

## *Limnodromus griseus* (Short-billed Dowitcher)

Family: Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Snipe)

Order: Charadriiformes (Shorebirds and Waders)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Photo by Terry Brashear

**Fig. 1.** Short-billed dowitcher, *Limnodromus griseus*.

[[https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/framlst/photo\\_hm/Images/h2310p2.jpg](https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/framlst/photo_hm/Images/h2310p2.jpg), downloaded 7 March 2017]

**TRAITS.** *Limnodromus griseus* is a medium-sized shorebird (Skagen et al., 1999), with a bill twice as long as its head, moderately long legs that are pale or dull and yellowish in colour (Cornell University, 2015), a white rump extending into a wedge on its back, and a tail that is barred black and white (Gough, 1998). Both sexes grow to a length of 25-29cm, with a weight of 65-154g and have a wingspan of 45-51cm (Van Gils et al., 2017). There are two forms for adults; the common adult form has a pale grey head and white supercilium (a stripe from the beak to above the eye like an eyebrow), pale grey breast that has little spotting, grey upper parts, a white belly and white undertail (Fig. 1). The alternate form has reddish underparts, and a dark crown with a red supercilium. Short-billed dowitchers are easily identified by their long bills, which are short in length only in comparison to long-billed dowitchers (Cornell University, 2015).

**DISTRIBUTION.** Short-billed dowitchers are a migratory species, during the warmer period in summer time (May-July) they can be found in North America in the northern areas of Canada

and Alaska. During the winter they migrate south to coastal areas of lower North America and South America (Fig. 2). They are found on the Pacific and Atlantic coastal areas from California to Peru and North Carolina to Brazil respectively (Arkive, 2014). The species has an extremely large range, with a total distribution area of 5,000,000 km<sup>2</sup> (BirdLife International, 2017).

**HABITAT AND ACTIVITY.** *Limnodromus griseus* is found during the summer in overwintering areas on coastal mud flats, brackish lagoons and mangroves of North America. They are also found in taiga and subarctic tundra which has low vegetation and cover as well as acidic soil. This area is used for their breeding purposes. During winter they migrate south to warmer areas and are found around beaches, saltwater tidal flats, salt marshes (Arkive, 2014), fresh water mud flats and flooded agricultural fields (Cornell University, 2015). The migration south begins in late July and migration north begins in early March (Arkive, 2014). The migration is an intermediate – long distance (Skagen et al., 1999).

**FOOD AND FEEDING.** Their diet can change based on season. During the breeding season (summer) the diet is made up mostly by fly larvae and pupae along with snails, beetles, insects and very unlikely seeds (Cornell University, 2015). The winter diet (migration period) comprises of aquatic worms, molluscs and crustaceans. Short-billed dowitchers forage through aquatic habitats by probing their bill into the substrate (Fig. 3).

**POPULATION ECOLOGY.** Short-billed dowitchers form large flocks during migration that contain hundreds of individuals. The females form flocks and begin migration early in July before the males (Arkive, 2014). The population trend is decreasing but the decline is not rapid so it is not labelled as vulnerable under population criterion (BirdLife International, 2017). The total population is estimated to be 320,000 birds (Van Gils et al., 2017).

**REPRODUCTION.** The nests are surrounded by twigs, dried grass some leaves and ptarmigan feathers on a clump of sedge in thick vegetation and it looks like a simple bowl (Cornell University, 2015). The period for nesting occurs during late May to late July. Males and females usually form monogamous pairs which last for one breeding season and on average they produce one clutch which contains four eggs although sometimes it can have three or five eggs (Arkive, 2014). The eggs are light green-brown or olive-green in colour with brown spots on the surface with more at the larger end of the egg (Cornell University, 2015). Both males and females take part in egg incubation which lasts 19-21 days but after the eggs hatch the males take up the most responsibility of caring for the young. The young only leave the nest when all eggs hatch. At the end of the breeding season females leave the breeding ground earlier than the males (Arkive, 2014).

**BEHAVIOUR.** Short-billed dowitchers are known for giving calls during migration to identify each other (Van Gils et al., 2017). Males sing during flight on breeding ground for the breeding season. When feeding, they probe their bills deep into soft areas to the depth of their bill but rarely submerge their head. Food is obtained and eaten under mud except for worms that are eaten above surface, and it only feeds in water up to the height of its belly. Juvenile short-billed dowitchers can walk and swim soon after they hatch and are able to feed themselves (Cornell University, 2015).

**APPLIED ECOLOGY.** The species is listed as Least Concern and is not believed to be approaching the vulnerable status although the population has been on a decline (IUCN, 2016).

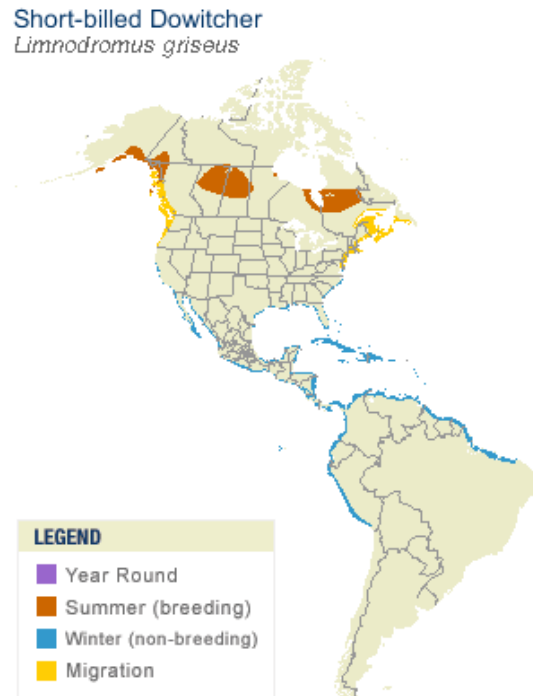
Threats faced by short-billed dowitchers are shrinking and drying of its breeding ranges due to global warming as well as habitat loss as suitable areas to live are being removed or degraded by agricultural pollution and sedimentation (Arkive, 2014). There are currently no conservation efforts for *Limnodromus griseus* (Cornell University, 2015) but recommendations are in place to begin breeding protection programs and protection of its habitats (Arkive, 2014).

## REFERENCES

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**Fig. 2.** Map of distribution for short-billed dowitcher.

[[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Short-billed\\_Dowitcher/id](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Short-billed_Dowitcher/id), downloaded 7 March 2017]



**Fig. 3.** Juvenile short-billed dowitcher feeding.

[[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/spp\\_photos.aspx?spp=2&sppid=471&keepThis=true&TB\\_iframe=true&height=488&width=875](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/spp_photos.aspx?spp=2&sppid=471&keepThis=true&TB_iframe=true&height=488&width=875), downloaded 7 March 2017]

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