filming with some a perfect sun behind me, it looks like a Starlings just before roost! But after these attack, we see that all birds stay in a estimated dense flock of 32.500 birds. And they are feeling good in this 'rest and peace position' for the next couple of hours, so not too much ring reading, there goes our planned record!



The wind is also really heavy, so telescopes to the ground for a steady image!

We decide to turn back to the Ponta da Erva fields , where a flock of 12.500 is in a steady position. The water level is a bit too high, and birds are not interested in foraging a bit, so we have a look on the other side of the High road N10. We check the Ze do Pinho and Porto de Ruivo area, maybe now the birds are moving more this area also gets more attention of the birds, but all fields are still empty. Within half an hour we are back at the same flock and read until darkness falls in... You never know that this last minutes will bring us to a new day-record.

In the evening Theunis Piersma gives us a call. He is in the Extremadura area in Spain with the people of the “Kening fan ‘e Greide” organisation(Frisian for Koning van het Weiland in Dutch), and they want to pay a visit tomorrow morning. Although the weather forecast is bad, they decide to come over for a visit, as they also have some meetings near Lisbon the next day. And, “Who does not want to see 50.000 godwits in one big flock?”, even if you are looking at godwits almost all your life! The work out of our notebooks is too much to finish this evening, and Maarten needs a good night rest. He is almost always working on his laptop late at night, to analyse all our records and deserves a good night rest. Tomorrow at two o’clock we also have to pick up the new team, formed by Haije Valkema and Egbert van der Velde, from the airport at Lisbon. And if the weather conditions are okay we have to decide who will stay next to the birds, and who will pick up our new ‘colleagues’. All and all 205 different birds were read, no breaking of the record, but a fine result for a windy and rainy day.

8 February 2014

We pick up Theunis, Harmen, Klaas Sietse and Sytze at their hotel in Porto Alto. The weather forecast is now with us, it is a grey day, but there is almost no wind and no rain, so not bad at all! Exciting to go into the field with enthusiastic godwit lovers and expert Theunis. The first group is around 9.500 birds close to the road at the Ponta da Erva. Lots of pictures are taken, good talking’s and excitement off course for the visitors. We show THE rice field near the canal, where we had the flock of almost 52.000 birds. This turned out to be now a group of 10.400 and independent from each other Theunis and I are coming to almost the same amount of birds in this dense flock. Good to calibrate and nice

to know that our count or estimation is not too bad. We also visit the Spoonbills, which are standing also very close together and mostly on one leg, so hard to see any complete ring combination. On the edge of these long road to Ponta da Erva is a house with two palm trees, where you have a good view on the Rio Tejo. Riding to this place we see a Black-shouldered Kite hunting above the Reserva Natural do Estuário do Tejo. On the way back we also find the biggest group of 30.200 godwits in the muddy Giganta rice fields. Again a almost exact independent count done by two observers(Theunis and Wim) gives a fine calibration of this hard to count two big flocks. That gives satisfaction about the total estimation of around 52.000 birds in the area!

More and more fields are 'ploughed' in the area, and it is getting wetter and wetter, so the birds can move to more places they like. Theunis and friends leave the area guided by Maarten, and Maarten offers to pick up our new colleagues, Haije and Egbert at Lisbon airport. Very kind of him, so Wim stays in the Giganta rice field, close to the big flocks. And lucky enough the showers stay behind the mountains and the sun shows up...! The hard wind makes it difficult, but after creeping on a small dike to get closer, he ends up almost between the birds! At the end of the afternoon Maarten, Haije and Egbert cannot refuse to read some birds off course, and specially for Haije and Egbert new ring reading excitement.

We show Haije and Egbert the best places to shop, what is needed in our 'cottage' and cantina at the farm and we have lot of things in spare for them...



In the evening we have a good diner in the centre of Lisbon, invited by the 'Kening fan 'e Greide' movement, so lots of laughing, but also good discussions about the problems meadow birds have to deal with in the Netherlands.

A late night is our deal, but it was a very fine and exciting day! Tomorrow will be our last day, and in the late afternoon Haije and Egbert will guide us the airport. And I will never be able to beat Maarten's record of ring reading this week, although I had a whole afternoon for my own, when I

count my ring records.

9 February 2014

The weather forecast was not good, but this time it is serious business! When we finally arrive with the four of us in the fields, the rain is really heavy. And with four men in a car, two people can read rings in the shelter of the car. Egbert and Maarten are on the right side. The light is very poor, so it also takes some time to discover the difference between Lime and Yellow.... The birds are spread out in the fields and more far away, so hard to read under this bad weather circumstances. The next flock is for Wim and Haije, but it's also raining inside the car and after several attempts to get the car into the right position we decide that it is better to stop.



