

NOTES

Further Records of the Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus Semipalmatus* From Thailand, with Notes on Its Distribution and Identification

While examining skins in the collection of Dr. Boonsong Lekagul, one of us (D.S.M.) found one skin of the Asian Dowitcher, *Limnodromus semipalmatus*. The label (No. SC572) recorded the bird as *Limosa lapponica* (Bar-tailed Godwit). The bird had been collected on 1 May 1954 at "Klong Dan, Central Thailand", about 40 km southeast of Bangkok. It was sexed as a female. The measurements of the skin are : bill (exposed culmen), 179 mm; wing, 179 mm; tail, 60 mm; tarsus, 50.5 mm. The bird is in full breeding plumage, the chestnut colouration appearing darker than usual, apparently as a result of contamination from subcutaneous fat. The primaries are "slightly" worn (after PRATER *et al.*, 1977).

On the morning of 20 March 1981, one of us (P.D.R.) saw 2 Asian Dowitchers on a partially flooded shrimp pond at Samut Sakhon, about 40 km southwest of Bangkok, and a group of 8 birds at the same location in the evening. Only one of these birds showed any rufous colouration on the breast. In both instances, the birds were disturbed by children or fishermen after a few minutes observation, when they flew to the coast. The pond supported an estimated 3000 waders at these times, principally Marsh Sandpipers *Tringa stagnatilis*, Curlew Sandpipers *Calidris ferruginea* and Lesser Sandplovers *Charadrius mongolus*, with smaller numbers of Broad-billed Sandpipers *Limicola falcinellus* and Red-necked Stints *Calidris ruficollis*. Dowitchers were on the pond mostly during early morning and evening. They probably fed on intertidal mudflats during the day and returned to roost on the pond.

The Asian Dowitcher breeds in scattered colonies across Western Siberia, Transbaikalia, Mongolia and Manchuria and winters in Indo-China, Peninsular Malaysia and eastern India. In addition, up to 130 dowitchers have been recently discovered at one site in Western Australia (B.A. LANE and C.D.T. MINTON, pers. comm). They occur as regular passage migrants, especially in spring, in Hong Kong where D.S.M. has considerable experience with them. The species is currently listed as "rare" by I.U.C.N. (KING, 1978) and is still very little known (PRIKLONSKY, 1976). In Thailand, DEIGNAN (1963) recorded it as a "visitor from northern Asia, reported on migration or in winter along the eastern coast from Samut Prakan to Nakhon Sri Thammarat, and also from the western coast (Satun)," but gave no indication of numbers. LEKAGUL & CRONIN (1974) record it as a rare vagrant.

The first record of the species in Thailand appears to be a male collected on Pulo Adang, Butang Islands (Satun Province) by W.L. Abbott on 15 December 1899 (RILEY, 1938) rather than the male collected by C.J. Aagaard on mudflats near the mouth of the Lakon* River, Nakhon Sri Thammarat Province, on 1 September 1911 (WILLIAMSON, 1916).

* An alternative spelling of Nakhon.

Subsequently, Aagaard collected a considerable number of specimens from Nakhon Sri Thammarat Province. ROBINSON & CHASEN (1936) wrote: "between 1910 and 1926 he obtained about fifty specimens . . . and in 1924 got seventeen 'red' birds. His collector afterwards worked near the mouth of the Menam River, in Siam, and in May 1927 Mr. Aagaard wrote to us that he had obtained about thirty specimens 'as red as copper'—i.e. in breeding plumage. A few of these birds are in the Raffles Museum. Of two dated 24th April one is changing plumage, but the other appears to be in almost complete nuptial dress. Another shot on the 22nd of the same month is in perfect winter plumage, as is one on the 27th September".

An additional 34 specimens were sent to Copenhagen and examined by JØRGENSEN (1949), details of which are as follows:

Fresh summer plumage:

6 males and 3 females, 22–28 April, 1927, Bang Hia, Menam.

Mixed summer plumage, changing to winter plumage:

6 males and 5 females, 29 August–1 September, 1924, Lakon.

Pure winter plumage:

7 males and 7 females, 22–26 November, 1923; 30 August 1924,

Lakon. The measurements of these birds in mm were given as follows:

16 males: wing, 169–184; bill, 78–90; tarsus, 47–56

12 females: wing, 168–185; bill, 81–94; tarsus, 49–55.

A further 2 of Aagaard's specimens are held by the British Museum (Natural History) as are another 13 collected in Thailand by W.J.F. Williamson and one by E. Chapple. We have been unable to trace any published record of these specimens which were recently examined by D.S.M. The details are given in Table 1.

Of particular interest are the specimens in wing moult, since moulting sites have hitherto never been recorded for the species. The only published statement on moult is that of PRATER *et al.* (1977) which notes "moult late August–November".

We are unaware of any recent records of dowitchers from Thailand other than those noted above.

In peninsular Malaysia, MEDWAY & WELLS (1976) record the species as a "passage migrant and winter visitor in small numbers, normally frequenting muddy shores, but also recorded from the Singapore prawn ponds and at an unspecified inland locality near Kuala Lumpur. Dowitchers are usually solitary or in small groups, but 27 were counted together on the mudflats at Tanjong Belanak (Perak) on 25 September 1965. Earliest arrival 4 August; the latest published dates in the Malayan states are December".

