

THE ORIOLE

A Quarterly Journal of Georgia Ornithology: Official Organ of the
Georgia Ornithological Society



Vol. XVII

SEPTEMBER, 1952

NO. 3

THE ORIOLE

Editor: Richard A. Parks, 2303 Pembroke Place, N. E., Atlanta, Georgia

Business Manager: Ralph L. Ramsey, 1578 N. Decatur Road, N. E., Atlanta, Georgia

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF DOWITCHERS IN GEORGIA

By DAVID W. JOHNSTON

The recent taxonomic and geographic revision of the dowitchers (*Limnodromus*) by Frank A. Pitelka (1950) has stimulated an extensive investigation into the current status of the genus in Georgia. The *Birds of Georgia* (Greene, *et al.*, 1945), following the A. O. U. Check-List, recognized one species with two subspecies as occurring in the State: the Short-billed Dowitcher, *L. griseus griseus*, and the Long-billed Dowitcher, *L. griseus scolopaceus*. Pitelka, however, believes that the Long-billed Dowitcher should be accorded full specific rank as *L. scolopaceus*. It is not the purpose here to discuss the validity of the species ranking or the various subspecies of *griseus*; rather, the present paper will recognize the taxonomy of Pitelka, *viz.*, a monotypic *L. scolopaceus* and a polytypic *L. griseus*. Of the three geographic races of the latter species, the western *caurinus* does not concern us in the present discussion, but attention will be focused on the interior form *hendersoni* and the eastern *griseus*, even though *caurinus* and *hendersoni* have not yet been recognized by the A. O. U. Committee on Classification and Nomenclature.

An attempt has been made to amass all extant specimens from Georgia except those examined and mentioned by Pitelka in his exhaustive study, and as many sight records as possible have been gleaned from the literature and other sources. In the course of the study, several institutions have loaned specimens: United States National Museum and Fish and Wildlife Service Collections (by Allen J. Duvall), Emory University (by Dr. P. W. Fattig) and University of Georgia (by Dr. E. P. Odum). Numerous individuals throughout the State, especially William W. Griffin and Dr. J. Fred Denton, have aided by the loan of specimens from their private collections and have furnished pertinent sight records. Especially helpful have been the suggestions and field data of Ivan R. Tomkins who probably has a greater knowledge of Georgia coastal birds than any other individual. Special acknowledgement is also made to Dr. Pitelka who has kindly given advice and time in identifying specimens by comparison with series in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology.

TABLE 1

Identification of Dowitchers from the Present Study.

<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>				
USNM	[♂] ad	J. LeConte	County and date unknown	
UGa	♂	M. Hopkins	Baker Co., Newton	Apr. 17, 1951
			(<i>Oriole</i> , 16:15. 1951)	
<i>L. griseus hendersoni</i>				
	♂ ad	J. F. Denton	Glynn Co., Sea Island	Sept. 3, 1949
Emory	♂ juv.	Rossignol	Chatham Co.	Aug. 12, 1908
<i>L. griseus</i> subsp.?				
UGa	♂	[Hoxic]	Locality unknown	Aug. 1, 1908
USNM	♀ juv.	Rossignol	Chatham Co., Savannah	Sept. 28, 1909
	♂ juv.	Griffin	Floyd Co., Rome	Aug. 28, 1949
			(<i>Oriole</i> , 15:10. 1950)	
	♀ juv.	Griffin	Glynn Co., St. Simons Is.	Dec. 30, 1948
Emory	♂	Murphey	Glynn Co.	Jan. 1900
Emory	♀ juv.	Rossignol	Chatham Co.	Aug. 18, 1908

SPECIMENS EXAMINED

It has previously been thought that *scolopaceus* was accepted on the accredited Georgia list on the basis of specimens taken by Gilbert Rossignol in Chatham County in 1908 and by Tompkins in the same general area in 1929, 1935 and 1936. These specimens were checked some years ago by Dr. H. C. Oberholser. Two Rossignol specimens in the Emory collection taken in 1908 have been examined and both are juveniles (Table 1). One was previously unidentified but is *L. griseus* (subsp. ?). The other was previously identified as *scolopaceus* and seems to fit this species' mensural characters except for the fact that the tertiaries and tail pattern are definitely those of *L. griseus*. If we consider the strong likelihood that it is a mis-sexed specimen, then its measurements would fall within the limits statistically possible for *L. griseus hendersoni*, to which it is now assigned.

