



# The travels of E7

by Peter Frost, from OSNZ Wanganui.

Courtesy of Forest and Bird Society, Manawatu.

Bar-tailed Godwit (Kuaka)  
*Limosa lapponica*

Research carried out by scientists in New Zealand and elsewhere along wading birds' migration routes is showing us something of the remarkable physiological achievements of these birds in flying exceptionally long distances non-stop.

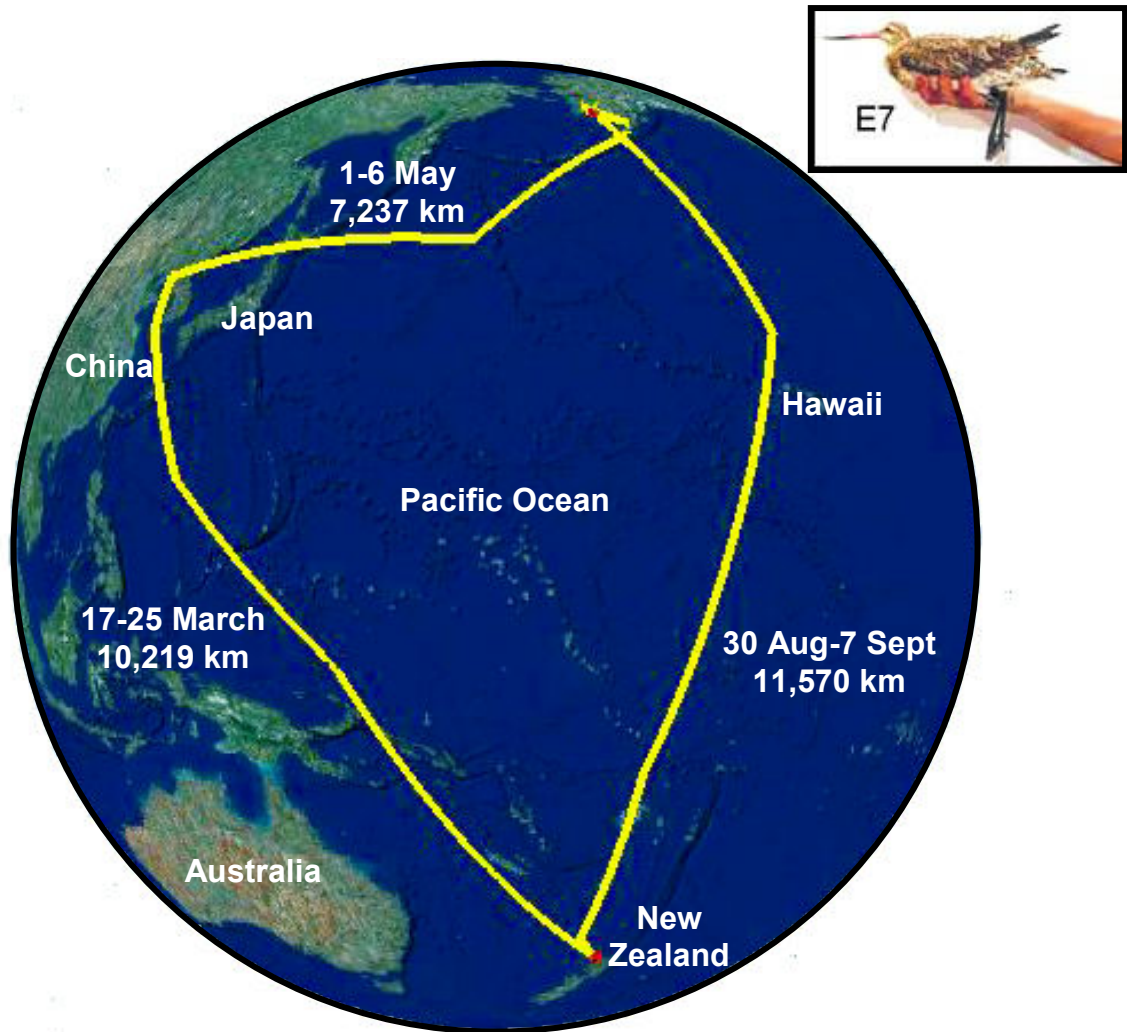
In early 2007, satellite-tracking transmitters were implanted in 16 Bar-tailed Godwits, 8 at Farewell Spit and 8 at Miranda on the Firth of Thames. Six birds were successfully tracked to their breeding grounds in Alaska and far-eastern Russia, while one bird remained in New Zealand (at Farewell Spit) throughout the southern winter and into the following spring and summer.

One bird, a female, "E7", was tracked all the way from New Zealand to her breeding ground in Alaska, via China and the Korean Peninsula, and then back to New Zealand in a remarkable non-stop flight across the Pacific Ocean from Alaska. Two other birds were tracked on the same route but they stopped short of New Zealand, one in New Caledonia (E5), the other in Papua New Guinea (Z0), where they remained for some weeks until their transmitters failed. A fourth godwit was tracked from Alaska to Pavuvu Island in the Solomon Islands before its transmitter went off the air.

A satellite-tracking transmitter was implanted in E7 on 6 February 2007 at Miranda on the Firth of Thames. At about 8 am on 17 March 2007 she left Piako (Miranda) and flew non-stop to Yalu Jiang, a nature reserve on the border between North Korea and China. She arrived there on 24 March after flying non-stop for 10,219 km for 7 days 13 hours (or 181 hours in all), at an average speed of 56.5 kph.

Between 24 March and 1 May 2007, she spent most of the time around Yalu Jiang, moving up and down about 45 km of coast, presumably recouping body reserves before flying to her breeding ground in Alaska. She left Yalu Jiang on 1 May, and flew eastwards over the Korean Peninsula and the island of Hokkaido, Japan, along a line that took her south of the Aleutian Islands. On 15 May she reached her final destination, about 610 km NNW of Port Heiden on the Yukon Delta in Alaska. In all, she had travelled a total of 17,456 km from Piako, involving about 14.5 days (350 hrs) of flying. She nested in that area.

On 29 August (or 06h00 on 30 August NZ time), she headed south over the Alaskan Peninsula and out over the Pacific, towards Hawaii. On 1 September 2007, just over 600 km north of the island of Kauai, Hawaii, she turned SW, arriving at the Miranda Estuary sometime on the night of 7<sup>th</sup> September. She had flown 11,570 km non-stop in 8½ days (204 hr), an average speed of 56.7 kph. In all, her migration route covered 29,181 km. The important thing is not just that E7 did all this, but that she showed that it can be done, as tens of thousands of godwits do each year, migrating between New Zealand (and Australia) and their breeding grounds in eastern Siberia and Alaska.



Migration route of female Bar-tailed Godwit E7 from New Zealand to Alaska, via China and the Korean Peninsula (March-May), and back across the Pacific (August-September)

Image from Google Earth and information given at [http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/shorebirds/barg\\_updates.html](http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/shorebirds/barg_updates.html)

Photos by Paul Gibson