

University of Groningen

Current state of Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa limosa* breeding in France

Robin, Frédéric; Robin, Jean-Guy; Dulac, Perrine; Guéret, Jean-Pierre; Piersma, Theun

Published in:
Wader Study Group Bulletin

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2012

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Robin, F., Robin, J-G., Dulac, P., Guéret, J-P., & Piersma, T. (2012). Current state of Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa limosa* breeding in France. *Wader Study Group Bulletin*, 119(2), 133-136.

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

Current state of Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa limosa* breeding in France

Frédéric Robin¹, Jean-Guy Robin², Perrine Dulac³, Jean-Pierre Guéret⁴ & Theunis Piersma^{5,6}

¹ 34 rue de Redon, 35000 Rennes, France. frobin02@gmail.com

² Le Daviaud - L'écomusée du Marais Vendéen, 85550 La Barre de Monts, France

³ Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO) Vendée, antenne Marais Breton, 16 rue de la Croix Blanche, 85 230 Beauvoir-sur-Mer, France

⁴ Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO), programme Marais Poitevin, Le Grand Mothais, 85450 Champagne-les-Marais, France

⁵ Animal Ecology Group, Centre for Ecological and Evolutionary Studies, University of Groningen, PO Box 11103, 9700 CC Groningen, The Netherlands

⁶ Department of Marine Ecology, Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research (NIOZ), PO Box 59, 1790 AB Den Burg, Texel, The Netherlands

Robin, F., Robin, J-G., Dulac, P., Guéret, J-P. & Piersma, T. 2012. Current state of Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa limosa* breeding in France. *Wader Study Group Bull.* 119(2): 133–136.

Keywords: shorebirds, breeding population, colour ringing, southern geographical limits, Marais Breton, Marais Poitevin

In recent decades, the NW Europe population of the nominate subspecies of the Black-tailed Godwit, *Limosa limosa limosa*, has been in steep decline. As no changes in survival have been apparent so far, these declines are likely to have been caused by declines in recruitment, possibly due to decreasing quality and availability of breeding habitat. Most nominate Black-tailed Godwits breed in agricultural grasslands in the Netherlands and, to some extent, in Germany. Here we show that, in contrast to the general decreasing trend, numbers of breeding pairs have actually increased at the southernmost limit of their distribution in France, from 51 pairs in 1985 to 164 pairs in 2011. We review current knowledge of this godwit population as a basis for a demographic study.

INTRODUCTION

The decline of the nominate subspecies of the Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa limosa* has now been in progress for several decades at a rate of ~5% per year (Gill *et al.* 2007). Most *limosa* Black-tailed Godwits breed in the Netherlands (45,000–50,000 individuals; BirdLife International 2004), where they prefer herb-rich grasslands with high water tables coincident with non-industrial dairy farming (e.g. Groen *et al.* 2012). There are also smaller populations breeding in Germany (6,000–7,300 ind.), Belgium (1,100–1,300 ind.) and Denmark (700–725 ind.). *Limosa* godwits winter in W Africa, mostly in the rice plantations of Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and in the flood plains of the Niger in Mali (Kirby & Scott 2009). Recently, a wintering population has also been discovered in the Doñana wetlands in S Spain (Marquez-Ferrando *et al.* 2011). During northward migration, these godwits stage for several weeks in harvested but unploughed wet rice-fields in Portugal and Spain (Lourenço *et al.* 2010). Largely, the decline in population size appears to reflect poor breeding habitat quality and low recruitment rates rather than reduced survival outside the breeding season (Kleijn & van Zijl 2004, Kleijn *et al.* 2010, Schekkerman & Beintema 2007, Schekkerman *et al.* 2009).

The estuaries of W France are known to be important for migrating and wintering Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits *L. l. islandica* (Robin 2011). In France, nominate Black-tailed Godwits mostly occur in spring in the wetlands of the Charente Maritime and Vendée departments, and also in the Basse Vallée Angevine in the Maine-et-Loire department,

mixing then with migrant Icelandic godwits en route to the Netherlands (Gill *et al.* 2007). The year to year variation in the numbers of staging birds may reflect variations in the extent of flooded grasslands in France (Jensen & Perennou 2007, Kuijper *et al.* 2006).

