

Funds for Waders Ride - 23-28 Aug 2020

Each autumn, wading birds around the world migrate to their wintering grounds. At the same time, the people who study them migrate to the annual conference of the International Wader Study Group (IWSG), which this year would have been in Germany.

The incoming chair of IWSG, Jen Smart, accompanied by her husband Mark, had planned to cycle from the UK, to promote responsible travel while raising money for wader conservation. The face-to-face conference will now take place on-line so Jen and Mark have adapted their plan: they are now cycling 600-miles in 8-days, following a route that links sites visited by black-tailed godwit chicks that were raised and released as part of Project Godwit. They will be raising money for Project Godwit and for IWSG's fund to support wader research.



Who they are

Mark and Jen Smart are combining their twin passions for cycling and for the conservation of wading birds, such as black-tailed godwits, redshank and lapwing.

Dr Jen Smart has worked for the RSPB for 14 years. As a scientist, she led RSPB's research into the conservation problems faced by breeding waders and developed solutions to help these species. She is now Head of Species for RSPB England, where she works with colleagues across the RSPB to ensure that we focus on the right solutions to help our priority species, in the most important places for those species.

Mark has worked for the RSPB for 26 years and is Senior Site Manager at Berney Marshes, a 600 ha grassland nature reserve with around 300 pairs of breeding waders. As well as managing the reserve, Mark works with other land managers, across the country, to develop and implement ways of improving habitats for breeding waders.

Both Jen and Mark have been actively involved with wader conservation for many years, having met while on a bird ringing trip with the Wash Wader Ringing Group. They have been members of the International Wader Study Group (IWSG) for many years, an organisation that brings together

volunteers and professional shorebird scientists from around the world. Jen will take over as Chair of the IWSG during this 50th anniversary year (<https://www.waderstudygroup.org>)

Why are they cycling 600 miles?

- It is an opportunity to combine both their passions, cycling and waders.
- It will allow them to promote organisations and projects that they care deeply about, the RSPB, Project Godwit and the IWSG.
- Raise awareness of the plight of wading birds, especially the globally Near Threatened black-tailed godwit and the challenges birds from the continental population face on their breeding grounds in the UK.
- Raise awareness of the critical importance of having a network of well managed coastal and wetland sites in the UK, which provide the conditions godwits need to fatten up for onward flights to Europe and then west Africa.
- Raise awareness of a specific threat of a proposed airport development to one of their key migration sites in Portugal on the Tagus estuary
<https://wadertales.wordpress.com/2019/12/23/tagus-estuary-for-birds-or-planes/>
- It will be a challenge! Although they have been cycling for 10 years, they have never attempted a long-distance multi-day ride.

Why this route?

Project Godwit has been trialling the use of head-starting (<https://projectgodwit.org.uk/>), where young godwits are reared in captivity safe from predators and released once fledged, to boost the number of godwits breeding in the UK. The route links eleven nature reserves in England, managed by a range of conservation organisations, where head-started black-tailed godwits have been spotted on migration (RSPB, WWT, Hampshire County Council, Kent, Suffolk and Norfolk Wildlife Trusts).

Project Godwit is a partnership between RSPB and WWT. The ride starts at a WWT site in the south-west because the prevailing wind should help them to reach end point in the Fens. Here they will visit, WWT Welney and RSPB Ouse and Nene Washes, the key breeding areas for black-tailed godwits in the UK and the sites where these headstarted godwits began their lives and their journeys.

Itinerary

Day	Date	Start	Godwit stops - ETA	Finish
Sun	23rd Aug	Stearth Marshes	Stearth Marshes - 0900	Salisbury
Mon	24th Aug	Salisbury	Titchfield Haven - 1200	Chichester
Tues	25th Aug	Chichester		Wrotham
Wed	26th Aug	Wrotham	Oare Marshes - 1130	Gravesend
Thurs	27th Aug	Gravesend	Old Hall Marshes - 1230	Harwich
Fri	28th Aug	Harwich	Trimley Marshes - 1100 Boyton Marshes - 1330	Cantley
Sat	29th Aug	Cantley	Cley Marshes – 1200 Titchwell – 1500	Titchwell
Sun	30th Aug	Titchwell	Welney - 1215 Ouse Washes – 1430 Nene Washes - 1645	Nene Washes

Why a stop at Cley Marshes NWT

Cley is really important for our godwits – many of those colour-ringed in the Fens including four head-started ones (Swampy, Anouk, Benwick and Chopstick) have been seen there. Godwits make extensive use of the site during this time of year. We will be stopping at Cley on Sat 29th August probably around midday before then heading onto Titchwell.

Why fundraise for IWSG and Project Godwit?

IWSG give out small grants each year to support wader projects around the world that would otherwise not happen without the financial support, for example an expedition to monitor waders in an unexplored part of Bangladesh or studying a little-known dotterel population in Sweden.

Project Godwit aims to secure the future of black-tailed godwits as a breeding bird in the UK, where the number of pairs has been below 50 pairs. It is a 5-year partnership project between RSPB and WWT and is funded by EU Life. This is a project that Jen & Mark are passionate about (<https://projectgodwit.org.uk/>).

How to donate:

Project Godwit: <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/fundsforwaders>

International Wader Study Group Small Projects Grants, please donate here:

<https://www.waderstudygroup.org/donate/>

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