

Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* at Jamnagar

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On 31 December 2018, the second author was bird watching with Bishnoi K. N. at Bedi Port area, Jamnagar, early in the morning. He saw an Asian Dowitcher (*Limnodromus semipalmatus*) with a flock of Black-tailed Godwits (*Limosa limosa*) near the gate of Bedi Port. He immediately took some photographs, sent them to the first author and also called him to check the identification and see the bird. The first author confirmed that this was indeed an Asian Dowitcher, a rarity here, and within 15 minutes, reached the site and saw the bird. It was a memorable sighting on the last day of the year!

The Asian Dowitcher is an elegant wader, and needs a second view to separate it correctly even for an experienced birder. Almost like a Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) in jizz and size, the Asian Dowitcher is easily confused with the former in non-breeding plumage. Here, it was with a group of Black-tailed Godwits and was clearly smaller in size. The difference was apparent when seen through binoculars and scopes. It mixed freely with Black-tailed Godwits while feeding or roosting.

We observed this individual constantly feeding in very shallow waters of an abandoned saltpan. The saltpan consisted of a fine layer of algae on the moist mud on its southern side and a pool of shallow water in the rest of the pan, probably providing this wader an ideal habitat to forage. The dowitcher was very deliberate in feeding. It was probing persistently in the mud with its bill. Most of the time, it foraged by wading through the water which was tarsus high for it, and sometimes, it foraged in slightly deeper waters, about the height of its tibia. It also preferred walking on the algae covered moist mud to feed. Here, the bird was very near to us and we could get very good profile photographs. Due to this location being very near to the road, the bird tolerated human presence.

Precisely described as a 'Snipe-billed Godwit' by Ali & Ripley (2001), it shows a marked similarity to snipes (*Gallinago* sp.) with a long, bold supercilium, dark loreal line and an almost similar forehead structure, leading to a relatively long bill. The bill is straight, dark and of even thickness, and slightly swollen at the tip (which is visible only in close-up views). In non-breeding plumage, the face, neck and the breast are slightly streaked or mottled grey-brown with a white belly. The flanks are also barred grey-brown. The feathers on the upperparts and wing coverts are darker grey-brown, containing dark brown shaft and a contrasting, neat, pale border on the feather fringes.

The typical feeding behavior of the Asian Dowitcher is what makes it look different from similar-looking waders. The long bill is used for probing in the moist mud in a fast vertical motion, like a sewing machine. It always feeds by poking; sometimes the bill is penetrated deep into the mud, just up to the nostrils and withdrawn a few seconds later with a worm or a crustacean. Feeding is almost continuous, usually in tarsus-deep waters and also on exposed mud. It covers more ground than godwits while foraging. It seems to feed mainly on marine worms (polychaetes) by pulling them out of the moist mud. Small crustaceans and mollusks were also consumed by jabbing in the mud, but it foraged for them in the water too. In one of the photographs, we were able to capture it feeding on a small fish.

The Asian Dowitcher was more comfortable roosting near or between the groups of godwits. A water level which was touching its tibia was ideal for it to roost. It also tended to bathe and preen in between bouts of sleeping. An occasional stretch exposed the under-wings and axillaries, which were white with almost no markings. The Asian Dowitcher looks most attractive when it stands upright and stretches the neck to scan the situation and the surroundings. Although generally silent while feeding, it gives a soft flight call when taking off. The take off, when alarmed, was sudden like snipes and godwits. Once, we were able to photograph the Asian Dowitcher with a group of Curlew Sandpipers (*Calidris ferruginea*) while it was landing. This displayed the tail with twelve feathers, which are barred. The rump showed streaks of grey-brown.

We found this individual in a saltpan at Bedi Port, four kms outside Jamnagar town. The Asian Dowitcher is a species which usually migrates along the East Asian - Australasian Flyway, wintering in S and SE Asia (BirdLife International 2019). It is interesting to learn, however, that this Asian Dowitcher

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reached Jamnagar, in western Gujarat, which lies in the Central Asian - Indian Flyway. This can be a case of it being a vagrant here. In this region, previously it has been recorded at Pirotan and Narara Island in the Marine National Park (Gulf of Kachchh) and also at Khijadia Bird Sanctuary, Jamnagar (Bhatt 2008, Forsten & Lindholm 2008, Robson 2012). This is the fourth record of an Asian Dowitcher from Gujarat. It should also be noted that the Asian Dowitcher is a 'Near Threatened' species (BirdLife International 2019) and hence, this sighting assumes importance.



Rajdeepsinh Jadeja

This Asian Dowitcher in Jamnagar is being watched from dawn to dusk by some or the other birders and photographers every day since it was found. We now wish and very much hope that the bird stays here safely and leaves for its breeding ground only after acquiring breeding colours. As of 10 March 2019, it is still present in the area; a total of more than two months

of stay here. This is one of the rare instances when an Asian Dowitcher has been observed in India over such a long period and its activities and foraging/feeding monitored closely.



Yashodhan Bhatia

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Sighting of Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* near Kheda: an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat

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The Yellow-breasted Bunting (*Emberiza aureola*) is a passerine bird, of the bunting family (*Emberizidae*) that is found across Eurasia. The species is listed as 'Critically Endangered' due to extremely rapid population decline throughout its range (BirdLife International 2019). It is a winter visitor to India, mainly to the foothills of the Himalayas, and in eastern and Northeast India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

On 12 January 2019, I was on the way to Pariej Lake (22° 33' 08" N, 72° 37' 05" E), near Kheda. It was a foggy morning. Suddenly, a bird came and perched in front of my car and I was lucky to take a few photos of the bird before it disappeared in the fields



Bhavesh Mengar