

## Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*



**Folk Name:** Brown-back, Gray-back

**Status:** Migrant

**Abundance:** Rare

**Habitat:** Mudflats

Both the Short-billed Dowitcher and its close relative the Long-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) are occasionally found migrating through the Carolina Piedmont. The Long-billed Dowitcher is much the rarer of the two. The two Dowitchers are very difficult to visually separate, and great care must be taken when reporting these species. Key items to consider are differences in visual field marks, call notes, habitat and habits, and timing during migration. One of the best field marks to pay attention to is the three-note call of the Short-billed, versus the one-note call of the Long-billed. An online resource for help is available from the American Birding Association at:

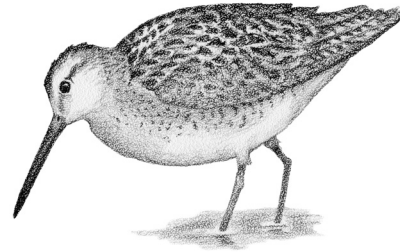
<https://www.aba.org/birding/v38n5p34.pdf>

The Long-billed Dowitcher should be considered a hypothetical species in the Central Carolinas. There have been two sight reports of it in this region, one from Cabarrus County in 2001, and one from Catawba County in 2015. Unfortunately, neither report was supported by detailed descriptions, photographs, or other physical evidence.

The Short-billed Dowitcher is a very rare migrant through the region in spring migration and a rare migrant here in the fall. Our first account is of a Short-billed Dowitcher found by Susan Ladd in a field off Horse Chestnut Lane in Charlotte on May 18, 1976. The bird was injured and unable to fly, and unfortunately it later died. The specimen was donated to Discovery Place. Museum curators prepared it as a mounted specimen and used it in their bird collection display.

David Wright found three Short-billed Dowitchers on an exposed mudflat at Cowan's Ford Wildlife Refuge on September 14, 1983, and relocated one there on a return visit on 20 September. This bird remained until 23 September. A group of spring bird count observers, led by Donald Booth, found one at the McAlpine WWTP in Pineville on May 5, 1984.

David Wright had a Short-billed Dowitcher in breeding plumage in the drying beds at the McAlpine WWTP in Pineville on July 25, 1985. During spring migration, JoAnn Martin discovered Short-billed Dowitchers moving along the Lattimore Road through Cleveland County on May 14, 1995. She counted an "amazing flock of 30" which is the highest count ever in this region.



There have been about six reports of Short-billed Dowitchers in the Central Carolinas since the turn of the twenty-first century. Alan Kneidel and other birders found one or two present at Lake Don T. Howell in Cabarrus County on several visits between 14 August and September 3, 2001. Dwayne Martin found one at Cowan's Ford Wildlife Refuge on July 25, 2006, and it was seen by several observers over the next 2 days. Sue Gardner found one there the next year on August 15, 2007, and she reported another from the same spot on October 7, 2007. Dwayne Martin reported one on the upper end of Lake Norman in Catawba County from August 11–13, 2015. He noted its long bill and characteristic "feeding in sewing machine fashion." Rob Van Epps spotted a juvenile Short-billed Dowitcher on southern Lake Norman in Mecklenburg County that lingered from September 8–12, 2015. This Dowitcher was seen by many birders including Kevin Metcalf who photographed it and wrote: "Separated from Juv. Long-billed by pattern on tertials (broad rust or buff edges, and additional wavy broken bars mid-way between feather shaft and feather edges), and tail with narrower black bands, more white."

The Short-billed Dowitcher is listed on the Yellow Watch List of birds of the continental United States. It is a species with both "troubling" population declines and "high threats." It is in need of conservation action.



Short-billed Dowitcher on Lake Norman. (Rob Van Epps)