Tompkins (1936) stated that the Short-billed Dowitcher is much more abundant than the Long-billed in the Savannah River area and, for the latter, lists only three specimens already mentioned. Recent double-checking with Tompkins, however, revealed the fact that these specimens were from the South Carolina side of the Savannah River and technically cannot be accredited to Georgia. One of these specimens, taken on November 30, 1929, is mentioned as the sole record of *scolopaceus* from South Carolina (see Sprunt and Chamberlain, 1949). The other two records of March 16, 1935, (note changes in dates from typographical errors in Tompkins' article in the *Oriole* for 1936) and April 14, 1935, should be checked and added to those for South Carolina. It seems rea-

TABLE 2

Identification of Dowitchers Taken from Pitelka, 1950.*

<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>			
USNM	♂	County and date unknown	
<i>L. griseus hendersoni</i>			
F&WS	♀	Chatham Co., Savannah	Apr. 24, 1938
AmerMus	♂	Chatham Co.	May 16, 1907
MusComZool	♂	McIntosh Co.	Apr. 22, 1890
MusComZool	♂	McIntosh Co.	Apr. 7, 1890
MusComZool	♂	McIntosh Co.	Apr. 23, 1890
F&WS	♂	Chatham Co., Oysterbed Is.	Apr. 24, 1938
<i>L. griseus</i> subsp.?			
MusComZool	♀	McIntosh Co.	Apr. 30, 1890
AmerMus	♀	Glynn Co., St. Simons Is.	Dec. 13, 1904
ChicMus	♂	Chatham Co.	Aug. 7, 1908

*Specimens here identified definitely as *hendersoni* are included by Pitelka (*op. cit.*, p. 78) in a single listing of all Atlantic Coast specimens examined. This listing is headed "*griseus* or *hendersoni*," but it includes both subspecies as well as intermediates.

sonable to believe that such records would also be expected from the Georgia side of the river.

Tables 1 and 2 include all specimens identified in this study and in that of Pitelka. A significant point disclosed by these tables is the fact that *scolopaceus* is far less represented by specimens than is the species *griseus*. In this work and in the investigations of Pitelka, only three specimens out of twenty have been identified as *scolopaceus*, and two of these bear incomplete data. It is evident from these tables that the long-billed *scolopaceus* is far less abundant in Georgia than the short-billed *griseus*, a fact that applies equally to neighboring southeastern states according to Pitelka's findings.

Subspecific determinations of *L. griseus* reveal that the form *hendersoni* is much more common in the State than *L. g. griseus*, although the accompanying tables contain a high percentage of birds unidentified for one reason or another, usually because they fall into the zone of overlap in measurements of *hendersoni* and *griseus* or because the specimens were old and faded. It is of interest to note that not a single unequivocal specimen of the nominate race *griseus* was examined in this study, but Pitelka has identified numerous specimens from neighboring southeastern states. Murphey (1937) mentions an adult female of *L. g. griseus* taken in Richmond County, September 1894, this specimen having been recently identified by Thos. D. Burleigh. Rowan (1932) cites a bird from McIntosh County taken on April 23, 1890, as being *griseus*, but

this specimen has been re-examined in Pitelka's study and is considered *hendersoni*. The racial names in numerous sight records throughout the State (Hebard, 1941, and Sprunt, 1936) must, of course, be disregarded, and henceforth it is recommended that nothing more than specific names be used in the absence of specimens. In many such instances, only the generic name can be safely applied.

