

## **2012 Annual Report of the North Carolina Bird Records Committee**

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The most significant development for both state Records Committees in 2012 was the adoption of a new set of operational Bylaws which included a new list category: "Introduced." The justification was that a number of species which occur with some regularity are excluded from any list simply because they are non-native or do not meet the standard benchmark of "stable or expanding breeding population for at least ten years." This list is intended to provide a means of recognizing the existence of feral species where the bird seen was not itself an escaped individual or from a sanctioned captive breeding reintroduction program. Birders are cautioned that individuals on this list are not "countable" on individual life lists under the traditional listing rules.

The North Carolina Bird Records Committee (NCBRC) voted on reports of 11 species, one subspecies, and re-evaluated one existing record in light of new information. The reference number (in parentheses) reflects the year reported and sequence in which the report was received.

### **Accepted as Valid**

**Greater White-fronted Goose** (*Anser albifrons*) (12-07, 12-08). This species is well known from the late fall through early spring and would not normally require NCBRC input. But, single individuals over-summered with feral Canada Geese in two locations. The first was at Lake Hickory, Burke County; photographed on July 25, 2012 by Jadon Carr. The second was at Lake Junaluska, Haywood County; photographed by Nathan Gatto on 23 June 2012 and Jeff Lemons on 29 June 2012. These occurrences raise the specter of a potentially new permanent resident goose species. The majority of members accepted both birds as wild although one member felt the Lake Hickory bird was a feral hybrid. Only time will tell if this occurrence was an anomaly or harbinger of a new pattern.

**Pacific Loon** (*Gavia pacifica*) (12-01). A winter-plumaged individual was photographed by Wayne Forsythe and seen by others on 5-6 January 2012 at Lake Julian, Buncombe County. Pacific Loon is a rare but regular winter visitor to the coast, but there are no previous records from the mountains of North Carolina. This record was unanimously accepted by the NCBRC. Pacific Loon is already on the Definitive List.

**Black-browed Albatross** (*Thalassarche melanophris*) (12-03). An adult seen and photographed a mile off Hatteras Inlet, Dare County by about two dozen observers on 18 February 2012 was unanimously accepted. There is a previous sight record of the species but no photographs or specimens. The photos elevate this species to the Definitive List.

**Harlan's race of Red-tailed Hawk** (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) (12-04). An adult light morph of this western subspecies of Red-tailed Hawk was seen by Mike Tove and Eddie Owens at Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, Dare County on 2 March 2012. Though the NCBRC normally does not vote on subspecies, the possibility that this may in the future be split from the nominate Red-tailed Hawk makes this a significant sighting. Six members accepted the written report.

Although this is the first sight report of Harlan's Hawk, the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences has a specimen taken at Morrow Mountain State Park, Stanly County, in the winter of 1974-75, but the NCBRC did not accept photos of this specimen (LeGrand et al. 2010). Based on the Tove/Owens sighting, Harlan's Hawk is placed on the Provisional List as a recognized sub-species.

**Piping Plover** (*Charadrius melodus*) (12-09). A single individual was seen on 4 September 2012 at Hooper Lane, Mills River, Henderson County by Wayne Forsythe, Simon Thompson and Bob Olthoff and photographed by Forsythe. It was unanimously accepted. This is the first record from the mountain region.

**Monk Parakeet** (*Myiopsitta monachus*) (12-10). That this species occurs in North Carolina is undisputed. However, it was previously excluded from any list because the former rules provided no guidance for acceptance of introduced species. Because the only suitable voting category was "Unaccepted Origin," a non-accept vote, all votes for introduced species were excluded from any state accepted list (e.g., Monk Parakeet record 08-11 in 2008; LeGrand et al. 2009).

The committee reviewed three records including a 1974 breeding observation from Buncombe County (Simpson and Ruiz 1974), a nest-building bird photographed on 6 August 2008 by Ron Morris at Farmington, Davie County, and a pair of birds at Kill Devil Hills, Dare County photographed on 20 September 2012 by Audrey Whitlock. Five members voted to add the species to the newly established Introduced List. Monk Parakeet thus becomes the first species to be included under this new listing.

**Say's Phoebe** (*Sayornis saya*) (12-13). A single individual was found near Pettigrew State Park, Washington County on 27 December 2012 by Ed Corey. It was photographed by Scott Winton, seen by Nathan Gatto, Kyle Kittelberger, Jeff Lemons, Jeff Lyons, Robert Meehan on that day, and by scores of birders afterward. The report was unanimously accepted. There are four previous Coastal Plain and two Piedmont records of which only one was from winter (after mid-December). This species is already on the Definitive List.