We have a good coffee in our local bakery/coffeeshop and again we are between the birds...!

We inform them about cards, keys and about the area's where to go and not to go for the birds. Which places of interest we have visited. During the rest of the day it keeps on raining, so a good moment to work on our last two days of ring readings into the database. And pack our stuff for the way back home!

Late in the afternoon it clear's a bit, still very hard wind almost storm. But Haije and Egbert are new, so no time to waste and back to the fields! Late afternoon they bring us to the airport in stormy weather, which has consequences for our flight... We supposed to fly at 19.30 but while lots of flights are cancelled, we are lucky to depart finally at 23.00 hour to the Netherlands.



With a lot of good memories, despite the sometimes hard 'work', short nights and rainy periods. In total we read 671 different godwits from several colour ring projects. Of which 379 from our own Dutch RUG-project! And when you are for the first time in a area, which you've never seen, it's always impressive how the birds cope with all circumstances in this semi natural landscape. So our memories stay tuned on the godwits, when they arrive in the breeding areas. Specially our 'own' colour ringed juveniles who will show up in polder Zeevang or at the former isle of Wieringen to breed for the first time, will stick in our heads. And we are back in the fields this spring we hopefully understand them a little better...

Team 2: Haije Valkema and Egbert van der Velde, 8-2 till 19-2-2014

8 February 2014

Today we (Haije Valkema & Egbert van der Velde) left Schiphol Airport around 11:45h. The flight went well with only a small delay because the door of the plane wouldn't close. Around 15:30h local time we arrived at Lisbon Airport where Maarten picked us up. After a short visit to the field station of the Companhia Das Lezírias we immediately went to the Giganta Rice fields to meet Wim and 20.000 of his friends. We were able to read a couple of colour rings and after the sun went down we did some quick shopping in Porto Alto. We drove back to our home to settle and change clothes to meet (the kings of the meadow), Theunis, Klaas-Sietse, Sytze P. and Harmen in the beautiful centre of Lisbon around 21:00h. It was there last night of their 4 day tour through godwit areas in Spain and Portugal. After a nice meal, good wine and some amazing cowboy stories we drove back to the field station for some well-deserved sleep.

9 February 2014

At 7:30h we had breakfast with Maarten and Wim and a good discussion about how to restore the meadow bird populations in the Netherlands. We agreed about the solution on our way to the Giganta rice fields to read colour rings because heavy rain was expected later. The ploughing of the rice fields appeared to have started and the large flock seemed to have split up in several smaller ones.

After reading only 20 colour combinations we were forced to stop because of the bad weather. Back at the field station we had some time to install ourselves and enter our data. When the rain had stopped we went back to the Gigantas for a short reading session, because at 17:00h we had to bring Wim and Maarten to Lisbon Airport. Later we heard they had to wait for 6 hours because of the storm. We drove back via Vila Franca de Xira and had a delicious traditional meal in Porto Alto. Just when we were back at the field station the power went down, probably because the storm blew some trees into the electricity cables. At 4:30h the next morning Haije woke up because the lights in his bedroom went back on.



10 February 2014

After breakfast we arrived back at the Giganta rice fields around 8:30h. We found the Godwits at the same fields as yesterday and most of them were standing on one leg. Because of the hard wind and



the high water levels as a result of the intensive rainfall (30mm) it was very hard to read rings. We put up the antenna and tried to load up data from transmitters in the area, but didn't find any. We also tried it on a group of 200

spoonbills but unfortunately without any success. At noon the wind went down a little and some smaller groups started foraging so we were still able to get a nice score for today. Total estimated number of Godwits in the Gigantas was set at 50.000. More or less the same amount as Maarten and Wim observed the days before.

At 16:30h we stopped reading combinations because all Godwits had started resting again. On our way back we explored the remaining parts of the Gigantas but didn't find any other groups. After

dinner we went back to the Gigantas again to see if the Godwits were roosting there as well and maybe foraging at night too. The large group still appeared to be on the same spot and was still resting. We stayed there until 21:30h and tried to film with infra-red in the meantime, but the light disturbance from the nearby cities hindered this.