The paucity of records from Thailand (with the exception of Aagaard's and Williamson's specimens) may relate to the scant attention which has been paid to shore-birds by most ornithologists and possibly also to confusion with the Bar-tailed Godwit,

listed as an "uncommon visitor" (LEKAGUL & CRONIN, 1974). The latter possibility is suggested by the incorrect skin label, a misidentification problem also encountered in the Soviet Union (DEMENT'EV & GLADKOV, 1969). Two races of the Bar-tailed Godwit have been recorded in Thailand: the western *Limosa lapponica lapponica*, which has a white rump and lower back sparingly marked with brown, and the eastern *L. l. baueri (menzbieri)*, which differs in being "darker on the rump, proximal upper tail coverts, under wing coverts, and axillaries, the feathers being invaded or more heavily barred and banded with brown, less white" (VAURIE, 1965). *Baueri* is also larger (Table 2).

The Asian Dowitcher superficially resembles the Bar-tailed Godwit (more especially *L. l. baueri*), but it is easily separated by its straight, all black bill with a slight but conspicuous swelling at the tip, similar to that of a snipe (*Gallinago* sp.). The bill of the Bar-tailed Godwit is tapered and slightly up-turned with a pinkish or orange base. In addition, the Asian Dowitcher is smaller (Table 1), more compact and shorter-necked and shows a more pronounced dark line through the eye than do the godwits and also a suggestion of a dark 'cap'. In flight, there is a diffuse pale area at the base of the secondaries, which are tipped white, in contrast to the more uniform upperwing of the Bar-tailed Godwit. The usual call away from the breeding grounds is a single, rather deep note, described as "chewsk", but a plaintive "yow" or "miau" has also been recorded (WEBSTER, 1968; KING *et al.*, 1975); this is in contrast to the loud "kaak-kaak-kaak" of the Bar-tailed Godwit (P.D.R.). On the breeding grounds, the dowitcher's call is "krü-rü, krü-rü" (NISBET, 1961). In Mongolia, KITSON (1978) noted the usual call as a "soft, moaning 'kiaow'" and once heard a soft "kewik-kewik-kewik-ku".

The Asian Dowitcher usually feeds with deliberate, snipe-like deep probes, the whole body being tilted and the legs used as a pivot, rather like a puppet or mechanical toy. This behaviour is well-described by PAIGE (1965). Although BURTON (1974) notes that probing rates in the genus *Limnodromus* "are very high", D.S.M. has never observed *L. semipalmatus* feeding noticeably more quickly than the Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*. Godwits, on the other hand, frequently 'guzzle' their food on the surface, feed with the neck extended and their feeding behaviour tends to be more 'fluid'.

It is hoped that future visitors to peninsular Thailand will look for Asian Dowitchers, especially around Nakhon Sri Thammarat which was, and may still be, an important moulting and possibly wintering area.

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Table 1. Biometrics, plumage and moult details of specimens of the Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* from Thailand, held by the British Museum (Natural History). Measurements given in mm. M = male; F = female; Ad = adult; Is = first summer; Juv = juvenile.

Date	Locality	Sex	Age	Plumage*	Bill	Wing**	Collector (see text).
4/9/13	Lakon ⁺	F	Is	T	85.5	165 pm	CJA
4/3/23	Prachin, ⁺⁺ near Bangkok	F	Ad	NBP	87.5	177	EC
22/11/23	Nakhon Si Thammarat	M	Ad	NBP	81.5	pm	WJFW
22/11/23	„	F	Ad	NBP	77	pm	WJFW
22/11/23	„	F	Ad	NBP	80	pm	WJFW
22/11/23	„	F	Juv?	NBP	88	181	WJFW
23/11/23	mouth, Nakhon River	F	Ad	NBP	84	pm	WJFW
23/11/23	Nakhon Si Thammarat	M	Ad	NBP	84	pm	WJFW
24/11/23	„	M	Ad	NBP	82.5	pm	WJFW
25/11/23	„	M	Ad	NBP	81	pm	WJFW
26/11/23	mouth, Nakhon River	F	Juv?	NBP	84	174	WJFW
26/11/23	Nakhon Si Thammarat	M	Ad	NBP	88	186	WJFW
26/11/23	„	M	Ad	NBP	83	pm	WJFW
29/8/24	mouth, Nakhon River	M	Ad	$\frac{1}{2}$ BP	84	184	WJFW
2/9/24	Nakhon Si Thammarat	F	Ad	$\frac{1}{4}$ BP	86	176 pm	WJFW
22/4/27	Ban Hia ⁺⁺	M	Ad	3/4BP	83.5	170	CJA

+ alternative spelling of Nakhon.

++ precise locality unknown

* T = trace of breeding plumage; $\frac{1}{4}$ BP, $\frac{1}{2}$ BP, $\frac{3}{4}$ BP = quarter, half and three-quarters breeding plumage respectively; NBP = non-breeding plumage.

** pm = primary moult.

Table 2. Measurements (mm) and weights (g) of *Limnodromus semipalmatus* and *Limosa lapponica*. M = male; F = female; U/S = unsexed.

	<i>Limnodromus semipalmatus</i>	<i>Limosa lapponica lapponica</i>	<i>Limosa lapponica baueri</i>
Wing*	174-188	190-224	199-240
Bill*	75-82	61-103	72-116
Tarsus*	46-53	47-61	50-61
Weight	M 150; F 174**	M + F 194-310***	5M 231.5-267****; U/S 295*****

* From PRATER *et al.*, 1977

** Specimens in Zoology Institute, Academia, Sinica Beijing, collected 25 August, Inner Mongolia.

*** From DEMENT'EV & GLADKOV, 1969.

**** From DEMENT'EV & GLADKOV, 1969, collected Sudzuhke Preserve, U.S.S.R.

***** Caught 26 November, Samut Sakhon, Thailand.

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