

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* at Sultanpur National Park, Haryana, India

Manoj Sharma, Harkirat Singh Sangha, Sharad Sridhar & C. Abhinav

Sharma, M., Sangha, H.S., Sridhar, S., & Abhinav, C., Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* at Sultanpur National park, Haryana, India. *Indian BIRDS* 8 (4): 101–103.

Manoj Sharma, Village Shankarpur, Ramnagar, District Nainital, Uttarakhand 244715, India. Email: treesswift@gmail.com

Harkirat Singh Sangha, B-27, Gautam Marg, Hanuman Nagar, Jaipur 302021, India. Email: harkirat.sangha@gmail.com

Sharad Sridhar, 1496, Sector 15- Part II Gurgaon, Haryana 122001, India. Email: sharadsridhar@gmail.com

C. Abhinav, Village & P. O. Ghurkari, Tehsil & District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh 176001, India. Email: drabhinav.c@gmail.com

Manuscript received on 6 March 2013.

On 2 March 2013, Martin Birch, Sanjay Sharma, and Atul Jain spotted a wader at Sultanpur National Park, Haryana, India which was initially identified as an Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*. Birch, who photographed it, suspected it to be one of the American dowitchers, most possibly a Long-billed Dowitcher *L. scolopaceus*. On 3 March 2013, while searching for the bird at Sultanpur, we saw a flock of waders disturbed by a Western Marsh-harrier *Circus aeruginosus*. The waders settled about 100 m from us and we found two dowitchers in the flock of Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, Spotted Redshank *T. erythropus* and Wood Sandpiper *T. glareola* [104]. Due to their distance from us, the dowitchers were scoped and the following list of main features noted:

Softparts: The long bills of both the birds had basal half dull yellow at the base, rest being black, darkening towards the tip. The legs were greenish-yellow, although they appeared lemon-yellow in the afternoon sun.

Upperparts: Generally grey-brown, individual feathers with dark brown shafts; wing coverts and tertials appearing browner.

Underparts: Whitish, neck and breast washed uniformly grey, merging into whitish belly; flanks with distinct broad bars and spots.

Tail: Had quite wide black tail bars. Undertails barred with black.

Head: The crown was slightly darker grey than the grey on its neck, broad white supercilium from bill arching over eye and extending past the eye (at least in one bird), dark brown lores (very thick in one bird), almost black post-ocular stripe slightly exceeding supercilium and white on chin.

Upwings: In flight, the secondaries seen from above had broad white tips. The greater coverts showed thin white tips.

Structure: The bird was perhaps more 'front heavy' and rounded, with a long snipe-like bill. While feeding, it appeared round-bodied.

The Long-billed Dowitcher occurs from north-central Siberia east to north-eastern Siberia, western Alaska, northern Yukon, western and central USA to Panama and French Guiana (Dickinson 2003). Sonobe & Usui (1993) record the species as a rare visitor to East Asia. Chandler (2009), and Rasmussen

& Anderton (2012) record it as an uncommon vagrant to India. There are only five previous records of the species from the Indian Subcontinent, two of them perhaps the same record.

Short-billed Dowitcher *L. griseus* is very similar to Long-billed Dowitcher, especially in its non-breeding plumage (Chandler 2009) as individuals in this phase provide the observer with the greatest difficulty (Chandler 1998). The two American species are similar in appearance and behaviour (Paulson 2005). According to Message & Taylor (2005), 'a combination of characteristic features rather than any one, apart from call, needs to be noted to separate these extremely similar species, particularly in worn breeding and non-breeding plumage'. The two species are best distinguished by characteristic calls. However, during our observations, we never heard the birds call.

No *deus ex machina* is available to assist with dowitcher identification in its winter plumage (Wallace 1980). However, a combination of detailed observations and several photographs helped us in concluding that the dowitchers at Sultanpur were indeed Long-billed Dowitchers.

According to Chandler (2009), 'female dowitchers have longer bills than the males. Since the bill length of these species overlap considerably, only the shortest-billed male Short-billed, and the longest-billed female Long-billed, can be identified on this character alone.' Svensson *et al.* (2009) feel, 'bill length overlaps extensively and is useful for extremes: twice head length or more indicates Long-billed, about 1.5 times head length indicates Short-billed'. One of the birds photographed showed bill length being double the size of head length, indicating the birds to be Long-billed Dowitchers, possibly a non-breeding female [103]. According to Message & Taylor (2005), 'the distal third of the bill on Short-billed Dowitcher usually appears slightly drooped compared with the very straight bill of Long-billed Dowitcher'. The birds seen at Sultanpur had very straight bills, indicating these to be Long-billed rather than Short-billed Dowitchers [103].

Hayman *et al.* (1986) state that the legs of the Long-billed Dowitcher are on average longer than a Short-billed Dowitcher.

