

## 2004 Annual Report of the North Carolina Bird Records Committee

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This report enumerates the decisions of the Carolina Bird Club's North Carolina Bird Records Committee during 2004. There were no changes to the membership of the Committee during the year. Committee voting information is referenced in parentheses (i.e., year report received, reference number).

### Accepted as Valid

The reported identification is judged to be accurate, and the bird is judged to be of wild origin. Photographs and/or written descriptions of all accepted records have been deposited in the NC Museum of Natural Sciences.

**Black-bellied Whistling-Duck** (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) (04-12). A group of five adults was seen in a wet field in Tyrrell County on 17 May 2004. The Committee accepted a description provided by the sole observer, Alisa Esposito. This is the first accepted record for the state, and as the record was not documented with a photograph or other tangible evidence, the species is placed on the Provisional List. Though there was no doubt as to the identity of the birds from her description, there was some disagreement about the origin of the birds. However, as the majority (four vs. three) considered the birds to likely have been of natural origin, the voting verdict was "Accept as Valid". The Committee has considered at least one previous report to have been of Unaccepted Origin, as well as the report (04-16) listed below.

**Barnacle Goose** (*Branta leucopsis*) (04-02). One was first seen at Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge in Hyde County on 9 November 2003 by Haven Wiley and his ornithology class from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. It remained at the refuge until at least 29 December 2003, when seen by Ricky Davis. The Committee accepted written descriptions from Wiley and Davis, and accepted photographs of the bird taken by Harry Sell. The Committee gave a unanimous 7-0 vote for "Accept as Valid", and thus there were no votes for "Unaccepted Origin". Acceptance of photographs places the species onto the Official List. The Committee is aware that a number of reference books consider many or most reports of the species in the United States to be of likely escapes and that many state records committees have not accepted records of birds as being of natural origin. However, the North Carolina Committee is also aware of the fact that

there are four or five other state reports from coastal wildlife refuges in the winter, where the birds were with other species of migratory geese. The Committee may vote on these older reports at a later date.

**Cackling Goose** (*Branta hutchinsii*) (04-22). A group of five geese were seen at an impoundment at Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge in Hyde County on 27 November 2004 by Derb Carter, Ricky Davis, and Keith Camburn. Several were seen there and on Lake Mattamuskeet later into the winter. The Committee accepted written descriptions from Camburn and Carter, and acceptance of photographs taken by Carter places the species onto the Official List. The birds appear to be of the subspecies *minima*, which breeds in western Alaska, though the Committee did not vote to subspecific identity. There was one vote of the seven for Unaccepted Origin, and questions of origin on all extralimital geese, swans, and ducks need to be addressed before and during voting. This is a recent (American Ornithologists' Union 2004) split from Canada Goose (*B. canadensis*), and thus the Committee has just started to review records of this taxon. There are several previous reports of the "Cackling race" of Canada Goose in *The Chat*, though likely there are no published descriptions. Nonetheless, the Committee expects to review other reports soon, including a 2004-05 report from the mountains.

**Trumpeter Swan** (*Cygnus buccinator*) (04-05). A group of four Trumpeter Swans was banded on 25 February 2004 at the Pungo unit of Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff. Joy Greenwood photographed one hand-held individual in comparison with a hand-held Tundra Swan (*C. columbianus*). The Committee accepted the photo, and also written material from John Wright, who saw the birds with Derb Carter and Ricky Davis on 28 February. This is a first record for the state, and acceptance of photos places the species on the Official List. The Committee reviewed many websites and e-mail correspondences regarding re-introduced populations in the East and Midwest. The general feeling was that the birds were probably not vagrants from the natural range in the Far West but rather from populations in the Great Lakes region where states in that area consider the birds to be established and "countable".

**Yellow-nosed Albatross** (*Thalassarche chlororhynchos*) (04-11). One was remarkable in flight over Cape Hatteras Point in Dare County, as seen by Kevin Metcalf on 11 April 2004. The Committee accepted his description and photo, and this becomes the second accepted state record. As the other accepted record, from a few miles offshore, also was documented by photographs, the species is already on the Official List. There are a few additional reports that have not been accepted by the Committee.

