



Environment and
Climate Change Canada

Environnement et
Changement climatique Canada

Canada

Short-billed Dowitcher *hendersoni* / *griseus*

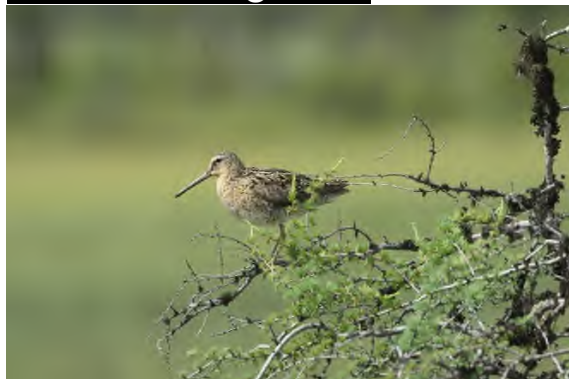


Photo: © Samuel Denault

Scientific Name

Limnodromus griseus hendersoni/griseus

Taxon

Birds

COSEWIC status

Threatened

Canadian Range

NT, NU, AB, SK, MB, ON, QC, NB, NS, PE, NL

Reason for designation

This medium-sized shorebird is endemic to Canada, where it breeds from Northwest Territories and Alberta to northwestern Quebec and Labrador. Individuals migrate through eastern and central North America, and winter along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the United States and the Caribbean coast of Central and South America. The greatest threat is sport and subsistence hunting in the southern portion of the wintering range; other threats include increasing loss of non-breeding habitat; disturbance by dogs and recreational activities at migratory stopover sites and on non-breeding grounds; impacts of pollution on birds and their prey; and effects of increased forest fires and climate change on the breeding grounds. The population is estimated at about 78,000 mature individuals, although this estimate is at least 25 years out of date. Data from the International Shorebird Survey suggest 3-generation declines

approaching 60%, although these surveys only partially cover the centre of the continent where trends may differ. Because the species does not meet the definition of Endangered (i.e., at immediate risk of extinction), it is designated as Threatened.

Wildlife Species Description and Significance

Short-billed Dowitcher is a chunky, medium-sized shorebird, with generally brown-mottled upperparts speckled with cream, and an orangey-rufous breast in the breeding season. Its bill, almost twice as long as the head, is straight and dark grey, and its stout yellowish legs are relatively short. Short-billed Dowitcher is a long-distance migrant, travelling as far as 15,000 km in a round trip between its breeding and non-breeding grounds. It is harvested as a game bird in the Caribbean and northern South America.

Spatial segregation in the breeding, migrating, and non-breeding ranges of known populations provide evidence for subdivision of Short-billed Dowitcher into two designatable units (DUs), the *caurinus* and *hendersoni/griseus* populations, following the subspecies or subspecies complexes of *L. g. caurinus* and *L. g. hendersoni/griseus*, respectively. There is strong inference that each of the *caurinus* and *hendersoni/griseus* populations have distinctly heritable traits, in the form of strongly differentiated migration routes and separate breeding and non-breeding grounds. Therefore, the two populations of Short-billed Dowitcher that occur in Canada are considered to be discrete and evolutionarily significant, and they are assessed as two separate DUs.

Distribution

Short-billed Dowitcher breeds primarily in the boreal forest of Canada and Alaska. In Canada, it occurs from British Columbia and Northwest Territories eastward to Newfoundland and Labrador. The *hendersoni/griseus* DU breeding range extends east from the south-central Northwest Territories, as far south as Edmonton in Alberta, central Saskatchewan, possibly as far southeast as the northern end of Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba and north along the Hudson Bay lowlands, and from Manitoba as far east in



Environment and
Climate Change Canada

Environnement et
Changement climatique Canada

Canada

Ontario as James Bay. This DU also breeds in Nunavut along James Bay, and from Hudson Bay and James Bay in northwestern Quebec and east into Labrador. Individuals described as *L. g. hendersoni* migrate through eastern and Central North America, east of the Rocky Mountains, and winter primarily along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the United States, but southward as far as the Caribbean coast of Central America. Birds considered to be *L. g. griseus* migrate along the Atlantic coast, and winter in the Caribbean and along the northern coast of South America, where they overlap with the range of *L. g. hendersoni*.