11 February 2014

Today we woke up with heavy rain. Nevertheless we were able to read around 80 ring combinations each because the Godwits on the Giganta rice fields were much more active than yesterday and near drivable roads. Even the main roads through the rice fields were flooded so we made good use of the 4x4. Outside the car it was still impossible to read any rings because of the intensive rain and hard wind. The flocks moved around a lot in groups of 100 to 25.000 individuals and we tried to download data from transmitters again once the groups clustered together and started resting around 16:00h, but without success. During the time we had the antenna put up and the laptop searching for birds we explored the northern part of the Gigantas once more where we found the same resting flock as yesterday. Hopefully we can get some logger data out of this group of 20.000 individuals tomorrow. Still around 50.000 Godwits on the Gigantas so no reason to explore the other areas yet.

12 February 2014

At 6.45 the alarm woke us up as usual and we started our day. At 8.30 we arrived at the Gigantas again and we immediately found a nice foraging flock of Godwits. The ring density was quite low so after a while we searched for other groups. It took a while to locate the other groups because they start to spread out more and more. At noon most of the Godwits clustered together again for a resting moment. This gave us the opportunity to count the group size, we counted at least 30.000 Godwits, but maybe we missed some (the area size is gigantic and Godwits were flying around a lot). While driving around we saw an Otter crossing the road. At 16.30h we called it the day, we were able to read about 110 combinations each. In the evening we had dinner at Alcochete with Pete Pots and his team, which was very interesting and fun.

13 February 2014

The Godwits on the Gigantas clustered together in a group of 40.000 individuals today. On average 80% was resting throughout the day and positioned far from the road which made it hard to read the colour combinations. We had the impression we have lost small numbers of Godwits every day since our arrival. We scanned the whole area for other flocks but didn't find any. When we returned to the main flock at 15:00, most individuals were still resting far off the road, so we decided to take a look at some other rice fields west and north of Samora Correia. On our way from Vila Franca to Benavente we encountered a flooded road forcing us to drive back to Porto Alto and take the road from there.



Because of the heavy rainfall of the last few days the water level of the Sorraia river was at least 2m above base level flooding the total area containing the rice fields.



We drove further north to Salvaterra De Magos to check out some old hotspots around the Tejo river, but didn't find any Godwits, only lots of maize fields and unplowed rice fields.

14 February 2014

Today we were very lucky to have around 40.000 Godwits clustered together very close to our car for a long time. We were able to score over 120 combinations each very quickly, but because of the stormy wind and the low water level on that field the rings started to become covered with up blowing clay particles. After trying to find some transmitter birds for an hour without any success we went to a meeting with Helena Amelia Pinto (technical supervisor of "Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas") and João Paulo Lopes (Previous coordinator monitoring, but since 2 months on a new function involving the fund coordination to all the different projects on the institute) in Alcochete. This was very interesting and we shared a lot of information. Both were surprised by the numbers of Godwits on the Giganta rice fields and the fact that they spent the night there as well now instead of moving to the river banks nearby Pancas as they used to do in the past. João was very interested in the transmitters but didn't know much about the Godwits. He actually replaced Vitor Encarnação who had to visit his ill mother in the hospital. Helena told us he knows everything about the dynamics in Godwit presence on the Giganta rice fields and some other areas as well, so we might make a new appointment with him. They had a very nice detailed map of the Tejo area and will send us a digitalized version which includes field use and other specifics. After the meeting we went to the Salinas des Samouco where we accidentally ran into Pete Pots his team. They called it the day because of the rain so we were able to check out the area without interfering their catching attempts. At the Salinas we met Jose Alves, Afonso Rocha and Sara Pardal. In the evening we had a very pleasant diner with these English and Portuguese people.



15 February 2014

In the morning it was hard to read rings because the 40.000 (mainly resting) Godwits were packed together on the far side of the same field as they were yesterday. Around 14:00h we had only read about 20 combinations each, but then some birds of prey started disturbing and splitting up the large group resulting in better circumstances for us. We also tried reading out transmitter birds again because we finally had some clear blue skies with bright sunlight but the equipment couldn't find any

even though we tried for several hours with the antenna placed on a water pipe at 8m height around 500m from the large resting group. At the end of the afternoon the Godwits started foraging actively making it possible for us to compensate for the loss of the morning.

16 February 2014

Nice and clear weather was expected so we decided to check out the southern areas around the Sado river. At Zambujal we saw 70 Godwits flying away.



The other areas appeared to be unsuitable because the water level was too high or the fields were still not ploughed. There was only one other place where the fields looked suitable for Godwits, but we couldn't find any. This was south-west of Comporta, south of the Museu do Arroz (rice museum). On our way back we spotted 3 Islandicas on the river bench near Sol Tróia from where we took the ferryboat to Setubal. It was a beautiful day giving us a much more diverse impression about the Portugese rice fields besides the Gigantas. Remarkably the presence of (wader and water) birds on all the areas we checked so far was negligible compared to the Giganta rice fields.

