

1996 Report of the North Carolina Bird Records Committee

Harry E. LeGrand, Jr., Chairman
Derb S. Carter, Jr.
Samuel Cooper
Richard J. Davis

John O. Fussell, III
Simon R.B. Thompson
Michael H. Tove

This report enumerates the decisions of the Carolina Bird Club's North Carolina Bird Records Committee during 1996. Four of the species mentioned in this report are results of splits with species already on the state's Official List. Documentation used for voting on these species was generally less than adequate, as the Committee was voting on "old" records. The Committee relied on communication with bird collections staff at the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences regarding the presence of photographs or specimens (which the Committee did not examine) of these four -- Bicknell's Thrush, Bullock's Oriole, Spotted Towhee, and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

Accepted as Valid. The reported identification is judged to be accurate, and the bird is judged to be of wild origin. Photographs, tape recordings, and written descriptions of all accepted records have been deposited in the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences.

CAPE VERDE ISLANDS PETREL (*Pterodroma feae*). One was seen in the Gulf Stream off Hatteras on 20 July 1996 by Harry LeGrand, Ned Brinkley, Brian Patteson, and others. The species is already on the Official List; this is the third accepted record to this species. (As of July 1997, the American Ornithologists' Union has given the species the common name of Fea's Petrel.)

BERMUDA PETREL (*Pterodroma cahow*). One was seen by several dozen birders on a pelagic trip off Cape Hatteras on 26 May 1996. The Committee accepted written descriptions from Shawneen Finnegan and Ned Brinkley. Photos taken by Brian Patteson were also accepted. This is the first accepted record of Bermuda Petrel for the state (and for North America). Acceptance of the photos places the species on the Official List. A previous report (in 1993) is Unresolved (Send to Outside Review verdict [NCBRC 1995]); this report has not yet been acted on for a second vote. A report from 1983 was not accepted (NCBRC 1990).

SWAINSON'S HAWK (*Buteo swainsoni*). An immature was seen on the surprisingly late date of 4 December 1995 near Durham by Will Cook and Jeff Phippen. The Committee accepted descriptions submitted by both observers. The

species is already on the Official List; this is the fourth accepted record for the state.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa limosa*). One was observed at North Pond on Pea Island on several dates in late July 1994 by numerous observers. The Committee accepted details provided by Susan Barrell. This is the second accepted record of this godwit for the state. The first record was documented by photos; thus, the species is already on the Official List.

MEW GULL (*Larus canus*). A first-winter gull, identified as being of the European race (*L. c. canus*), was seen at Cape Hatteras point on 27 December 1995 by Ned Brinkley and Brian Patteson. The Committee accepted the details provided by Brinkley, both to the full species and to the *canus* subspecies. The species is already on the Official List; this is the fourth accepted record. This is the first record accepted to the *canus* race. Two previous records were of birds reported as the *canus* race, and the other reported as the western North American race (*L. c. brachyrhynchus*) race. The other three votes for Mew Gull were taken before the Committee began voting for subspecies as well as the full species. If the species is split in the future, the Committee will vote on the other three records again.

YELLOW-LEGGED GULL (*Larus cachinnans*). An adult was seen and photographed by Robert H. Lewis at Cape Hatteras point on 13 March 1995 (Lewis 1996). The Committee accepted the written description, and it also accepted a series of color photographs provided to the Committee by the observer. (Black-and-white photos printed with the published report were not used in the voting.) Although there had been several previous state reports of Yellow-legged Gull (a recent split from the Herring Gull), this is the first vote taken by the Committee. The Committee tabled a vote on an earlier report because of the lack of experience of Committee members with the species. This becomes the first accepted record for Yellow-legged Gull in the state, and acceptance of both the written description and the photos places the species on the Official List.

BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus alexandri*). An immature male was seen at a feeder on Figure Eight Island in New Hanover County, by Derb Carter, from 4 to 6 November 1994. This is the first accepted record for the state for Black-chinned Hummingbird. A previous sight report was not accepted; several additional Black-chinned reports are being reviewed by the Committee. As there are no accepted photos or specimens, the species is placed on the Provisional List.

CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD (*Stellula calliope*). An immature male was present at Fred Thompson's feeder near New Bern from 29 October to 4

November 1995. The Committee accepted photos taken by Thompson and comments on the photos by Nancy Newfield, a hummingbird expert from Louisiana. This is the first accepted record for the state, and acceptance of the photos places the species on the Official List.

LAZULI BUNTING (*Passerina amoena*). An immature male was seen and photographed by numerous observers at Fort Macon State Park in Carteret County from 22 March to early April 1996. The Committee accepted written descriptions by Tony Ziccardi (the original observer) and by Harry LeGrand; photos taken by Derb Carter were also accepted. This is the first record for the state, and acceptance of the photos places the species on the Official List.

SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*). A male was trapped at Fayetteville on 14 February 1957 by Doris Hauser, but it died overnight. The specimen was delivered to the N.C. State Museum (Hauser 1957). This species was recently split from the Rufous-sided Towhee (*P. erythrophthalmus*); this is the first and only known record of Spotted Towhee from North Carolina. It is added to the Official List; the Rufous-sided Towhee is already on the Official List.

NELSON'S SHARP-TAILED SPARROW (*Ammodramus nelsoni*). The Sharp-tailed Sparrow was recently split into this species and the Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow (*A. caudacutus*). The Committee accepted the Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow to the Official List based on specimens and numerous sightings. (The Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow is considered to already be present on the Official List.)

BULLOCK'S ORIOLE (*Icterus bullockii*). The Northern Oriole was recently split into this species and the Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*). The Committee accepted the Bullock's Oriole to the Official List based on approximately 10 reports for the state, and the presence (at the N.C. State Museum) of a photograph of a male taken in Raleigh. The Baltimore Oriole is already on the Official List.

Unaccepted Origin. The identification is judged to be accurate, but the bird is judged to be a likely escapee or a member of an unestablished, introduced population, or to have received significant human assistance such that the bird's survival without the assistance would have been very unlikely.

WHOOOPER SWAN (*Cygnus cygnus*). One was seen by numerous observers at Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge in February 1994. There was concern from the Committee that the bird could have come from feral or escaped populations in the northeastern states. However, because the swan was present at a wildlife refuge, in the winter, with wild birds (seemingly paired with a Tundra Swan [*Cygnus columbianus*]), and because the species is a migrant in

Europe, there is certainly the chance that it could have been a legitimate stray. Thus, further action on this record might take place, even though no additional action is required.

Unaccepted Sighting. The bird is judged to be a species other than that reported, or the bird is insufficiently documented to identification of the species reported.

ROSS' GOOSE (*Chen rossii*). An immature blue morph goose seen at Cape Hatteras point during the winter of 1995-96, and reported as a Ross', was not accepted. Some Committee members believed that the bird was a very small blue morph Snow Goose (*Chen caerulescens*), or perhaps a hybrid of Ross' and blue morph Snow geese. Ross' Goose is already on the Official List, but there is no accepted record of the dark phase, extremely rare anywhere, for the state.

WESTERN GULL (*Larus occidentalis*). An adult reported from the coast in February 1996 (Lewis 1996) was not accepted. Neither the written description nor the photos were accepted, as there was a feeling by many Committee members that the bird was a hybrid Great Black-backed Gull (*L. marinus*) x Herring Gull (*L. argentatus*), or at least the possibility of such a hybrid was not convincingly ruled out.

Unresolved. Further consideration by the Committee is needed.

YELLOW-BILLED LOON (*Gavia adamsii*). A bird in winter plumage, identified as an immature, was observed in the ocean along the southern coast in December 1995. The report received a Send to Outside Review verdict; the written description will be sent to at least two outside reviewers. There are no accepted records of this species for North Carolina.

WHITE-CHINNED PETREL (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*). One reported off of Oregon Inlet on two dates in October 1996 received a Send to Outside Review verdict. The written description will be sent to at least two outside reviewers; but a distant photograph of the bird was not accepted. This is the first report of the species for the state. Also, the species is not on the accepted list for North America.

BROWN SKUA (*Catharacta lonnbergi*). One seen and photographed in the Gulf Stream off Hatteras Inlet in late May 1993 received a Send to Outside Review verdict. This is the first report of Brown Skua for the state; a second vote is necessary following at least two outside reviews. The species is also not on the accepted list for North America.

BICKNELL'S THRUSH (*Catharus bicknelli*). A specimen from near Southport, taken in May 1939, resides in the U.S. National Museum collection (Lee 1995). Several Committee members asked that a letter directly from the museum be used for documentation of the record, as opposed to using the 1995 paper for documentation. A second ballot will be held after receipt of such a letter is received. This is a recent split from Gray-cheeked Thrush (*C. minimus*), which is already on the Official List. The Bicknell's Thrush undoubtedly migrates regularly through North Carolina, but the identification of the two species appears to be extremely difficult.

Status of Official List. Prior to these voting results, the Official List for North Carolina stood at 413 species, and the Provisional List stood at 15 species. The voting results listed above yield an Official List of 420 species; added in 1996 are Bermuda Petrel, Yellow-legged Gull, Calliope Hummingbird, Lazuli Bunting, Spotted Towhee, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, and Bullock's Oriole. The Provisional List has increased to 16 species, as Black-chinned Hummingbird has been added.

Literature Cited

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