

Species Status Assessment

Common Name: Short-billed Dowitcher **Date Updated:** 2024-12-20
Scientific Name: *Limnodromus griseus* **Updated By:** tgh
Class: Aves
Family: Scolopacidae

Species Synopsis

(a short paragraph which describes species taxonomy, distribution, recent trends, and habitat in New York):

Long-billed dowitcher and short-billed dowitcher were designated as separate species in 1950. Three subspecies of short-billed dowitcher breed in North America: *L. caurinus* occurs on the Pacific Coast, *L. griseus* on the Atlantic Coast, and *L. hendersoni* in central Canada. The nominate *griseus* breeds in northern Canada and occurs in New York during migration, although a few specimens of *hendersoni* have also been taken in New York. Exposed mudflats are used as stopover points in New York, available on the Coastal Lowlands of Long Island and along the Great Lakes, as well as the large national wildlife refuges, Montezuma and Iroquois.

The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan and the International Shorebird Survey note significant declines in short-billed dowitcher populations since the mid-1970s. Declines are attributed to habitat loss on breeding grounds and on wintering grounds. Trends in New York are not available.

I. Status

a. Current legal protected Status

i. Federal: **Candidate:**
ii. New York: Unlisted: protected native

b. Natural Heritage Program

i. Global: G3
ii. New York: SNRN **Tracked by NYNHP?**

Other Ranks:

NYS 2025 SGCN status: Species of Greatest Conservation Need

COSEWIC: Not listed in Canada
 IUCN Red List: Least Concern
 Northeast Regional SGCN: Not listed

Status Discussion:

Short-billed dowitcher is a common to abundant migrant on coastal areas of New York during spring and fall. During spring migration, it is uncommon inland.

II. Abundance and Distribution Trends

Region	Present?	Abundance	Distribution	Time Frame	Listing status or S-Rank	SGCN?
North America	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown for US		
Northeastern US	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown		No
New York	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown		Yes
Connecticut	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	SNA	
Massachusetts	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	S4N	
New Jersey	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	S4N	
Pennsylvania	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	S3M	
Vermont	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	SNA	
Ontario	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	S3B,S4M	
Quebec	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	S3B	

Column options

Present?: Yes; No; Unknown; No data; (blank) or Choose an Item

Abundance and Distribution: Declining; Increasing; Stable; Unknown; Extirpated; N/A; (blank) or Choose an item

SGCN?: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item

Monitoring in New York

(specify any monitoring activities or regular surveys that are conducted in New York):

