

# 2011 Annual Report of the North Carolina Bird Records Committee

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The year 2011 saw two notable changes in the North Carolina Bird Records Committee. First, after many years of superlative leadership as the Committee's chair, Harry LeGrand stepped down, passing the baton to Michael Tove, though LeGrand remains on the Committee. Second, two members left the Committee, reducing it from nine to seven members.

The NCBRC received 25 reports of 22 species. The reference number (in parentheses) reflects the year reported and sequence in which the report was received. Only reports receiving one or more accept votes are listed herein.

## **Accepted as Valid**

These reports included sufficient documentation to warrant acceptance of the bird as reported. When a species has been documented by specimen, photographs, or three written reports of different occurrences, it is placed on the state's Official List. When a species is documented by fewer than three accepted written reports without recognizable photos or a specimen, it is placed on the Provisional List.

**Mottled Duck** (*Anas fulvigula*) (11-13). A single individual reported by Dwayne Martin was seen by many observers and photographed at Riverbend Park in northern Catawba County in July 2011. The report was unanimously accepted. There are several previous records from the state, including some supported by photographs. Although the species is already on the Official List, this is the first record from the piedmont.

**Common Merganser** (*Mergus merganser*) (11-19). This is a regular wintering species in North Carolina and normally requires no review by the Records Committee. However, the Committee received a report of breeding which is highly significant as this is only the second time it has been documented in the state. In this case, multiple individuals and crèches of up to sixteen individuals (adult females and chicks) were seen and photographed during the spring and summer seasons from 2008–2011 along the Green River (Polk County) by Zora L. Rhodes and Jerry L. Johnson. The Committee evaluated the photographs and accompanying paper (Rhodes and Johnson, 2012). Based on this documentation, the report was unanimously accepted.

**Great Blue Heron (white morph)** (*Ardea herodias*) (11-21). An individual of the morph commonly known as "Great White Heron" was photographed along the Eno River (Durham County) by Kathy Lee on 18

November 2011 and seen and subsequently photographed by many others thereafter. This recognized color morph of Great Blue Heron has been documented previously in the state by at least two to three records each from the coastal plain, piedmont, and mountains. However, the present sighting appears to be the first photographically documented record from the piedmont. Based on these photos, the report was unanimously accepted. This record provides no change in status for either the species or the form.

**White-faced Ibis** (*Plegadis chihi*) (11-11). A bird was seen at Lake Mattamuskeet (Hyde County) on 28 April 2011 by David A. Clark. It was not relocated and no photographs were obtained. The written report was unanimously accepted. This is the second record from the state, the first being a well-seen and photographed individual from South Nags Head in July 2002. The species is already on the Official List.

**Hudsonian Godwit** (*Limosa haemastica*) (11-15). An individual photographed on 27 August 2011 by Andrew Scaboo at Lake Wheeler, Raleigh (Wake County) was unanimously accepted. The species is expected at this time of year but the inland location and first Wake County record were significant.

**Common Murre** (*Uria aalge*) (11-02, 11-03, 11-04). Three separate reports of four birds, all from pelagic trips in January 2011 out of Hatteras (Dare County) occurred in connection with a massive alcid invasion. All four birds were documented by photographs including two birds on the 15th (11-02 by Brian Patteson) and one bird each on the 28th (11-03 by Jeff Lemons) and 29th (11-04 by Chris Sloan). All three reports were accepted (by 7, 6, 7 votes respectively). There are two previous records, including photographs from the state. The species is currently on the Official List.

**Long-billed Murrelet** (*Brachyramphus perdix*) (11-12). A moribund individual was found at Emerald Isle (Carteret County) on 29 April 2011. The specimen was delivered to the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. The Committee was able to view photographs of the specimen and unanimously accepted the record. There are two previous sight records from the state, neither of which is supported by photographs or specimens. Based on the specimen and photographs, this species is added to the Official List.

