

'E7' the legendary Godwit

No godwit in history has commanded as much attention as 'E7' did in 2007 when her entire annual flight from New Zealand to Yalu Jiang, on to Alaska and back to New Zealand was traced by a satellite transmitter implanted in her abdomen. Until then only a very few people believed Bar-tailed Godwits were capable of such enormous non-stop flights. Flights that seem to defy human logic, in both their endurance and distance covered to say nothing of the extraordinary navigational skills such birds must possess.

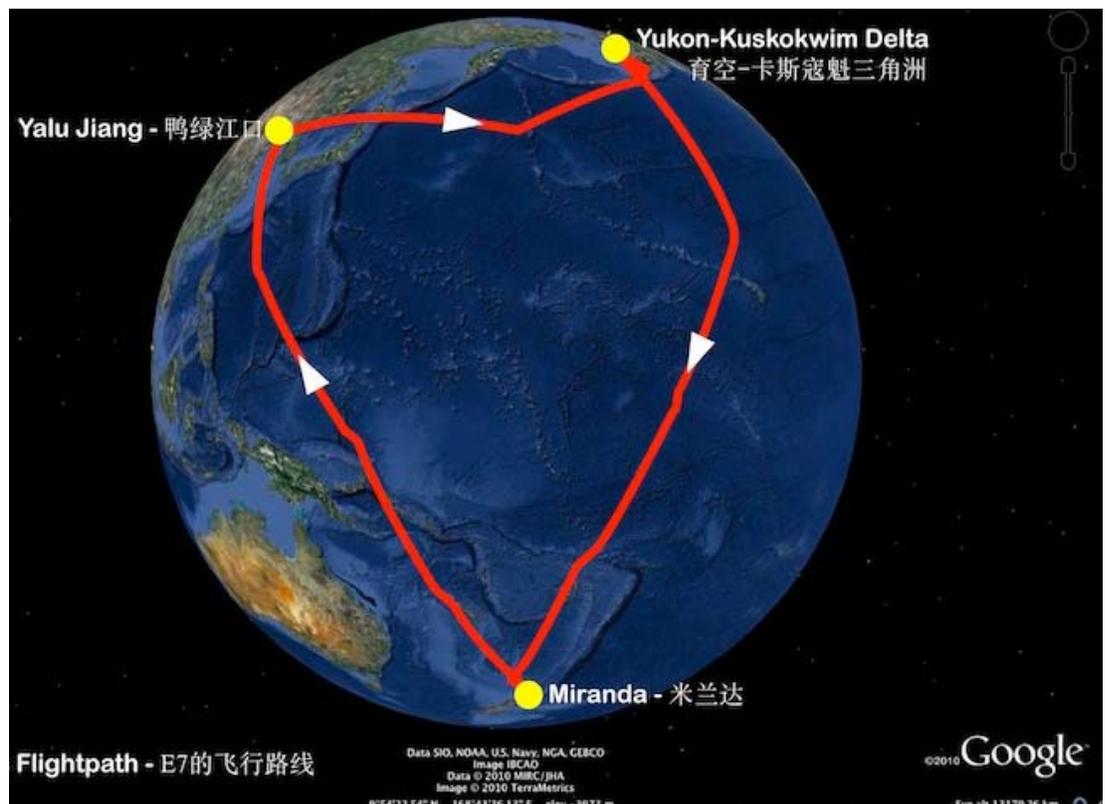
On 17 March 2007, E7 took off from Miranda and after flying for seven days and nights, arrived at Yalu Jiang having not stopped flying for one moment on the 10,200km journey. This was the longest confirmed non-stop flight by any land bird and in doing so not only showed godwits could fly non-stop to East Asia but all the way to the northern shores of the Yellow Sea in a single flight. E7's last footsteps in New Zealand were at Miranda on the Firth of Thames, her next footsteps were in the mud at YJNNR, two sites already linked with a sister site agreement, nothing could have illustrated this link better. Her amazing flight was tempered with the concern that Yalu Jiang is the most northern refuelling site in East Asia for godwits and that she had bypassed other suitable sites further south. As godwits are known to be very site faithful, Yalu Jiang is almost certainly E7's only regular staging site. Even more concerning is the fact she spent the next five weeks in and around Site 2 and the mudflats south of Donggang, the area under most development pressure. Should this site become so degraded godwits can't feed there, what will they do? It is extremely unlikely they will go south again looking for food when the urge to continue north to Alaska is very strong. So will they continue northward with insufficient fuel to reach Alaska or to breed successfully if they get there?

On 1 May 2007, E7 slipped away from Yalu Jiang, unseen by the human eyes that

had been looking for her, but watched from space by an orbiting satellite. She flew east then north skirting bad weather to reach the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta in southwest Alaska six days later. Again she eluded humans including one from Miranda who was only 30km to the north of her final destination at the time but was unable to reach her location.

After apparently breeding she refuelled on the Kuskokwim Shoals, (the most important staging site for godwits leaving Alaska), before departing southwards, and once again into the record books, this time by flying for eight days and nights non-stop back to Miranda in New Zealand. Here, after 11,760km, she slipped quietly back into a difficult to reach part of the coast and remained there, unseen for several more weeks.

This story was picked up by media around the world and was talked about for many weeks. Of course what E7 did was just one example of what thousands of godwits do each year as they travel between breeding and non-breeding grounds but surely few people could remain unmoved by E7's story? It is hoped that she and her like are able to continue making this remarkable journey for many years to come.



Bar-tailed Godwit 'E7's Flight path from Miranda to Yalu Jiang, Alaska and back to Miranda