**Cape Verde Shearwater** (*Calonectris edwardsii*) (04-14). One was seen by several dozen birders on a pelagic trip off Hatteras Inlet on 15 August 2004. This taxon has recently been split from the Cory's Shearwater (*C. diomedea*) and elevated to full species status by some authors, including Clements (2004), which is followed by the American Birding Association. The Committee accepted photos taken by Brian Patteson. During the

deliberation of this report the record (including multiple photographs and a detailed description of the bird) was published in *North American Birds* (Patteson and Armistead 2004). This is the first record for the state and for North American waters, and acceptance of the photos places the species on the Official List.

**Black-bellied Storm-Petrel** (*Fregetta tropica*) (04-13). One was studied by over a dozen birders on a pelagic trip off Oregon Inlet on 31 May 2004. The Committee accepted a photo taken by Tom Lambertson and a description provided by Mike Tove. This is not only the first record for North Carolina but also the first documented record for North America. Acceptance of the photo places the species on the state's Official List. As with the shearwater above, a full description of the bird and multiple photographs were published in *North American Birds* (Guris et al. 2004) while the Committee was already in deliberation of the report.

**Magnificent Frigatebird** (*Fregata magnificens*) (04-17). One was observed by Brian Bockhahn and others on 17–18 July 2004 at Falls Lake in Wake and Durham counties. The Committee accepted a written description by Bockhahn and a photo taken by Patricia Tyndall. This is the first accepted record from inland North Carolina; a previous winter report from Wayne County was not accepted.

**Hudsonian Godwit** (*Limosa haemastica*) (04-19). A group of three birds was seen and photographed by Wayne Forsythe along Hooper Lane in Henderson County on 8 September 2004, immediately following the passage of Hurricane Frances. The Committee accepted a photograph taken by Forsythe. This is the first Mountain record; there are a few other inland records from the inner Coastal Plain and Piedmont.

**Marbled Godwit** (*Limosa fedoa*) (04-20). On 8 September 2004, Wayne Forsythe observed two individuals at the same spot as the Hudsonian Godwits above. The Committee accepted his photograph of the birds taken on the following day. This also is a first Mountain record, with there also being a few other records from the inner Coastal Plain and Piedmont.

**Baird's Sandpiper** (*Calidris bairdii*) (04-06). One bird was seen and photographed by Wayne Forsythe and several other birders in Henderson County on 15 April 2004. The Committee accepted photos taken by Forsythe, which represent the first documented state record for the spring season. There are several other reports at this season, but they have not been reviewed by the Committee; the species is extremely rare in the East except in the fall season.

**Slaty-backed Gull** (*Larus schistisagus*) (04-01). A winter-plumaged adult was observed at Cape Hatteras Point in Dare County on 16 February 2003 by Ricky Davis, Derb Carter, and Jeff Pippen. The Committee accepted written descriptions from Davis and Carter. As the bird was not photographed, this first state record for the Slaty-backed Gull places the species onto the Provisional List.

**Sabine's Gull** (*Xema sabini*) (04-21). One adult in breeding plumage was seen by Jonathan Mays on 8 September 2004 on Lake Junaluska in

Haywood County. The Committee accepted both the written description and photographs taken by Mays. This is another first Mountain Region record, with there also being a few Piedmont records.

**Gull-billed Tern** (*Sterna nilotica*) (04-18). One was seen on 17 September 2004 along Hooper Lane in Henderson County, shortly following the passage of Hurricane Ivan. The Committee accepted three separate written accounts from Art and Beverly Hudson (the initial observers), Wayne Forsythe, and Jon Smith. This is the first record for the Mountain Region. There are several previous records from the Piedmont.

**Calliope Hummingbird** (*Stellula calliope*) (04-04). An adult male visited the feeders of Ginger Travis near Hillsborough in Orange County from November 2002 into January 2003, when it was banded by Susan Campbell. The Committee accepted photos taken by Will Cook. This is surprisingly the fifth accepted state record, and there are approximately six other state reports for which the Committee has not voted.

**Gray Flycatcher** (*Empidonax wrightii*) (04-03). An unidentified *Empidonax* flycatcher was observed in eastern Chatham County on 28 December 2003 by Joshua Rose and party while on a Christmas bird count. Derb Carter relocated the bird on 30 December and made the initial identification of Gray Flycatcher. The bird was seen by dozens of birders into January 2004. The Committee accepted a written description from Carter and photographs taken by Will Cook. This is the first state record for this species of the western United States, and acceptance of the photos places the species onto the Official List.

