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Arne J. Lesterhuis Olivier Claessens Brian J. O'Shea Sean Dilrosun
Gini Dilrosun Elie Monin Karel de Weerdt

Photo: Brian O'Shea

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First observations of *Limosa fedoa* (Marbled Godwit) in Suriname, French Guiana, and Guyana

Arne J. Lesterhuis*[1], Olivier Claessens[2], Brian J. O'Shea[3], Sean Dilrosun[4], Gini Dilrosun[5], Elie Monin[6], and Karel de Weerdt[7]

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Cover Page: First record of *Limosa fedoa* (Marbled Godwit) in Guyana. One of the three individuals among a flock of *Tringa semipalmata semipalmata* (Eastern Willet) on 12 January 2025 at Maida, East Berbice-Corentyne, Guyana. Photographer: Brian O'Shea; Macaulay Library ML635477797.

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* Corresponding Author

[1]Manomet Conservation Sciences/Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network Executive Office, San Francisco 1944, Fernando de la Mora, Paraguay;
e-mail: alesterhuis@manomet.org

[2]Groupe d'Etude et de Protection des Oiseaux en Guyane, 431 route d'Attila Cabassou, 97354 Remire-Montjoly, French Guiana;
e-mail: olivier.claessens@gepog.org

[3]North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, Raleigh, North Carolina 27601, USA;
e-mail: brian.oshea@naturalsciences.org

[4]Freelance Bird Guide, Paramaribo, Suriname;
e-mail: seandil@hotmail.com

[5]Green Heritage Fund Suriname, Geertruidastraat 24, Paramaribo, Suriname;
e-mail: gini@greenfundsuriname.org

[6]Groupe d'Etude et de Protection de Oiseaux en Guyane, CD 8 – PK 27,5 Avenue Paule Berthelot, 97360 Mana, French Guiana:
e-mail: elie.monin@gepog.org

[7]Freelance Journalist, Ombeekhof 81, 9040, Sint Amandsberg, Belgium;
e-mail: karel.deweerdt@gmail.com

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Abstract

Limosa fedoa, the Marbled Godwit, is a large shorebird that breeds in the grasslands of the northern United States and southern Canada, and winters along the coast of the United States, Mexico, and Central America, occasionally reaching the Pacific and Atlantic coasts of South America. During fieldwork along the coasts of Suriname, French Guiana, and Guyana in 2023–2025, small numbers of the species were observed, representing the first records for the three Guianas. These records expand geographical knowledge of the distribution of the species on the north coast of South America.

Keywords

French Guiana, Guyana, *Limosa fedoa*, Marbled Godwit, Suriname, Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network

Resumen

Primeras observaciones de *Limosa fedoa* (Aguja Canela) en Surinam, Guayana Francesa y Guyana • *Limosa fedoa*, conocida como Aguja Canela, es una ave playera de gran tamaño que se reproduce en los praderas del norte de los Estados Unidos y el sur de Canadá e inverna a lo largo de la costa de los Estados Unidos, México y América Central; alcanzando ocasionalmente las costas del Pacífico y del Atlántico de América del Sur. Durante trabajos de campo a lo largo de la costa de Surinam, Guayana Francesa y Guyana en 2023–2025, se observaron pequeños grupos de esta especie, lo que representa los primeros registros para las tres Guayanas. Estos registros amplían el conocimiento geográfico de la distribución de la especie en la costa norte de América del Sur.

Palabras clave

Avoceta Parda, Guyana, Guyana Francesa, *Limosa fedoa*, Res Hemisférica de Reservas para Aves Playeras, Suriname

Résumé

Premières observations de *Limosa fedoa* (Barge marbrée) au Suriname, en Guyane française et au Guyana • *Limosa fedoa*, la Barge marbrée, est un grand limicole qui se reproduit dans les prairies du nord des États-Unis d'Amérique et du sud du Canada, et qui hiverne le long des côtes des États-Unis, du Mexique et de l'Amérique centrale, atteignant parfois les côtes du Pacifique et de l'Atlantique de l'Amérique du Sud. Lors de travaux de terrain le long des côtes du Suriname, de la Guyane française et du Guyana en 2023–2025, l'espèce a été observée en petits nombres, ce qui représente les premières mentions pour les trois Guyanes. Ces signalements élargissent la connaissance géographique de la répartition de l'espèce sur les côtes nord de l'Amérique du Sud.

Mots clés

Barge marbrée, Guyana, Guyane française, *Limosa fedoa*, Réseau de réserves d'oiseaux de rivage de l'hémisphère occidental, Suriname

Fig. 1. Localities of *Limosa fedoa* (Marbled Godwit) observations in the three Guianas during 2023–2025. Map by Alison DeGraff Ollivierre.

