

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER

Limnodromus scolopaceus

Family: SCOLOPACIDAE

Order: CHARADRIIFORMES

Class: AVES

B197

Written by: C. Swarth

Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt

Edited by: R. Duke

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common to abundant migrant and winter visitant in the Central Valley and along coastal California (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979). Widespread during migration, and common in inland regions where suitable habitat exists. Fall migrants arrive in large numbers in late July in the Central Valley, 2 mo before a similar influx is noted in late September on the coast (McCaskie et al. 1979, Page et al. 1979). Immatures are more likely than adults to occur in coastal locations (Pitelka 1950). Spring migration through the Central Valley appears to take place between late March and early May; by mid-May most have departed (McCaskie et al. 1979). There are very few summer records for California (McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981). At inland areas, prefers wet meadow, fresh emergent wetland, pasture, and shallow lacustrine habitats. Also uses croplands, and muddy borders of shallow lakes and ponds (Cogswell 1977). On the coast, forages on the broad intertidal mud flats of estuarine habitats. At the Salton Sea, forages on bordering mudflats and nearby diked ponds (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Much more common inland in winter, and in freshwater habitats than the short-billed dowitcher (Cogswell 1977).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Forages on soft mud substrates by probing deeply and rapidly with perpendicular strokes of the long bill. In shallow water the entire head may be immersed. Food on the wintering grounds is taken mainly in freshwater habitats, and includes midge and other fly larvae and small, burrowing crustaceans (Cogswell 1977). During the nesting season, takes crane fly and midge larvae, other insect larvae, small snails, and some seeds and plant fiber (Johnsgard 1981).

Cover: In estuarine habitats, requires undisturbed areas for roosting above high tide. Page et al. (1979) suggested that some coastal wetlands support wintering dowitchers as parts of larger, integrated wetland systems.

Reproduction: Nests on moist, low tundra close to lakes and marshes. The nest is merely a depression in the short vegetation, generally placed in a damp clump of sedges (Johnsgard 1981). Nest may be lined sparsely with small leaves (Harrison 1978).

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: In California, mostly wet meadow, cropland, and estuarine mud flat habitats are used for wintering.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Nests on the arctic tundra of northeastern Siberia, northwestern Alaska and in the Mackenzie district of Canada. Winter range extends from western and southeastern U.S. south to Guatemala (Palmer 1967).

Home Range: In Siberia, has nested in densities of 2-7 pairs/km² (5-18/mi²) (Johnsgard 1981).

Territory: In Siberia, nesting pairs remained in an area about 100-300 m (330-990 ft) in diameter. Male performs a courtship flight by hovering 15-20 m (50-66 ft) over the tundra while singing a prolonged song (Johnsgard 1981). Male defends nesting territory, often remaining near the nest during incubation and warning off intruders.

Reproduction: The breeding season begins in late May and early June. Average clutch size is 4 eggs, and only 1 brood is raised each season. Both sexes incubate, 20-21 days; but as the eggs approach hatching, the male takes over. Precocial young leave the nest within hours of hatching, and are tended by the male alone (Johnsgard 1981).

Niche: Useful field methods for distinguishing this species from the very similar short-billed dowitcher are given in McCaskie et al. (1979).

REFERENCES

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