

2005 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 2005. There were no changes to the membership of the Committee for 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 N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences.

Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*) (05-06). One was seen by Don Hendershot on Lake Junaluska in Haywood County on 27 December 2004. It was later seen by Jonathan Mays and Bob Olthoff. The Committee accepted photos and a written description provided by Mays. It appears to be of the Richardson subspecies (*B. h. hutchinsii*), though the Committee did not vote on subspecific identity. The species is already on the Official List, with photographs accepted in 2004 of birds near the coast. This is the second accepted state record, the first for the Mountain Region.

Cackling Goose (05-21). One was seen by Harry LeGrand at Lake Mattamuskeet in Hyde County on 17 December 2005. LeGrand identified it as the Richardson subspecies. The Committee accepted a written description by LeGrand, though it did not vote on subspecific identity. This is the third accepted state record. A number of other reports have yet to be reviewed.

Mottled Duck (*Anas fulvigula*) (05-09). Two birds, perhaps a mated pair, were seen by Jamie Cameron, Sue Cameron, and Gary Haught on an impoundment at Camp Lejeune in Onslow County on 14 May 2005. The Committee accepted the many photographs and detailed written description provided by the first observer. Six of the seven Committee members accepted the report as being of Mottled; of these, four believed the birds to be of natural origin (most likely from the established population in South Carolina). As the majority (four versus three) considered the birds to likely have been of natural origin, the voting verdict was Accept as Valid. As the photos were accepted, the species is placed onto the Official List, with this being the first state record. Obviously, this species can be very difficult to

identify, as the female of the closely related Mallard (*A. platyrhynchos*) and both sexes of the American Black Duck (*A. rubripes*) are very similar. Hybrids of Mallards and American Black Ducks can be extremely similar to Mottled Ducks, as well.

European Storm-Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) (05-13). Two birds were seen in the Gulf Stream off Oregon Inlet on 30 May 2005 by several dozen birders. The Committee accepted photographs of one of the birds taken by George Armistead. This is the first accepted record for the state and apparently just the second accepted record for North American waters, with the first being a specimen from Sable Island, Nova Scotia, on 10 August 1970 (McNeil and Burton 1971, American Birding Association 2002). Acceptance of a photo places the species directly onto the Official List. The Committee (LeGrand et al. 2004) did not accept a 2003 photograph that might have been this species, owing to poor angle of the bird in the photo and the fact that the species was not reported from the boat at the time of the sighting. In hindsight, because of a flurry of sightings of this species offshore in late May and June 2005, that 2003 bird was likely a European Storm-Petrel.

European Storm-Petrel (05-14). One was observed in the Gulf Stream off Hatteras Inlet on 5 Jun 2005 by over 30 birders. The Committee accepted a written description provided by Harry LeGrand. This becomes the second accepted state record. At least three other observations, including photographs, were made off both Hatteras and Oregon inlets between 30 May and 5 June. The Committee has not reviewed all such reports, in part because there might be duplication of birds involved in these sightings.

Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) (05-12). One adult was observed near Avon on the Outer Banks of Dare County on 4 December 2004 by a group of four birders. The Committee accepted a written description, with sketches, provided by Janet Mehmel. The species is already on the Official List, and this is the seventh accepted record, with one previous early-winter (December) record.

Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) (05-05). One was photographed by Tim Cooper on 23 December 2004 at Mackay Island National Wildlife Refuge in Currituck County. The Committee accepted a photograph and a written account provided by Cooper. The species is already on the Official List, as the only previous state record is a specimen from Chatham County in 1926. This is the first record for the coast.

Franklin's Gull (*Larus pipixcan*) (05-23). Jeff Lewis found one in basic plumage, considered likely to be a second-year bird, at Manns Harbor in Dare County in December 2005. It was seen by dozens of other birders over the next few weeks. The Committee accepted a description and photos provided by Lewis. Though there are numerous state records, this is just the second for the winter season.

Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) (05-02). One was seen by Ricky Davis, Jeff Pippen, and Harry LeGrand at Jordan Lake in Chatham County on 16 January 2005. The Committee accepted a written description provided

by LeGrand. This is the first truly inland record for the state; there are several records from tidewater areas, as well as many from the coast.

California Gull (*Larus californicus*) (05-03). An adult was seen at the north Raleigh landfill in Wake County on 22 January 2005 by Harry LeGrand, Derb Carter, and Jeff Pippen. The Committee accepted a written description provided by LeGrand. This is the first inland record for the state; all other records are from the immediate coast.

Broad-billed Hummingbird (*Cynanthus latirostris*) (05-19). An adult male was photographed by Jeff Lewis on 15 July 2005 at a feeder in Colington in coastal Dare County. The species is already on the Official List as one was previously photographed at a feeder.

Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*) (05-22). One was found by Sam Cooper in central Carteret County in December 2005 and was subsequently seen by a few other birders. The Committee accepted photos taken by Will Cook and Jeff Pippen. This is the fourth accepted state record, the second for the coastal region.

Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) (05-20). One was discovered by Ricky Davis west of Lake Phelps in Washington County on 19 November 2005 and was seen over the next few weeks by many other birders. The Committee accepted Davis's written description, including a voice description, and photographs taken by Jeff Lewis. The species is already on the Official List; this is the third accepted state record – all from late fall or early winter and documented by photos, though there is no voice recording documentation.

