

Actions of the Michigan Bird Records Committee for 1995

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This is the sixth report of the Michigan Bird Records Committee (MBRC). It covers the Committee's actions for 1995. The members of the Committee during this year were Doug McWhirter (Eaton Co.), Mike Kielb (Washtenaw Co.), Kip Miller (Berrien Co.), Karl Overman (Oakland Co.), Curt Powell (Wayne Co.), Kevin Thomas (Ingham Co.) and Ron Weeks (Midland Co.), with alternate members Brian Allen (Manistee Co.) and Jack Reinoehl (Hillsdale Co.). McWhirter was Chairman and Reinoehl was Secretary during the past year.

Thirty-five records were considered by the Committee; of these, twenty were accepted. Two records resulted in changes to the state list of Michigan. The first was the replacement of Arctic/Pacific Loon by Pacific Loon. The second was the addition of the Ash-throated Flycatcher to the list. As a result of these changes, the Michigan state list stood at 398 species at the start of 1996.

Since this report concerns sightings from 1995 or earlier, the split of Sharp-tailed Sparrow into two species (by the A.O.U.) had not occurred when the records below were examined by the committee. Those submitting records were, therefore, not concerned about distinguishing between the two species of this sparrow that are now recognized.

The information on previous records of rare species was compiled by Phil Chu in his capacity as the previous Secretary of the MBRC. The author is most grateful to Phil for making these available, and for Phil's great job during his tenure as Secretary, which is most difficult to live up to. Doug McWhirter, Chairman of the MBRC, gathered data on hybrid ducks and reviewed the entire manuscript. Allen Chartier also reviewed the manuscript and made some very helpful suggestions.

Records accepted:

Pacific Loon (description: Adam Byrne; expert opinion: Jon Dunn), vote: 7-0. One in alternate plumage on 27 May, 1994. Since the early 1980s, the "black-throated" loons have proven to be rare but regular at WPBO, one or two seen flying by the point most years, almost exclusively during the last week in May. During that decade, these loons, formerly all called Arctic Loons, were split into two separate species, very similar in appearance: the Arctic Loon, nesting mostly in Siberia, and the Pacific Loon, nesting mostly in northwestern Canada. This represents the first record for the state of an individual of this group identified by species since this split. In his description, Byrne noted that "The division between white underparts and dark back was a straight line without any incursion of white from the underparts to the back or sides." Dunn in his letter stated that during numerous visits to Gambell, he "[has] found it easy to separate flying birds and can identify nearly all individuals that come within one-quarter mile or so of shore. The difference on the rear flank is not subtle..." This feature of the plumage of the Pacific Loon is discussed and illustrated by photograph in Dunn, Rose 1992.

frigatebird, sp. (description: Daniel Magennis), vote: 7 - 0. on the second round. One, on 6 July, 1995 on the east shore of Grand Traverse Bay in Leelanau Co. This bird was described as having a "black head and body with a white breast." It had a long, deeply forked tail. This individual was watched as it soared in circles, gaining height before drifting off to the north. Although the record was submitted as a Magnificent Frigatebird, the Committee chose to accept the record as frigatebird, sp., due to the lack of detail in the report and the difficulty of distinguishing between this species and

other frigatebirds, especially the Great Frigatebird. This latter species has been recorded only twice in the United States, a specimen from Oklahoma in 1975 and one photographed off California in 1992 (ABA 1996). This was the first frigatebird record in Michigan since 1988 when there were 4 sightings of storm-driven birds. These were the only previous records for the state.

Tricolored Heron (description: Steve Santner), vote: 7-0. One, between 24 July 1994 and 7 August 1994 at Pt. Mouillee, Monroe Co.

White-faced Ibis (description by Bill Bouton; photographs by Darlene Friedman), vote 7-0. One on 5 May, 1995 in Monroe Co., well photographed.

Ross' Goose (description: Michael E. Petrucha), vote: 5 - 1. One on 10 November 1994 at Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge, Saginaw Co.