In contrast to the decline in the numbers of pairs further north, a small core of breeders in France has expanded over the last few decades (Robin & Dulac in press). However, except for knowledge of the number of breeding pairs, we know very little of the wintering range, migration and recruitment of this population at the southern breeding limit. Here, our aim is to review information on distribution, numbers and habitat-use of Black-tailed Godwits breeding in France as a basis for a programme of research into their demographics.

METHODS

Estimates of the breeding population of Black-tailed Godwits in France were derived from national surveys in 1984, 1995 and 1996 (Issa & Boutin 2010), and more recent surveys of rare and endangered breeding birds in France by Robin & Dulac (in press) for the period 2001–2011. Likely breeding areas were identified based on the knowledge of local naturalists in each region (Table 1). The number of breeding pairs in individual fields was estimated by walking a loop-transect twice in April and May, or in May if there was a single survey. An estimated range of the number of breeding pairs was determined for each discrete area from a minimum based on the number of pairs observed with clear breeding behaviour to a maximum that included pairs whose breeding status was

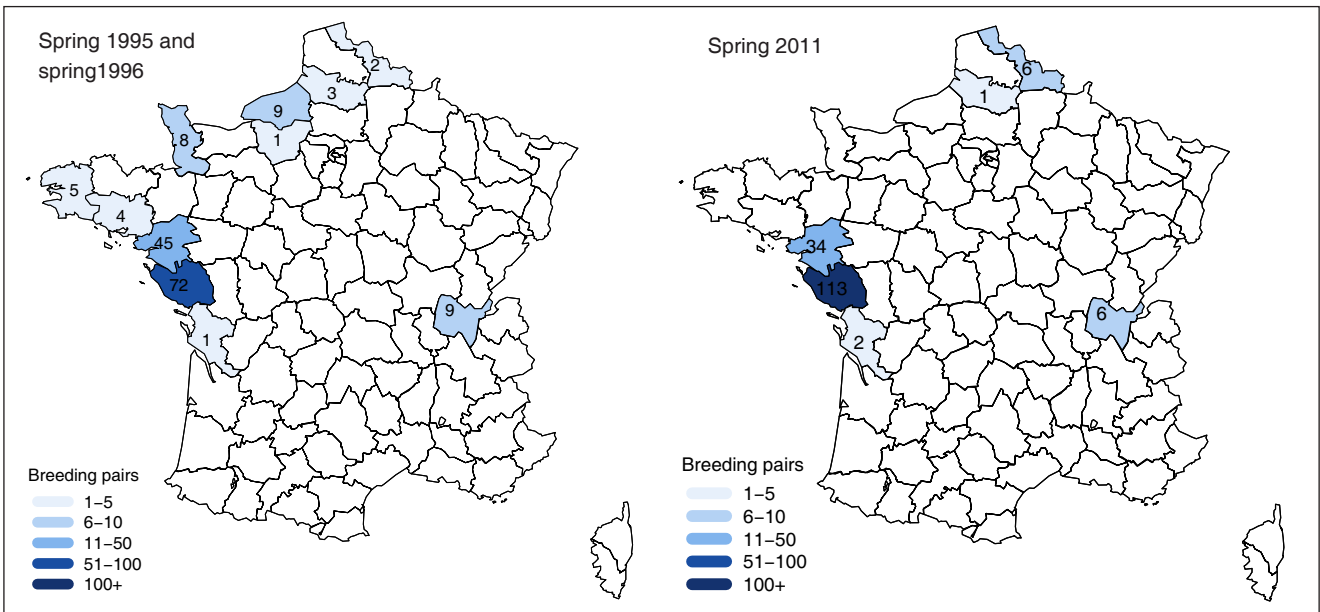


Fig. 1. Estimated maximal number of breeding pairs of breeding Black-tailed Godwits per department in 1995–1996 from Issa & Boutin (2010) and in 2011 from Robin & Dulac (in press).

Fig. 2. (right) Population trend of continental Black-tailed Godwits breeding in France. The black line shows the mean number of pairs, and grey shading indicated the range between the minimum and maximum estimates (Robin & Dulac in press); also shown is the slope of the decline in the overall population of the subspecies estimated by Gill *et al.* 2007.

