

---

**Two Long-billed Dowitcher  
*Limnodromus scolopaceus*  
specimens from Ecuador**

Long-billed Dowitcher

*Limnodromus scolopaceus* and Short-billed Dowitcher *L. griseus* are boreal breeding shorebirds that winter primarily in North and Middle America. They were treated as conspecific until 1950 when Pitelka<sup>11</sup> separated them on the basis of morphological and ecological differences. Field identification of dowitchers continues to represent a significant challenge, particularly in basic plumage, and the status of Long-billed Dowitcher in South America has been obscured for this reason. Recent interest in the identification issue has clarified some of the key field marks for distinguishing these birds away from the breeding grounds<sup>1,6,9,10,13,20</sup>.

Short-billed Dowitcher is well known in northern South America<sup>4,16,17</sup>, where it displays a strong preference for coastal, intertidal areas, and may be largely or entirely absent inland<sup>17</sup>. Long-billed Dowitcher is known from sight records in the Netherlands Antilles<sup>19</sup> and specimens from Argentina<sup>21</sup> (though controversial<sup>7</sup>), Colombia<sup>3,8</sup> and Ecuador<sup>2</sup>, but only a single unequivocal record exists, a basic adult trapped and photographed in Colombia<sup>18</sup>. The sight records have not been peer-reviewed, and many of the specimens have not been critically re-evaluated following our most recent refinements to dowitcher identification criteria. However, the current checklist of birds of South America places this species on its Main List based on these sight records, the Colombian photograph, and on the existence



Figure 1. First-year female Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* (MLZ 5491) prov. Chimborazo, Ecuador; the pattern of the retained juvenile tertials (pale-fringed and lacking internal markings) is diagnostic for this species (Caleb G. Putnam)

of the two specimens described below<sup>15</sup>.

During an ongoing study of dowitcher moult and migration strategies, CGP found a Long-billed Dowitcher specimen from Ecuador held at the Moore Laboratory of Zoology, Occidental College, Los Angeles, California, USA (MLZ 5491). The specimen (Fig. 1), a first-year female, was identified by plumage characters (juvenile tertials lacking pale internal markings and rectrices with narrow white and broad black bars) and measurements (culmen 74.8 mm, tarsus 40.0 mm). Both measurements are diagnostic of *L. scolopaceus*<sup>12,14</sup>. The specimen was obtained on 14 December 1929 at Lago de Colta (3,300 m), a highland lake in prov. Chimborazo, Ecuador by T. Mena, who collected five other bird specimens (all deposited at MLZ) on that date at that locality, and 50 others elsewhere in Ecuador during December 1929 (E. Reddington pers. comm.).

Chapman<sup>2</sup> included a record of a dowitcher from the highlands of Ecuador based on a specimen now held in the Museo Regionale di Scienze Naturali, Turin, Italy. The bird was collected during the Salvadori & Festa expedition of 1895–98, during which nearly 2,900 specimens were collected throughout Ecuador<sup>2</sup>. Photographs, measurements and locality data for the specimen were provided by R. Toffoli. The specimen was labelled by Viaggio E. Festa in 1896 with collector number 577

and museum number MRSN 6866, and was collected in prov. Cañar on 9 October 1896. The culmen measures 62 mm (bill broken) and the tarsus 40.5 mm. The specimen is labeled *Macrorhamphus griseus*, but this identification predates the ‘splitting’ of Long-billed and Short-billed Dowitchers. Tarsus length alone excludes Short-billed Dowitcher<sup>14</sup>, and the lack of internal markings on the pale-fringed (juvenile) tertial feathers confirms this. The bird can be aged as a first-year male based on the retained juvenile tertials. The identity, age and sex of this specimen were confirmed by P. Pyle (pers. comm.).

With two specimens of Long-billed Dowitcher from the highlands of Ecuador (and at least one confirmed record from elsewhere in South America), any dowitcher seen on the continent should be closely scrutinised, particularly those found away from the coast.

