

Birds: Godwits travel thousands of miles on their migrations

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“Most likely they got caught in a weather system that transported them across the Pacific and here instead of north into Alaska,” Lowe said. “No one really knows but obviously this is unprecedented.”

Birders spotted four bar-tailed godwits in Newport at the end of April. “And we figured that was interesting,” said Patterson. “At the time four was a big deal.”

People kept reporting a sighting here, a sighting there.

“By the time I finally found them it was kind of, ‘Well, it’s about time,’” Patterson said. He has seen bar-tailed godwits before, but never in the spring.

For these birds, being blown off-course means they might not make it up to Alaska in time for the breeding season. They’ll need to rebuild fat reserves, Lowe said, a process that takes weeks, assuming they can find the right kind of food here.

“I suspect it would be way too late and take too much energy to breed this year,” Lowe said.

The godwits travel thousands of miles on their annual migrations. They fly from New Zealand to China, stopping at the Yellow Sea’s tideland



Mike Patterson spotted 17 adult bar-tailed godwits on a stretch from Gearhart to the Peter Iredale shipwreck on Wednesday.

flats in March to fatten up for a month, then proceeding on to Alaska and then back to New Zealand. Birds fixed with satellite tracking gear have logged upward of 7,000 miles in a single nine-day slog.

Throughout much of their migration, “they’re lucky if they see an island enroute,” Lowe said.

‘Big as a chicken’

Bar-tailed godwits are fairly large. Patterson describes them as “big as a chicken” with long legs and a very long bill “that turns up at the end like

Bob Hope.” If you know what you’re looking for, he says, they are very distinctive even when compared to other godwit species.

Lowe is used to seeing the adult birds somewhere else entirely — in China, on fragile tidal wetlands along the Yellow Sea between China and North Korea and South Korea.

He has traveled there seven times, since he retired from the Fish and Wildlife Service in 2015, as a volunteer with Global Parks, a nonprofit group made up of retired professionals with similar backgrounds in

conservation and wildlife and resource management. With funding from the Paulson Institute, he and others have been working on wetland conservation with the Chinese.

The habitat in the Yellow Sea is crucial for the bar-tailed godwits, but it is an area where they are quickly losing their footing. It’s a familiar story to West Coast residents, though on a much more massive scale: rapid development encroaching on wetland habitat and species getting lost in the mix. In China, whole cities and ports are filling up former wetlands,

Lowe said.

In their long travels back and forth, the godwits need these areas to build up fat reserves.

“If they don’t have the Yellow Sea, they’re in real trouble,” Lowe said. “We can do great stuff in Alaska, but if everyone else doesn’t do their part, these birds can’t make a go of it.”

Threatened wetlands

“The coastal wetlands are the most threatened, but least protected, ecosystems in China,” stated a summary

of findings for a conservation and management plan for the Yellow Sea and Bohai Sea announced in Beijing in 2015. In the past 50 years, the country has lost more than half of its temperate coastal ecosystem and the majority of its mangroves and coral reefs due to economic development.

Recently, a number of countries, including New Zealand and Great Britain, and groups like Global Parks, have started working with the Chinese to protect these areas.

Lowe and Patterson say birders should get out on the beach while they can; the godwits will not stick around for long. But Lowe, a photographer in his spare time, has a request to dog owners: Don’t let them chase shorebirds.

To nonbirders, the different birds on the beach all resemble each other and dogs don’t usually discriminate, at all. If you could follow a godwit out on the beach, you would soon find out, as Lowe has looking through his camera scope, that dogs up and down the coast are chasing shorebirds all day long.

And maybe, Lowe said, those particular shorebirds have just flown from New Zealand.

Missing: Merrill ‘has access to firearms which were not recovered’

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amount” of guns, and a smaller safe containing ammunition had been “totally destroyed.” The burglars had also taken coins and silver.

As he took in the scene, the brother remembered that just as he arrived, he’d heard two male voices coming from the property next door, before a car started up and sped away.

The sniff test

Pacific County Sheriff’s Deputy Rick Goodwin quickly realized this burglary was different from the hasty “smash and grab” crimes he usually dealt with.

“The moment I walked in the shop, I knew exactly how they got into the safe,” Goodwin wrote in his report. A distinctive, familiar odor made him instantly recall a long-ago job, assembling trucks.

“The smell I recognized was the smell of a grinder on metal,” Goodwin said. He found gouges from a grinder and crowbar all over the safe, and the blue tinge from a torch on the damaged hinges. Thieves had used a cutting torch to destroy the smaller safe.

Outside, Goodwin noticed a mole hill that had been kicked over and box of ammunition scattered on a small trail. He followed the trail to an old motor home on the neighboring property.

When the owner arrived from Arizona two days later, he discovered that financial records, tools, knives and documentation for the guns were missing, too.

The burglars had used the man’s own grinder to break into his safe.

The runaway lookout

A week later, a man named Carter Strever called Goodwin. Sounding panicked, Strever, 48, allegedly told the deputy “the burglary was not his idea.” Eventually, he explained that he was supposed to act as a lookout for the Ocean Park burglary, but he’d gotten mad and left. Strever reportedly said one of the men who broke in named was “Kurt,” and the other was Richard Quartier. He said he and Quartier, 57, had both pre-

viously lived in RVs on the victim’s neighbor’s property.

The neighbor, George Kopp, told Goodwin that three weeks before, Strever had suddenly given Kopp his motor home, and asked for a ride to the Astoria Bridge.

