

DID YOU KNOW THE BLACK-TAILED GODWIT IS AT RISK?

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Black-tailed godwits foraging for food at the Perumbakkam wetland, which is part of the Pallikaranai Marsh, on February 10, 2021 | Photo Credit: PRINCE FREDERICK

Peck down to the soul of any cliché and you would be probing into the soft tissue of an universal truth. Having sufficiently prepared the reader for this overworked saying, one can safely spout it: A thing is better-appreciated after it is well and truly gone.

One would like to wear rose-coloured glasses and peer into a future in which this hackneyed line is not mouthed for the black-tailed godwit (*limosa limosa*), bemoaning its loss.

The numbers of this species have dwindled on account of stressors in its breeding grounds.

As distant as 2006, BirdLife International sounded a note of warning, placing this species in the near-threatened category on the basis of a striking drop in its numbers over a 15-year period immediately preceding the time of study.

In the wetlands in and around Chennai, the black-tailed godwit is somewhat like Alfred Noyes' Highwayman, evocative of a persistence mirrored in the line — "I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way".

For example, during the winter migratory season, the species shows up in impressive numbers at the Perumbakkam wetland, which is actually a stage and a showcase for the birds, both migratory and resident, of the Pallikaranai marsh. According to information currently available about the black-tailed godwit, habitat loss in its breeding grounds is noticeable and so is the corresponding decline in its number. The afore-typed line may suggest the issue is far from our borders and we just have to sit twiddling our thumbs, a prayer on our lips, and hope for the best outcome. Any loss of feeding grounds can exacerbate a species' difficult situation back home where it breeds.

All cross-border groups formed for the protection of migratory species at risk emphasise this inter-connectedness. The black-tailed godwit is covered by the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA).

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