

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*

The Long-billed Dowitcher is one of the more common shorebirds in San Diego County on fresh water, surpassed inland only by the Least Sandpiper and Killdeer. It is even more common in coastal estuaries, but it is scarce on the tidal mudflats of San Diego and Mission bays sought by the Short-billed Dowitcher. The Long-billed arrives later in the fall than the Short-billed, and, unlike the Short-billed, rarely remains as a nonbreeding visitor through the summer.

Winter: The Long-billed Dowitcher occurs in equal abundance both along the coast and inland. Along the coast, the main sites are the San Diego River flood-control channel and Famosa Slough (R8), with up to 185 at the latter 6 January 2000 (J. A. Peugh), and the north county lagoons, with up to 310 at Batiquitos (J7) 2 January 1998 (C. C. Gorman) and 297 at San Elijo (L7) 23 December 2001 (E. Garnica). The Long-billed Dowitcher frequents the channels within the marshes in the estuaries of the Tijuana and Sweetwater rivers but avoids the open tide flats of San Diego Bay preferred by the Short-billed Dowitcher. Nevertheless, the two species have ample opportunity to mix.

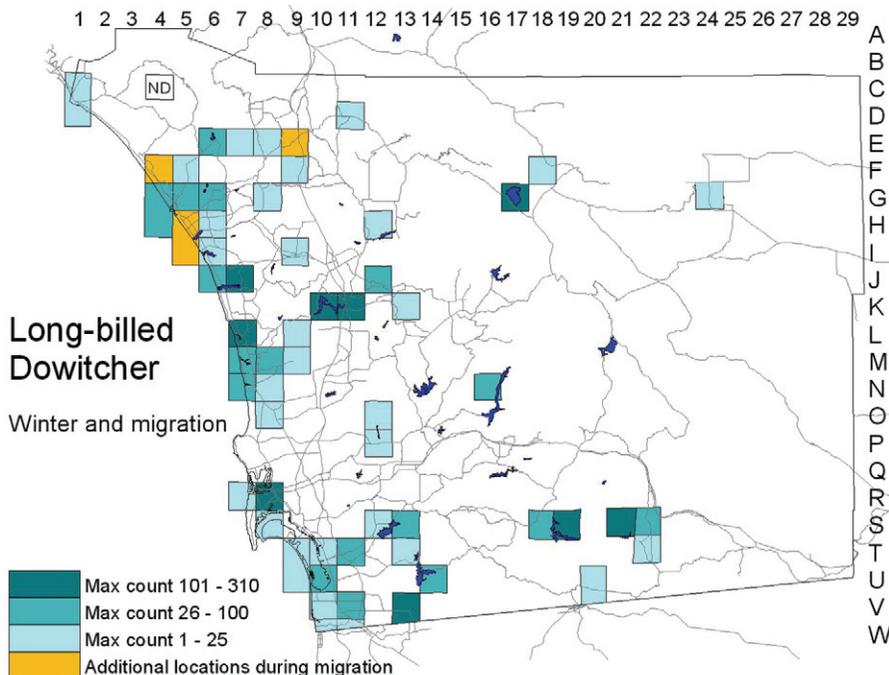


Photo by Brian L. Sullivan

Inland, the Long-billed Dowitcher occurs both around reservoirs and in shallow ponds or wetlands wet only during winter rains. Large concentrations in the former habitat are 309 at Lake Hodges (K10) 22 December 2000 (R. L. Barber) and 160 on the north side of Lake Morena (S21) 23 January 2000 (S. E. Smith). Large concentrations in the latter habitat are 100 at the Dairy Mart pond, Tijuana River valley (V11) 16 December 2000 (G. McCaskie) and

36 in San Dieguito Valley (M8) 28 February 1999 (R. T. Patton). Lake Morena, at 3000 feet elevation, was the highest site where we noted wintering dowitchers. One at Borrego Springs (G24) 23 February 1998 (P. D. Ache) was most likely an early spring migrant.

Migration: A few migrant Long-billed Dowitchers may arrive by late June, but the bulk of adults begins arriving in late July, that of juveniles, in late August. Thus the fall migration of the Long-billed is later than that of the Short-billed. Spring migration extends from late February, as suggested by the record from Borrego Springs, to early or mid May. Our latest spring date from 1997 to 2001 was 11 May (1999, three at Buena Vista Lagoon, H6,



M. Freda; nine at San Elijo Lagoon, M. B. Stowe). Unlike the Short-billed, the Long-billed has no strong peaks of migration in San Diego County.

The Long-billed is far less frequent than the Short-billed as a nonbreeding visitor through the summer. Nevertheless, there are a few records: one on south San Diego Bay and one at the Tijuana River mouth 9 June 1984 (R. E. Webster, G. McCaskie, AB 38:1062, 1984), two at the Sweetwater River mouth (U10) 24 June 1988 (Macdonald et al. 1990), one at Batiquitos Lagoon 5–7

June 1998 (F. Hall, C. C. Gorman). From their monthly surveys of San Elijo Lagoon 1973–83, King et al. (1987) reported an average in June and July of 1.2.

Conservation: The Long-billed Dowitcher has taken advantage of new habitat created with reservoirs, but it has suffered loss of considerable habitat because of channelizing of rivers, development of floodplains, and elimination of seasonal wetlands.