

**Ontario Species at Risk Evaluation Report for  
Short-billed Dowitcher *hendersoni/griseus*  
Bécassin roux *hendersoni/griseus*  
(*Limnodromus griseus*)**

Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario  
(COSSARO)

Assessed by COSSARO as Threatened

January 2026

Final

## Executive summary

Short-billed Dowitcher *hendersoni/griseus* (*Limnodromus griseus hendersoni/griseus*) is a subspecies of the medium-sized shorebird Short-billed Dowitcher. It breeds in central and eastern Canada in the summer before migrating south to overwinter along the Atlantic coast of the Americas. The species' summer range in Ontario includes the shores of Lake Huron and James Bay. Short-billed Dowitcher *hendersoni/griseus* is threatened by a combination of factors such as hunting and land use change at its migration and overwintering sites. The International Shorebird Survey suggests a 3-generational decline of approximately 58.94%, and threats are expected to continue.

Short-billed Dowitcher *hendersoni/griseus* is assessed by COSSARO as Threatened in Ontario. The estimated decline in the population of mature individuals of the population meets the threshold for Endangered under criterion A2bd+4db, but does not meet the definition (i.e., imminent risk of extinction) and is therefore modified to Threatened based on the definition of Threatened under the *Endangered Species Act, 2007*. This status matches the most recent COSEWIC assessment. Short-billed Dowitcher *hendersoni/griseus* was not previously assessed by COSSARO.

# 1. Eligibility for Ontario status assessment

## 1.1. Eligibility conditions

### 1.1.1. Taxonomic distinctness

Short-billed Dowitcher *hendersoni/griseus* is considered a valid species, one of three in the genus *Limnodromus* (Paulson 1995; American Ornithologists' Union 1998).

### 1.1.2. Designatable units

The Ontario population is a single designatable unit. The wider population consists of two designatable units: the *hendersoni/griseus* subspecies, which breeds across central and eastern Canada, and the *caurinus* subspecies, which occurs in British Columbia and Alaska (COSEWIC 2024, IN PRESS).

### 1.1.3. Native status

Short-billed Dowitcher *hendersoni/griseus* naturally breeds in Northern Ontario and migrates to and through the province in the summer (Jehl *et al* 2020).

### 1.1.4. Occurrence

Short-billed Dowitcher *hendersoni/griseus* is a seasonal migrant that breeds in Northern Ontario (Jehl *et al* 2020). Extensive observational data in NHIC demonstrates the long-term occurrence of this species in the province.

## 1.2. Eligibility results

Short-billed Dowitcher *hendersoni/griseus* (*Limnodromus griseus hendersoni/griseus*) is eligible for status assessment in Ontario.

## 2. Background information

### 2.1. Current designations

- GRANK: G3TNRQ (NatureServe 2025)
- IUCN: Vulnerable (July 2024)
- NRANK Canada: NNRB,NNRM (NatureServe 2025; N3N4B,N4N5M for species as a whole)
- COSEWIC: Threatened (November 2024)
- SARA: Not listed
- MBCA protection: Yes
- Aquatic species under SARA: No
- COSSARO: Not assessed
- ESA 2007 (Species at Risk in Ontario List): Not previously listed
- SRANK: S3B, S4M (ranked in 2020)

### 2.2. Distribution in Ontario

Short-billed Dowitcher *hendersoni/griseus* breeds along the Ontario coastlines of Hudson and James bays, with an overlapping mixture of the two subspecies *L. g. hendersoni* and *L. g. griseus* (Burke and Sutherland 2007). No Element Occurrences have been identified by NHIC for this species in Ontario and locations are not defined but are presumed to exceed five. The Extent of Occurrence for the Ontario breeding population is 139,025,744 km<sup>2</sup>, while the Area of Occupancy is 312,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Numerous additional observations have been reported to NHIC in the south of the province but are attributed to migrating individuals rather than breeding locations.

### 2.3. Distribution, status and the broader biologically relevant geographic range outside Ontario

The breeding range of Short-billed Dowitcher *hendersoni/griseus* extends east through Quebec, as far as Canada's east coast, and west into the prairie provinces as far as Alberta (Burke and Sutherland 2007). The northern extent of the range is not well described, but extends to the southern Northwest Territories

After breeding in Canada, the Short-billed Dowitcher *hendersoni/griseus* migrates south to overwinter along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the USA, and the east coast of Central America, the West Indies, the Caribbean, and South America (Dunn *et al.* 2010; Reed *et al.* 2018; Jehl *et al.* 2020).