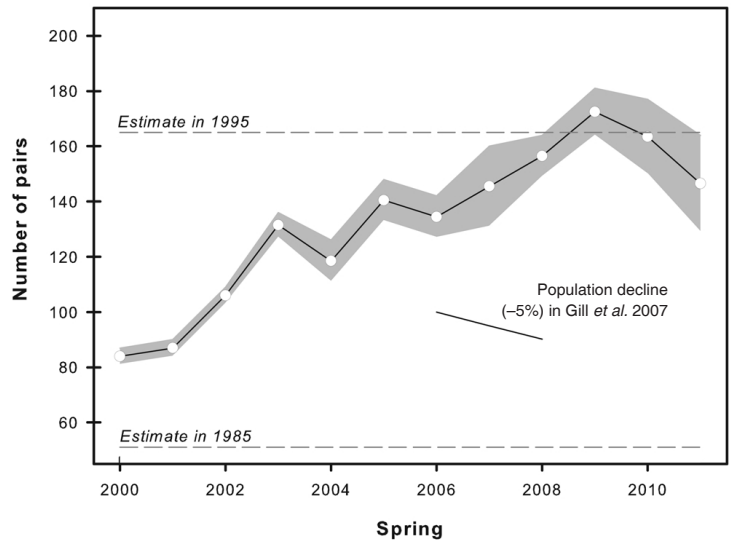
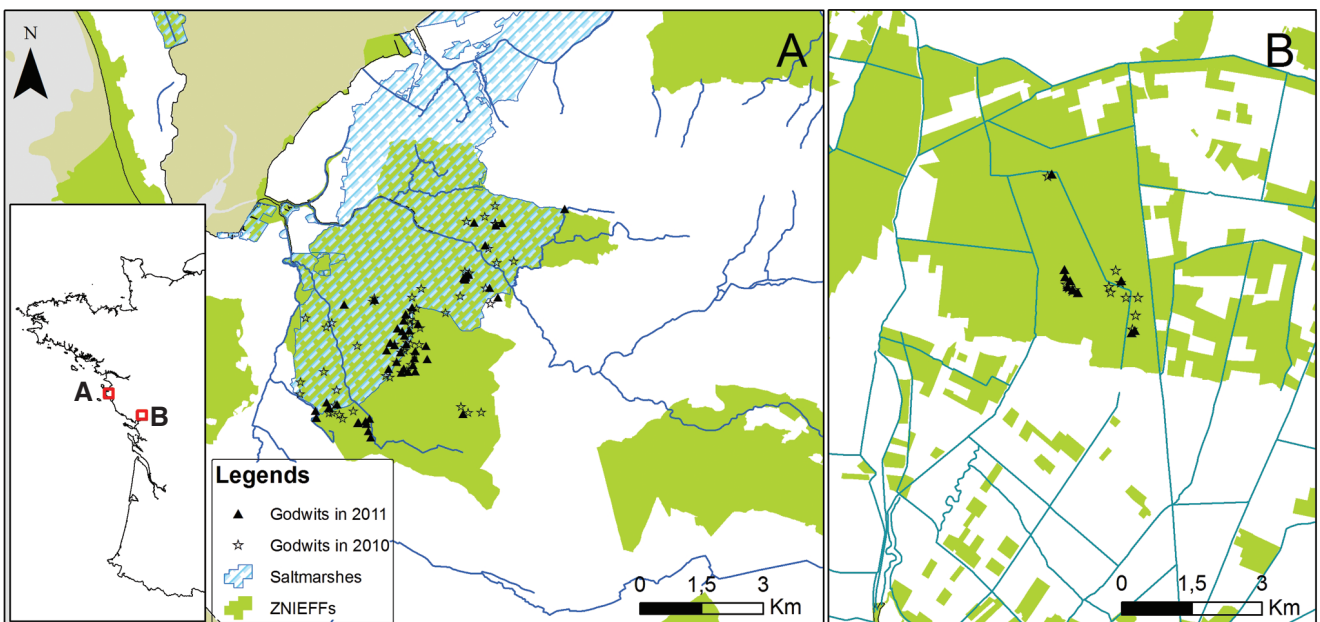


Fig. 3. (below) Location of pairs of Black-tailed Godwits in spring 2010 and 2011 in (A) the Marais Breton, Vendée, and (B) the North part of Marais Poitevin, Vendée (regional nature reserve of la Vacherie). Natural Zones of Animal and Plant Ecological Interest (Zones Naturelles d'Intérêt Ecologique, Faunistique et Floristique) are indicated in green and saltmarshes by blue hatching.