SIGHT RECORDS

Obviously, it would be impossible to mention all dowitcher sight records from the State, but certain generalities might be drawn by examination of the published sight records. The many observations of dowitchers would indicate the validity of Tomkins' statement (pers. comm.) that "dowitchers are plentiful, and may be found at nearly any time of year." Table 3 presents selected, published sight records from Georgia with additional unpublished, pertinent records from Robert A. Norris and the Fish and Wildlife Service files through the courtesy of Chandler

TABLE 3
Selected Sight Records of Dowitchers.

Observer and Reference	Locality	Date
Sprunt (1936)	Camden Co., Cumberland Is.	Apr. 13-21, 1932 Apr. 7-15, 1933
Tomkins (1936)	Chatham Co., Savannah	Apr.-June July-Sept.
Tomkins (pers. comm.)	Chatham Co., Savannah	July 1, 1950
J. H. Rise (F&WS)	McIntosh Co., Blackbeard Is.	winter, 1914
Boisclair (F&WS)	McIntosh Co., Blackbeard Is.	winter, 1916-7
Worthington (F&WS)	McIntosh Co., Darien	Mar. 20, 26, 1890 Apr. 20, 1890
Woodward (1949)	Glynn Co., Sea Island region	Chiefly the first week in April
Johnston (1947)	Glynn Co., St. Simons and Sea Is.	Apr. 25, 1947
Norris (pers. comm.)	Glynn Co., St. Simons Is.	June 4, 1939
Norris and Bell (pers. comm.)	Glynn Co., Sea Is.	June 14, 1939
Hebard (1941)	Charlton Co., Chase Prairie	Feb. 3, 1931
Hopkins (1951)	Baker Co., Newton	Apr. 16-17, 1951 July 25, 1950
Giles (1939)	Dekalb Co., Atlanta	Aug. 19, 1939
Eyles (1937)	Dekalb Co., Atlanta	Aug. 25, 27, 1932

S. Robbins. These data plus the records of specimens indicate that dowitchers are common in spring and fall but become much scarcer in winter and summer. The nonbreeding June birds of Norris and Bell and the numerous winter records are of particular interest. It is also apparent that practically all coastal counties are represented by records at one time or another.

INLAND RECORDS

Tables 1, 2 and 3 reveal the fact that dowitchers are rather uncommon inland, occurring only in favorable habitats which are likewise uncommon in the interior of the State. In several instances, these inland occurrences have been attributed to inclement weather conditions. It would seem that practically all inland sight records should be *L. griseus* because of the large proportion of such specimens examined in this study, but the admittedly meager data presented here do not necessarily bear out such a contention. Of the three inland specimens examined, one is definitely *scolopaceus*. Furthermore, Pitelka (*op. cit.*, p. 54) presents data which show that in interior North America in the Great Lakes region 24 per cent of the specimens are *scolopaceus* with the percentage rising to 45 in the Mississippi Valley. Then, too, *scolopaceus* is believed by Pitelka to be more closely associated with fresh-water habitats. Thus, it would be exceedingly unsafe to relegate all inland sight records to *L. griseus* on the basis of its preponderance among the twenty specimens involved in this study. Under favorable conditions of lighting and plumage, it might be possible to distinguish the two species afield, but ordinarily collection of the specimen would be the sole means of definite identification. For pertinent field marks, see Pitelka (1950) or Sibley (1952).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Of twenty specimens of *Limnodromus* examined from Georgia, only three have been identified as the long-billed form, *L. scolopaceus*. One-half of the specimens of the short-billed form, *L. griseus*, is definitely assignable to the subspecies *hendersoni*, while the other half was undetermined due to intermediacy or to fading of the specimen. Coastwise, dowitchers might be found at any time of year, being most abundant during migration. Inland, dowitchers are rather scarce in migration, and might be referable to either species. It is evident from the paucity of specimens that further extensive and intensive collecting must be effected in order to evaluate more completely the relative abundance of the species and subspecies in the State.

