

A photograph of a flock of birds, likely terns, flying over a blue ocean under a clear sky. The birds are captured in various stages of flight, with their wings spread. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# *Georgia Wild*

News of nongame and natural habitats

# Marathon migration

## Whimbrel's nearly 5,000-mile flight underscores role Ga. habitat plays

After an amazing journey, the pigeon-sized shorebird has settled down in the remote Coppename Monding Nature Preserve in the South American country of Suriname.

The rest is deserved. The bird, a whimbrel, has just traveled more than 4,700 miles, including nearly 3,500 nonstop in five days!

While whimbrels are known for long-distance migrations, it has been unclear how exactly far they fly and where they go after leaving Georgia.

Until now.



Chinquapin, one of two whimbrels fitted with radio transmitters in Georgia in May, is providing key information about the species' migration patterns to Georgia DNR biologists and other partners in the study at the Center for Conservation Biology at the College of William &

Mary.

After leaving the Georgia coast, the tagged whimbrels flew north to Hudson Bay in Canada, one of them nonstop. Transmitter data shows that Chinguapin ended up approximately 350 miles west of the bay, below the Arctic Circle in the Northwest Territories. He probably nested there based on the length of time spent in a relatively small area.

Chinguapin departed his summer territory for Coats Island in Hudson Bay during the second week of July and stayed there until early August. At Coats Island, he geared up for the next leg of what would become a marathon migration flight.

During the early morning hours of Aug. 5, Chinguapin flew 600 miles south over Hudson Bay, then continued down the length of James Bay, over Quebec, over Maine and finally out over the open Atlantic. Tropical Storm Colin was pumping north toward Bermuda as Chinguapin headed south. He appears to have skirted the storm's cyclonic winds by swinging 300 miles east of Bermuda on Aug. 8.

His transmitter beeped next from the beaches of northwest Puerto Rico on Aug. 10 near Playa de Isabela -- a nonstop journey of 3,470 miles. That's the equivalent of flying about five days around-the-clock from Boston to Anchorage, Alaska.

The small bird was not finished. After a two-week rest, he headed 1,300 miles south over the island of Grenada to [Suriname](#), his current location.

Although from only one bird, the information received is invaluable, said Nongame Conservation Section Program Manager Brad Winn.

"Chinguapin is just one tagged whimbrel, but it is important to remember that these are gregarious birds, so it is likely he is flying in a flock. His movements also represent thousands of other smaller shorebirds that make similar flights from the Arctic to South America and back," Winn said.

"It is pretty mind-boggling that a bird the size of a pigeon can leave subarctic Canada and go nonstop to the beaches of Puerto Rico.

"It is an amazing journey and it is something to be awed and admired."

The transmitter-toting whimbrels are not only showing scientists the resources they and their kind need to exist, such as seasonal foods and nesting habitat, they are also reminders that maintaining the health of coastal landscapes has implications beyond state lines and even national borders. Whimbrels and many other species of shorebirds are in Georgia by the thousands for a short period of each year.

"These global migrants visit us on their migratory

## Ga. DNR e-news Sept. 2010

trek for about six weeks each spring to feast on the fiddler crabs in our marshes," Winn said.

"The energy they get from our crabs supports them during the next 2,000- to 3,000-mile leg of their annual migration. If our marshes are destroyed or become polluted, the crabs will be gone and this vital link in the migratory chain will be lost.

"We have a responsibility to be good stewards of our coastal habitats for birds that call the entire Western Hemisphere home."

### Wandering whimbrels

- [Track their travels](#)
- **Update:** There are three satellite-tagged whimbrels on the coast of Suriname -- Chinquapin and two tagged in Virginia