17 February 2014

Today we went back to the Gigantas to find our Godwit hotspot ploughed and only 35 Godwits left. We searched for them until 12:00h when we finally found our group of around 40.000 individuals



way back on some fields with suitable water levels. Luckily we were able to drive there, otherwise we should have had to walk for at least 30 minutes and probably had disturbed the flocks. After reading far over 100 colour combinations each, we witnessed an odd phenomenon. Many Godwits started to leave the flocks and climbed up very high in the sky to dive down 15 minutes later with high speed

and join the resting/foraging flocks again. We had the idea they might have checked the circumstances to migrate further north. Around 17:45h we called it the day because the light was not bright enough anymore when suddenly even more large flocks started to appear and join the already present large flocks. After several counts we estimated that there were 60.000 to 70.000 individuals present filling 3 rice fields.

It was really overwhelming and we made some awesome videos to share this experience even though the videos probably won't even give a slight impression of this amazing moment. Back in Porto Alto we absorbed a disgusting traditional meal containing a whole fish including Skin, gills, eyeballs, skull and bones. No way we'll ever order that again.



18 February 2014

We found the Godwits at the same location in the Gigantas as where we left them yesterday. We noticed Pete Pots of our amazing experience and he'd like to see it with his own eyes, so we guided him and his team to the flock at 11:00h. They were really overwhelmed by the numbers and told us they wouldn't be surprised if there were even way more than the 70.000 we estimated. Even though we were quite sure numbers had decreased significantly since yesterday afternoon (around 2/3 of what we'd seen then). Several people in the team had much experience with counting bird flocks over 1 million individuals so there's a good chance we underestimated. Around 13:00h we drove to Lisbon to pick up Hendriekus en Rienk Jelle at the airport. We showed them the Godwit hotspots, read some colour combinations and guided them through some other parts of the Gigantas. On our way back we met Sara who was planning to put a mist net at the hotspot to get some blood samples. She only had to get permission of the owner, because the fields appeared to be private property. While talking to her we saw the missing part of the flock swarming north of the Gigantas but were unable to locate it because the sun went down and we lost the birds somewhere north east of Vila Franca. At Porto Alto we had a very good meal together and then went to our field station to settle Rienk Jelle and Hendriekus and prepare for our departure tomorrow.

19 February 2014

In the morning we checked the areas east of Samora Correia together with Rienk-Jelle en Hendriekus. A small part of the rice fields there appeared suitable, but we didn't see any Godwits. Afterwards we headed to the Lisbon airport to fly home. We had a great time in Portugal with many amazing experiences and impressions. We heard the first Godwits already arrived in Fryslân so we can continue observing right away.

Team 3: Rienk-Jelle Hibma and Hendriekus Algra, 18-2 till 27-2-2014

18 February 2014

14C Wind 4 North, sunny

At 14.00 Portugal time we get picked by Haije Valkema and Egbert van der Velde (Team 2). They immediately show us the way to the Giganta and Ponta da Erva ricefields. We go to the location where they have been observing the godwits recently. In the rice paddies surrounding a former roost of the Black-tailed Godwits, there are still a few thousand birds foraging, among which some colour ringed birds and one bird with a code flag. We then continue to the place where the godwits have been staying for the past few days. A big flock flies northward and we try to find it across the road in some smaller paddies, but no luck there. At sunset we decide to go to our headquarters to make ourselves at home.

19 February 2014

14C Wind 3-4 North, sunny with some clouds

At 8.15 we leave the apartment. Before bringing the guys to the airport, we visit Samorra Correia, Belmonte ricefields (D) and Santo Estevão, Paul de Belmonte (E) (after some search time..) and encounter no godwits there. We bring Haije and Egbert to the Lisbon airport at eleven o'clock and



At the field station

drive to Vila Franca to check "our" flock again. There are some 20.000 godwits around and we begin to scan the flock. After a while some groups of a couple of thousand leave the main fields and we try to follow them, because we couldn't find them the day before. We witness a flock of 5.000 birds landing near a ploughing tractor. Gulls and glossy ibises are the first to follow the tractor, but the godwits seem to know when and where to be for newly ploughed fields! After half an hour the flock left to the east side of the Giganta rice fields, the second gate. We returned to the roosting spot. From 17.00 on a lot of birds come in to roost, but most of them from quite high in the sky, really falling in! When we leave at 18.15 we estimate the flock to be 35.000 individuals! We check already 60 rings the first afternoon before sunset. Dirk Tanger calls to meet us at the gate to exchange the key card. He takes his travel partners for diner with the Jose Alves and Pete Potts groups.