Ross' Goose (description: Steve Rosenberg), vote: 7 - 0. One on 12 March, 1995 at Fish Point Wildlife Area, Tuscola Co.

Tufted Duck (description: Kevin Thomas; data on hybridization prepared by Doug McWhirter), vote: 6 - 0 - 1. One on 8 - 23 February, 1995 along the St. Clair River. Among marks noted in the description were uniform black back, yellow eye, round head with an extended tuft, flanks white with some small gray smudges near the rear. All of these features fall within the range of characters typical of a Tufted Duck. This record and the record below constitute the second and third accepted records for the state. This individual was observed on the Canada side as early as 18 January near Sombra (Rideout 1995). The record was reviewed and accepted by the Ontario Rare Bird Committee (Dobos 1996). Due to the recent occurrence of hybrids between this species and other *Aythya* sp. in both Michigan and Ohio, much care was taken by the observers to eliminate the possibility of another hybrid occur-

rence. This task is complicated by the fact that several species are candidates for hybridization with the Tufted Duck. We herein summarize briefly the main points of distinction. Both scaup species have finely streaked gray backs, and hybrids between either scaup and the Tufted Duck would be expected to show some trace of this. Therefore, the uniformly black back is one indication that this individual was not a scaup-Tufted Duck hybrid. Another is the extended tuft; hybrids of this species with scaups would be expected to have tufts that are short and stout. The comments concerning the tuft and back color also apply to possible hybrids with the Redhead. For a discussion of *Aythya* sp. hybrids, see Gillham, et al., 1966. Possible hybridization with the perhaps more closely related Ring-necked Duck presents a different problem. This species also has a solid black back, but lacks a tuft, has a different head shape, a strongly-marked bill and gray instead of white flanks. In no case was any intergradation noted towards any of these features. McWhirter noted, based on his personal observations from Japan, that it is not unusual for Tufted Ducks in winter plumage to have smudges on their flanks, so these are not indicative of hybridization of any sort.

Tufted Duck (descriptions: Gerald Annelin, Ron Weeks) vote: 6 - 0 - 1. One between 14 April and 3 May of 1995 at Nayanquing Pt., Bay Co. This individual was present in a flock of about 10,000 scaup. This record and the above are the second and third accepted records for the state. The first was in October 1973, in Washtenaw and Livingston Cos. This record and the one above were part of a larger pattern of occurrence of this species over northeastern North America during the winter of 1994-1995. During that winter 27 individuals were recorded in northeastern North America, according to the various seasonal surveys in

Audubon Field Notes (49:2). Of these, most were along the coast but there were three individuals in Ontario and Michigan, one of which was shared. By contrast, during the previous winter, only five were recorded in these surveys with none in Ontario; see Audubon Field Notes (48:2). So this European species has established a pattern as a casual visitor to the northeastern U.S., mostly along the coast, but visiting the Great Lakes as well with numbers varying from year to year. This bird was described as having a "thin and long" crest and "apparently all black back." The flanks were white with "no dark flecking," distinguishing this individual from that in the previous record. The bright yellow eye was particularly noted by both observers. For distinction between this species and its hybrids, see the previous account. The bird was discovered by Annelin on the 14th and not seen again until it was relocated by Annelin on 2 May. At that time he noted that the bird was assumed to be the same as the previous sighting because "no distinguishing characteristics between observations were noted." It was seen by several other observers on the 3rd.

Long-tailed Jaeger (description: Curt Powell), vote: 5 - 2 - 1. One adult at the Rouge River Bird Observatory in Dearborn on 7 May 1995. Identified by small size ("[nearby Ring-billed Gulls] seemed much larger and broader winged"). Also "white body and uniform gray underwings" and "tail points longer than the tail itself."

Mew Gull (photograph by Jim Ponshair), vote: 7-0. One on 26 December 1994 at Grand Haven in Ottawa Co. Accepted on the basis of the photograph. This is the sixth accepted record for Mew Gull in the state, all since 1987.