The *hendersoni/griseus* subspecies and designatable unit of Short-billed Dowitcher is a logical choice to define the broader biologically relevant geographic range for the Ontario population. This is due to the lack of clearly distinguishable sub-units within this grouping, and absence of overlap with other subspecies and designatable units. For the purpose of this assessment, the BBRGR will be defined as the breeding range of the subspecies. The full *hendersoni/griseus* subpopulation was assessed as Threatened in

2024 (COSEWIC 2024, IN PRESS). No other jurisdiction has specifically assessed the *hendersoni/griseus* designatable unit. However, species rankings within the range of the broader population should reflect the appropriate subspecies grouping and range from Vulnerable to Apparently Secure, though many jurisdictions have not ranked Short-billed Dowitcher.

Table 1. Condition of the Species in Adjacent Jurisdictions and Broader Biologically Relevant Geographic Range

<b>Adjacent Jurisdictions</b>	<b>Biologically Relevant to Ontario (n/a, yes, no)</b>	<b>Condition</b>	<b>Notes &amp; Sources</b>
Quebec	Yes	S3,S4B	Natureserve 2025
Manitoba	Yes	S4B	Natureserve 2025
Michigan	Yes	SNRN	Natureserve 2025
Minnesota	Yes	SNRN	Natureserve 2025
Nunavut	Yes	SUB	Natureserve 2025
New York	Yes	SNRN	Natureserve 2025
Ohio	Yes	SNA	Natureserve 2025
Pennsylvania	Yes	S3M	Natureserve 2025
Wisconsin	Yes	S4N	Natureserve 2025

## 2.4. Ontario conservation responsibility

Not known but assumed to be less than 25% of the global breeding population.

## 2.5. Direct threats

The subspecies threats were assessed separately by COSWIC, with overall threat impact considered to be Medium for *L. g. hendersoni* and High for *L. g. griseus* (COSEWIC 2024, IN PRESS). Threats considered include:

IUCN 5.1: Hunting and collecting terrestrial animals. The species has been historically, and sometimes still is, hunted during migration and overwintering in the southern extents of its range. Various efforts to encourage sustainable hunting have reduced this impact in recent years, but the threat remains present and is considered medium to low for this designatable unit.

IUCN 1.1: Housing and urban areas. Habitat loss due to development primarily affects migration and overwintering areas. This threat is ongoing but considered low impact.

IUCN 1.3: Tourism and recreation areas. Low threat.

IUCN 2.1: Annual and perennial non-timber crops. This threat primarily affects the *L. g. hendersoni* subspecies due to development along its migratory routes, but the threat is considered low overall.

IUCN 2.4: Marine and freshwater aquaculture. Low threat due to development of shrimp farms at overwintering sites and associated broader environmental processes.

IUCN 6.1: Recreational activities. Low threat due to disturbance along coastlines during migration.

IUCN 7.3: Other ecosystem modification. Low threat due to range-wide reduction of prey availability.

IUCN 8.1: Invasive non-native/alien species/diseases. Low threat due to feral cats and dogs and domestic dogs disturbing shorebirds.

IUCN 8.2: Problematic native species and diseases. Low threat due to climate change associated range expansions of Red Fox and Coyote and increasing avian botulism.

IUCN 9.1: Domestic & urban wastewater. Low threat due to increased pollution from urban wastewater in migratory stopover sites.

IUCN 9.2: Industrial & military effluents. Low threat due to substantial concentrations of mercury on the breeding grounds of Short-billed Dowitcher.

IUCN 9.3: Agricultural & forestry effluents and IUCN 9.4: Garbage & solid waste. Unknown threat from waste polluting wetlands and lakes, especially at inland migration sites.

IUCN 11.1: Climate change and severe weather. Low threat due to increasing temperatures changing habitat in the boreal region.

IUCN 11.2: Droughts. Low threat due to potential drying or partial drying of wetlands and coastal mudflats.

IUCN 11.3: Temperature extremes. Low threat due to temperature changes affecting breeding season.

IUCN 11.4: Storms and flooding. Low threat due to potential impacts on migratory stopover sites.

