

NEW WORLD SECTION



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COPPER RIVER DELTA/ORCA INLET FACILITIES

Goose Cove Lodge on Orca Inlet, adjacent to the Copper River Delta, Alaska, was opened this spring. A large fraction of the estimated 20 million shorebirds that use the area in the spring can be observed and studied on the flats immediately in front of the lodge. Goose Cove Lodge is owned and operated by Pete and Belle Mickelson. Pete has been studying Alaskan geese

for over 15 years, and Belle is active in Alaskan environmental education. A full program is available for birdwatchers and other vacationers. Special arrangements may be available for researchers wishing to work in the area. For particulars contact: Pete and Belle Mickelson, Alaska Wild Wings, Dept. WSG, Box 325, Cordova, AK 99574, U.S.A.

AGE AND SEX COMPOSITION OF WINTERING DUNLIN POPULATIONS IN WESTERN WASHINGTON

by J.R. Buchanan, L.A. Brennan, C.T. Schick, S.G. Herman and T.M. Johnson

INTRODUCTION

Published accounts of the age and sex structure of wintering Dunlin *Calidris alpina* populations in North America have been reported only from the central coast of California (Holmes 1966, Page 1974). Results from these studies suggest that age-ratios and sex-ratios of wintering Dunlin populations are variable. At Bolinas Lagoon, California, Page (1974) found that females were less common in winter than males. In the same study, the age structure of the Bolinas population shifted during the course of the winter from an abundance of immature birds to a roughly equal proportion of adults and immatures. These findings led Page to speculate that the geographic distribution of wintering Dunlins was in some way organized according to age and sex. In this note we present data from various sources and years concerning the age and sex composition of several wintering Dunlin populations in western Washington, and speculate about possible causes for the observed patterns.

METHODS

During the 1980-81 winter we collected a total of 226 Dunlins from four estuaries in western Washington (Figure 1) as part of an organochlorine contamination study (Schick et al. in prep.). Dunlins were collected at each site in both early and late winter. This sample will be referred to below as Set I. For each bird in Set I we recorded sex from gonadal inspection, and age class by primary feather wear and the presence in immatures of chestnut/buff colouration at the distal edge of the innermost tertial feathers (Prater et al. 1977).

A discriminant function model developed from the 1980-81 sampling (Brennan et al. 1984) was used to predict the sex of Dunlins netted at one study site (Nisqually) during the winters of 1979, 1981, 1982, and 1983. Dunlins netted at Nisqually during the 1976 and 1977 winters were sexed using bill-length only, assuming that birds with bill-lengths <37.7 mm were males, while those >39.8 mm were females (Page 1974). Birds which fell between these limits were excluded from the sample.

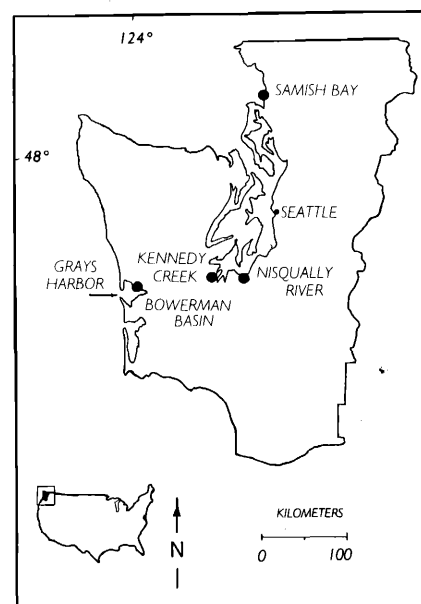


Figure 1. Geographic locations of the four study areas in western Washington state.