Ruin with some ricefields in the valley

20 February 2014

12C Wind 4 South 8.15-11.00: cloudy 11.00-16.45: rainy 16.45-18.15: dry spells, some sun

We drive back to the site where we have been observing the first few days. Jose Alves and his colleagues have been mistnetting the flock and caught 3 of them for blood. Sara had sent us a text message the evening before to invite us, but a little too late: we were already “roosting”. At that time they encountered the flock still around the fields where we left them. Now the remainder of the flock (about 15.000) left to a “safer” field a bit to the south where we couldn’t check them from the car. We experienced that they get a bit cautious when two tall Frisian guys try to come closer (maybe of course also because of the mistnetting disturbance). Due to heavy clouds we can’t read colour rings as nicely as yesterday, but still we do read a few. At midday most godwits are resting. At 13.00 small groups spread out to the northern fields and scanning gets better. From 16.00 most of the godwits are foraging and scanning efficiency goes up. Sunset really breaks our mojo! From 17.00 a lot of birds fall in again and we estimate the group again at least 35.000 individuals.

21 February 2014

15C Wind 4 Southwest, later in afternoon Northwest, sunny with cloudy hours

At 8.15 we find 30.000 still around at the same southern fields at Giganta.

We scan the flock for colour rings and read quite some combinations. Then, at 10.00, the flock goes to rest and reading gets a little more challenging.

At 11.30 the flock spreads to the surrounding paddies and it gets interesting again! At 13.15 only 4.000 birds are still in chill mode. At 13.45 it gets really cloudy and some rain is

coming down. The birds “huddle” in the middle of the fields and reading gets limited to the most peripheral birds. We decide to check the rice paddies to the east on Giganta and Ponta da Erva. We don’t find a lot of wet fields, appropriate for our godwits and return to the place to be at 15.30. There we find Pete Potts, Dirk Tanger and Jose Alves already busy reading the now foraging group. We check the other side and together get a lot work done! They leave at 17.00 when the flock is again gathered in the middle of two fields. Some 5.000 birds fall in and we stay till 18.00, until the sun puts the legs in the shadow of other birds. Surprisingly 400 birds leave to the North.

Nice detail: we managed to make contact with bird Y2RYLY (1008), one of the www.uva-bits.nl birds (a female ringed on the 27th of May, 2013)! After 20 minutes the communication power of the gps-logger was low, so contact stopped, but we now know it’s on its way back via Portugal!



A rainbow over foraging godwits



UVA-bits antenna in action

22 February 2014 - On tour with Dirk Tanger c.s. along the Sado estuary

15C Wind 3 Southwest Sunny with some clouds around Lisboa

This day we perform a thorough scan of the Sado Estuary. We start at Zambujal (block K), 1 godwit on a mudflat. In Marateca (L), Palma Bridge (M), Monte Novo da Palma (N), Alberge (O), Alcacer do Sal (P+Q), the south side of the Sado estuary (N/R253) (the rice fields at Batalha), Santa Maria do Castelo, Montovil & Cachopos (R), Monte Novo do Sul (S), Carresquiera (T) and Comporta (U) we don't encounter any of them. There are some small suitable fields but very sporadic. Giganta is definitely the most promising site this year. We



The Sado estuary near Troia

compensate our Sado trip (with only one godwit) with nice observations of Egyptian mongoose, Caspian tern, Azure-winged magpie, Common crane, Black stork and about 170 spoonbills of which some birds ringed in the Netherlands. We take the ferry at Troia and we go back to Giganta once more at 16.00. At 16.30, about 20.000 birds leave to the North. Dirk c.s. find them back on recently ploughed fields closer to the main road, but still on Giganta, accompanied by Flamingos and Glossy ibises. At 17.30 they return to the main flock and the total is back to about 35.000.

23 February 2014

16C Wind 3 South Sunny/ from 17h cloudy

First we check the main spot again and Dirk Tanger c.s. check the field where they found the rest of the flock yesterday. At 12.00 the flock is resting and after lunch we decide to look on some areas we haven't been and have been promising earlier years. We check out Zé do Pinho (C). No godwits around, but quite some seemingly suitable fields for godwits. A tractor is ploughing a field with a lot of gulls searching for prey. At 14.15 we return to our flock on Giganta and find some godwits starting to forage. The birds are brutally wakened up by a Peregrine falcon on the hunt. This happens at 14.30, 15.45, 16.00 and again at 18.10! The godwits fly really low over our car and we aren't their priority anymore. In between those attacks they get some rest from 15.30 until 15.45 and from 17.00 until 18.10. However disturbing for the birds, it helps us to read a lot of new rings among which two birds with code flags. At 17.40



35.000 godwits trying to escape a peregrine falcon!

thousand bird leave to the North, probably to the field with the ibises and flamingos.