#### Acknowledgements

We thank Roberto Toffoli (Museo Regionale di Scienze Naturali, Turin, Italy) for providing photographs of the Cañar Long-billed Dowitcher, and Alberto Masi for assistance communicating with the museum. P. Pyle helped age the specimens. J. C. Hafner provided a specimen loan for the MLZ dowitcher, and Emily Reddington provided information on its collector, T. Mena.

#### References

- Chandler, R. J. (1998) Dowitcher identification and ageing. *Brit. Birds* 91: 93–106.
- Chapman, F. M. (1926) The distribution of bird-life in Ecuador. *Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.* 55.
- Hellmayr, C. E. & Conover, B. (1948) Catalogue of birds of the Americas 1(3). *Zool. Ser., Field Mus. Nat. Hist.* 13.
- Hilty, S. L. (2003) *Birds of Venezuela*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hilty, S. L. & Brown, W. L. (1986) *A guide to the birds of Colombia*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Lee, C.-T. & Birch, A. (2006) Advances in the field identification of North American dowitchers. *Birding* 38: 34–42.
- Mazar Barnett, J. & Pearman, M. (2001) *Annotated checklist of the birds of Argentina*. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions.
- Naranjo H., L. G. (1991) Confirmación de la presencia de *Limnodromus scolopaceus* (Aves: Scolopaciidae) en Colombia. *Trianea (Act. Cient. Tecn. INDERENA)* 4: 559–561.
- O’Brien, M., Crossley, R. & Karlson, K. (2006) *The shorebird guide*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Paulson, D. (2005) *Shorebirds of North America: the photographic guide*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Pitelka, F. A. (1950) Geographic variation and the species problem in the shorebird genus *Limnodromus*. *Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool.* 50: 1–108.
- Prater, A. J., Marchant, J. H. & Vuorinen, J. (1977) *Guide to the identification and ageing of Holarctic waders*. Tring: British Trust for Ornithology.
- Putnam, C. (2005) A tale of two strategies: fall molts of adult dowitchers. *Birding* 37: 380–390.
- Pyle, P. (2008) *Identification guide to North American birds*, 2. Bolinas, CA: Slate Creek Press.
- Remsen, J. V., Cadena, C. D., Jaramillo, A., Nores, M., Pacheco, J. F., Robbins, M. B., Schulenberg, T. S., Stiles, F. G., Stotz, D. F. & Zimmer, K. J. (Version 23 February 2009) A classification of the bird species of South America. [www.museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/SACCBaseline02.html](http://www.museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/SACCBaseline02.html).
- Restall, R., Rodner, C. & Lentino, M. (2006) *Birds of northern South America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Ridgely, R. S. & Greenfield, P. J. (2001) *The birds of*

- Ecuador. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
18. Salaman, P., Donegan, T. & Caro, D. (2008) Listado de las aves de Colombia 2008. *Conserv. Colombiana* 5: 1–85.
  19. Voous, K. H. (1985) Additions to the avifauna of Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire, south Caribbean. In: Buckley, P. A., Foster, M. S., Morton, E. S., Ridgely, R. S. & Buckley, F. G. (eds.) *Neotropical ornithology*. Orn. Monogr. 36. Washington DC: American Ornithologists' Union.
  20. Whan, B. (2003) Testing field marks of adult dowitchers in Ohio: the testimony of specimens. *Ohio Cardinal* 26: 178–187.
  21. Zotta, A. R. (1942) La becassina migratoria, *Limnodromus griseus scolopaceus* (Say), inverna también en la Argentina. *El Hornero* 8: 171–178.

**Caleb G. Putnam**

146 Timmer Dr. NE, Sparta, MI  
49345, USA. E-mail:  
larus10@hotmail.com.

**Andrew W. Jones**

Cleveland Museum of Natural  
History, 1 Wade Oval Drive-  
University Circle, Cleveland, OH  
44106, USA. E-mail:  
ajones@cmnh.org.

**Robert S. Ridgely**

World Land Trust-US, PO Box 58,  
North Sandwich, NH 03259, USA.  
E-mail: rridgely@earthlink.net.

Received 24 February 2009; final  
revision accepted 28 April 2009

---