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Museum of Vertebrate Zoology
Berkeley, California

GENERAL NOTES

A NEW BREEDING SPECIES FOR GEORGIA: THE SPOTTED SAND-PIPER.—Although various publications have listed the Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*) as a breeding species as far south as South Carolina, actual evidence of nesting has not been reported south of Asheville, North Carolina, in the southeastern United States. In northern Georgia the species has been regarded as a transient only, late spring migrants remaining frequently until the end of May and fall migrants reappearing as early as the middle of July. On June 1, 1952, however, it was my good fortune to discover a nest of this species at the Intrenchment Creek Sewage Disposal Plant six miles southeast of the center of Atlanta in DeKalb County, Georgia. On that date the nest contained four eggs.

The nest itself was merely a depression in the ground lined with grasses. It was located under low weeds and tomato plants which were growing in the dry, pebbly, base of one of the unused sludge pits at the Disposal Plant. Nearby were other pits filled with sludge and water, a large rock spray bed and the banks and sand bars of Intrenchment Creek, all of which offered attractive habitat for the species.

During the several trips made to the nesting site only one adult bird was seen. On June 1, the date of discovery of the nest, this adult remained always in close proximity to the nest but would not disclose its exact location while I remained in sight. The nest was finally discovered by leaving and then approaching the vicinity from the opposite direction, thereby flushing the incubating adult which had returned to the nest during my absence. Twice the bird flushed while I was still at a considerable distance, but on my third approach the bird sat closely, flushing only when nearly trodden and thus enabling me definitely to spot the clump of weeds harboring the nest. I was unable to visit the nest again until June 15, but on that date it was found to be empty. The single adult was very much in evidence, however, and its action indicated the presence of young. While I searched for the young the old bird remained within thirty feet of me, repeatedly calling *peet-weet-weet* and running back and forth in an apparent attempt to lead me from the weed-grown

sludge pit containing the nest and in which I suspected the young were hiding. Despite a rather careful search, however, no young birds were to be found.

Later on during the summer on July 5 Rufus Godwin was successful in finding the single adult and one young bird, fairly well feathered, at the edge of one of the nearby sludge pits. On several occasions subsequent to this date in July and early August I too saw a single adult in company with one immature bird. Presumably this immature was hatched at the Disposal Plant. Possibly the other three eggs hatched and the young were unable to survive the intense, sustained, heat which gripped the region during mid June.—WILLIAM W. GRIFFIN, 3232 Pine Ridge Road, N. E., Atlanta, Georgia.

WHISTLING SWANS IN FLOYD COUNTY.—Eight Whistling Swans (*Cygnus columbianus*) were found in company with the twelve Mute Swans on November 23, 1951, on Victory Lake, Berry College Campus in Floyd County, Georgia. The birds were fairly tame and could be approached closely enough to see the oval yellow spot at the base of the black bill. They fed with the domesticated swans but otherwise kept to themselves and seemed to stay in pairs. The birds left the lake on March 8, 1952. There appear to be but four previous records of this species for the State.—GLENN W. BELL, 115 Willowood Circle, S. E., Atlanta, Ga.

THE PURPLE SANDPIPER AS A REGULAR WINTER VISITOR ON TYBEE BEACH.—The first specimen of the Purple Sandpiper (*Erolia maritima*) for the state of Georgia was collected on December 26, 1949, and duly recorded in *The Oriole* (15:7, 1950). During the rest of that winter I found some of these birds on five occasions up to February 22 (1950), eleven being the greatest number seen on any one day. The next winter the first ones were found on Christmas Day (1950), and I found from two to seventeen at a time on eight different days up to March 3 (1951). The species appeared again on November 3, and I saw them on eight different days to April 5 (1952). On December 17 a group estimated to contain thirty Purples was seen on one groin. There were visits on which no birds were seen, perhaps because high tides covered the groins, or because the seas broke over them, driving the birds to more sheltered beaches. It was not always possible to examine all the groins along this beach, and some birds may have been missed. It is a forty mile drive down and back, so it was not possible to make regular checks at low tide, but these data are considered sufficient to validate the species as a regular winter visitor to the locality.

Nothing like a complete list of recent records from the South Atlantic States is at hand, but from the standard works it appears that we have a population of Purple Sandpipers here, several hundred miles south of

the usual winter range. We could profit by a tabulation of such records, as well as by more careful examination of suitable habitat to north and south of the Savannah area. I hope to continue counts whenever possible.

