

RARE SPECIES DOCUMENTATION
Records of Vermont Birds

The following form has been prepared to encourage full documentation, when requested, of rare or unseasonal birds in the state of Vermont. These reports are put into a permanent file and should be as detailed as possible. New reports are reviewed annually by the Vermont Bird Records Committee, which evaluates records for their acceptability to future researchers and for inclusion in the state bird list.

Please print or type

SPECIES: Short-billed Dowitcher

NUMBER OBSERVED: 1

OBSERVER MAKING REPORT: OTHER OBSERVERS (and addresses if available) Matt Cahill (and David Belicek)

LOCATION: (place, township, county) Dead Creek WMA, Addison, Addison County. Specifically just north (0.75 mi) of Rt. 17 in the first large western side channel off the main creek (by canoe).

DATE: October 17, 2014

TIME AND LENGTH OF OBSERVATION: 1 minute at close range, then 10 minutes from farther away.

DISTANCES FROM BIRD: Maximum ___150 ft_ Minimum ___30-50 ft

WEATHER: Very pleasant.

wind direction _West_____ wind speed __5 mph_____

sky cover __partly cloudy_____ light in relation to observer's position: looking toward the sun, but the low angle kept the sun largely behind clouds and minimized glare.

temperature ___50's_____

OPTICAL EQUIPMENT: (make, power, etc.)

Bushnell Legend 8x42

OBSERVER'S PREVIOUS ACQUAINTANCE WITH THIS SPECIES OR SIMILAR FORMS:

I've seen dowitchers many times in many states. I have only occasionally attempted to differentiate the species (long-billed and short-billed) in the field. I am an experienced birder familiar with most sandpipers and nearly all of the expected Vermont species.

OTHER DOCUMENTATION: Photo __x___ Tape Recording _____ Specimen _____

If yes to the above, where is this information deposited?__Ebird checklist S20261194

HABITAT: (be as detailed as possible, include associated bird species)

Shallow emergent vegetation and mud, among lily pads and associating with a flock of Lesser Yellowlegs.

BIRD'S BEHAVIOR: (feeding actions, manner of flight, displays or interactions, reaction to observer)

The dowitcher arrived over our shoulders and landed in front of us with a group of 9 Lesser Yellowlegs, soon joining another 11 Lesser Yellowlegs already present nearby. It stood about 30-50 feet from us preening in good light and calm conditions. I was excited to see a dowitcher, and had time to get a photograph. Then all the shorebirds flew farther off (150 ft) and began feeding along the mud margins. The dowitcher fed in the classic 'sowing machine;' style, dipping its face close to the water surface and walking methodically forward.

VOCALIZATION: (song or calls)

Called as it arrived, a strong, clear, quick, and emphatic 'tu-tu-tu', twice, that seemed to descend in pitch. The Lesser Yellowlegs it arrived with were silent in flight and generally silent while feeding. I recall well being struck by the 'strange' Yellowlegs-like call that I heard as the flock landed, but not fitting it to either species. We had been watching the first group of Lesser Yellowlegs for about 10 minutes, and they had been vocal on and off, especially when a Northern Harrier had spooked them. Additionally, we'd seen Greater Yellowlegs earlier in the trip, so both species calls were fresh in my mind. I've spent a lot of time with Yellowlegs before, and feel I know their call well. I don't believe I mistook a Yellowlegs call for the dowitcher - it was louder and stronger than the Yellowlegs voice, and descending slightly between notes, more akin to Greater Yellowlegs, of which there were none nearby at the time.

DESCRIPTION: (Describe what you actually saw during the observation. We hope that observers will take field notes during the observation and before consulting field guides, etc. Additional pages with sketches and copies of field notes are encouraged.)

Please see photograph, which is the same as in the ebird checklist - clearly a dowitcher (long straight bill, obvious supercilium above eye, grayish overall). I photographed the bird shortly before it flew farther away.



Relative size and shape:

Head (crown, cheeks, eye, throat, nape):

Feet and Bill (shape, color, length):

Upper back:

Lower back and rump:

Wings (shape, length, markings):

Breast, belly, flanks, undertail coverts:

Tail (shape, length, markings):

IMPORTANT: WHAT SIMILAR SPECIES WERE ELIMINATED WHEN MAKING THIS IDENTIFICATION AND HOW WAS THIS BIRD DIFFERENT?

Determining if it to species has been based on 1.) the flight call, which was well heard and quickly identified in my mind as matching a Short-billed once I saw I was looking at a dowitcher, and 2.) structural details of the photograph including a supercillium that appears rather arched (opposed to straighter in Long-billed) and tapered from the front where the supercillia meet (not sharply V-sharped), The belly sides appeared chevroned (rather than barred though its debatable in the photo), belly mostly white (rather then darker with more barrings), and there is discernable markings in some of the unmolted wing coverts and what looks like a tertial feather (opposed to grayish or indiscernible markings within the same feathers).

The structural and plumage details of the bird I've assed well after the sighting using online sources, especially a Rice University article by Cin-Ty Lee and Andrew Birch: www.ruf.rice.edu/~ctlee/LeeBirchDowitcher.pdf

COMMENTS: (was age or sex determined?, etc.)

It appears to be a Juvenile well into a basic molt based on apparent rufous margins and interior markings to unmolted coverts and tertial feathers.

This report was written from notes taken during _____ immediately after ___X___ the observation, or written from memory _x_____ (please attach copies of notes if available)

I I.D.'d the bird in the field first as a dowitcher (which for me felt obvious) and second as a Short-billed based on it's flight call. I recorded my thoughts on the call during our canoe. My detailed looked at the photograph for helpful supporting details I did afterward with consulting sources.

NAME (print)_ Matt Cahill _____ SIGNATURE (not req'd) _____

MAILING ADDRESS _ 16 Edgewood Run, Amherst, NH 03031

DATE ____ 10.22.14 _____

Return electronically (preferred) to: vbrc@vtcostudies.org or mail to: Vermont Bird Records Committee, Vermont Center for Ecostudies, PO Box 420, Norwich, VT 05055