## 2.6. Specialized life history or habitat use characteristics

The species reproductive ability is limited due to a maximum annual clutch size of four eggs (COSWIC 2024). The species may also be limited by the availability of suitable foraging habitat during migration and overwintering, especially as the shoreline habitat that they require is often a dynamic and changing environment (COSEWIC 2024, IN PRESS).

## 3. Ontario status assessment

### 3.1. Application of endangered/threatened status in Ontario

#### 3.1.1. Criterion A – Decline in total number of mature individuals

Meets Endangered A2bd+4bd. International Shorebird Survey trend suggests a 3-generational decline of 58.94% (95% confidence intervals: -81.93, -14.74). Threats are continuing and an ongoing decline is assumed.

However, while the species does meet the criteria, it does not meet the definition of Endangered, i.e., imminent risk of extinction, due to the large population size combined with some uncertainty about the extent of the breeding range and population. The species does face multiple continuing threats, amplified by elements of its life history, and therefore is assessed as Threatened, based on meeting the definition for Threatened.

#### 3.1.2. Criterion B – Small distribution range and decline or fluctuation

Does not apply. EOO and IAO exceed thresholds.

#### 3.1.3. Criterion C – Small and declining number of mature individuals

Does not apply. Reliable count data for the Ontario population are not available. The broader Short-billed Dowitcher *hendersoni/griseus* population was estimated at 78,000 mature individuals by Jehl *et al.* (2001) and Andres *et al.* (2012). Numbers are likely to have declined since, but it is not clear to say that there are fewer than 10,000 in Ontario.

#### 3.1.4. Criterion D – Very small or restricted total population

Does not apply. Ontario population likely exceeds thresholds.

#### 3.1.5. Criterion E – Quantitative analysis

Does not apply. No analysis has been conducted.

### 3.2. Application of Special Concern in Ontario

Does not apply. Meets criteria for Threatened or Endangered.

### 3.3. Status category modifiers

#### 3.3.1. Ontario's conservation responsibility

Does not apply. Species is G3, but Ontario's Conservation Responsibility is <25% of the global range or population.

### 3.3.2. Status modification based on level of risk in broader biologically relevant geographic range

Does not apply. The assessed status matches that of the BBRGR.

### 3.3.3. Rescue Effect

Does not apply. Threats are common across the broader population meaning there is no effective source for rescue to occur.

## 3.4. Other status categories

### 3.4.1. Data deficient

Does not apply.

### 3.4.2. Extinct or extirpated

Does not apply.

### 3.4.3. Not at risk

Does not apply.

## 4. Summary of Ontario status

Short-billed Dowitcher *hendersoni/griseus* (*Limnodromus griseus hendersoni/griseus*) is classified as Threatened in Ontario based on meeting the definition for Threatened.

This status of this species is consistent with the definition of Threatened under the *Endangered Species Act, 2007*.

## 5. Information sources

American Ornithologists' Union. 1998. Check-list of North American birds, 52th suppl. American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, District of Columbia.

Andres, B.A., Smith, P.A., R.I.G Morrison, C.L. Gratto-Trevor, S.C. Brown, and C.A. Friis. 2012. Population estimates of North American shorebirds, 2012. Wader Study Group Bulletin, 119: 178-194.

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Jehl, J.R., Jr., J. Klima, and R.E. Harris. 2020. Short-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromusgriseus*), version 1.0. in Birds of the World (A. F. Poole and F.B. Gill, Editors).Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. Website: <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.shbdow.01> [accessed January 2021].

Paulson, D. 2005. Shorebirds of North America: The photographic guide. Princeton University Press. Princeton, New Jersey. 360 pp.

Reed, E.T.K., J. Kardynal, J.A. Horrocks and K.A. Hobson. 2018. Shorebird hunting in Barbados: Using stable isotopes to link the harvest at a migratory stopover site with sources of production. The Condor 120:357-370.

