

During the day I saw two more groups of small passerines, one being a group of pardalotes (*Pardalotus* sp.) over 5 km out to sea. These birds may have been driven out by the high westerly winds of the previous day. Land birds swept to sea are undoubtedly left vulnerable, while fatigued, to opportunistic predators such as the Arctic Skua.

The behaviour of Arctic Skuas in pursuing other seabirds, forcing them to drop food, is well known. Predation, although less studied, can also be an important way for Arctic Skuas to feed. Martin & Barry (1978) found that, of 173 food pellets examined, 81.4% contained remains of passerines. Thus, birds may be important in the Arctic Skua diet, especially during the breeding season, when Martin & Barry did their study. My observation, to the best of my knowledge, is the first of such behaviour by Arctic Skuas while they are in Australian seas and perhaps elsewhere in the non-breeding period.

#### LITERATURE CITED

- MARTIN, M.; BARRY, T. W. 1978. Nesting behaviour and food habits of Parasitic Jaegers at Anderson River Delta, Northwest Territories. *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 92: 45-50.
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#### Unexpected reaction of Bar-tailed Godwits to a rain squall

On 6 February 1986, L. Paterson, J. Engebretsen, S. M. Widgery and I were at Access Bay, on the Miranda coast of the Firth of Thames. The weather was overcast with a light northerly wind. A fairly heavy rain squall came through at about 11.15 a.m., but otherwise the day was dry. The temperature was about 24 °C.

With a 3.1 metre high tide due at 5.57 p.m., a large number of birds had gathered by 5.20. On the shellbank were 2 Pied Shags, 3 Black-backed Gulls, 20 + Red-billed Gulls, 20 + White-fronted Terns and perhaps 1500 South Island Pied Oystercatchers. On the mudflat nearby were a flock of 500 + Wrybills and a group of dotterels with a few Knot. Much nearer on the mudflat was a close-packed group of 1000 + Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*).

At about 5.30, a very narrow-fronted band of rain was seen moving in from the north-northwest. When this squall suddenly reached the mudflat, 90% of the godwits turned their bills skywards, standing rather like alarmed bitterns. This presumably reduced their exposure to the heavy rain. During the 10 minutes or so that the downpour lasted the godwits held their bittern-like pose, but the Wrybills ran about their roosting area in an apparently aimless agitated way. The dotterels, knots and the birds on the shellbank just sat it out.

The rain stopped as suddenly as it had started, and the godwits simply shook themselves and began feeding. Although the tide had not yet been over the feeding area, the rain had so thoroughly wetted the mudflat that the birds did not bother to await the arrival and passage of the tidal peak.

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