**Tennessee Warbler** (*Oreothlypis peregrina*) (12-12). A single individual was photographed at Hillsborough, Orange County on 24 December 2012 by Carol Tuskey. This species is a regular migrant and normally warrants no consideration by the NCBRC. However, in light of the extreme late date, formal evaluation was appropriate. This report was unanimously accepted. This is the second winter record from the state. The first was a bird collected in Durham on 15 February 1967. Tennessee Warbler is already on the Definitive List.

**MacGillivray's Warbler** (*Geothlypis tolmiei*) (12-14). A single individual was seen 12 October 2012 in Manteo, Dare County by Audrey Whitlock and later heard by Jeff Lewis. Six members accepted the written report. This constitutes the third record from the state, all of which are from the Coastal Plain. MacGillivray's Warbler is currently on the Definitive List by virtue of a specimen and a photographed individual, both from Lake Mattamuskeet, Hyde County.

**White-winged Crossbill** (*Loxia leucoptera*) (12-11). A flock of up to six individuals was photographed at Manteo, Dare County on 23 November 2012 by Jeff Lewis and Bryan Murphy. The report was unanimously accepted. White-winged Crossbill is a rare and irregular late fall and winter visitor mostly in the western portions of the state. This constitutes the second record from the coast; the first involving more than a lone individual.

### **Unaccepted Sighting**

The following reports were judged to be unacceptable by a majority of NCBRC Members.

**Zino's Petrel** (*Pterodroma madeira*) (12-02). In 1995, Brian Patteson photographed a bird which he speculated on his website as a possible Zino's Petrel. Because Patteson's website is not a publication and he hedged the identification, it required no review by the NCBRC. This changed when Howell (2012, p. 189) published it, without the hedge, as the first North American record of Zino's Petrel.

This critically endangered species is unknown away from its breeding grounds at Madeira in the eastern Atlantic – more than 3000 miles from North Carolina. If accepted, such a record would constitute not only a first record from North Carolina and North America, but anywhere in the world away from the immediacy of its breeding grounds. As such, the burden of proof is, and should be, very high.

Committee members expressed varying opinions that ranged from passive acceptance to a strong belief the bird was misidentified; with four voting to reject. The majority of members, including at least one who did not vote to reject, expressed concerns that the current understanding of at sea identification is too poorly known to make this identification. However, two points were raised that specifically contradicts the identification:

Wing shape. Fea's (*P. feae*) and Zino's Petrel are known to differ by proportionate wing shape without overlap (Tove 2001). Photos of the NC

bird, converted to black-on-white silhouettes were examined side-by-side with black-on-white silhouettes of known Fea's and known Zino's in nearly identical flight poses. The wing shape of the NC bird matched Fea's and not Zino's.

White under-wing bar. The identification as Zino's was principally influenced by recent observations that a minority of Zino's Petrels seen off Madeira have a white under-wing bar while Fea's from those waters apparently do not. However, there are two problems with this assumption:

The total number of live sightings of Zino's Petrels is very small. Thus a minority of that number means this plumage feature may occur in very few individuals and is anomalous.

The presence of a white under-wing stripe has not been demonstrated to be characteristic of Zino's Petrel, it is not unique to that species. The NCBRC viewed a photograph by Tommy Ekmark (Bird Quest – Google Images) taken in the Cape Verde Islands of a Fea's Petrel with a white mid-wing stripe.

**Yellow-legged Gull** (*Larus michahellis*) (12-06). A single report of this species (Lewis 1996) was previously accepted on the Definitive List. However, in light of more recent revelations about gull hybrids, particularly Herring X Lesser Black-backed (*L. argentatus* x *L. fuscus*) it was re-circulated for re-evaluation. This time, only three members accepted the published description and none accepted the photos. Accordingly, this species is removed from the North Carolina List.

**Mountain Bluebird** (*Siala currucoides*) (12-05). A bird seen and photographed from Fayetteville, Cumberland County, was judged by six members to be more likely an aberrant Eastern Bluebird (*S. sialis*). Although the plumage initially seemed good for a female Mountain, scrutiny of the bird's posture, head and bill proportions revealed a bird more consistent with Eastern Bluebird. That the bird seemed paired – at least for a time, with a male Eastern, did not help the case for Mountain Bluebird.

## **Summary**

This round of reports elevates one species (Black-browed Albatross) to the Definitive List, adds one species (Monk Parakeet) to the newly recognized Introduced List, adds one sub-species (Harlan's Hawk) to the Provisional List and deletes one species (Yellow-legged Gull) from all lists. Thus, the Definitive List remains at 461 species, but with the acceptance of one species onto the new Introduced List, the Accepted List is increased to 474 species (i.e., 461 Definitive, 1 Introduced, and 12 Provisional – not including subspecies).

**Literature Cited**

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