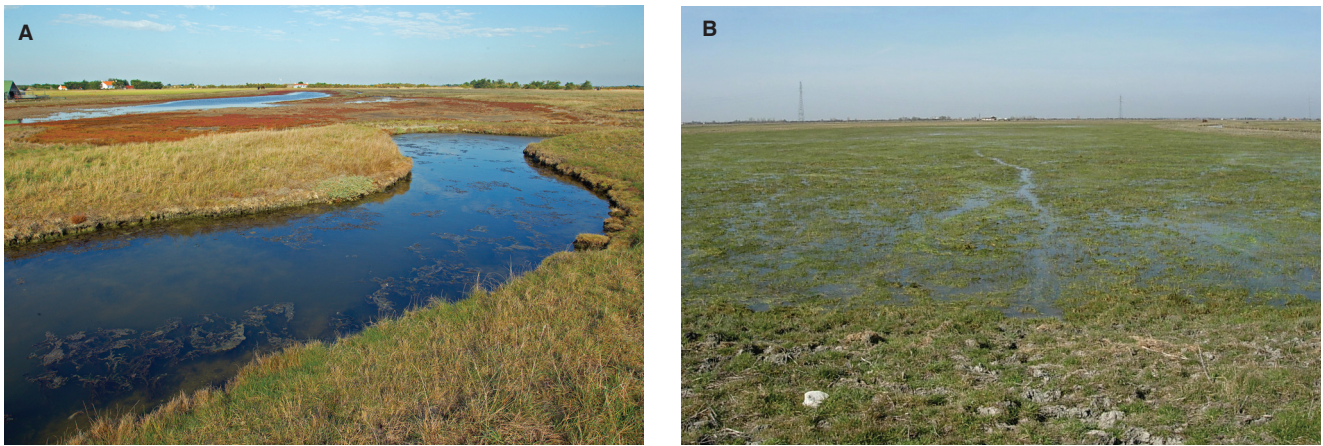


Fig. 4. Typical breeding meadows used by Black-tailed Godwits at: **(A)** Marais Breton in northern Vendée (photo: Louis-Marie Préau) and **(B)** Marais Poitevin in southern Vendée (photo: Jean-Pierre Guéret).

water levels and vegetation structure are managed for waders (Fig. 3B). Most of the areas in which godwits breed are large, open meadows with steadily lowering water tables during the breeding season and a degree of cattle grazing (Fig. 4B).

Summary of research plans

The nominate *limosa* subspecies of the Black-tailed Godwit is classified as vulnerable (BirdLife International 2004) and is protected by a 5-year hunting moratorium in France covering 2007–2012. Despite this special status, few studies have been carried out on Black-tailed Godwits in France. Recruitment rates in particular are completely unknown. Moreover, as *limosa* godwits occur in France as late as end of October (database of the Nature Reserve of Moëze-Oléron), it is uncertain whether the birds that are present in autumn are local breeders or come from elsewhere in Europe. This needs special attention, especially if there are any moves to allow the resumption of hunting in late August or early September. To fill these knowledge gaps, a colour-ringing programme was initiated in 2012 in the two main breeding areas in Vendée, Marais Breton and Marais Poitevin (Fig. 3). The study aims to document: (1) individual site-faithfulness and habitat use; (2) (local) recruitment and survival, (3) the length of the post-breeding period, and (4) the wintering areas used by this most southerly breeding population. Do they go to W Africa or stay in Iberia?

These studies should help site managers to adjust and optimize agro-environmental schedules and other management measures (timing of mowing, nest protection, water level). We also hope they will generate data that will inform decisions on the hunting moratorium.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the count coordinators J. Piette, G. Gelinaud, D. Montford, M. Caupenne, P. Triplet, P. Provot, P. Crozier, R. Purenne, N. Fillol and all volunteers involved for the survey work and Jenny Gill for her constructive comments on a draft.

