

2009 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 2009. 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.

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) (09-05). A male, apparently a first-winter bird, was seen at a sewage treatment pond in Winston-Salem, Forsyth County, from 30 January to 14 February 2009, by several hundred observers (Hopkins et al. 2009). The Committee accepted written details by Marbry Hopkins and photos taken by Hopkins, David Disher, and John Haire. The Committee not only accepted the bird's specific identity but also considered it to have been a wild bird, in part because of its close association with several other diving duck species, the fact that several other reports of the species had been made farther northward in the same winter, and the lack of any evidence of local escapes from waterfowl breeders. This is the first state record, and acceptance of photos and its provenance places the species directly onto the Official List.

Swinhoe's Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma monorhis*) (09-16). One was seen approximately 36 miles off Cape Hatteras, Dare County on 6 June 2009 by a boatload of observers, including Brian Patteson and Steve Howell. The Committee accepted written details provided by Kevin Metcalf; however, the single photo of the bird was not accepted because the Committee felt that other dark-rumped species of storm-petrels could not be ruled out, even though no other such species are known to occur in the North Atlantic. This is the third North Carolina and United States record, all from this same general area. As the previous two records contained photos that were accepted by the Committee, the species is already on the Official List.

Red-billed Tropicbird (*Phaethon aethereus*) (09-14). An adult was seen in flight over a tidal pond at Cape Hatteras Point, Dare County, on 10 March 2009 by Pat and Neal Moore and Brian Patteson. The Committee accepted a photo taken by Patteson. Though there are several dozen offshore records, this appears to be the first state record of a bird seen from shore, and the appearance of one actually over land is quite exceptional.

Roseate Spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*) (09-15). An immature was seen in the Catawba River, along the Catawba/Alexander County line on 11 August 2009 by Monroe Pannell. The Committee accepted a photo taken on 12 August by Dwayne Martin. Though there are numerous state records, this appears to be just the second for the piedmont, and the farthest inland record for the state.

Snail Kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*) (09-08). An adult male was found dead in the Crusoe Island community in Columbus County on 10 April 2009 by a local citizen, and identified as this species by Keith Rogers. The bird bore leg bands; it had been banded in Florida in 1997. The Committee accepted photos of the specimen taken by John Hammond, and the bird is now a specimen at the NC Museum of Natural Sciences. This is a first state record and appears to be the northernmost record for the species; acceptance of the photos places the species onto the Official List.

Mew (Common) Gull (*Larus canus canus*) (09-02). An adult was seen by Wade Fuller, Rich Boyd, Bob Holmes, and Ken Wilkins at Cape Hatteras Point on 24 January 2009. It was found later in the day by several other birders, and Brian Patteson was able to photograph the bird. The Committee accepted Patteson's photos and the written description by Fuller. This represents the fourth accepted record for this European subspecies (all from this exact location) and the fifth overall for the species. Thus, the species is already on the Official List.

Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii*) (09-01). One was photographed at Fort Fisher, New Hanover County, on 1 October 2008 by James Parnell. This is the fourth accepted state record, the third for the coast in fall; these three records have all been documented by photos. Thus, the species is already on the Official List.

Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*) (09-09). A most unusual record was one seen and photographed on a ship about 40 miles off the coast of Currituck County, on the surprisingly late date of 2 June 2009. The Committee accepted photos of the bird taken by Lauren Morgens. The species is already on the Official List; this is the third accepted state record but only the second with photos. The other two records are from the fall season, one from the coast and the other from the mountains. A few additional reports have not been accepted.

Nashville Warbler (*Vermivora ruficapilla*) (09-11). One was seen on 6 December 2008 at Charlotte, Mecklenburg County by Larry Barden and others. Though there are numerous records of the species for the state, including at least nine winter reports for coastal/tidewater areas and one

from the eastern edge of the piedmont, based on the Avendex database, this is apparently the first in winter from the western half of the state.

Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*) (09-04). One seen by Richard Brown and Kent Fiala, and photographed by Fiala, was found in a wooded area at Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge, Hyde County on 1 February 2009. The Committee accepted the photograph; this is the first documented winter record for the state, though there are six other winter reports for the state listed in the Avendex database. Most or all of these others may well be correctly identified but have not been reviewed by a records committee.