Mr. Francis M. Uhler of the Fish and Wildlife Service, has furnished an analysis of the contents of the stomachs of four birds collected on December 20, 1951. The birds had eaten small mussels, snails, one species of small cancrroid crab, and considerable quantities of "tender green marine alga resembling *Ulva*." The alga contents of the four stomachs was 5, 42, 50, and 60% respectively.

It seems to me that there are many places along the coast that would satisfy these food requirements, such as rock jetties, breakwaters, and oyster-reefs. The Ruddy Turnstone, which is a companion of the Purple Sandpiper on the timber and steel groins of Tybee Island Beach, is fully as plentiful in these other locations.—IVAN R. TOMKINS, 1231 East 50th Street, Savannah, Georgia.

CONNECTICUT WARBLER IN ATLANTA.—On May 10, 1952, I collected a Connecticut Warbler (*Oporornis agilis*) in woods bordering the South River some six miles south of the center of Atlanta in Fulton County, Georgia. I have only one previous Atlanta observation, a bird seen on May 24, 1940, (*Oriole* 5:18, 1940). There are, however, numerous additional May records for the region. During the 1952 spring George Beal reports seeing a bird later in the day on May 10 at South River.—WILLIAM W. GRIFFIN, 3232 Pine Ridge Road, N. E., Atlanta, Georgia.

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER AT ATLANTA.—On May 17, 1952, a flock of four White-rumped Sandpipers (*Erolia ruficollis*) was found at the Intrenchment Creek Sewage Disposal Plant south of Atlanta in DeKalb County, Georgia. The birds were feeding with Least and Semipalmated or Western Sandpipers at the edge of standing water in one of the sludge pits. One bird was collected in order to substantiate the identification. It proved to be an exceedingly fat male in fine spring plumage. Later in the day these sandpipers were observed by Ray C. Werner and Rufus Godwin, but the following day they were absent.

The specimen is the first from the Atlanta region and one of the few from inland Georgia. The observation of a single bird of this species in the South River bottoms by Don Eyles and Norman Giles, Jr., on May 21, 1932 (*Auk* 52:461, 1935) represents the only previous published record from Atlanta.—WILLIAM W. GRIFFIN, 3232 Pine Ridge Road, N. E., Atlanta, Georgia.

POSTJUVENAL MOLT OF TAIL FEATHERS IN THE PINE WARBLER.—In discussing molts in the wood warblers (*Parulidae*) that occur in New York State, Dwight (*Ann. N. Y. Acad. Sci.*, 13: 73-360, 1900) states that, although the types of molt are numerous in this family, the remiges

(primary and secondary wing feathers) and rectrices (tail feathers) are retained until the first postnuptial molt, with one possible exception, the Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*). This means that among the various wood warblers in New York only the chat is known to lose any of these "flight feathers" in the postjuvenile molt, the molt in which juvenile plumage is replaced by first winter plumage.

The postjuvenile molt in the Pine Warbler (*Dendroica pinus*) "involves the body plumage and wing coverts but not the rest of the wings nor the tail" (*op. cit.*: 270). Although this pattern may well be the rule in this species, two specimens collected August 7 and 17, 1951, near Tifton, Tift County, Georgia, indicate that some individuals and perhaps some populations show postjuvenile loss and replacement of rectrices. My specimens are both immature females with incompletely ossified skulls, and both are replacing juvenile plumage all over the body. There is no renewal of primaries or secondaries but there is definite replacement of rectrices, of which new ones have appeared and grown out. An examination of these feathers in one bird reveals basal sheaths around all but the longest, fully grown median shafts; the outermost (and newest) feathers are slightly more than half the length of the longest, and the graduated appearance of the tail is quite symmetrical. The second bird's rectrices are similar, although the central rectrices are only 70 per cent grown and the others shorter accordingly. Thus, the tail feathers in these young Pine Warblers are being replaced along with the body plumage.

