

First record of Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* for Papua Province, Indonesia

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Ringkasan. Seekor Trinillumpur Paruh-panjang diamati dan difoto di kolam akuakultur di Pantai Hotekamp, dekat Jayapura Provinsi Papua pada 13 April 2017. Ini merupakan rekaman pertama spesies ini di Papua dan catatan kedua yang diklaim untuk Indonesia.

Introduction

The Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* is a Holarctic wader, breeding in north-eastern Siberia, Alaska and north-west Canada, and migrating largely to southern parts of North America and Central America (Hayman *et al.* 1986; Chandler 2009). It is a regular straggler to Europe and Japan and a rare vagrant to India, South-East Asia and Papua New Guinea (Sonobe & Usui 1993; Holt 1999; Robson 2000; Message & Taylor 2005; Bishop 2006). There is only one confirmed record from Indonesia, a single bird seen 3 km south of Sanur, Bali, on 23 December 1982 (Klapste 1984; Andrew 1992; Sukmantaro *et al.* 2007; Eaton *et al.* 2016). Another dowitcher was reported from approximately the same location (Pulau Serangan south of Sanur) on 13 August 2011 (Smith 2011), but unfortunately, was neither photographed nor observed sufficiently closely to confirm its identity (D. Smith, pers. comm.).

Methods and Results

On 13 April 2017 we visited an extensive area of aquaculture ponds at Pantai Hotekamp (2°37'N, 140°47'E), on the eastern side of Yos Sudarso Bay, 12 km south-east of Jayapura City, Papua Province. We spent three hours in the area, surveying approximately 100 ha of the 600 ha site and recording 708 waders of 19 species (Crossland & Sinambela 2017). Equipment used were 10x42 binoculars and 30x80 spotting scope. The most abundant species were White-headed Stilt *Himantopus h. leucocephalus* (256 birds), Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* (112), Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata* (106), Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* (84), Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* (65) and Common Greenshank *T. nebularia* (21).

Most waders were feeding or loafing on shrimp ponds with varying proportions of exposed muddy edge and shallow water. Smaller numbers were roosting on ponds that retained edges or islands of mangrove vegetation, as well as raised areas of dry mud and dead mangrove stumps. One such pond supported a varied assemblage of roosting birds, including White-headed Stilts, Wood Sandpipers, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Curlew Sandpipers *Calidris ferruginea*, Common Sandpipers *Actitis hypoleucos* and Red-necked Stints *Calidris ruficollis*. While taking long range photos of some of these birds we spotted a hitherto unnoticed wader standing on the edge of a flock of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. At a distance of c.50m, the body size relative to the neighbouring sandpipers, the long bill and long legs were reminiscent of a Common Redshank *T. totanus*, but when viewed at high zoom through a 200x camera viewfinder it became immediately clear that the bird was in fact a dowitcher. Also immediately apparent was the fact that it had green legs and was therefore clearly not an Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, a species with which we are very familiar (Crossland *et al.* 2007; Crossland 2013). This left the possibility of either the Long-billed Dowitcher *L. scolopaceus* or Short-billed Dowitcher *L. griseus*.

We attempted a closer approach but the bird became alert and took flight when 25 m distant, along with the flock of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. We took a series of five photos on high zoom just prior to the bird flushing (Plate 1-3) but we failed to get higher quality, close up images or photos from different angles. The dowitcher flew several hundred metres away into distant ponds which we were unable to access. The bird called when it flew, but we failed to take note of the call, not being aware of how crucial this is to dowitcher identification. In flight we noticed a white back and upper rump, grading into a barred lower rump and tail. Body and wings were greyish-brown with a narrow white trailing edge to primaries. When standing, the bird showed a reddish-orange back, nape, chest and flanks, while the vent and tail were barred black and white. The head was snipe-like with a brownish cap, broad white supercilium, dark eye-stripe and a thick straight bill approximately twice the length of the head.

