V. Food supply:

A. How has the local wild bird food supply been in your area? Has it affected the numbers of birds in the area?

VI. Weather:

A. Has weather had an affect on bird activities? Cite specifics or effects of storms, abnormal temperatures, droughts, long wet periods, poor nesting results due to weather.

VII. Rarities:

A. Note location, date and numbers of individuals and sex or age if it can be determined.

B. Is the bird rare for the season? E.g. a Blackpoll Warbler in December or an Iceland Gull in August.

C. Is the bird rare for the area? First record for a county or area where the bird is seldom found, e.g. a Bobwhite in Rowley.

See: "On Records of Birds" Part I, reprinted from Bird Observer, Vol. II #3.

The above topics can provide the basis of information to get a fuller picture of the current status of birds in Massachusetts. If you have birded an area for a period of time and are aware of changes, we would be most anxious to hear from you. (See: 70 Years of Breeding Birds on Milton Hill, Vol. IV #5, for some examples.)

Much is still to be discovered about the birds of Massachusetts, for example the status of Chuck-wills-widow, the Cape Cod spring hawk flight, breeding range of birds such as Nashville Warbler or Red-breasted Nuthatch, the owl population, etc. Please give us your cooperation since all our subscribers can provide valuable assistance. Your ideas and suggestions are needed and strongly encouraged. Remember, this publication is the only one left that reports the status of Massachusetts birds in detail. Please support us with comprehensive reports of your sightings and encourage others to subscribe and report as well.

DOWITCHER POST-SCRIPT

On reading Mr. Zendeh's article on dowitcher identification, I was struck by certain of his comments that conflict with my own impressions of these species in the field. More specifically, I feel that he minimizes the various plumage distinctions while at the same time, exaggerates the differences between the two species.

Although distinguishing the juvenals of these two species in the autumn on the basis of their plumage characteristics alone is at best confusing, and at times impossible, I feel that an attempt should be made by the observer to learn the subtle plumage distinctions in order to facilitate location of the "odd" bird in a feeding flock. For a comprehensive review of the field characters of these species, the reader is referred to Wayne Petersen's field note #7, "Long-billed and Short-billed Dowitchers", published by the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

In particular, I find that the rufous-colored adult Long-bills with strong vermiculations on the flanks, from under-tail coverts to breast, and without the white belly typical of Short-billed, that appear with some regularity among the Short-bills in July - September, are readily distinguishable on the basis of these field characters alone. - Later in the fall (after mid-Oct.), plumage distinctions become progressively less reliable, and one must rely upon hearing the characteristic alarm notes of the respective species for positive identification.

I feel that Mr. Zendeh's analogy of dowitcher identification to yellowlegs identification is misleading, especially considering the extensive range of overlap in size between the two dowitcher species. Whereas the mensural differences between Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs are virtually always diagnostic, and the differences in length and depth of the bill are very distinctive, I feel strongly that this is not the case with the two dowitchers. There is considerable overlap in bill-length, and the actual average difference in overall length is only 1/2". (Corresponding average difference in Yellowlegs overall length is 2 1/2".) In summation, although I feel virtually completely confident of identifying the two species of Yellowlegs solely on the basis of mensural characters, I would hardly attempt this in the case of the dowitchers.

R. R. V.