

SOME COMMENTS ON THE SPECIES OF DOWITCHERS IN ALABAMA

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In the current state bird book (Imhof, 1962) I have been credited with records of the Long-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) near Birmingham on July 3, 1936, and September 28, 1935. At the time this book was in preparation, I probably concurred with the author in this disposition of my dowitcher records, in the belief that the Short-billed Dowitcher (*L. griseus*) did not occur in the interior. Certainly at the time they were seen these birds were not differentiated as between the two forms, then thought to represent only subspecies. (Only after many more years of experience have I learned to make this distinction, and then only under favorable conditions.) In the same work (p. 252) it will be noted that no inland records of dowitchers were referred to the short-billed form, although it had long been known to occur inland in other states.

Recent elevation of the Long-billed Dowitcher to full species rank has focused the attention of more field workers on details of its morphology, voice, habits, habitat, distribution, and season of occurrence, with the result that certain changes in the apparent probabilities have ensued. There are now enough specimens extant to indicate that either species of dowitcher may occur at any suitable inland locality, although there tends to be a different period of migration for each. It has been shown that the Long-billed Dowitcher migrates earlier in spring and later in fall than the Short-billed (cf. Ogden, 1964).

This difference in time of migration is borne out by records around Tallahassee, Florida, where three Long-billed Dowitchers have been taken on dates ranging from September 1 to November 7. Reliable sight records, most of them based in part on the call note, also fall within this period, except for a record in January and, in northward migration, from March 7 to April 18. On the other hand, *L. griseus*, although found on the coast at any time of the year, does not reach its peak in spring until late April and May--after the larger species has departed. A numerical increase in July, involving birds in both summer plumage and winter plumage, denotes the early beginning of this species' fall migration, a fact also supported by early returns of dyed individuals (Loftin, 1962). Likewise, the only two inland specimens of this form were taken on August 19 (Stevenson, 1962) and August 30, before the known arrival date of *scolopaceus*.

As these facts strongly suggested the improbability of Long-billed Dowitchers occurring in the South in June or July, and perhaps even in May or early August, I attempted to determine the status of some specimens collected during these months and referred to this species. I am indebted to Mrs. Roxie C. Laybourne, of the U. S. National Museum, for information about these specimens, including the measurements given below. Two collected on Dauphin Island by Arthur H. Howell, July 5, 1913, are not distinguished in her letter from one originally referred to *griseus*, because all three specimens have since been identified as *L. g. hendersoni*, an inland race of the Short-billed Dowitcher. Two of the identifications were made by Allen Duvall, the other by John W. Aldrich.

The measurements (in millimeters) of the wing, culmen, tail, and tarsus follow: male--133, 59, 53, 37; male--139.5, 56.5, 49, 38.5; female--148, 65.5, 61, 39. The great difference in length of tail is explained by the fact that the first two specimens are in worn winter plumage, but the third in breeding plumage. It may be noted that in no case is the bill length maximal for the respective sex of *griseus*. Unfortunately, a "Long-billed" Dowitcher collected by F. W. McCormack at Leighton, May 15, 1891, was not preserved.

Two Florida specimens referred to *scolopaceus* but collected on unlikely dates were taken at Clearwater Harbor, May 21, 1918, and in Pinellas County, June 2, 1903 (Howell, 1932). Although the latter specimen could not be located, Mrs. Laybourne stated that the Clearwater Harbor bird had also been referred by Aldrich to *hendersoni*. It was a female with a bill length of 66.5 millimeters.

In a review of the Georgia specimens of dowitchers, Johnston (1952) found only three undoubted specimens of *scolopaceus*. The only one bearing a date was taken on April 17, 1951.

In addition to the indicated periods of spring and fall migration of Long-billed Dowitchers, it should be added that there are Florida sight records, if not specimens, in winter. Such birds were found chiefly in fresh-water situations, some along the coast and some far inland, and in several cases the distinctive call notes were heard. Assuming these birds to have been correctly identified, it would not be surprising to find the species occasionally wintering in Alabama. A record made by Lois McCollough at Marion, on February 23 (Imhof, op. cit.), could represent either an early spring migrant or a wintering bird.

Summarily, there appears to be no incontrovertible evidence of the occurrence of Long-billed Dowitchers in the Southeast from late May to early August, and records in June and July seem, especially unlikely. My two sight records near Birmingham, listed under the long-billed species in *Alabama Birds*, should be considered simply unidentified dowitchers. It is recommended that the same disposition be made of other early-summer dowitcher records not supported by specimens, unless there is reason to consider them Short-billed Dowitchers.

I am indebted to Dr. William B. Robertson, Jr., for critically reading this manuscript.

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