Trends Discussion

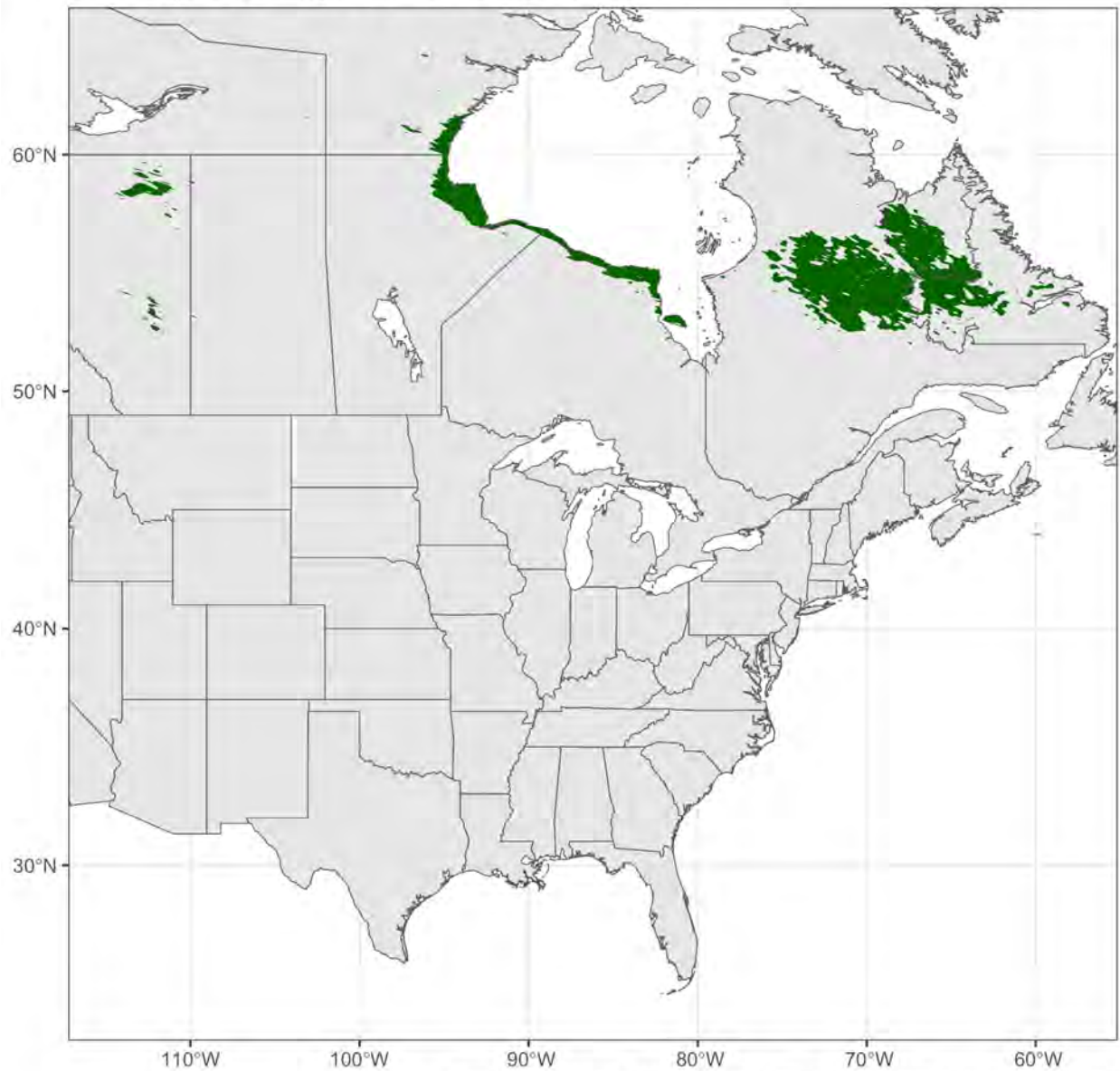
(insert map of North American/regional distribution and status):

From Jehl et al. (2001): Dowitchers were hunted almost to extinction during the 1800s, but legal protection allowed populations to rebound and they were again common during the 1950s and 1960s. However, there are indications that this trend has been reversed, and that the species

(at least on the East Coast) is perhaps only about half as common as several decades ago. International Shorebird Survey results from 1972 to 1983 indicated decline of 5.5%/yr, 46% overall (Howe et al. 1989). Similar rates continued through 1995–1997 at 6 sites in Massachusetts and Brigantine, NJ. Data from Maritimes (e. Canada) Shorebird Survey, 1974–1991 (Morrison et al. 1994), indicate significant decline, the rate dependent on type of analysis.