The coasts of Suriname, French Guiana, and Guyana can be considered one of the most important areas for migratory shorebirds in the Americas. Year after year, millions of these long-distance migrants depend on the extensive mudflats and mangroves distributed along the coasts of these three countries. Aerial surveys along the entire coast of South America carried out by the Canadian Wildlife Service in the late 1980s found the highest numbers of wintering migratory shorebirds along the coast of the three Guianas (Morrison and Ross 1989). Despite the critical importance of these habitats, threats are many and rapidly growing. The natural integrity of the coast and its resources are under great pressure due to increasing poverty, lack of conservation and management capacity, unsustainable use of natural resources, and perhaps most pressing, the international interest in offshore oil reserves. Fortunately, conservation attention has become more focused on the area in recent years, resulting in more awareness and knowledge of the importance of the coasts of the three Guianas.

Four species of godwits are recognized globally (Johnsgard 1981), three of which breed in the Western Hemisphere: *Limosa haemastica*, the Hudsonian Godwit, *Limosa lapponica*, the Bar-tailed Godwit, and *Limosa fedoa*, the Marbled Godwit. The fourth, *Limosa limosa*, the Black-tailed Godwit, is restricted to the Old World and only occasionally visits South America as a vagrant (Hayes and Kenefick 2002, Remsen *et al.* 2024). In the three Guianas (Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana), only *Limosa haemastica* is known to occur regularly during southbound and northbound migration (Spaans *et al.* 2018, GEPOG 2025, eBird 2025). *Limosa lapponica* has been observed twice in French Guiana, at Kourou in 2007 and again in 2009–2010 (Claessens and Comité d'Homologation de Guyane 2015).

Limosa fedoa is a large shorebird that breeds in the grasslands of the northern United States and southern Canada, but small, isolated nesting populations are also found in southwestern James Bay and western Alaska (Gratto-Trevor 2020). Two subspecies have been recognized, namely the nominate *L. f. fedoa*, which breeds on the Great Plains, and *L. f. beringiae*, which breeds on the Alaska Peninsula (O'Brien *et al.* 2006). The species is considered a relatively short- to medium-distance migrant, with most birds migrating no farther than the coasts of the United States, Mexico, and Central America (O'Brien *et al.* 2006, Gratto-Trevor 2020). However, small numbers can be found farther south, especially along the Pacific coast where the species irregularly reaches the coast of Peru south to central Chile (Senner and Angulo Pratolongo 2014, García-Walther *et al.* 2017). In Venezuela, the species is a fairly regular migrant along the Caribbean and Atlantic coasts, and increasing reports over the last decade might indicate the species uses the coastal wetlands of Venezuela more frequently than previously thought (Giner *et al.* 2017). In the Caribbean and along the Atlantic coast of South America, the species is much rarer (Raffaele *et al.* 2003, Kenefick *et al.* 2007).

Limosa fedoa is globally considered Vulnerable (BirdLife International 2024), as breeding and migration surveys in Canada and the United States indicate significant population declines over the past three generations (Ziolkowski *et al.* 2022, Smith *et al.* 2023). In the United States and in Canada, the species has been categorized as of high concern (USSCPP 2016; Hope *et al.* 2019).

Observations

Suriname

On 25 October 2023, AL, SD, GD, and KW found two *Limosa fedoa* at the Coppenamemonding Nature Reserve (5°51'55.41"N, 55°57'12.91"W) in Saramacca District, Suriname (Fig. 1). The two individuals were readily identified by AL by their large size, overall brownish mottled plumage, and pinkish base of the bill (Fig. 2). They were easily distinguished from *Limosa haemastica* which has a clear white rump, black tail, and a black and white pattern in the wings. The two godwits observed at Coppenamemonding clearly lacked a white rump and had all brown upper wings (Fig. 2). The other two species of godwit also have turned up as a vagrant in South America (*Limosa limosa*: Hayes and Kenefick 2002; *Limosa lapponica*: Giner *et al.* 2017, Remsen *et al.* 2024), but these species cannot be confused with the Marbled Godwit owing to their characteristic tail and wing patterns.

The Coppenamemonding Nature Reserve lies at the

Fig.2. Two *Limosa fedoa* (Marbled Godwit) observed at Coppenamemonding Nature Reserve, Suriname, in October 2023. Photo by A. Lesterhuis.

Fig.3. The first *Limosa fedoa* (Marbled Godwit) observed at the rice fields of Mana, French Guiana, in December 2024. Photo by O. Claessens.

Fig.4. A second *Limosa fedoa* (Marbled Godwit) observed at the Mana rice fields, French Guiana, in April and May 2025. Photo by V. Rufray.

confluence of the Coppename River and Saramacca River, and is situated approximately 90 km west of Paramaribo, the capital of Suriname (Spaans 2003). The area can only be reached by boat from a small village called Boskamp located on the east bank of the Coppename River. Mudbanks and mangroves are the main types of habitat, attracting large numbers of shorebirds. The Coppenamemonding Nature Reserve is a designated Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) site of hemispheric importance since 1989 owing to its significant importance to shorebirds (Morrison 1989, Hunter *et al.* 1991) based on data from aerial surveys that were carried out by the Canadian Wildlife Service (Morrison and Ross 1989). The Suriname coast in particular proved to be the most important wintering area for migratory shorebirds during these surveys, including 80% of the world's population of *Calidris pusilla*, the Semipalmated Sandpiper (Hunter *et al.* 1991).