## Appendix 1: Technical summary for Ontario

Species: Short-billed Dowitcher *hendersoni/griseus* (*Limnodromus griseus hendersoni/griseus*)

### Demographic information

Demographic attribute	Value
Generation time. Based on average age of breeding adult: age at first breeding = X year; average life span = Y years.	4 years
Is there an observed, inferred, or projected continuing decline in number of mature individuals?	Yes based on estimation from surveys.
Estimated percent of continuing decline in total number of mature individuals within 5 years or 2 generations.	Unknown
Observed, estimated, inferred, or suspected percent reduction or increase in total number of mature individuals over the last 10 years or 3 generations.	Estimated reduction of 58.94% (95% Cis -81.93, -14.74)
Projected or suspected percent reduction or increase in total number of mature individuals over the next 10 years or 3 generations.	Unknown, but expected due to past declines and ongoing threats
Observed, estimated, inferred, or suspected percent reduction or increase in total number of mature individuals over any 10 years, or 3 generations, over a time period including both the past and the future.	Inferred and suspected reduction due to past declines
Are the causes of the decline (a) clearly reversible, and (b) understood, and (c) ceased?	a. No b. Yes c. No
Are there extreme fluctuations in number of mature individuals?	No

### Extent and occupancy information in Ontario

Extent and occupancy attributes	Value
Estimated extent of occurrence (EEO).	139,025,744 km <sup>2</sup>
Index of area of occupancy (IAO).	312,000 km <sup>2</sup>
Is the total population severely fragmented? i.e., is >50% of its total area of occupancy in habitat patches that are: (a) smaller than would be required to support a viable population, and (b) separated from other habitat patches by a distance larger than the species can be expected to disperse?	a. No b. No
Number of locations.	Unknown, but assumed to exceed 5

<b>Extent and occupancy attributes</b>	<b>Value</b>
Number of NHIC Element Occurrences	None defined
Is there an observed, inferred, or projected continuing decline in extent of occurrence?	No
Is there an observed, inferred, or projected continuing decline in index of area of occupancy?	Yes, inferred from past declines
Is there an observed, inferred, or projected continuing decline in number of sub-populations or EOs?	Not applicable
Is there an observed, inferred, or projected continuing decline in number of locations?	No
Is there an observed, inferred, or projected continuing decline in [area, extent and/or quality] of habitat?	Yes, observed and inferred
Are there extreme fluctuations in number of populations?	No
Are there extreme fluctuations in number of locations?	No
Are there extreme fluctuations in extent of occurrence?	No
Are there extreme fluctuations in index of area of occupancy?	No

## Number of mature individuals in each sub-population or total population (if known)

Ontario population size is not known. The broader population is estimated at around 78,000 individuals, although this is likely an overestimate due to ongoing declines.

## Quantitative analysis (population viability analysis conducted)

Probability of extinction in the wild is unknown.

## Threats

A threats calculator was prepared by COSEWIC 2024. The overall threat impact was considered to be medium for both species. The only individual medium threat was hunting and collecting of terrestrial animals, while the overall threat rating resulted from a large number of low impact potential threats affecting the species habitat, particularly during migration and overwintering.

## Rescue effect

<b>Rescue effect attribute</b>	<b>Value</b>
Does the broader biologically relevant geographic range for this species extend beyond Ontario?	Yes
Status of outside population(s) most likely to provide immigrants to Ontario	Threatened

<b>Rescue effect attribute</b>	<b>Value</b>
Does the broader biologically relevant geographic range for this species extend beyond Ontario?	Yes
Is immigration of individuals and/or propagules between Ontario and outside populations known or possible?	Possible
Would immigrants be adapted to survive in Ontario?	Yes
Is there sufficient suitable habitat for immigrants in Ontario?	Yes
Are conditions deteriorating in Ontario?	Unknown
Is the species of conservation concern in bordering jurisdictions?	Yes
Is the Ontario population considered to be a sink?	No
Is rescue from outside populations likely?	No

### Sensitive species

Not a data sensitive species.

## **Acronyms**

BBRGR: Broader Biological Relevant Geographic Range  
COSEWIC: Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada  
COSSARO: Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario  
ESA: Endangered Species Act  
EO: Element occurrence (as defined by NHIC)  
EOO: extent of occurrence  
GRANK: global conservation status assessments  
IAO: index of area of occupancy  
IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources  
MBCA: Migratory Birds Convention Act  
MNR: Ministry of Natural Resources  
NHIC: Natural Heritage Information Centre  
NNR: Unranked  
NRANK: National conservation status assessment  
SARA: Species at Risk Act  
SNR: unranked  
SRANK: subnational conservation status assessment  
S1: Critically Imperiled  
S2: Imperiled  
S3: Vulnerable  
S4: Apparently Secure  
S5: Secure  
IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources  
CDSEPO: Le Comité de détermination du statut des espèces en péril en Ontario