California Gull (description: Kip Miller), vote: 5 - 1 - 1. One in first winter plumage on 15 November 1994 at Lion's Beach State Park in Berrien Co.

Arctic Tern (description: Adam Byrne), vote: 5-1-1. One at WPBO on 16 May 1995.

Ash-throated Flycatcher (descriptions: Tim Granger, Brian Allen; photographs: Brian Allen; expert opinion: Van Remsen and Steve Cardiff), vote: 7 - 0. One in 13-14 November in Manistee Co. just south of Lake Bluff Audubon Center in Manistee, MI. A comment from a nearby resident suggested that the individual may have been present for a couple of weeks before it came to the attention of Michigan birders. Copious documentation and excellent photographs were necessary to verify this first state record, a member of the very difficult *Myiarchus* genus of tyrant flycatchers. In their comments, Remsen and Cardiff, both of the Louisiana State University Museum of Zoology, stated that "separation of Ash-throated Flycatcher from the relatively small eastern Brown-crested Flycatcher (*M. tyrannulus cooperi*) can be a formidable ID problem. However, your photos are good enough that, after comparing them with our series of *Myiarchus* skins we feel that the bird is indeed an Ash-throated Flycatcher..." Their three reasons for this were the relatively small size of the bird, that the bill was "proportionally small (short and thin) with no hook on the tip of the maxilla" and most importantly, the tail in which "at least some of the rectrices have dark outer webs and completely rufous inner webs" (emphasis in the original). The details were in fact sufficient to rule out all species of *Myiarchus* recorded in the United States except the "virtually identical" Nutting's Flycatcher of western Mexico, which has been recorded once in the United States, in Arizona (A.O.U. 1983). Allen noted that the Ash-throated Flycatcher "has been seen in sixteen north-central and northeastern states and provinces." The combination of very thorough documentation and the highly plausible occurrence

of this species as a vagrant at this season convinced the committee to accept this record.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (description: Kevin Thomas) vote: 6 - 0 - 1. One adult on 8 May 1995 at WPBO in Chippewa Co.

Black-billed Magpie (descriptions: Leonard Graf, Philip Chu and Brian Allen; photograph: Carl Freeman), vote: 7 - 0. Found on 24 April 1995 by Barry Barto in Arcadia Township, Benzie Co. and clearly photographed, this was the first record in the state since 1977. It was present through 28 April.

Carolina Chickadee (account by Kenneth C. Parkes), vote 7 - 0. This specimen, UMMZ 49667, was collected on 7 July 1899 by B. H. Swales and identified by R. Ridgeway. Dr. Parkes, the Senior Curator of Birds at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, agreed to reexamine the specimen, to authenticate this record, still the only record for Michigan. He stated, "I have no hesitation in identifying [this specimen] as an immature male of *Parus carolinensis extimus*."

Northern Wheatear (account by Bob Rogers, who also submitted photos), vote 7 - 0. One 8 miles ENE of Alpena on Lake Huron in Alpena Co. which was present from 24-27 September 1995. Banded and photographed in the hand. This is the seventh accepted record for the state and the fourth accepted record since 1989. All records fall between 7 September and 23 October.

Western Tanager (description: JoAnne McIntyre), vote 7 - 0. One at the east dike of the Erie Shooting Club reserve on 13 May 1995.

Western Tanager (description: Michael A. Duse), vote 6 - 1. One east of Mio along M-33 at McKinley Rd. on 15 May 1995. This record and the above constitute only the third and fourth records for Michigan. All records are in May; the first was in 1989.

Painted Bunting (account received from Keith Westphal), vote: 6 - 1. One male on 17 May 1994 on the south end of Crystal Lake in Benzie Co. This individual was not seen by the reporter, but observed by two homeowners living one-quarter mile apart.