At 18.10 a couple of thousand of them leave as the Peregrine attacks once more.

24 February 2013

14C Wind 3 West Sunny and cloudy spells, some rain

Today we went early to the Giganta ricefields to see what the godwits do at daybreak and if some of them come in from elsewhere. When we arrived at the rice fields we see the same flock around and the sunrise at 7.00 seems the cue to start foraging in combination



The wounded godwit with bloody feathers

the foraging bouts seem quite short and they are mostly resting. At 16.00 a male marsh harrier wakes them up, but they group up again resting. At 16.45 the same bird of prey tries to catch a godwit and about 10.000 leave to a more northern refuge. One godwit is clearly wounded and isn't able to get out of the water. We observe a quite touching spectacle: a group of godwits hovers above it, as if to help it stand up or say goodbye.. When the group leaves to a neighboring paddy, Rienk-Jelle checks it out and it passes away soon.. We see blood in its feathers, dark coloured flesh and 7 holes in its breast skin. We leave the body in nature. The last light we use to check some last rings. We speculate in the car about the cause: was the marsh harrier the culprit or the peregrine that flew over around six..?



Godwits hovering above a wounded fellow godwit

with a marsh harrier flying over. At 8.30 they rest and we keep on scanning until 9.45. We decide to go to the Samora Correia ricefields (A, B, F & I) between Samora and Benavente. There is a lot of maize and no suitable areas for godwits, like in almost all areas this year. We return to Giganta, first to the northern spot, but no godwits around. At 11.00 we observe half of the main flock foraging. Dirk Tanger c.s. are assisting us again. At 13.15 the godwits are back in a siesta. We read a ring of an avocet, RL(zero)//OL, and do some paperwork until they start foraging again at 15.30. On this day

25 February 2014

12C Wind 3 West, cloudy with some sun

Today we went back to the Giganta ricefields to check as many new rings possible. The grey weather wasn't in our favor, but we performed well because the birds were really spread out and foraging a lot (extra pre-migration feeding?). At 15.00 all 35.000 birds were resting "en groupe" and at 17.00 they started foraging again. Big groups of in total around 10.000 birds flew northward, but returned around six.

26 February 2014

15C Wind 3 West semi-clouded

At 8.30 we find a smaller group (25.000) than the days before on our main scanning fields, so where are the other 10.000..? Some of the birds are foraging, but not a lot and at 10.00 they all are in close flocks in the middle of the fields. At 10.30 some of them distribute again and start foraging. At 11.00 they are resting again and we decide to try and find the other 10.000. We check all possibilities: Zé

do Pinho and the north of Giganta, but don't see them, only about 400 ruffs, many flamingos and some glossy ibises again. At 12.30 they start to lunch, but 14.00 is their siesta time, we presume. At 14.20 a tractor is passing with chemicals to exterminate the weeds around the fields. We wonder if these pesticides won't get in the water.. The farmer asks how long the godwits will stay, because he wants to plough the fields. It takes him 6 hours to get the water off the field and then some days to dry enough to work it with their equipment. We tell him in our best Spanish, that we



The last sunset with "our" godwits on the left

estimate that the godwits will leave within two weeks, but wonder why he asks, because other fields are ploughed without taking the birds into account. We appreciate the thought, but still.. At 15.30 most of them are still resting, we manage to read some rings and at 16.00 all of them are back "in line". A male marsh harrier "helps" us a little at 16.30, but at 17.00 big groups are leaving to the North, at the same time as some days before. In the late afternoon light we manage to score our last rings this year, once of which is 1LC59B which misses its complete tarsus! At 18.00 only 15.000 are left on the main spot. When we leave we see a big flock above the fields in the north of Giganta and I mean HUGE!! We check it out and see that they were disturbed by the same tractor with chemicals. We count about 20.000 over there and conclude they still haven't left to Fryslân yet. In total still 35.000 godwits are around!

27 February 2014

After packing and cleaning the field station, we return the key card to the rice company at 8.30h. This takes some time, because the card was linked to the ID of Wim Tijssen and now we bring it back and not Wim himself: Big problem!! We were thinking about keeping the card, but then the boss is called and he tells his employees it's okay and we get the money back. They make a new copy of our IDs and we have to sign a form and at 10 o'clock we can be on our way.