REFERENCES

BirdLife International. 2004. *Birds in Europe: population estimates, trends and conservation status*. BirdLife International, Cambridge, UK.
Gill, J.A., Langston, R.H.W., Alves, J.A., Atkinson, P.W., Bocher, P., Vieira, N.C., Crockford, N.J., Gélinaud, G., Groen, N., Gunnarsson,

T.G., Hayhow, B., Hooijmeijer, J., Kentie, R., Kleijn, D., Lourenço, P.M., Masero, J.A., Meunier, F., Potts, P.M., Roodbergen, M., Schekkerman, H., Schroeder, J., Wymenga, E. & Piersma, T. 2007. Contrasting trends in two Black-tailed Godwit populations: a review of causes and recommendations. *Wader Study Group Bulletin* 114: 43–50.
Groen, N.M., Kentie, R., De Goeij, P., Verheijen, B., Hooijmeijer, J.C.E.W. & Piersma, T. 2012. A modern landscape ecology of Black-tailed Godwits: habitat selection in southwest Friesland, the Netherlands. *Ardea* 100: 19–28.
Issa, N. & Boutin, J.-M. 2010. *Anatidés et Limicoles nicheurs en France: enquêtes 2010*. MEEDDM (Ministère de l'Ecologie, de l'Energie, du Développement Durable et de la Mer).
Jensen, F.P. & Perennou, C. 2007. *European Union Management Plan for Black-tailed Godwit Limosa limosa 2007–2009*. European Communities, Luxembourg.
Joyeux, E. & Guéret, J.-P. 2010. *Suivi de la migration pré-nuptiale de la Barge à queue noire Limosa limosa en Marais Poitevin – Février–Mars 2010*. Commande par Parc Interrégional du Marais Poitevin.
Kirby, J. & Scott, D. 2009. The Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*. In: *An Atlas of Wader Populations in Africa and Western Eurasia*. Delany, S., Scott, D., Dodman, T. & Stroud, D. (eds). Wetlands International, Wageningen, the Netherlands.
Kleijn, D., Schekkerman, H., Dimmers, W.J., Van Kats, R.J.M., Melman, D. & Teunissen, W.A. 2010. Adverse effects of agricultural intensification and climate change on breeding habitat quality of Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa l. limosa* in the Netherlands. *Ibis* 152: 475–486.
Kleijn, D. & van Zuijlen, G.J.C. 2004. The conservation effects of meadow bird agreements on farmland in Zeeland, the Netherlands, in the period 1989–1995. *Biol. Conserv.* 117: 443–451.
Kuijper, D.P.J., Wymenga, E., van der Kamp, J. & Tanger, D. 2006. *Wintering areas and spring migration of the Black-tailed Godwit (Limosa limosa): Bottlenecks and protection along the migration route*. Altenburg & Wymenga Report 820. Altenburg & Wymenga Ecological Consultants, Veenwouden, the Netherlands.
Lourenço, P.M., Kentie, R., Schroeder, J., Alves, J.A., Groen, N.M., Hooijmeijer, J.C.E.W. & Piersma, T. 2010. Phenology, stopover dynamics and population size of migrating Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa limosa* in Portuguese rice plantations. *Ardea* 98: 35–42.
Marquez-Ferrando, R., Hooijmeijer, J., Groen, N., Piersma, T. & Figuerola, J. 2011. Could Doñana, SW Spain, be an important wintering area for continental Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa limosa*? *Wader Study Group Bull.* 118: 82–86.
Robin, F. 2011. *Distribution, habitat selection and feeding strategies of the Black-tailed Godwit Limosa limosa at the French wintering site scale*. Ph.D. thesis, University of La Rochelle, France.
Robin, J.-G. & Dulac, P. in press. La barge à queue noire. In: *Les oiseaux nicheurs rares et menacés en France en 2011*. *Ornithos* 19(5).
Schekkerman, H. & Beintema, A.J. 2007. Abundance of invertebrates and foraging success of Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* chicks in relation to agricultural grassland management. *Ardea* 95: 39–54.
Schekkerman, H., Teunissen, W. & Oosterveld, E. 2009. Mortality of Black-tailed godwit *Limosa limosa* and Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* chicks in wet grasslands: influence of predation and agriculture. *J. Ornith.* 150: 133–145.