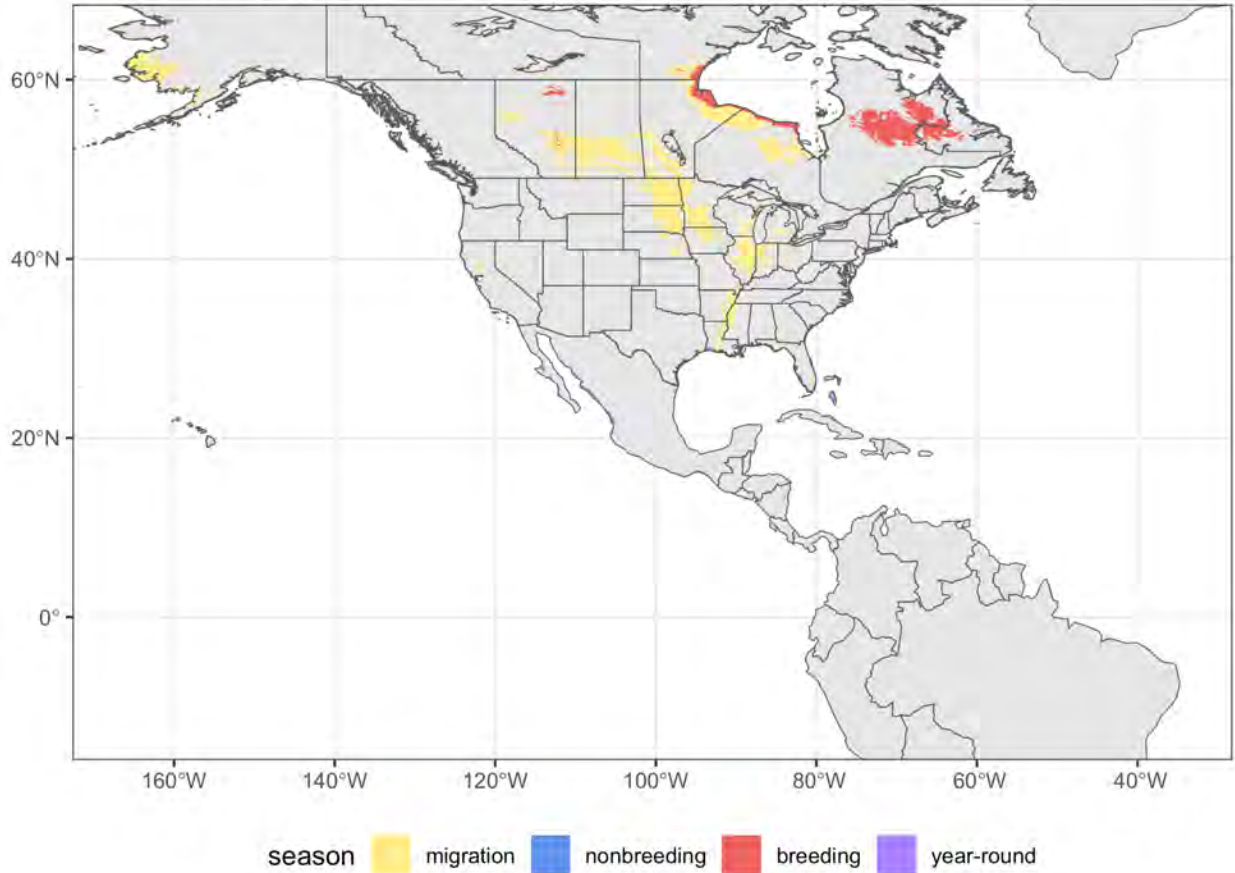
Breeding range map for Short-billed Dowitcher



Range map data from eBird Status and Trends, Data Version: 2022; Released: 2023

Figure 1: Breeding range for short-billed dowitcher. Data source is eBird.

Year-round range map for Short-billed Dowitcher



Range map data from eBird Status and Trends, Data Version: 2022; Released: 2023

Figure 2: Full (year-round) range for short-billed dowitcher. Data source is eBird.

III. New York Rarity

(provide map, numbers, and percent of state occupied)

Breeding range map in NY for Short-billed Dowitcher



Range map data from eBird Status and Trends, Data Version: 2022; Released: 2023

Figure 3: NYS breeding range for short-billed dowitcher based on eBird data.

Details of historic and current occurrence:

The first Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) (1980-85) documented occupancy in 0 blocks, 0% of the survey blocks statewide (Andrle and Carroll 1988). The second BBA (2000-05) documented occupancy in 0 blocks, 0% of the survey blocks statewide (McGowan and Corwin 2008).