Table 1. Records of Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* from India

Date	Location	Remarks	References
13–23 February 1997 11 May 1997	Keoladeo NP, Bharatpur, Rajasthan Harike, Punjab	Recorded on multiple days. Seen by Per Undeland and probably the same bird from Bharatpur.	Robson 1997, Holt 1999, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012 Kazmierczak & Singh 2001, Per Undeland pers. comm.
22 January 2001 13 January 2008	Keoladeo NP, Bharatpur, Rajasthan Khijadiya Sanctuary, Jamnagar, Gujarat	Unpublished Photo record of a single bird along with Asian Dowitcher.	Robson 2002, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012 Forsten & Lindholm 2013
16 February 2012	Jamnagar, Gujarat	Unpublished Photo record of a single bird by Laurens Steijn.	Praveen J. pers. comm.

Photos: S. Sridhar & C. Abhinav



103. Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* showing very long straight bill.

The birds had longish legs with long tibia, indicating Long-billed Dowitcher [105].

The tail feathers of both the species are barred black and white with the Long-billed Dowitcher showing black bars wider than white and Short-billed Dowitcher showing white bars equal to or wider than the black bars (Chandler 2009). The birds seen in flight and from various angles while preening clearly showed broader black bars on the tail feathers [105].

Long-billed Dowitcher in non-breeding plumage shows unspeckled grey on throat and entire breast, whereas throat and upper breast of non-breeding Short-billed Dowitcher is light grey, finely speckled with lower edge of breast often spotted (Hayman *et al.* 1998). Svensson *et al.* (2009) find Long-billed Dowitcher in winter to have, 'whole breast grey with rather abrupt border against white belly.' The birds seen by us showed grey throat and breast that was unspeckled and had no spotting but an abrupt border against white belly [106].

Tertials and primary tips of Long-billed Dowitcher are equal in adults and normally fall short of tail-tips, and those of Short-billed Dowitcher extend beyond (Message & Taylor 2005). The birds seen from various angles showed tertials and primary tips to be equal and a little short of tail end [106].

Another useful, though by no means absolute, distinction between these two species is Short-billed's preference for brackish or saline coastal wetlands, and Long-billed's preference for freshwater habitats (Chandler 2009). On migration and in winter the Long-billed Dowitcher is mainly found at freshwater sites, such as marshes and drying lake shores (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). Although the birds at Sultanpur were in suitable habitat for a Long-billed Dowitcher, one would expect these to break down where vagrants are concerned.



104. Long-billed Dowitcher pair with Greenshank.



105. Long-billed Dowitcher showing its long legs & broader black bars in tail feathers.

Photo: Manoj Sharma

Some of the feathers on the rear scapulars on one of the birds showed rufous fringes and dark brown centres, indicating these to be retained juvenile feathers, a combination indicating a first-winter Long-billed Dowitcher. The scapulars on the Short-billed Dowitcher juvenile show wavy internal markings. Holt (1999) based this feature to be a significant identification feature for the bird seen at Keoladeo National Park during February 1997.

Photos of the birds from Sultanpur were sent to Alvaro Jaramillo, who comes across the species commonly in the new world. In his email dated 24 June 2013 (pers. comm. Aasheesh Pittie) he confirms these to be Long-billed Dowitcher based on features including structure, long and straight beak with no kink at the end, shallow bill base and dark breast coloration.

Though a vagrant, the Long-billed Dowitcher is comparatively regular to the western Palearctic with many records from Asia whereas the Short-billed Dowitcher is a scarce visitor to parts of western Palearctic, restricted mostly to Europe.

Although this is the sixth record of Long-billed Dowitcher for the Indian Subcontinent, it was not altogether unexpected. The species breeds in Alaska and north-eastern Siberia and there have been several records from various parts of Asia: 'in excess of 30 records' in Japan (Brazil 1991), at least six from Hong Kong (Carey 1996), from Oman (Foster & Greaves 1986), and from Bali, Brunei, and Thailand (Hayman *et al.* 1986).

The Long-billed Dowitchers were last seen on 30 March 2013 at Sultanpur (Sanjay Sharma *pers. com., verbally*).

Acknowledgements

We thank Martin Birch for finding the bird and showing it to others and Sanjay Sharma,



106. Long-billed Dowitcher showing grey breast with abrupt border against white belly.

Photos: S. Sridhar & C. Abhinav

Atul Jain, and Soma Ateesh for all their help in the field. MS wants to thank Aasheesh Pittie, Praveen J. and Vivek Tiwari for their help with the unpublished Gujarat records, Laurens Steijn for sharing his unpublished photos from Gujarat coast and Alvaro Jaramillo for his valuable comments on the identification features. HSS also thanks Per Undeland for supplying unpublished information and Paul Holt for his help.