Today is the day we return the 4WD to Sevilla. It's a nice drive through the inlands of Portugal and Spain (Extremadura for example) and we spot some nice bird species: Iberian shrike, Red-legged Partridge and we believe to see a Black kite already.. We arrive in Seville at 16.00h (Spanish time, so a 5 hour drive), clean the car and drive to Northgate where we return the car. There we meet 'n greet (diner) with Rocío Marquez Ferrando who takes us to our hotel. We exchange experiences about the godwits in Spain and Portugal and have a few tapas and cervezas in a restaurant near the Ibis hotel. The other morning we leave the hotel at eight, walk to the busstop and arrive at Sevilla airport at 8.30. The plain is delayed because of thick fog. Rienk-Jelle's brother is already waiting at Schiphol airport to take us back to Fryslân.

Summary

The total of our 8 day trip is 362 unique combinations of the RUG-scheme and 131 of other schemes, mostly Portuguese (Jose Alves), German (Johannes Melter) and Icelandic (Tomas Gunnarsson). Rienk-Jelle's idea was to keep records of saturation: how many new RUG rings we would find each day (see Table).

Saturation	Day I	Day II	Day III	Day IV	Day V	Day VI	Day VII	Day VIII
Rienk-Jelle	100%	88%	53%	52%	61%	60%	52%	44%
Hendriekus	100%	94%	82%	56%	69%	65%	45%	57%

Our conclusion was that we needed some extra days to check all rings or new birds replaced birds already migrating further north.

Team 4: Nathan Senner, Mo Verhoeven and Alice Mc Bride, 27-1 till 23-2-2014

27 January 2014

Alice McBride, Nathan Senner, and Mo Verhoeven arrived in Madrid today. We rented a Nissan Pathfinder from Northgate Rentals and immediately took off for Santa Amalia. We really did not encounter any traffic and arrived in Santa Amalia by 20:00 where we met up with Pipe Abad and got settled in our apartment.

28 January 2014

Today we split up into two teams and explored the area bounded by Santa Amalia, Yelbes, Hernan Cortes, and Vivares. We found between 5-6000 godwits, mainly in the area immediately to the north of Hernan Cortes. We did not encounter very many birds from the RUG scheme — only 15 in total. In the evening we watched for the roosts. Most birds seemed to be roosting to the north of the road that stretches between Valdehornillos and Vivares.



Foto: Jose Abad

29 January 2014

We again split up into two groups and covered roughly the same area as on the 28th. The number of birds appeared to stay roughly the same and we found all of the birds once again to the north of Hernan Cortes. We did find significantly more birds from the RUG scheme, recording 46 in total. In the evening we again watched for the roost and most birds spent the night north of the road between Valdehornillos and Vivares.

30 January 2014

Pipe returned to Badajoz for the day, so we were in one group today. All of the birds were again centered around Hernan Cortes, with an overall estimate of 5-6000 birds. We made our first resightings of two of last year's satellite transmitter-carrying birds, Amsterdam and Amalia and, in total, resighted 43 birds from the RUG scheme.

31 January 2014

Today we did not spend as much time resighting as we prepared to catch during the night. We focused on the area right around Hernan Cortes and resighted 27 RUG birds. In the evening we had a successful catch, joined by Jos and a larger team from la Universidad de Extremadura, in total

capturing 37 individuals. Eight of those were females that we took into captivity in Badajoz so that we can give them satellite transmitters and observe them overnight.

1 February 2014

We all traveled to Badajoz to attach the satellite transmitters. Everything went well and we should hopefully release the birds tomorrow.

2 February 2014

At noon we released 7 new satellite transmitters; one individual did not take well to the transmitter and we left her in captivity in Badajoz. We spent the morning resighting around Hernan Cortes, finding only 7 RUG birds and only a few thousand birds in total. We took the afternoon off to hike around the Alange Dam.

3 February 2014

We again resighted around Hernan Cortes, resighting 60 birds from the RUG scheme and many newly ringed birds from the Spanish scheme. Watching the roosts (now moved to just south of the road between Valdehornillos and Vivares), we estimated that 6-7000 birds were in the area. Still many, many fewer birds than last year.

4 February 2014

We did a grand tour today of all of the places that have held godwits in the past. Other than a group of ~800 birds, all of the godwits that we found were in the general vicinity of Hernan Cortes. Most of the ringed birds in the area are from either the Spanish scheme or the RUG scheme. In total, from both our tour and the roost, we estimated 6-7000 birds in the region.

