



CTYBC TIPS for birding the Gulf Coast

LONG-BILLED WADERS

Long-billed wading birds that can be seen in April on the Gulf Coast are: Whimbrel, Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, Long-billed and Short-billed Dowitchers.

Whimbrels and **Long-billed Curlews** both have gray legs, a black eye stripe, brown mottled wings, and a very long, markedly down-curved bill. But the Long-billed Curlew's bill is ridiculously long, much longer than the Whimbrel's. The Whimbrel has a pale stripe along the crown of the head, which the Curlew does not have, but it is unlikely that you'll have to check.

The Marbled Godwit has a long bill, but it is curved upward, not downward. The legs are dark, and the body is buffy with dark barring in the breeding season. The underwing is cinnamon colored. They feed in mud flats and shallow pools.

The Long-billed Dowitcher has a long, slightly down-turned bill which may look straight. It has a pale supercilium, and in April is starting to get its rufous breeding coloring on the neck, chest and belly. The back and wings are mottled, and the neck and flanks are becoming barred. It has a white patch on the rump and lower back seen in flight. It prefers probing in freshwater pools, but can be found elsewhere.

The Short-billed Dowitcher is virtually identical to the Long-billed. Its bill is a little shorter, but not enough to be able to tell in the field which one you have. In breeding plumage, the Short-billed of the Atlantic population has a white belly, whereas the Long-billed has a rufous belly. Short-billed Dowitchers prefer probing on beaches and mudflats, but can also be seen elsewhere. Both are found in close-spaced groups.

The backs of the dowitchers stay fairly horizontal while feeding, while the smaller stilt sandpiper, with which they often occur, leans farther forward with its tail up in the air.
