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# Genetic patterns of Black-tailed Godwit populations and their implications for conservation

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**Citation**
Trimbos, K. B. (2013, November 5). *Genetic patterns of Black-tailed Godwit populations and their implications for conservation*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/22110

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**Title**: Genetic patterns of Black-tailed Godwit populations and their implications for conservation
**Issue Date**: 2013-11-05

Thesis:

Genetic patterns of Black-tailed Godwit populations and their implications for conservation

by Krijn Trimbos

# Acknowledgements

I remember starting off as a very green PhD candidate at the end of 2007. Fresh from college I had sunk my teeth into finding a job in academic research especially in the field of ornithology. I presented myself at the CML every day for a couple of months in a row to show my enthusiasm to Kees Musters, my co-promotor, and especially Geert de Snoo, my promotor, who advised me to stay put and wait for my chance. I am so grateful that Kees and Geert after a little while provided me with that opportunity. Even when I got (pretty) upset during my job interview when Geert asked me if I was motivated enough both Geert and Kees kept believing I was the right man for this PhD position. Geert and Kees provided me with a safe and stimulating working environment which were essential components for me during this PhD. Kees your 'my door is always open policy' made it very easy for me to stop by when I felt like discussing new questions and research directions or just to catch up. Geert never refrained from testing me by asking daring questions and pushing me out of my comfort zone. I miss our discussion meetings where the three of us would have lively talks about manuscripts and what to do next with the thesis. Without your invaluable help I don't think I could have figured out what direction to take after the initial idea for the thesis lead to a dead end. I want to thank you both so much for your continuous guidance and expertise, for sticking by me throughout this PhD and for being the inspiring researchers and supervisors you are.

Most scientific research involves fieldwork and this is where the Animal Ecology group (Rijks University of Groningen) of Theunis Piersma came in. They needed an extra pair of hands for their ongoing demographic research on the Black-tailed Godwit in Friesland and I needed DNA samples of Godwits, which were collected at the study site in Friesland, to do my research. And so for three years I became a part of the Black-tailed Godwit fieldwork team in Friesland. During this time I met so many inspiring people that I can't thank every individual here. However I want to thank some people in particular. First I of course would like to thank Theunis Piersma, my second promoter. Theunis is the beating heart of most wader bird related research in The Netherlands. Being an extremely active researcher at different fronts, waders in the Wadden Sea area, wader research related to the Global flyway network and of course the Black-tailed Godwit demographic research in Friesland, it was very inspiring and educational for me to have him in my scientific life. As a promoter Theunis took much

interest in polishing my scientific writing. With your critical yet constructive notes I have seen my writing and the content of my articles improve so much (Krijn your references really need TLC) thanks so much for that! Also I am very grateful that you trusted me enough to be part of the fieldwork and entrusted me with my own little research area around Stavoren. You and Petra opened your home in Gaast to us field workers, with BBQ's, different meetings and just catch up, making it feel like a temporary home in Friesland, thanks! Roos Kentie and Pedro Lourenco were my friends and inspiring PhD colleges during the fieldwork. It was great spending time with you in the field and during our field station time in Gaast. Pedro sadly left the field team after my 2nd field season because he had to finish his thesis. I must say Pedro I really missed your humor and of course the ever familiar and cozy sound of your snoring during that year. Roos was the project manager of the field work team. She did such a great job there, often doing a million things at once and still being able to put extra care into her personal research area the Haanmeer. Roos I don't think I have ever met a person more skilled in R even if you say you learned most stuff from Allert! Thank you both for all the help you provided and the stuff you taught me. Ysbrand Galema was my Frysian buddy during the fieldwork. Ysbrand thanks for being a friend in Friesland. We had some good times man 'dit is het moment'! Jos without you I know the project in Friesland would have not been the success it is today. Your total commitment to the demographic fieldwork and superior organization skills have been such a great inspiration to me and I know to the rest of the team as well. And if you keep sending us ringed and satellite tagged birds in Noord Holland I promiss we will keep finding them. Other people I would like to thank from the fieldwork team are Lucie Schmaltz, Petra de Goeij and Niko Groen.

At the end of 2008 I went to Toronto to learn the basics of population genetic laboratory work. Yvonne Verkuil one of Theunis' PhD's from the Animal Ecology group was working on Ruff genetics at the Royal Ontario Museum there. She was such an excellent host during my stay in Toronto and I have learned so much from her about laboratory work and genetic statistics. She set the bar for my genetic work and analysis during the rest of my PhD. To me you are and will always be my genetics guru, thanks so much Yvonne! My thanks also goes out to the laboratory group at the IBL. Camiel, Frank, Dick, Rene and Ben. Whenever I got stuck with my genetic research you provided me with ways out. No less important were the nights at Franks place where we could kick back, relax and discuss our work and daily routine at the laboratory. Beer and Pizza have never tasted better guys! Other people I'd like to thank in the laboratory work are Alan Baker for allowing me access to his laboratory in Toronto, Marco van der Velde, Peter de Knijff, Ken Kraaijeveld and Laura Bertola. Laura it was great to have somebody at the CML to talk to about genetic theory, new articles and our laboratory frustrations , thanks.

