



# Project Godwit

## Annual report

Winter 2018

LIFE15 NAT/UK/000753 – LIFE BLACKWIT UK



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- How you can get involved with Project Godwit



Jonathan Taylor RSPB

**Manea, one of nine headstarted birds released into the fens in 2017 that returned to the project sites in spring 2018**

# Progress in year two

**Project Godwit is partnership project between RSPB and WWT with major funding from the EU LIFE Nature Programme. The project aims to secure the future of black-tailed godwits in the UK.**

## Headstarted godwits return

In 2017, 26 young black-tailed godwits were released into the wild at the Ouse Washes, using a technique known as headstarting. Headstarting involves collecting eggs from the wild under a licence from Natural England. The chicks are then reared in captivity and released at the point of fledging.

This was the first time that headstarted black-tailed godwits had been released in the UK. We are using headstarting to supplement

the small population of black-tailed godwits at the Ouse Washes, where habitat is being specifically managed for black-tailed godwits and other waders.

Black-tailed godwits are migratory birds and spend the winter in the wetlands of Spain, Portugal and West Africa. In early February four of our birds were spotted in Portugal. Then, in April, Delph, a male bird released last year was seen in front of the main observatory hide at WWT Welney, just a stone's throw from where we was released.

We now know that nine of the released birds returned to the fens in 2018, at three different sites. This is particularly encouraging as most black-tailed godwits don't return to breeding until they are two years old, so we hope to see more of the released birds back in the fens in the spring of 2019.

In another significant milestone for the project, one of the returning

birds successfully raised a chick of her own in 2018, after pairing up with wild bird at the RSPB Ouse Washes.



Jonathan Taylor RSPB

**Breeding of headstarted birds is a significant milestone**

## Facing the flood

In early April a large flood displaced several breeding black-tailed godwits at the Nene Washes, and some birds nested in nearby farmland. We were able to work with the farmer and collect the eggs for headstarting.

In June, a further 38 young godwits were released into suitable habitat at the Ouse and Nene Washes. This means that 64 birds have been released by the project to date.

# Enhancing godwit habitat

## Project Godwit focuses on two wetlands in the east of England, the Ouse and Nene Washes.

Through Project Godwit we aim to enhance over 1000 hectares of habitat for black-tailed godwits through the lifetime of the project. These sites need careful management to ensure they provide safe nesting areas and food for the birds when they return in the spring.

## Making new scrapes

### Seven new scrapes have been created at the project sites, to provide foraging areas for godwits and other waders.

Wet pools and scrapes provide important microhabitats and variation, which in turn results in more invertebrate food for black-tailed godwits and other waders. Our new scrapes will also provide areas for birds to roost and will hold water which could be very valuable in years when the washes are dryer than normal.

## Reducing predation

Predation has limited the breeding success of black-tailed godwits at the Nene Washes in recent years. Because of this, we have been trialing the use of exclusion fencing as a means of protected black-tailed godwit nests from predation.

In the first two years of the project we have installed temporary electric fencing during the breeding season. In both years we have found that nest survival was significantly higher inside the exclusion fencing. Permanent barrier fencing is being installed at the Nene Washes to help protect key areas of godwit nesting habitat.

In order to measure the effectiveness of these measures we are monitoring the nests and families of godwits at their breeding sites. To date the project have monitored over eighty godwit nests and 282 nests of other wader species. Our team have also been monitoring the potential predators of godwits use trail cameras, ink tunnels and motion activated nest cameras.



Thomas Pringle RSPB

### Anti-predator fencing at the Nene Washes

## Wild godwits take to the skies

### Black-tailed godwits bred at the RSPB Ouse Washes for the first time since 2012, with four chicks successfully fledged.

Safe, flood-free habitat has been created adjacent to the Ouse Washes for black-tailed godwits and other waders to safely nest in when the washes are in flood. Expanding the breeding range of black-tailed godwits is a key objective of Project Godwit.

Elsewhere in the fens breeding success was the highest since 2013. A total of 18 wild black-tailed godwit chicks fledged in the wild in 2018, joining 38 headstarted birds.

# Get involved with Project Godwit

## Visit us at Welney

### Join us during May and June for special guided tours and behind the scenes access to Project Godwit.

Over 270 people have already joined us at WWT Welney to hear first-hand about Project Godwit. Hear the latest news and have the chance to see chicks in the rearing aviary. See our website for more details as booking is essential.

-  [facebook.com/projectgodwit](https://www.facebook.com/projectgodwit)
-  [@projectgodwit](https://twitter.com/projectgodwit)
-  [theteam@projectgodwit.org.uk](mailto:theteam@projectgodwit.org.uk)

## Godwit Guardians

### Becoming a Godwit Guardian is a great way to get involved in Project Godwit.

Becoming a Guardian links you to one of the godwits, and you will be able to follow your bird's progress over the coming years, as they make a home in the Fens and head off each year on migration across Europe and Africa. Becoming a Godwit Guardian is free for local schools and community groups.

To find out more and to see some of the birds looking for guardians please see our website.

## Schools

### Would your school like a visit from the Project Godwit team?

We are offering free visits and activities for primary schools located near the project sites. If you'd like us to visit your school please contact us [theteam@projectgodwit.org.uk](mailto:theteam@projectgodwit.org.uk).



Bob Ellis WWT

### The Project Godwit team



Jen Smart RSPB

# Globe-trotting godwits

**For the first time, the migration timing and route of a black-tailed godwit breeding in the UK has been revealed.**

We've been fitting black-tailed godwits at the Nene Washes with geolocators, to understand more about their migratory movements. Geolocators are small, lightweight tracking devices which can be attached to a leg-ring or flag. This is the first time that tracking has been used to follow the movements of black-tailed godwits breeding here in the UK.

Eight geolocators were deployed onto adult birds at the Nene Washes in 2017. In spring 2018, all the birds wearing geolocators were re-sighted back in the breeding grounds. The geolocators need to be retrieved to download the data, but fortunately we were able to recapture two of the birds and retrieve their tags.

The tags revealed that these birds had travelled all the way to West Africa for the winter, over 4000 miles. The birds had stopped off in the wetlands of Spain and Portugal on their outward and return journeys. Ten more tags have been deployed in 2018.

**Seen a black-tailed godwit?**

**We'd love you to tell us about it!**

We've been marking black-tailed godwits with individual combinations of colour rings and flags, to help us understand more about the birds' movements away from the breeding sites. All the birds from our scheme have a lime green colour ring with the letter E. If you think you may have seen one, please visit our website and report the sighting.

[www.projectgodwit.org.uk](http://www.projectgodwit.org.uk)

## About us

Project Godwit is a partnership between the RSPB and WWT with major funding from the EU Life nature programme, the HSBC 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary fund, Heritage Lottery Fund through the Back from the Brink programme, Natural England and Leica UK. The project aims to secure the future of black-tailed godwits in the UK.



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The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England & Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654  
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