

STATUS OF THE DOWITCHERS IN NORTH CAROLINA

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The status of the Short-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus griseus*) and the Long-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) in North Carolina needs to be revised. Spring, summer, and fall records are quite numerous and need not be cited here, but winter observations need to be studied carefully. A glance at the AOU *Check-list* (1957) points out the need for revising the winter range in North Carolina. It gives the winter range of the Short-billed Dowitcher (hereafter designated SBD) as “. . . coastal South Carolina south through Central America. . .” and the winter range of the Long-billed Dowitcher (hereafter LBD) as “. . . the Gulf coast of the United States (to Florida) south through Mexico. . .” Bent (1929) gives the winter range of the SBD as “north. . . probably rarely to North Carolina (Fort Macon)” and has about the same range for the LBD as the AOU *Check-list*. We will review some of the winter records of the two species of dowitchers in coastal North Carolina and make special reference to inland records, including a LBD specimen in March from Raleigh.

COASTAL RECORDS

The SBD appears to be a common and regular fall and spring transient, uncommon but regular visitor in summer, and a fairly common winter resident in coastal North Carolina. Spring, summer, and fall records are too numerous to cite here. Winter records include 115 SBD on the 1958 Christmas Count (*Chat*, 23:8), 36 on the 1959 count (*Chat*, 24:9), and 21 on the 1960 count (*Chat*, 25:8) including one at Hampstead in Pender County. Paul Sykes and H. A. Hesperheide identified 8 SBD by field marks and call on the 1965 Christmas Bird Count held on 28 December at Bodie-Pea Island (*Chat*, 30:19). Sixty-eight SBD were found on the 1968 count at Wilmington (*Chat*, 33:12) which was held on 28 December. Seven SBD were seen by Paul Sykes, Richard Peake, Browne, and Grant on the 1969 Christmas Count at Bodie-Pea Island held on 30 December (*Chat*, 34:11). Grant found seven SBD on 20 December 1969, one on 24 January 1970, and 14 on 25 January 1970 at West Onslow Beach in Onslow County.

Several spring, summer, and fall records (specimens in spring and fall) for the LBD in coastal North Carolina are well documented by Pearson, Brimley, and Brimley (1959). Additional records are four LBD studied carefully by Sykes at Knotts Island, Currituck Sound, on 10 March 1962 (*Chat*, 26:39). He noted the single call note of the LBD. Potter (*Chat*, 31:82) observed two LBD at Wilmington on 29 April 1967. Due to the difficulty in distinguishing these two species of dowitchers, the sight records are few in number. Grant observed seven LBD in a flock with seven SBD at West Onslow Beach on 20 December 1969. The single call note was heard and the bills were noticeably longer than those of the SBD nearby. These could have been either winter visitors or late fall migrants on this date.

There are numerous winter observations of dowitchers in coastal North Carolina which were not identified to species. Most are probably SBD since this appears to be the more common dowitcher during the winter. A brief look at the Christmas Bird Counts shows unspecified dowitchers were found at various North Carolina count locations in 1955, 1956, 1957, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, and 1969 (*Chat*, vol. 20-34). Forty were counted in 1966, 62 in 1967, 8 in 1968, and 53 in 1969. On the 1958, 1959, and 1960 Christmas Counts, all dowitchers were identified as SBD but both prior to and after this period most were simply listed as “dowitcher (sp.)” At any rate, these numbers indicate dowitchers are fairly common winter residents in coastal North Carolina.

INLAND RECORDS

Inland observations are few in number but do show that dowitchers are spring and fall transients over mountain, piedmont, and upper coastal plain North Carolina. The only mountain record is a SBD specimen (*L. g. hendersoni*) collected by Burleigh (Pearson, Brimley, and Brimley, 1959) on 5 July 1934 near Swannanoa, Buncombe County. Piedmont records include two Eastern Dowitchers (presumably SBD; specimens could not be located) taken on 30 August 1945 by Larry Crawford at Lake Jeanette, about 5 miles N of Greensboro (*Chat*, 10:19). At this same lake near Greensboro, one Eastern Dowitcher was observed on 7 September 1947 two on 13 September 1947, and two on 14 September 1947 by Oscar Paris and others (*Chat*, 12:35). Mattocks (*Chat*, 33:24-25) found dowitchers present at Brant Lake, near Greensboro, between 24 August and 7 October in 1966, 1967, and 1968. He found a maximum of 10 on 2 September 1967. Hader (*Chat*, 29:57) found one dowitcher on 26 August and one on 4, 5, 7, and 12 September 1964 at Lake Johnson near Raleigh. On 27 March 1965 Hader (*Chat*, 29:90) found one in non-breeding and one in breeding plumage, and on 3 May 1965 another in breeding plumage was at Raleigh. Hader (*Chat*, 31:25) found one or two dowitchers on nine occasions from 29 August through 15 October 1966. He (*Chat*, 33:60) and others saw 10 SBD on 7 September 1968 and one to four until 19 October 1968 at Raleigh. J. W. E. Joyner identified three SBD at Bynum's Pond in Nash County on 13 July 1958 (*Chat*, 23:39).

On 14 September 1968 William Post (pers. com.) and Browne banded two SBD at Lake Wheeler near Raleigh. Measurements for No. 1083-70809 were: weight 138.4 grams, wing 143 mm, total culmen 60.5 mm, and fat class 1. Measurements for No. 1083-70810 were: weight 128.7 grams, wing 134 mm, total culmen 56.2 mm, and fat class 1. Browne studied a dowitcher feeding with a Pectoral Sandpiper (*Erolia melanotos*) at Greenview Pond near Raleigh on 11 March 1969. We returned on 13 March 1969 and collected the bird, which was later identified as LBD by Roxie C. Laybourne at the United States National Museum. This represents the only known LBD specimen from inland North Carolina.

DISCUSSION

The best field mark is the three-note call of the SBD and the single-note call of the LBD (Robbins et al., 1966).

Numerous verifiable sight records of the SBD in winter along the coast of North Carolina indicate this bird is a fairly common winter resident there. The winter status of the LBD is not clearly known because of the lack of field identifications to species. Additional specimens and sight records with call notes heard are needed to clarify its status. Inland records indicate that both SBD and LBD are transients over the interior regions and are found more commonly during dry periods when numerous mud flats are exposed.

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