A lot of the DNA samples that were used in this PhD came from Friesland. However loads of DNA samples came from elsewhere. As such I would like to thank Niko Groen, Heinrich Belting, Angela Helmecke, Ole Thorup, Astrid Kant, Lyda Kanters, Dirk Tanger, Wim Tijsen and Jacob Höglund for providing me with such a great sample set.

At the CML where I was stationed primarily I would like to thank everyone at the Departments of CB and IE. Especially my thanks go out to Esther Phillips, Jory Sjardijn, Martina Vijver and José Brittijn. Girls I believe it is invaluable during a PhD to be able to not think about it from time to time. With you I felt like I could do that; to just talk about things that happened at home. Patrick and Atejo were my room buddies for quite a while at the CML. Thanks for all the useless conversations and introducing me to spotify guys. Even tiny wings can fly. Thanks to my two internship students Joyce and Carola who both put in a lot of hard work in the lab.

Thanks to the reading committee, Frank Berendse, Nico van Straalen, Jacob Höglund, for taking the time to read and comment on the thesis.
Finally, within a professional context I would like to thank my fellow biology students, Max, Karin, Olivier, Monique , Noortje, Ronald and Ellen. Long days and evenings with most of you at The University Library (UB) have in the end paid off I guess. Max you were a great buddy during our studies and have been (believe it or not) a great inspiration to me. Oh yeah and you are currently working at Cambridge because you are an excellent researcher, deal with it!

And of course many thanks go out to all my family members and friends. Especially to my lifelong mates, Erwin, Joost, Lieven, Floris and Ruud. I have never met a bunch of people I cared so much about that are generally so not interested in my (or each other's) working life. Even at the most frustrating workdays this put everything into perspective for me. Thanks so much for all the In Casa and pub nights, the laughs, the cries and your general company, I love you guys!

Lian thanks for being such a dear friend ever since we met at high school. Our dates could always get me away from it all. It is so good to see that although a lot has changed around us we are still the same when we are together.

With Jasper en Bart, my nature photography buddies, I could escape working life every now and then. Thanks guys for sharing a passion for nature photography, and being great company to be with!

Steven Kragten was my supervisor during my only environmental biology oriented internship (skylark breeding success in Flevoland) in 2006. I remember I was so stunned when he found our first skylark nest, it was so small and he seemed to have found it without any effort. After that we didn't find any nests for the next 2-3 weeks, which was extremely frustrating. Against all odds we found about 50 skylark nests during that internship. He showed me what environmental research was all about. Thanks to him I became sure that academic environmental research was the right next step for me. Thanks Steef for being a great supervisor during my internship, giving me that necessary push and for still being a good friend.

Many thanks to my parents, Trudy and Baptist and my sister Roesja. Trudy and Baptist, both accomplished academic people, are probably the reason I went for a PhD position in the first place. When I was young I was always secretive about my passion for birds as I felt most people wouldn't understand. You two motivated and supported the nature lover and birder in me. Mum I still cherish our little rounds through your garden, with you explaining about the different plants that had started growing, and of course all our lunches. Thanks for all the newspaper articles! Dad at a time in my life when I was at a crossroad, thinking about a career either in law or biology, you put me straight; made me see what was the right direction for me. Thank you both for believing in me. Roesja my dear sister and the artistic part of the family spawned my passion for nature photography. Nature photography in turn put me that much closer to my research subject the Black-tailed Godwit. It made me understand the Black-tailed Godwit better and observe its behavior more thoroughly. Roes over the years you have given new meaning to the word perseverance, an essential part for success in every PhD position and life. Thank you so much for showing me what it really means.

Last but not least I want to say thanks to my wife Mariëlle and to Minoes my recently born daughter. Mariëlle you were at my side from the beginning till the end of this PhD and have in that time become my buddy in life! You stuck by me when life was tough for me. You are my support, my

backbone and my strength. And although not the most romantic place ever, I am so grateful for our first diner together on that generator at the Pasar Malam. During my PhD I remember so vividly how much effort you put into understanding what I did at work exactly, something that must have been extremely difficult for a lawyer. Thank you so much for taking such an interest in me and my working life. I couldn't have finished this thesis without you, you are wonderful and I love you! And finally, thank you for our beautiful daughter Minoes, oetedaan! Minoes honey I know you don't understand this right now, but even you have contributed to my PhD. The thought of not being with you because I would have to write my thesis has made me finish it that much faster. You are such a little miracle; I never imagined I could care so much for somebody in such a short while.

Sadly, it is impossible to thank everyone accordingly with such limited space. However, to all the people that have helped me throughout the course of this PhD and that I have not mentioned already I would like to say thank you very much!

After 6 years I must say that I am left with many more questions than when I started out this PhD thesis. It made me feel cynical about research for a while. I turned out believing that I would go and save the Black-tailed Godwit (really) or at least solve an invaluable peace of the Black-tailed Godwit conservation puzzle. However, the more I thought about it the more I realized the problems the Godwits and other meadow birds are facing are so much bigger and more complex than a simple answer to one or two questions. In that light I now see that it probably is a good thing and maybe the best end to a scientific journey, to be left with more questions compared to what you start out with. Because without asking ourselves all these questions we will never really seek for or get the answers that will help us forward. Hopefully, this thesis, providing some answers to some questions, will move us forward a little bit in our goal to preserve a beautiful and such a characteristic species of the Dutch farmlands, the Black-tailed Godwit.