



GODWITS

Long-haul champions

by Keith Woodley



MEDIA RELEASE

Lunch is served some 9000 m above the Coral Sea. High over the Bismarck Archipelago the in-flight movie begins. Several hours later we are over the Marianas, Guam lies somewhere out to the southwest, Saipan to the east. Directly ahead are the southern Japanese island of Kyushu and the tip of the Korean Peninsula. Out in the darkness two powerful engines pull us northwards. Routine progress on a Korean Airlines flight from Auckland to Seoul-Incheon.

Twenty-seven days earlier, a small flock of bar-tailed godwits had taken off from where the Piako River spills into the Firth of Thames, southeast of Auckland, New Zealand. Quickly gaining altitude, the birds headed north up the bay. This early morning departure should have been discreet and unobserved. But hundreds of kilometres above the earth it was noticed, because one female bird in the flock was a betrayer. Inside her body lay a foreign object, a tiny transmitter programmed to reveal her moments to passing satellites. On her upper leg she carried a black plastic flag, with 'E7' etched in white. For the next seven days the steady northward transit of E7 and her companions was monitored: over the Coral Sea, east of New Guinea, directly between Guam and Saipan, and up the western coast of Korea, only stopping once they reached Yalu Jiang on the northern Yellow Sea coast of China. A tiny cardiovascular system burning fat was the engine for this journey.

Godwits: Long-haul champions, an enchanting, wonderfully illustrated book by shorebird expert Keith Woodley, tells the miraculous story of the godwits and their migrations. It follows the birds on their intrepid journeys, examining the places they visit, be it an estuary in northern New Zealand, a mudflat on the Chinese-North Korean border, or a tundra nesting site in Alaska. Woodley, manager of the Miranda Shorebird Centre, details the amazing changes these birds undergo before their departure - from moulting into new plumage, to doubling their weight and shrinking non-essential body organs - as well as outlines their array of innate skills in weather prediction and global navigation.

Incorporating the author's own eye-witness accounts as well as meticulous research, this tale of navigation and stunning fortitude is written in a compelling yet accessible style that will appeal to both professional bird watchers and general readers curious to discover more about one of nature's quiet achievers.

For **Keith Woodley**, full-time manager at the Miranda Shorebird Centre on the Firth of Thames, a fledgling curiosity in birds very quickly led to a strong interest in ornithology. As a result, he became 'born again' - as a birdwatcher. He has since hosted thousands of people at the Centre and given hundreds of talks on the subject of shorebird migration. He has fostered an intense knowledge of the shorebird migration flyway and visited key sites in Australia, Alaska, China and Korea - all the while having had a front seat as the godwit story unfolded.



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KEITH WOODLEY IS AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW

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