Our initial identification was Long-billed Dowitcher based on bill length and shape, eye position, tail markings and size relative to the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. The habitat also supported Long-billed Dowitcher as this species prefers ponds and marshes, while the Short-billed Dowitcher typically favours mudflats (Chandler 2009). However, as Short-billed Dowitcher is also a candidate for vagrancy to Indonesia - this species having reached Australia (Campbell & Minton 2007) – we sought expert opinion. Nine experts from Australasia, North America and Europe reviewed the photographs and unanimously leaned toward Long-billed Dowitcher as the identity of this bird, noting however that the photographs were not sharp and required careful scrutiny. The experts based their identification on the balance of probabilities and noted the following features as the most compelling in support of Long-billed Dowitcher:

Head and bill: long-faced look of a Long-billed Dowitcher. Straight bill, accentuated by the dark lores that run in a straight line to the eye, and lacking the distinct droop of *L. griseus*. Flat forehead with a very low angle. Supercilium very low and flat (i.e. not arched as in *L. griseus*).

Tail: not very white and with thick black bars indicating *L. scolopaceus* rather than *L. griseus*.

Wings: fresh wing coverts that are mostly black with strong white tips. The few black nuptial coverts visible are “squared off” instead of pointed, as in *L. griseus*.

Body: extensive reddish-orange on the vent and lower belly coupled with obvious barring on the sides of the breast. Suggestion of a contrasting white rear flank patch. Chevrons rather than spots are visible on the flanks. The black bars on the rear flanks have white edging.



Plate 1. Long-billed Dowitcher roosting with Sharp-tailed Sandpipers at Pantai Hotekamp, near Jayapura, Papua. (Photographer A. Crossland).



Plate 2. Long-billed Dowitcher near Jayapura, Papua (Photographer A. Crossland).



Plate 3. Long-billed Dowitcher near Jayapura, Papua (Photographer A. Crossland).

Discussion

This sighting of Long-billed Dowitcher comprises the first record for the Indonesian province of Papua and the second confirmed record for Indonesia. It is also the second confirmed record for the island of New Guinea, the species having been previously recorded in December 1984 at Aroa Lagoon, Central Province, Papua New Guinea (Anon 1984; Bishop 2006).

In the wider region, Long-billed Dowitchers have also been reported in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Thailand, Vietnam and Sabah, with possible records in Brunei and Singapore (Robson 2000, 2002; Brazil 2009; Phillipps & Phillipps 2014). The Sabah record involved two birds, one in breeding plumage, at Kota Belud on 8 April 1996 (reported in Mann 2008, and attributed to Craig Robson *in litt.*). The Brunei report involved a bird thought to be an immature Long-billed Dowitcher, seen at Sungai Seria from 12 to 22 September 1980 (Vowles & Vowles 1985). This report was widely cited (e.g. Hayman *et al.* 1986; Richards 1988; MacKinnon & Phillipps 1993; Rosair & Cottridge 1995), but subsequently rejected as unreliable by Mann (2008) and disregarded by other authorities (e.g. Howes & Bakewell 1989; Sonobe & Usui 1993; Phillipps & Phillipps 2014). A dowitcher sighted in Singapore in December 1991 was thought to be this species (Ollington & Loh 1992; Robson 2000), but Wells (1999) treated it as either Long-billed or Short-billed Dowitcher. The Nature Society (Singapore) followed this recommendation and have categorised Long-billed Dowitcher as a “species for which all records must be considered as doubtful because of the possibility of mis-identification” (Lim 2009). More recently a Long-billed Dowitcher was recorded at Lake Tutchewop in Victoria, Australia, from 7 November 2014 to 5 January 2015, constituting the first confirmed record for Australia (Birdlife Australia Rarities Committee, Case 997: accepted but summary still in preparation).

Across the Indonesian archipelago, the seasonal distribution of accepted records are split between the northward migration period in April (Sabah, Papua) and the middle of the non-breeding season in December (Bali, PNG). In addition, the Singapore bird was also recorded in December, while the Australian bird was present from at least early November, through December into early January. We recommend that wader watchers in Indonesia be aware that vagrant Long-billed Dowitchers could occur almost anywhere in the archipelago, particularly in northern and eastern areas, and photographs with details of calls should be obtained whenever possible to confirm the identification.

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