The possibility of complete loss of rectrices through accident, with consequent regrowth simulating postjuvenile molt, seems almost nil, since two individuals were taken (the only ones that I have obtained at this particular age) and since each shows normal, laterally graduated and symmetrical replacement beginning with the middle feathers.

There is, moreover, hardly any chance that the outgrowing rectrices in these two birds are merely juvenile feathers whose appearance has lagged behind that of the rest of the juvenile plumage. Admittedly, the juvenile and adult tail feathers are of like color. But Pine Warblers are known to keep their distinctive brownish juvenile plumage in conjunction with fully developed wing and tail feathers for a matter of several weeks, at least, before the postjuvenile molt is begun. (I have collected a number of such non-molting, independent juveniles, all with fully formed rectrices, and have noted others in collections.) Moreover, the tail feathers of my August-collected specimens conform structurally to the adult type rather than to the juvenile. The structural comparison was made as follows:

Counts were made of the number of barbs arising from the feather shaft, or rachis, through a linear distance of 15 millimeters, in adult and

juvenile specimens. An outermost rectrix was used in each case, and the segment for the count was selected from the subterminal portion (marked by a broad area of white). The lengths of segments were determined as accurately as possible, and counts were made with 20x magnification. The specimens used, all from the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, were about equally divided between the sexes and were collected in various eastern states. The juveniles were relatively young, essentially non-molting individuals, presumed to have juvenile rectrices. The number of barbs per 15 millimeters was as follows:

	Extremes	Mean	Standard Deviation
14 adults	33-37	35.43	1.33
8 juveniles	36-40	38.00	1.41

The difference between the means was found to be significant statistically. Since the two young female specimens in question are considered to have adult, rather than juvenile, rectrices, they are combined with 12 "true adults" in the table; their own barb counts were 34 and 35, well within the limits of the adult class, and beneath the lower limit of the juvenile class. This aspect of feather morphology, then, provides further evidence that the developing tail feathers of these young Pine Warblers are not juvenile feathers but are first winter rectrices that have replaced the juvenile set.

This tardy recognition of a postjuvenile molt of rectrices in Pine Warblers points up the need for a thorough study of this common, yet poorly known, inhabitant of our southern pine forests and, indeed, of the subject of molt program in passerines generally.—ROBERT A. NORRIS, *Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California, Berkeley 4, California.*

SANDHILL CRANE TAKEN IN FULTON COUNTY.—Three Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*) were observed in the northern part of Fulton County, Georgia, on November 1, 1951, by an unknown farmer who shot and killed two of them. He recognized them as being strange birds, and a friend took them to Roy Wood, who lives near Roswell and knows them from field studies which were conducted in Florida for the Fish and Wildlife Service. He recognized them at once and reported the full information to me. Unfortunately the farmer disposed of the birds and no specimens were saved. They were first seen in fields, probably looking for food. Reports indicated the third bird escaped unharmed. This appears to be the most northerly record of this bird for the State.—HAROLD S. PETERS, 968 Cumberland Road, N. E., Atlanta, Georgia.

NEWS AND COMMENTS

FALL MEETING AT INDIAN SPRINGS.—The Georgia Ornithological Society will hold its 27th semi-annual meeting at Indian Springs State Park on Saturday and Sunday, October 4 and 5. The Elder Hotel will provide all facilities for the meeting, including the entire hotel for sessions, meals, and lodging. An interesting program and business session will be held on Saturday afternoon. The banquet will be held at 7:00 P. M. Saturday with Mr. George Dorsey as the speaker for the evening. Several choices for field trips will be offered for Sunday morning.

ORIOLE REPRINTS.—The following reprints of out-of-print issues of *The Oriole* are now available from the Business Manager at \$1.00 each:

Vol. 1, No. 1 — January, 1936

Vol. 11, No. 3 — July, 1946

Vol. 11, No. 4 — October, 1946

Vol. 12, No. 1 — January, 1947

COLOR PLATE.—The color plate of the Eastern Bluebird which appears as the frontispiece in this issue is used here through the courtesy of the editor of the *Southern Telephone News*, house organ of Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company. The painting was originally reproduced on the cover of this magazine.