

The first Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* for Oman

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In November 2015, German bird tour leader Tobias Epple told JE that he had recently seen what he thought was an Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* at Al Ansab wetland in Muscat, northern Oman, on 3 November 2015. JE was naturally skeptical as it would be a first for Oman. However, distant photos by Tobias Epple of the bird certainly looked promising.

HE and JE eventually returned to Muscat and JE visited Al Ansab wetland with American birder JH on 29 November 2015. The first pond had as usual quite a few waders but none very rare. After more birding on the site and preparing to leave, JE and JH decided to have another go at the wader pond. Suddenly, an unusual wader and clearly the bird in question stepped out in the open from behind a bush. At this point, MA-K, resident biologist at Al Ansab wetland, came by and when asked to have a look through the telescope, she immediately said 'dowitcher!'. We spent the next hour studying the bird in detail (Plates 1 & 2). There was no doubt that this was indeed an Asian Dowitcher and clearly the same bird as discovered by Tobias Epple almost four weeks earlier. The bird stayed on for several more weeks and HE, JE and MA-K spent several days at the pond trying to obtain further decent photos of the bird (Plates 3–6). We hoped that it would stay on and eventually change into summer plumage, but during a severe storm over Muscat on 9 February 2016 the bird took off and was not seen again. A Rare Bird Report with several photos was submitted to the Oman Bird Records Committee and the claim was accepted as the first record for Oman. A previous claim from Barr Al Hikman, eastern Oman, of an Asian Dowitcher on 24 October 2012 had not been accepted by OBRC due to lack of details and photos.



Plate I. Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* in flight with Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* showing relative sizes, Al Ansab wetland, Muscat, Oman, 29 November 2015. © Jens Eriksen



Plate 2. (left) Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* in flight showing relatively unbarred underwings, barred rump and barring on the flanks, Al Ansab wetland, Muscat, Oman, 29 November 2015. © Jens Eriksen

Plate 3. (right) Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* landing, Al Ansab wetland, Muscat, Oman, 5 January 2016. © Jens Eriksen



Plate 4. (left) Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* in flight showing upperparts with barring on lower back and rump, Al Ansab wetland, Muscat, Oman, 5 January 2016. © Jens Eriksen

Plate 5. (right) Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* showing white supercilium, black wedge between eye and base of bill, almost straight black bill with small reddish base to lower mandible and black barring on flanks, Al Ansab wetland, Muscat, Oman, 5 January 2016. © Jens Eriksen

This accepted Oman record is only the second for Arabia and the Middle East. The first was of a bird observed on the mudflats at Aden, Yemen, 22–23 August 1958 (Paige 1965). Though the drawings were not great, the description was good and several experts feel that the bird was indeed an Asian Dowitcher. Asian Dowitcher breeds on the Siberian steppes with the breeding range centred around lake Baikal. The main wintering grounds are in southeast Asia, especially on Sumatra, and in Northern Australia (van Gils & Wiersma 1996). It is ‘Near Threatened’ (IUCN 2016).

The Oman record is a bird in winter plumage. It is somewhat similar to a Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* in winter plumage (Plate 7) and could be mistaken as such in poor light and when seen from a long distance. But the Asian Dowitcher is not difficult to identify if seen well as there are several important differences. The long bill is straight,



Plate 6. (above) With Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*. Size of Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* similar to male Ruff. Al Ansab wetland, Muscat, Oman, 5 January 2016. © Jens Eriksen

Plate 7. (right) Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* in flight for comparison, Barr Al Hikman, Oman, 23 December 2015. Note the relatively heavy barring on underwing, lack of barring on the flanks, an obviously upturned, two-coloured bill with inner half reddish and outer half black. © Jens Eriksen



perhaps with an ever so slight upturn. It is black except for a small pale reddish base to the lower mandible. The bill tip is slightly swollen. Thus the bill is very different from that of a Bar-tailed Godwit. The plumage is similar to a Bar-tailed Godwit but with a clear white supercilium, a black wedge from eye to base of bill and some black barring on the flanks. The lower back and rump are barred unlike the Bar-tailed Godwit though its eastern race *L. l. bauri* also has a barred rump. The underwing is much less barred than that of a Bar-tailed Godwit. All in all, there are sufficient differences to distinguish the two species with certainty.

LITERATURE CITED

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