References

- Brazil, M., 1991. *The birds of Japan*. London: Christopher Helm.
- Carey, G. J., (ed.) 1996. *Hong Kong bird report 1995*. Hong Kong Birdwatching Society.
- Chandler, R. J., 1998. Dowitcher identification and ageing. A photographic review. *British Birds* 91: 93–106.
- Chandler, R., 2009. *Shorebirds of the Northern Hemisphere*. London: Christopher Helm.
- Dickinson, E. C., (ed.) 2003. *The Howard and Moore complete checklist of the birds of the World*. Revised and enlarged 3rd ed. London: Christopher Helm. Pp. 1–1039.
- del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A., & Sargatal, J., (eds.) 1996. *Handbook of the birds of the world. Volume 3. Hoatzin to Auks*. 1st ed. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions. Vol. 3 of 16 vols: Pp. 1–821.
- Forsten, A., & Lindholm, A., 2013. Photos and sound recordings. Website: http://www.elisanet.fi/antero.lindholm/Linnut/Kahlaajat/dowitchers_gujarat.html. Accessed on 31 March 2013.
- Foster, D.J. G., & Greaves, C. M., 1986. First record of Long-billed Dowitcher in the Sultanate of Oman. *Sandgrouse* 8:113–114.
- Hayman, P., Marchant, J., & Prater, T., 1998. *Shorebirds: an Identification guide to the waders of the world*. London: Christopher Helm. Reprint ed. Pp. 1–412.
- Holt, P., 1999. Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* at Bharatpur, Rajasthan, India: a new species for the Indian subcontinent. *Forktail* 15 (August): 95–96.
- Kazmierczak, K., & Singh, R., 2001. *A birdwatchers' guide to India*. 2nd ed. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. Pp. i–xii, 1–337.
- Message, S., & Taylor, D., 2005. *Shorebirds of North America, Europe, and Asia. A guide to field identification*. 1st ed. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. Pp. 1–224.
- Paulson, D., 2005. *Shorebirds of North America. The photographic guide*. London: Christopher Helm.
- Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona: Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. 2 vols. Pp. 1–378; 1–683.
- Robson, C., 1997. India. *Oriental Bird Club Bulletin* 26: 60–61.
- Robson, C., 2002. From the field: India. *Oriental Bird Club Bulletin* 35: 84–86.
- Sonobe, K., & Usui, S., 1993. *A field guide to the waterbirds of Asia*. 1st ed. Tokyo: Wild Bird Society of Japan. Pp. 1–224.
- Svensson, L., Mullarney, K., & Zetterstrom, D., 2009. *Collins bird guide: The most complete guide to the birds of Britain and Europe*. 2nd revised and enlarged ed. London: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Wallace, D. I. M., 1980. Dowitcher identification: a brief review. In: *Frontiers of bird identification. A British Birds guide to some difficult species*. Ed., J. T. R. Sharrock. London: Macmillan.

Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicaria*: An addition to the avifauna of Peninsular India

Tejinder Singh Rawal, Hemant Kumar & Kuldeep Shukla

Rawal, T.S., Kumar, H., & Shukla, K., 2013. Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicaria*: An addition to the avifauna of Peninsular India. *Indian BIRDS* 8 (4): 103–104.

Dr. Tejinder Singh Rawal, E-13, Anjuman Complex, Sadar, Nagpur 440001, Maharashtra, India, Email: tsrawal@tsrawal.com

Hemant Kumar, 304, Sari Sai Residency, Maruthi Nagar, Puppalaguda, Manikonda, Hyderabad 500089, Andhra Pradesh, India.
Email: hemantkumar.3d@gmail.com

Kuldeep Shukla, 187, KT Nagar, Katol Road, Nagpur 440013, Maharashtra, India, Email: kuldeepshukla76@gmail.com

We report two back-to-back sightings of the Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicaria* from two localities in peninsular India during April–May 2013. This is probably the first time it has been reported from this region and there exist only a handful of records from the Indian subcontinent (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Grimmett *et al.* 2011).

Osman Sagar (17°23'N, 78°18'E), Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh

It was a regular day out bird watching on 28 April 2013 at Osman Sagar, Gandipet, Hyderabad, when one of us (HK) with another birder Iqbal Siddiqui came across this bird. This beautiful bird was seen on the edge of a small water body. We initially thought that it was a chick of some regular wader, as this is was

the breeding season and we took several photographs [107–109] casually. As we moved in closer, the bird appeared quite approachable. We took many photographs at close range.

Later, these photographs were posted on forums on Facebook where it was identified as said species. The short, thicker beak clearly eliminated the Red-necked Phalarope *P. lobatus*. The bird was not sighted when we visited the place the next day.

