

First occurrence of Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* (Say, 1823) in the Maltese Islands

Charles Coleiro & Nicholas Galea

Waders are well known long-distance migrants and it is not infrequent that some individuals overshoot their designated destination and arrive in areas where they do not normally occur, sometimes even on another continent. On 5 October 2012 at Simar Nature Reserve, a small wetland along the northeastern coast of Malta, a long-billed medium sized wader was noticed feeding along one of the shorelines within the wetland. At first glance it resembled a Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* but the curved bill was unlike that of any *Limosa* sp. The apparent long bill pointed to a Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*, which was further confirmed by its short and sharp shrill call uttered whilst flying around. It also had a broad and rather distinct supercilium, thus suggesting a dowitcher species. Further indication of this bird being a Long-billed Dowitcher were the tertials which had plain grey centres. The overall plumage suggested a first winter bird where the scapular and covert feathers had buffish fringes. This constituted the first ever sighting of this species in the Maltese Islands, and the record was accepted by the Malta Rarities and Records Committee on 7 July 2012, after a description of the bird and photographs were submitted. The bird stayed for 20 days in the nature reserve up until 25 October.

The Long-billed Dowitcher is migratory, wintering (apparently including Siberian breeders) from southern USA (California east to Florida) south to Guatemala. Their main southward passage is between July and September, and some birds make long southeastern movements towards the Atlantic coast. Long-billed Dowitchers breed in northern Siberia tundra from the Chukotskiy peninsula (south into Koryak Highlands) west to Lena Delta, and also in western and northern Alaska and extreme northwest Canada (Snow & Perrins 1998; Vans Gils *et al.* 2019).

Single birds have been recorded in Quebec, Sable Island (Nova Scotia), and W Europe between Finland and Spain; juveniles are virtually annual in Britain and Ireland from 20 September onwards, and sometimes overwinter (Hayman, Marchant & Prater 1986). There have been seven accepted records in Italy, including one in Sicily. The Sicilian record, a first winter bird, was

present at the Augusta Saltpans on the eastern coast, from 20 December 2006 to late February 2007. This is also the only wintering record of this species in Italy (Brichetti & Fracasso 2018).

References

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Charles Coleiro – charles.coleiro@birdlifemalta.org