The third BBA (2020-25) is currently underway and utilizes a different number and layout of survey blocks across New York, making direct comparison with the first two Atlases difficult. There were 5,333 blocks in the first and second BBAs, and there are 5,710 blocks in the current BBA, of which 1,815 are considered priority blocks. To date, short-billed dowitcher has been documented in 9 priority blocks, 0.2% of all priority blocks statewide during the third BBA (NY BBA III Overview, 2024).

New York's Contribution to Species North American Range:

Based on eBird data, 0.16 percent of the population breeds in New York, while 0 percent of the non-breeding population occurs in New York. Among all states with breeding populations, New York ranks 11 of 20.

Percent of North American Range in NY	Classification of NY Range	Distance to core population, if not in NY
1-25%		

Column options

Percent of North American Range in NY: 100% (endemic); 76-99%; 51-75%; 26-50% 1-25%; 0%; Choose an item

Classification of NY Range: Core; Peripheral; Disjunct; (blank) or Choose an item

IV. Primary Habitat or Community Type

(from NY crosswalk of NE Aquatic, Marine, or Terrestrial Habitat Classification Systems):

NatureServe broad habitat types: Grassland/herbaceous, Sand/dune, Tundra, TEMPORARY POOL, Riparian, Bog/fen, HERBACEOUS WETLAND, Herbaceous wetland, Tidal flat/shore

Habitat or Community Type Trend in New York

Habitat Specialist?	Indicator Species?	Habitat/ Community Trend	Time frame of Decline/ Increase
Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

Column options

Habitat Specialist and Indicator Species: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

Habitat/Community Trend: Declining; Stable; Increasing; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

Habitat Discussion:

Mudflats along Long Island's south shore.

Nests in grassy or mossy tundra and wet meadows, in muskeg. The nest is a shallow hollow in mosses or grasses, lined with grasses, leaves, and twigs. Non-breeding habitat includes mudflats, estuaries, shallow marshes, pools, ponds, flooded fields and sandy beaches (AOU 1983, Jehl Jr. et al. 2020). Prefers shallow salt water with soft muddy bottom, but visits various wetlands during migration (Jehl Jr. et al. 2020).

V. Species Demographics and Life History

Breeder in NY?	Non-breeder in NY?	Migratory Only?	Summer Resident?	Winter Resident?	Anadromous/ Catadromous?
Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No

Column options

First 5 fields: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

Anadromous/Catadromous: Anadromous; Catadromous; (blank) or Choose an item.

Species Demographics and Life History Discussion

(include information about species life span, reproductive longevity, reproductive capacity, age to maturity, and ability to disperse and colonize):

Knowledge of the life history of short-billed dowitcher is limited because of its insect-rich muskeg breeding habitat, the difficulty in locating nests, and its history of being lumped with similar-looking long-billed dowitcher.

Age at first breeding is not known, probably 1–2 yr. First-year short-billed dowitchers frequently summer in small numbers south of breeding grounds. One brood is normally raised per season. Longest documented life span 13 yr 3 mo (Klimkiewicz and Futcher 1989). By analogy to other similarly sized shorebirds, maximum expected about 20 yr (Marks et al. 1990). No data on survivorship. Predation by raptors apparently the major cause of death during migration and winter.

Presumably susceptible to avian botulism (Type C), as 4 sick dowitchers (spp.) seen during outbreak at Delta Marsh, Manitoba in 1964 (Manuwal 1967).

VI. Threats

Threat Level 1	Threat Level 2	Threat Level 3	Spatial Extent	Severity	Immediacy	Trend	Certainty
6. Human Intrusions & Disturbance	6.1 Recreational Activities	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
7. Natural System Modifications	7.3 Other Ecosystem Modifications	Choose an item. (dredging, filling, beach nourishment)	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
9. Pollution	9.1 Domestic & Urban Wastewater	Choose an item. (runoff)	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
9. Pollution	9.2 Industrial & Military Effluents	9.2.1 Oil spills	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
11. Climate Change	11.1 Habitat Shifting & Alteration	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
11. Climate Change	11.5 Storms & Severe Weather	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.

Table 1. Threats to short billed dowitcher.