**Bicknell's Thrush** (*Catharus bicknelli*) (04-15). One bird was captured in a mist net and banded at Howell Woods, Johnston County, on 5 May 2004. The Committee accepted photos (of the bird hand-held) and a description provided by Brian Strong. He also provided the Committee the species account in Pyle (1997) that shows the primary wing extension and other detailed information that the Committee needed to make a determination. The Committee had previously (North Carolina Bird Records Committee 2003) accepted a record of a banded bird that was not photographed, placing the species at that time on the Provisional List. Acceptance of the photos of the 2004 record now elevates the species to the Official List. There are a handful of other sight reports of the species that the Committee has not evaluated; most or all probably lack necessary details. A specimen is reported (Lee 1995) to reside in the U.S. National Museum; however, the Committee did not wish to accept the specimen without seeing photographs or without written corroboration of the record.

**Harris's Sparrow** (*Zonotrichia querula*) (04-10). One approaching full-adult plumage was seen by Earl Cooke in his yard near Winnabow in central Brunswick County during the latter half of April 2004. It was seen by many birders, and the Committee accepted photos taken by Harry Sell, Will Cook, and Sam Cooper. This is the seventh state record, but only the second from the Coastal Region.

**Smith's Longspur** (*Calcarius pictus*) (04-07). One individual, either a female or male in non-breeding plumage, was seen along Hooper Lane in Henderson County on 26 March 2004 by Wayne Forsythe and Ron Selvey. The Committee accepted a written description and photos provided by Forsythe. This is the fourth accepted state record, and the first for the Mountain Region.

**Painted Bunting** (*Passerina ciris*) (04-08). One was seen at a feeder in Asheville, Buncombe County, in mid-March 2004. The Committee accepted a photo of the bird, an adult male, taken by Simon Thompson on 15 March. This is the first record for the Mountain Region.

### **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.

**White-tailed Kite** (*Elanus leucurus*) (04-09). One seen in Davidson County in late February 2004 was not accepted. Though the report was probably correct, the details were skimpy, and they came second-hand from someone who did not see the bird. The state has four accepted records, including one with photo (and thus the species is already on the Official List).

### **Unaccepted Origin**

The reported identification is judged to be accurate, but the origin of the bird is uncertain (and thus might not be of natural origin).

**Black-bellied Whistling-Duck** (04-16). A flock of eight birds at Lake Medcalf in Sunset Beach, Brunswick County, in June 2004, seen first by Mary McDavit and later photographed by Harry Sell, was not accepted as being of wild, natural origin. McDavit indicated in an e-mail to the carolinabirds listserv that a waterfowl breeder in Myrtle Beach, SC, had a free-flying group of whistling-ducks that came and went as they pleased, and thus the Committee felt that the North Carolina birds could have been from that flock. However, it should be noted that the species is reportedly expanding its range within Florida and Texas, with many extralimital reports (Brinkley and Baicich 2004). The birds at Sunset Beach showed no obvious signs of captivity (such as bands) and appeared to be fairly wary. This species favors fresh-water ponds, such as those at Sunset Beach which lie very close to South Carolina, and because most extralimital records occur in the spring and summer, it seems reasonable that birds found in Brunswick County could represent legitimate wild birds and that this locale might be the most logical place in the state for these birds to appear.

### **Discussion**

The review of reports by the North Carolina Bird Records Committee for 2004 resulted in adding eight species to the state's Accepted List. Seven

have been added to the Official List, and the Provisional List grew by one (two added and one moved to Official). Barnacle Goose, Cackling Goose, Trumpeter Swan, Cape Verde Shearwater, Black-bellied Storm-Petrel, Gray Flycatcher, and Bicknell's Thrush were added to the Official List. The thrush was elevated to the Official List from the Provisional List; Black-bellied Whistling-Duck and Slaty-backed Gull were added to the Provisional List. The current Official List is now 447 species, and the Provisional List is now 16 species, for a total of 463 species on the state's Accepted List.

As would be expected, the Committee had much consternation regarding the origin of all waterfowl reports during the voting process. The Committee is aware that certain state committees may not have accepted reports of some species of waterfowl that were accepted by this Committee in 2004; however, we tried to look at many factors, such as frequency of vagrancy and known waterfowl breeders in the vicinity of the sightings. Of course, records voted on during 2004 could have a re-vote in upcoming years, pending new information.

### **Acknowledgments**

In addition to the many people named above who provided written material and photographs for the Committee to review, we thank Russ Tyndall and Kent Fiala – webmasters of the Carolina Bird Club – for placing a number of the photographs on the club's website for Committee review.

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