5 February 2014

We did a shortened day of resightings in preparation for a catch in the evening. We did find one group (633 individuals) today south of Santa Amalia for the first time. The catch went reasonably well, but only netted 4 transmitter-worthy females, which we took to Badajoz for safe keeping overnight.

6 February 2014

We met up with the Kening fan 'de Greide team in Badajoz and attached transmitters to the females that we had captured last night. All went well and many photos were taken. The afternoon saw a torrential downpour.

7 February 2014

Along with Theunis P. and Sytze Pruiksmá, we resighted this morning around Hernan Cortes. At noon, in the company of the Kening fan 'de Greide group and a class of local school children, we released the 4



transmitter-carrying females south of Hernan Cortes at the same sight as last year. After a merry lunch, we spent the rest of the afternoon (sans Theunis and Sytze) resighting north of Hernan Cortes. From the roost in the evening, our estimate of the number of birds in the region dropped by half, to 3,500-4,000 birds.

8 February 2014

The rains have come. We spent much of the day inside. In the late afternoon we got out for a bit of resighting in between Valdehornillos and Hernan Cortes. Once again, we only estimated 3,500-4,000 birds in the region.

9 February 2014

We spent most of the day exploring the La Serena region. In the late afternoon we returned and tried to find the roost. Through the pouring rain, we determined that most birds were roosting near the abandoned house along Canal Secundario #3 and then just south of Alonso de Ojeda.

10 February 2014

We resighted around Hernan Cortes and then, unsuccessfully tried to catch in the evening. It rained off and on and then made everything hard. No increase in the number of birds present.

11 February 2014

More of the same. The birds are all concentrated in the area around Hernan Cortes and then splitting up in the evening between a number of different roosts, all north of the road between Vivares and Valdehornillos. Numbers in the region have yet to increase.

12 February 2014

During the day, resightings around Hernan Cortes. In the evening another failed catch. Too much wind and rain. And, unlike in years past, after a flock has been pushed towards the nets at a roost site, they switch roost sites instead of returning again to the area that they had just left. Frustrating. Numbers have increased slightly to ~5,500.

13 February 2014

More rain and more limited resighting effort in the Hernan Cortes region. In spite of the low numbers and poor weather, we have resighted 158 individuals from the RUG scheme as of today.

14 February 2014

Valentine's Day in the most romantic village in the world. Doing our rounds of the Hernan Cortes region, we note a very slight influx of new individuals, mostly with abdominal profiles of 1. Presumably these are birds coming straight from Africa.

15 February 2014

We are now graced by the presence of Albert Beintema and show him around the area. Numbers do seem to have picked up slightly and the center of activity has moved to two new areas, one just south of Valdehornillos and the other south of Hernan Cortes. Both are new places where we have not observed godwits before, either this year or last.

16 February 2014

A largely failed catch, with only two males captured during the first net run. Before that, more resightings in the same general area. A visit to Almoharin proves fruitless.

17 February 2014

Resightings in the same general area. No change in the number of birds or their areas of usage.

18 February 2014

During the day another tour of La Serena. At night, a successful catch—finally! We were able to get 9 transmitter-worthy females and enough males to use in our experiment.

19 February 2014

A trip to Badajoz to attach the transmitters to the new females.

20 February 2014

We released the last 4 transmitter birds today at the same locations as the previous release. It was a whole lot quieter this time as there were no kids and no Kening fan 'de Greide group. There was a nice breeze into which to release the birds and Reahel, Drylts, Gerkeskleaster and Aldeboarn all flew of very well.

21 February 2014

We did a grand tour of the area today, covering all known locations between Santa Amalia in the south, Palazuelo in the north, Almoharin in the west and Yelbes in the east. The hours of driving around felt like a waste, as the only birds we found were the well-known 7000 birds in the Hernan Cortes region. We managed to resight 66 individuals from the RUG scheme in the afternoon.

22 February 2014

We went straight to the Hernan Cortes region today and encountered a flock of 5000 birds. We read rings there until 15:00 and resighted 49 RUG scheme individuals. We then saw a flock of 2500 godwits flying northwest in the direction of Vivares – after trying multiple dirt roads we encountered this flock and resighted transmitter female Aldeboarn and 4 other RUG scheme godwits.

23 February 2014

Today was our last day – we spent the morning resighting in Hernan Cortes, which resulted in 29 RUG scheme individuals. The rest of the day we cleaned our incredibly dirty car and our field station.



Foto: Jose Abad