Lesser Goldfinch (*Spinus psaltria*) (09-07). One adult male of the dark-backed form was seen at Ross McGregor's feeders in Beaufort, Carteret County, from 2 to 4 March 2009. The Committee accepted both his written description and his photos. Acceptance of the photos elevates the species from the Provisional List to the Official List; this is the second state record, with the first being a sight record from the piedmont province.

Unresolved

Further action by the Committee is needed.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*) (09-12). An immature was reported at a sod farm in Craven County on 31 August 2009. This was a single-observer report, with no photographic documentation; however, there was enough of a written description that six of the nine Committee members accepted the report. However, as at least 75% of votes (at least seven) must be Accept as Valid to accept a record on a first vote, the voting verdict is "Send for Outside Review". There are no previous records of the species for the state, though both Virginia (at least four records—Rottenborn and Brinkley 2007) and South Carolina (one sight record—Carter and Eastman 1998) have the species on their state lists.

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.

Mottled Duck (*Anas fulvigula*) (09-10). A pair was reported from a city park in the northeastern piedmont in December 2008. Though the description was adequate, and the birds were compared with nearby Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*) and American Black Ducks (*A. rubripes*), the Committee felt that the report was inadequately documented. There is a need for photos or exceedingly thorough details for such a difficult species to identify and for a location outside the expected range. The species is already on the Official List, with two accepted photographic records for the southern half of the coast.

Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*) (09-03). An adult reported in flight in the central piedmont, over a field, in January 2008 was not accepted. The

odd habitat, observer's inexperience with the species, and extreme rarity of the species away from salt water suggest that the bird was something else.

Red-tailed (Harlan's) Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) (09-13). A specimen at the NC Museum of Natural Sciences (NCSM 4504), collected in the winter of 1974–75 at Morrow Mountain State Park, Stanly County, had been labeled as a “Krider's” Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis krideri*). This is no longer considered to be a valid subspecies by the American Ornithologists' Union; rather, it is considered a pale color morph of several subspecies. In 2009, a noted hawk expert identified the specimen as a “juvenile light-morph Harlan's Hawk”, but without reasons for such a conclusion. However, because three photos (taken by Will Cook) of the specimen were available to the Committee for review, it was decided that a review could be done. Only three of nine members voted Accept as Valid. The general feeling of the majority of the Committee members was that the bird appears to be too pale overall even for a light-morph Harlan's. Because there were more than 50% non-accept votes, the identification as the Harlan's subspecies is not accepted. According to regulations, because “Inadequately Documented” received more non-accept votes than “Unaccepted Sighting” votes, the report can be sent back for more details and a second vote.

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).

Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*) (09-06). An apparent family group of four birds—three adults and one immature—was seen at a small pond in southern Nash County on 21–22 February 2009 by Ricky Davis, Jeff Pippen, Clyde Sorenson, Harry LeGrand, and several other observers. The birds had been present for at least two weeks prior to this date, according to Matthew Ordess. Though the photos taken by Davis were accepted to this species, the fact that the birds were extremely tame led the Committee to a voting verdict of Questionable Origin. The species is already on the Official List, based on acceptance of photos and provenance of four birds banded at Pungo refuge in February 2004.

Discussion

The review of reports by the North Carolina Bird Records Committee for 2009 resulted in adding three species to the state's Official List. Tufted Duck and Snail Kite are added directly to the Official List, whereas Lesser Goldfinch is elevated from the Provisional List (which decreases by one species). The current Official List is now 456 species, and the Provisional List is 13 species, for a total of 469 species on the state's Accepted List. Further Committee action is expected on the reports of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Red-tailed (Harlan's) Hawk.

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.

Literature Cited

- Carter, R. M., and C. M. Eastman. 1998. Sharp-tailed Sandpiper observed in Orangeburg County, South Carolina. The first sight record for South Carolina. *Chat* 62:38–40.
- Hopkins, M., J. Haire, D. Disher, and S. Disher. 2009. A Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) in Forsyth County: first record for North Carolina. *Chat* 73:149–153.
- Rottenborn, S. C., and E. S. Brinkley. 2007. Virginia’s birdlife: an annotated checklist. Fourth edition. Virginia Society of Ornithology, Virginia Avifauna No. 7.