Around the same time, the victim said when he went to Kopp’s house to ask him about the burglary, he saw his own stolen powder horn hanging on the wall. Kopp gave it back, and said he’d found it inside the motor home.

Guns on the run

The day after the raid on Merrill’s home and businesses, they served a warrant at his unit at Pioneer Storage. They didn’t find any guns.

A source told Sheriff’s Office Detective Ryan Tully that Jeffrey Walton, the manager of the storage facility, had covered up the surveillance cameras, and moved the guns to a different unit. Walton, 57, initially denied having anything to do with the guns, or with Merrill, but later admitted to knowing Merrill, according to police documents.

The burglary investigation stalled out.

Cutting torch and incentive

In late April, deputies met with a woman who claimed to know Merrill very well. Facing legal problems of her own, she volunteered to work as a confidential informant.

She alleged that Quartier and Kurt Jones, 54, had done the burglary, with help from Kopp. But, she said, Merrill had provided the men with both a cutting torch and an incentive.

According to the informant, when they finally cracked the safe, Jones and Quartier took the guns to Kopp’s house. Merrill allegedly came over the next night, and bought the guns for “\$4,000 and some dope.” Quartier and Jones split the money.

She also said that shortly after the April 4 raid, Merrill had transferred a storage unit to her name. She claimed Merrill’s collection included the Ocean Park guns, as well as guns taken from other places.

Later, investigators learned

that when they searched Merrill’s unit, the guns were actually close by, in the informant’s unit. Walton and the informant then allegedly moved them again, to an empty unit.

In late April, Tully served a warrant on units belonging to Walton and the informant, then did a basic search of all the other storage units at Pioneer, but didn’t find anything.

A failed gun sale

By early May, the guns had been moved to a unit at Affordable Storage, the informant said. She agreed to help the cops get them.

In a May 10 meeting that included an undercover detective from Oregon, she called Walton and told him she had a buyer who would pay \$15,000 for the guns. He agreed to make the sale.

The following day, they sorted out the details: allegedly, Walton would get \$11,000, and she would get \$4,000 for acting as go-between. She asked for photos of the guns. According to Tully’s report, the pictures showed “assault rifles, pistols and shotguns. One of the firearms appeared to be a sawed-off shotgun.”

That evening, an undercover officer and the informant went to Affordable Storage, where they met two men, Bryan Haberman, 37, and Jeffrey Bean, 20. The men told them the guns would be ready in 10 minutes.

At that point, Tully arrived with two deputies and arrested Haberman and Bean. Inside the facility, Tully said, “I observed at least 20 to 30 firearms laid out on the floor.”

Haberman and Bean

Bean claimed he worked for Haberman’s moving business. He said he didn’t know until he arrived at the facility that his boss wanted him to help move stolen guns.

Haberman said he knew Walton because he had an office at Pioneer Storage, for which Walton had a key. He claimed that Walton moved the guns into his office after police searched the first storage units. Walton allegedly asked him to help him find a new hiding place for the guns, saying he was moving them on behalf of

“Tony.” Haberman allegedly agreed to help in exchange for three guns.

A Long Beach officer arrested Walton at Pioneer Storage. In custody, he allegedly admitted Merrill had moved firearms into his storage unit, then transferred them to the informant. Walton allegedly admitted he moved them several more times to keep police from finding them. He was to receive \$4,000 for his trouble.

When the Ocean Park burglary victim visited the Affordable Storage unit, he identified 12 of his stolen guns, along with ammunition and accessories.

New charges

Haberman, Bean and Wal-

ton face charges first-degree trafficking in stolen property and possession of stolen firearms. Haberman faces an additional charge of heroin possession while armed with a deadly weapon.

Quartier was arrested on May 15. Kopp was arrested on May 17, and was recently released on bail. Strever was arrested in Clark County in late May, and transferred to Pacific County Jail. He remains in custody, according to McClain.

Jones has not been apprehended yet, McClain said.

Quartier, Kopp, Strever and Jones face charges of first-degree burglary, theft of a firearm and theft of a motor vehicle.

Arrest and release dates,

cities of residence and bail amounts were not available for some suspects, because the Pacific County Sheriff’s Office has temporarily removed arrest and booking information from their website.

Merrill was released on \$250,000 bail several days after his April 4 arrest. When he failed to show up in May, McClain sought a nationwide warrant for his arrest. He asked that bail be set at \$1 million this time, noting in his May 24 request that Merrill “has access to firearms which were not recovered.”

On top of the April drug charges, Merrill now faces charges of first-degree burglary, theft of a firearm and theft of a motor vehicle.



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Gearhart: As of late May, city was looking at 285 short-term rentals for all of its zones

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parking, residential appearance, garbage service, septic-sewer capacity inspections and cesspool requirements not required of other residents.

A summary of the ballot initiative underwent changes as a result of a decision issued by Circuit Court Judge Dawn McIntosh in May.

Petitioners are still working to collect enough signatures to qualify for the ballot.

Gearhart property owner David Townsend, who has fought the regulations, could not immediately be reached for comment. Jim Whittemore, one of the appellants, said he needed to review the decision before commenting.

Proponents of the ordi-

nances argue the regulations help maintain Gearhart’s residential feel, while those who want to change the rules say the regulations discriminate against rental-home owners.

As of late May, Brown said the city was looking at about 285 short-term rentals for all zones, equating to about 15 to 20 percent of total dwelling units in Gearhart.