Dark-eyed (Gray-headed) Junco (*Junco hyemalis*, either *J. h. caniceps* or *J. h. dorsalis*) (05-07). One was observed at an urban feeding station in Charlotte on the remarkably late date of 26 May 2004 by a number of observers. The Committee accepted photos and a written description by Taylor Piephoff. This might be the first report of either subspecies in the state; these two subspecies breed in the southern Rocky Mountains. The "Oregon" (*J. h. thurberi*) and "Pink-sided" (*J. h. mearnsi*) subspecies, which breed from the central Rockies to the West Coast, have been previously reported, though not reviewed by the Committee. Of course, the full species is already on the Official List.

Unresolved

Further consideration by the Committee is needed.

Arctic Loon (*Gavia arctica*) (05-01). One was reported from Wrightsville Beach, New Hanover County, on 1 and 3 January 2005. It was seen in the ocean from several piers and compared with other loon species, including the similar Pacific Loon (*G. pacifica*). This report received more than 50% Accept as Valid votes but more than 25% Non-accept votes, all of which were Inadequately Documented votes. By regulation, the report will be sent for outside review. Several Committee members felt that, because the species is essentially unknown from the entire Eastern North America, including from western Atlantic Ocean waters, and because differentiation

from the Pacific Loon (from which it was split a few decades ago) can be difficult, acceptance of a sight record causes concern.

Mottled Duck (05-10). Two birds seen at an impoundment in coastal Onslow County on 14 May 2005 – the same date as Record 05-09 (above) – received a Send for Outside Review verdict, as there were more than 50% Accept as Valid votes but more than 25% Non-accept votes. The Committee is treating this report as different from Report 05-09, as the locations are sufficiently far apart that it is unlikely that the same two birds were involved in both reports. Despite thorough written details, there was no photographic documentation, causing a shift of a single vote from that of Report 05-09 but yielding a completely different verdict. In essence, photographic documentation might be necessary for Committee acceptance of future Mottled Duck reports.

Unaccepted Sighting

The bird is judged to be a species other than that reported, or there is insufficient documentation of the reported species.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) (05-17). One reported from the coast of Dare County in August 2005 was not accepted. The Committee believed that the single field mark observed – two long head plumes – was suggestive of Little Egret, but that other field marks distinguishing the bird from the very similar Snowy Egret (*E. thula*) were not seen or reported. In addition, the report was made by a solo observer and the bird could not be relocated later by other birders. There are no accepted state records for Little Egret.

Intermediate Egret (*Egretta intermedia*) (05-18). An egret was seen in flight by birders on a pelagic trip about 30 miles off the Dare County coast in June 2005. It was tentatively identified, after a later review of books and other literature, as an Intermediate Egret; however, no photos were taken. Two observers, well aware of the unlikelihood of Committee acceptance, submitted descriptions for consideration, wanting to have the report of an unusual egret mentioned in the literature. Because of the difficulty of identification of this Old World species, which has yet to be confirmed in the United States or Canada, it was not accepted by the Committee.

Common Murre (*Uria aalge*) (05-11). One reported from shore on the Dare County Outer Banks in February 2005 was not accepted. Most Committee members felt that other alcid species, particularly the much more likely Razorbill (*Alca torda*) and Thick-billed Murre (*Uria lomvia*), were not adequately eliminated from the written description. The species is, however, on the Official List, with a single accepted record of a bird photographed at Cape Hatteras Point in 2001.

Black Guillemot (*Cephus grylle*) (05-04). One reported along the coast of Hyde County in December 2004 was not accepted. As the bird was reported to be in breeding plumage, which is seldom seen in the winter season, and as the species is extremely rare along the mid-Atlantic coast, the report was unanimously not accepted. The species remains on the Provisional List, with two previously accepted sight records.

Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*) (05-08). One reported in Raleigh in April 2005 was not accepted. It was determined that the bird in question was almost certainly an Eastern Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*). North Carolina remains one of the few Eastern states with no accepted records for this species (George 2000); none of the three state reports reviewed by the Committee has been accepted.

Hepatic Tanager (*Piranga flava*) (05-16). Two birds, including a male, were reported from Wilkes County in July 2005. The Committee unanimously felt that the species was misidentified, with Summer Tanager (*P. rubra*) being the most likely candidate. Not surprisingly, there are no records for the state, and perhaps for the eastern part of the country, for this species of the southwestern United States and the Neotropics.

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).

Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*) (05-15). One was photographed by Wilton Lewis at the edge of a parking lot at a mall in downtown Asheville on 28 May 2005. The Committee unanimously accepted the photo as being of a Burrowing Owl. However, the Committee believed that an owl in downtown Asheville, along the edge of a busy shopping center parking lot, in late May, and apparently somewhat tame, likely did not arrive at that spot on its own. The species is already on the Official List, with two coastal records, one being a specimen.

Discussion

The review of reports by the North Carolina Bird Records Committee for 2005 resulted in adding two species to the state's Accepted List. European Storm-Petrel and Mottled Duck were each added directly to the Official List, based on accepted photographic documentation. However, during the year the American Ornithologists' Union (2005) lumped Black-backed Wagtail (formerly *Motacilla lugens*) with the White Wagtail (*M. alba*). Because both taxa were on the Official List, the removal of Black-backed Wagtail reduces the net increase in species on the Official List during the calendar year to just one. The current Official List now numbers 448 species, and the Provisional List remains at 16 species, for a total of 464 species on the state's Accepted List.

Acknowledgments

In addition to the many people named above who provided written material and photographs for the Committee to review, we thank Kent Fiala – webmaster of the Carolina Bird Club – for placing a number of the photographs on the club's website for Committee review and sending electronic submission of Rare Bird Report forms to the Committee chair.

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