***Cypseloides*, sp. Swift** (11-16). A single individual seen by Derb Carter at Hemphill Bald along the eastern border of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (Haywood County) on 19 September 2011 was identified as a Black Swift (*C. niger*). It was not seen after this date and was not photographed. This report generated some discussion as to which species or even subspecies might have been involved. Four members accepted the report as *Cypseloides*, sp. but not to species; three accepted it as *C. niger*. While the Committee was generally united in its belief that Black Swift (*C. niger*) was the most reasonable possibility, the majority felt that without physical evidence to support a specific identification, acceptance to genus only was more appropriate. At least one Committee member noted that there are two distinct populations of *C. niger*; one from the western United States and one from the Caribbean which may in the future be split. A logical guess

would be that Carter's bird came from the Caribbean—presumably as fallout from Hurricane Lee, but there is no way to know. This is the first record of the genus from North Carolina and it is added to the Provisional List as *Cypseloides sp.*

**Anna's Hummingbird** (*Calypte anna*) (11-01, 11-23). An adult male at New Bern (Craven County) from 17 January to 11 February 2011 was accepted based on a series of photographs from multiple observers. An adult male was banded in New Bern by Susan Campbell on 12 November 2011 at the exact same location as the previous bird. Campbell reported that it was very likely the same individual. Five members agreed that both records refer to the same individual bird; two members expressed no opinion either way. Therefore, collectively both reports constitute the second record from the state, the first being an immature male at Charlotte from 29 November 1998 to 4 March 1999. That individual was documented by photographs, placing the species on the Official List. The present record represents the first from the coastal plain but otherwise provides no change to status of the species in the state.

**Allen's Hummingbird** (*Selasphorus sasin*) (11-22). An adult male was caught and banded by Dwayne Martin and photographed by Michael McCloy on 19 November 2011 at Riverbend Park (Catawba County). The bird was subsequently seen and photographed by numerous observers. Based on the photographic evidence, this record was unanimously accepted. There is one previous record from the state; an immature male photographed at Manteo (Dare County) during the winter of 2003. The species is currently on the Official List.

**Fork-tailed Flycatcher** (*Tyrannus savana*) (11-09). An adult was photographed near Wagram by John Haire on 25 April 2011 while he was watching the Cassin's Sparrow (see 11-08 below). Based on the photographs, this report was unanimously accepted. The species is already on the Official List from two previous records from the coast. This constitutes the first inland record.

**Violet-green Swallow** (*Tachycineta thalassina*) (11-17). The Committee received two reports of this species, both seen by single observers on 1 October 2011. The first (11-17) was seen and photographed in Chapel Hill (Orange County) by Ali Iyoob. This report was unanimously accepted. The second (11-18) was not photographed and did not receive sufficient votes for acceptance (see below). This species was previously unrecorded from the state. Based on the photograph and written report by Iyoob alone, this species is added to the Official List.

**Chestnut-collared Longspur** (*Calcarius ornatus*) (11-10). A basic plumaged adult female was photographed at Fort Fisher (New Hanover County) on 23 April 2011 by Bruce Young and on 25 April by Greg Massey and Harry Sell. Based on written reports by Young and Massey and photographs by Young, Massey and Sell, this record was unanimously accepted. The species is already on the Official List with two previous

records, one with photos. However, this is the first record from the coastal plain.

**Cassin's Sparrow** (*Peucaea cassinii*) (11-08). A skylarking and singing adult male was discovered by Gil Miller on 20 April 2011 near Wagram in the Sandhills Game Land, northern Scotland County, and it continued through at least May 6. Based on written reports by Miller and Harry LeGrand plus many photographs and song recordings from multiple observers, this report was unanimously accepted. This is a first record of the species from the state and is placed on the Official List.

### **Unaccepted Sighting**

The following sightings, while sufficiently documented to warrant consideration and acceptance by at least one Committee member, received a majority of non-accept votes and were not accepted.

**Clark's Grebe** (*Aechmophorus clarkii*) (11-25) A single bird reported from Dare County was judged to be inadequately documented (three members) or misidentified (two members) and was not accepted.

**Little Stint** (*Calidris minuta*) (11-14). A single bird was reported from New Hanover County, but the written description and photographs were somewhat inconsistent with each other and ultimately inconclusive. In light of the challenges of peep identification and rarity of the species in North America, six members felt the report was inadequately documented to be acceptable.