French Guiana

On 15 December 2024, EM, OC, and AL, along with Katia Delvoye, Vianey Ramirez, Laetitia Demarcy, and Clémentine Coûteaux, visited the former rice fields of Mana (5°39'36.18"N, 53°42'12.09"W; Fig. 1) to show the Manomet organization its potential for hosting migratory shorebirds and as a possible WHSRN site. Upon reaching the beach, a group of *Calidris canutus* (Red Knot) was observed foraging on the mudflat, along with *Charadrius semipalmatus* (Semipalmated Plover) and *Limnodromus griseus* (Short-billed Dowitcher). Among them, EM quickly spotted a godwit, distinguished by its much larger size and very long, slightly upturned bill. However, its plumage did not match that of a *Limosa haemastica*, which was the most likely species despite the unusual date. The bird had an entirely beige plumage, speckled with brown on the back and wings; at the observation distance, the head, neck, underside, and tail feathers appeared uniformly beige; and the bill, very long and slightly upturned, was bicolored, pale pink at the base and gradually darkening toward the tip (Fig. 3). These characteristics led AL to identify it as a *Limosa fedoa*, a species he had previously observed in Suriname at the Coppenamemonding Nature Reserve. The bird continued to forage while gradually moving away and eventually disappearing behind a slight rise. It was not seen in flight. Thanks to the photos taken, the sighting was accepted by the French Guiana Rarities Committee. This constitutes the first record of *Limosa fedoa* for French Guiana (Comité d'Homologation de Guyane 2025). In April 2025, another individual was seen and photographed at the same site by EM. An individual was seen again by EM, together with Emma Tourtigues, Vincent Rufray, and Mickael Baumann, in the rice fields at the site on 30 April, 16 May, and 28 May 2025 (Fig. 4). Presumably these observations were all of the same bird as in December, thus potentially indicating overwintering at this site.

The former rice fields of Mana, located on the coast at the westernmost tip of French Guiana, form a 3,700-ha (formerly 4,800 ha) polder, separated from the sea by a sandy ridge. During its use from the 1980s to 2000, the site was known for its significant bird diversity (Pelletier *et al.* 2017). Rice cultivation gradually ceased there after 2011, and the polder has been experiencing significant coastal erosion. Despite the natural changes at the site resulting from the lack of management and the increase of seawater into the basins, it remains an exceptional site for birdlife, especially migratory shorebirds of which 30 species have been recorded (GEPOG 2025).

Guyana

On 12 January 2025, while conducting an informal shorebird survey in the vicinity of Maida, East Berbice-Corentyne (6°11'58.20"N, 57°15'19.08"W; Fig. 1), BJO, along with Leon Moore and Christopher Mathura, observed three *Limosa fedoa* in a large assemblage of shorebirds (Fig. 5). The birds were associating closely with a group of *Tringa semipalmata* (Willet) in nearly constant motion, flying short distances between brief foraging bouts among small mangroves along the shoreline, and occasionally perching on the mangroves as the tide rose. The birds were immediately recognized by their buffy plumage, large size, and bicolored, upturned bills. Several photos of the birds were obtained and uploaded to eBird (O'Shea *et al.* 2025). This observation constitutes the first record of *Limosa fedoa* for Guyana. The Maida area is within the Guyana East Coast Important Bird Area (IBA GY-009; BirdLife International 2025) and is known to support tremendous numbers of migratory shorebirds.

Fig.5. Two of the three *Limosa fedoa* (Marbled Godwit) observed among a flock of *Tringa semipalmata* (Willet) in the vicinity of Maida within the Guyana East Coast Important Bird Area, in January 2025. Photo by B. O'Shea.

Discussion

These observations of *Limosa fedoa* represent the first documented records of the species for the three Guianas and expand geographical knowledge of the distribution of the species on the north coast of South America. Nonetheless, these records do not represent the southernmost record along the Atlantic coast in South America. During 2001–2003, the species was found multiple times at the Ilha de Canelas, Pará, Brazil, with a high count of ten individuals on 14 September 2003 (Kober *et al.* 2006). Being relatively regular at that location, it can be expected to occur along the coast of the Guianas as well. The species is likely to be overlooked in the Guianas owing to the inaccessibility of much of the coast and the limited number of coastal observers. With *Limosa fedoa*, French Guiana now has a total of 39 shorebird species (40 taxa), Suriname has 35 documented species (36 taxa), and Guyana 33 species. Of all species (46) recorded in the three Guianas, 9 are South American breeding birds and 7 taxa have a Palearctic origin.

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Author Contributions

All authors participated in the fieldtrips; AL, SD, GD, and KW in Suriname, AL, OC, and EM in French Guiana, and BJO in Guyana. AL led development of the manuscript and described the observation in Suriname. BJO prepared the text regarding observations in Guyana, and OC and EM prepared the text for the observations in French Guiana. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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