Map of breeding range in Canada, used for calculation of extent of occurrence (EOO) for each DU of Short-billed Dowitcher in Canada (see legend; estimated distribution based on Consortium Gauthier et Guillemette – G.R.E.B.E. 1991; Smith 1996; Sinclair *et al.* 2003; Burke and Sutherland 2007; FAN 2007; Fraser 2015; Artuso 2018; Quebec Breeding Birds Atlas 2020; Saskatchewan Breeding Bird Atlas 2020; Fink *et al.* 2023; eBird 2024; Hache unpubl. data). Breeding range in the northern part of the boreal forest in most provinces and territories is suggestive due to the limited information available.

Source: COSEWIC. 2024. IN PRESS. COSEWIC assessment and status report on the Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*, *caurinus* subspecies (*Limnodromus griseus caurinus*) and *hendersoni/griseus* (*Limnodromus griseus hendersoni/griseus*) in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa. xv + 83 pp.

Habitat

Short-billed Dowitcher nests principally in fens of the boreal forest, particularly in large fens with expanses of emergent aquatic vegetation (e.g., sedges) and numerous shallow ponds and pools, interspersed with shrubs and small

conifers. In winter, it prefers coastal wetlands such as estuaries, lagoons, mudflats, and the edges of mangrove forests.

Biology

Short-billed Dowitcher is socially monogamous and defends only a small area around the nest, and around the brood once the young have left the nest. Adults arrive on their breeding grounds in mid-May and incubation begins in early June. The nest is a simple depression on dry ground. Four eggs are usually laid, with a three-week incubation period beginning between mid-May and mid-June. The precocial young leave the nest shortly after hatching and the male is responsible for brood rearing, which generally lasts 14 days. Short-billed Dowitcher produces only one brood a year. Age at first breeding is one year, and generation length is estimated to be four years. On the breeding, migrating, and non-breeding grounds, the species feeds primarily on aquatic invertebrates such as molluscs, worms, and crustaceans.

Population Sizes and Trends

The published population size in Canada is 78,000 mature individuals for the *hendersoni/griseus* DU, the entirety of which breeds in Canada. However, these estimates are based on surveys conducted in the 1980s and '90s. There is no more recent information on *hendersoni/griseus*.

Long-term trend analysis (1980-2019) of International Shorebird Survey (ISS) data showed a decline of 85.24% (95% CIs: -93.14, -66.89) for the *hendersoni/griseus* DU. The short-term ISS trend (2007-2019), equivalent to three generations, was -7.19% (-13.21, -1.32) per year, corresponding to an overall three-generation decline of 58.94% (-81.93, -14.74).

Threats and Limiting Factors

Multiple, interacting threats and limiting factors are likely responsible for Short-billed Dowitcher's population decline. With a maximum clutch size of four eggs and a single brood, the species has limited annual reproductive output. For the *hendersoni/griseus* DU specifically, the greatest threat is sport and subsistence hunting occurring in the Caribbean and South America. For both DUs, important threats are considered to be loss



Environment and
Climate Change Canada

Environnement et
Changement climatique Canada

Canada

and degradation of wetlands and other habitat at migratory stopover sites, on the non-breeding grounds, and, increasingly, on the breeding grounds; and the threat of climate change and severe weather, which affects the species on its breeding and non-breeding grounds as well as during migration.

Protection, Status, and Ranks

In 2024, the IUCN uplisted Short-billed Dowitcher from Least Concern to Vulnerable. In Canada, NatureServe considers the Short-billed Dowitcher Vulnerable as a breeder and Apparently Secure as a migrant (N3N4B, N4N5M). Its status as a breeder is Vulnerable (S3) in most provinces where ranked. Short-billed Dowitcher and its nests and eggs are protected under the Canadian *Migratory Birds Convention Act*, and the species is also safeguarded under similar laws in a number of provinces. A small portion (~3%) of suitable breeding habitat (i.e., boreal wetlands and coastal mudflats) in Canada is protected by national or provincial parks, migratory bird sanctuaries, or national wildlife areas. Outside the species' breeding range, a network of important stopover sites in the Americas deemed to be of national or international significance for shorebirds including Short-billed Dowitcher are identified through various conservation designations such as the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) and BirdLife International's Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBBA) programme.

Source: COSEWIC. 2024. IN PRESS. COSEWIC assessment and status report on the Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus, caurinus* subspecies (*Limnodromus griseus caurinus*) and *hendersoni/griseus* (*Limnodromus griseus hendersoni/griseus*) in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa. xv + 83 pp.

For more information, please visit

<https://species-registry.canada.ca/index-en.html>

For information regarding reproduction rights, please contact Environment and Climate Change Canada's Public Inquiries Centre at 1-800-668-6767 (in Canada only) or 819-997-2800 or email to Enviroinfo@ec.gc.ca