**Violet-green Swallow** (*Tachycineta thalassina*) (11-18). A single bird was reported from Durham County on the same day as the bird documented from Chapel Hill (11-17). This report received four non-accept votes and three to accept. What concerned the Committee was that this report seemed to have been spurred by the former through the power of suggestion.

The Committee also received five reports which either failed to meet minimum criteria to be judged or were unanimously judged to be unaccepted sightings. To minimize introduction into the literature of those reports, including species previously unrecorded from the state, no further citation will be made.

### **Unresolved**

Howell (2012) includes a photo (p.189) of a bird from 16 September 1995 off Hatteras (Dare County), NC that he states is a Zino's Petrel. This is the same bird that appears on the Brian Patteson, Inc. seabird website (in two images) listed as "?Zino's Petrel." Neither claim was submitted to the NC BRC (nor to our knowledge, any Records Committee) and Zino's Petrel is not accepted to the State List. Because the Patteson Seabirds website is private and not a refereed scientific publication, and his photos were accompanied by the "?" hedge, the NC BRC felt no need to review the claim. However, with Howell's publication of this identification as a statement of fact, circumstances have changed. The Committee will review

the photographs and any written description that might still exist and report its determination in the 2012 report.

## Discussion

With this round of voting, Violet-green Swallow and Cassin's Sparrow are added to the Official List, Long-billed Murrelet is elevated from the Provisional to the Official List and *Cypseloides sp.* is added to the Provisional List. Accordingly, the accepted State List is increased to 473, of which 461 species are on the Official List and 12 on the Provisional List.

As is always the case, observers of rare species, particularly if their report would constitute a first state record, would do well to invest a reasonable amount of time properly documenting the bird to the best extent possible. Of the 17 reports that were accepted, only two were not accompanied by photographs. In both those cases, extensive field notes made either at the time of the sighting or immediately afterward were provided. Of the eight reports not accepted, only one included photographs and thorough written documentation.

Too often, observers forget that the burden of proof is theirs to prove the claim, not the Committee's to disprove it. We are aware and sensitive to the fact that at times we may fail to accept reports of species which were correctly identified. However, the Committee is tasked with the responsibility of only accepting reports that can be sustained by the evidence provided. Accordingly, the following guidelines are offered to anyone fortunate enough to discover a bird of sufficient rarity to warrant submission:

1. Obtain high-quality digital photographs if at all possible.
2. Whether photographed or not, take exhaustive notes on all field marks seen, ideally *with the bird in view* or at the first possible opportunity thereafter. Record everything you can think of—even if you are uncertain it is important.
3. Get the word out fast so others can see the bird and confirm the identification.
4. Do your homework. Double check your notes for accuracy and consistency with the expected.
5. Be honest with yourself. The only aspect of a sighting that improves with time is “memory enhancement.” Do not submit a formal report for an identification for which you are initially uncertain unless it is later verified. Of course, there is a big difference between broadcasting your suspected sighting to get the word out and submitting a formal report for Committee consideration.
6. Write your report as soon as possible. Describe in great detail everything you saw but only what you saw. Generally, the rarer the bird, the more detail is warranted and remember to describe the *bird*; not people, places or things. Both a downloadable Rare Bird Report form and an online Rare Bird Report form are available from the Carolina Bird Club website at <http://www.carolinabirdclub.org/br/>.

Finally, observers are encouraged to refer to the new online reference “Birds of North Carolina: Their Distribution and Abundance” by Harry LeGrand, John Haire, Ali Iyooob and Tom Howard which can be accessed via the Carolina Bird Club web site. The official checklist of species from North Carolina may be found on the Carolina Bird Club website at [www.carolinabirdclub.org/brc/checklist\\_of\\_North\\_Carolina\\_birds.html](http://www.carolinabirdclub.org/brc/checklist_of_North_Carolina_birds.html).

### **Literature Cited**

Howell, S. N. G. 2012. Petrels, Albatrosses, & Storm-Petrels of North America: A Photographic Guide. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Rhodes, Z. L. and J. L. Johnson. 2012. Second nesting record of Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*) in North Carolina. *Chat* 75:149–152.

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