Migrant shorebirds are susceptible to the effects of oil spills and to habitat loss from development of coastal areas. Climate change could alter availability of exposed mudflats in coastal areas.

Short-billed dowitcher is one of the six species that make up 95% of migrating birds feeding on horseshoe crab eggs at Delaware Bay in the spring. Numbers there have declined in response to reduced availability of this rich food resource.

Global warming may have especially strong impacts on this species. Anticipated climate change will be greatest at polar and temperate latitudes, where short-billed dowitcher breed and winter. All known major migration staging sites, and most of the major wintering range, are on temperate coastlines of both the New and Old World, where sea level change is predicted to be greatest.

In March 2006, Global Forest Watch Canada reported that the boreal breeding grounds of the short-billed dowitcher have been seriously degraded and fragmented in areas where energy and logging companies have commercial access (Audubon website).

[[THREATS TABLE HERE]]

Are there regulatory mechanisms that protect the species or its habitat in New York?

Yes:  **No:** **Unknown:**

If yes, describe mechanism and whether adequate to protect species/habitat:

This species is included in the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (16 U.S.C. 703-712) and is protected as a native species under the NYS Environmental Conservation Law.

Describe knowledge of management/conservation actions that are needed for recovery/conservation, or to eliminate, minimize, or compensate for the identified threats:

Action Category	Action	Description
A.1 Direct Habitat Management	A.1.2.0.0 Manage non-living habitat components	Site/Area management (posting/fencing)
B.3 Outreach	B.3.1.4.0 Public outreach and information	Awareness & Communications (educational materials)
C.6 Design and Plan Conservation	C.6.5.0.0 Conservation planning	Resource/Habitat Protection

Action Category	Action	Description
C.6 Design and Plan Conservation	C.6.2.2.0 Acquire title for conservation purposes	Site/area protection via acquisition
C.6 Design and Plan Conservation	C.6.2.3.1 Conservation Easement	Site/area protection via easements
C.7 Legislative and Regulatory Framework or Tools	C.7.1.0.0 Create, amend, or influence legislation, regulation, or codes	Establish seasonal use restrictions
C.7 Legislative and Regulatory Framework or Tools	C.7.2.2.2 State guidelines	Adjust state land mgmt. plans
C.10 Institutional Development	C.10.3.0.0 Alliance & Partnership Development	Support and participate in international shorebird conservation efforts

Table 2. Threats to short-billed dowitcher.

The Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (NYSDEC 2005) includes recommendations for the following actions for transient shorebirds, which includes short-billed dowitcher.

Fact Sheet:

_____ Develop educational materials about conservation needs of shorebirds in New York, and promote habitat protection measures.

Habitat Management:

_____ As important foraging areas become known, identify potential threats and protect those habitats (ex- beaches, tidal flats, shoals, etc.) from permanent alteration, degradation, or adverse human disturbances. Management may include acquisition, easements, establishing seasonal use restrictions, and posting or fencing, etc. as is currently done for beach-nesting birds.

Habitat Research:

_____ Conduct field studies to document ecology of transient shorebirds on Long Island, including important food items, habitat use (ex- importance of tidal flats) and time/activity budgets.

_____ Compile data and input from birders to derive a map showing important shorebird foraging and resting areas in New York.

Other Action:

_____ Provide technical support, funding, or political support as needed, to further international shorebird conservation efforts.

Population monitoring:

_____ Identify specific locations, procedures, and observers (volunteer or other) for conducting annual shorebird surveys at 5-10 locations in New York, and initiate surveys as soon as possible.

State Land Unit Management Plan:

_____ On state-owned or other public lands, ensure that management plans consider shorebird needs and appropriately restrict site development and seasonal uses that may adversely affect critical shorebird foraging areas.

Statewide Management Plan:

_____ Develop a conservation plan for transient (non-breeding) shorebirds that regularly occur in New York, to include objectives and actions that we can assist with both inside and out of New York State.

VII. References

This SSA drew heavily from these resources:

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