Painted Bunting (description: David Peters, who also submitted photographs), vote: 7-0. One adult female between 24 April and 27 April, 1995 in Saginaw, Saginaw Co.

Painted Bunting (description: Adam Byrne, who also photographed this individual), vote: 5 - 0 - 2. One male on 15-18 May 1995 at Gladstone, Delta Co. which was well photographed. This and the previous two records constitute the third through fifth accepted records for the state. All five of these records fall between 24 April and 18 May, and several of the reports involve birds that stayed at a feeder for several days before moving on.

Sharp-tailed Sparrow (description: Doug McWhirter), vote: 6 - 0 - 1. One on 8 May 1995 at Point LaBarbe, Mackinac Co.

Smith's Longspur (description: L. C. Binford), vote: 7 - 0. One on 19 May 1995 at Brockway Mt. Drive, a lookout near Copper Harbor in Keweenaw Co.

Smith's Longspur (description: Jim Granlund), vote: 7-0. One on 14 October 1995 at WPBO. These are the fifth and sixth accepted records for the state.

Records not accepted

Arctic/Pacific Loon (one description), vote: 2 - 5.

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These two records, from 12 May and 18 May 1983, were reviewed at the request of WPBO personnel. The first record was passed by the committee in Round #18 with a 6 -1 vote and the second record

had not been reviewed by the Committee. Both sightings were made from the hawk-watch site at WPBO. The two descriptions, which were nearly identical, mentioned primarily the "large square black throat patch" and a "solid silvery gray nape." In neither sighting was the back observed. Committee members felt that the descriptions did not fully rule out the Red-throated Loon, especially because, as one committee member noted, "without the back pattern, you can't be sure." The red on the throat of a Red-throated Loon is in fact seldom seen, leaving the appearance of a dark throat patch, and both species have some gray on the back of the head. With this decision, there are now seven accepted spring records of the Arctic/Pacific Loon in spring at WPBO, with four between 26 May and 31 May, the earliest on 17 May and the latest on 13 June.

Black Vulture (one description), vote: 0 - 6 - 1. This was a sighting from September or October 1982. A birder who had previously lived in South Carolina and become very familiar with this species observed one in with a group of Turkey Vultures along Langton Rd. (T6S, R10E, Section 17) in Monroe Co. One committee member stated that he "suspect[s] this observer saw this species...especially given his familiarity with the species." But as several committee members noted, there was no description of shape, plumage or flight style for this species in the letter and thus it does not provide an acceptable record. Although there are three published reports of this species in the state and other reports such as this one, there remains no accepted Michigan record for the Black Vulture.

Turkey Vulture (one description), vote: 2 - 5. One from Crooked Creek Rd. at Klinger Lake in St. Joseph Co. observed during a Christmas Count on 17 December 1994. The bird seen was a large black bird flying from north to south. One of the observers noted seeing the bird's

"ugly head." Committee members felt that the description provided was too incomplete to be accepted; one member commented that this record "lacks any real details."

Mississippi Kite (one description) vote, 1 - 6 on second round. Observed on 27 March 1994 at the Muskegon Wastewater Plant. The observer reported a bird that "flew out of the ditch on the left side of the road." He first observed a gull-like bird with "a long black tail," then further "White head, wings black to the wrist, the back blue-gray with a white inner wing edge." The bird then "flew about a quarter-mile to the end of the dike and landed." The greatest concerns of committee members relating to this record were the date of the sighting and the reported behavior. The first migrants of this kite generally arrive in south Texas in early April; the earliest S. Illinois record is 20 April (Bolen, Flores 1983). One committee member further noted that this species is "highly aerial." Committee members concluded that both the date and the behavior strongly suggested a male Northern Harrier, which would be very likely at this site on this date, would present an appearance somewhat similar to that described and, unlike the kite, would commonly alight on the ground.

Swainson's Hawk (one description) vote, 1 - 5 - 2 on the second round. One reported on 21 April 1995 in Bay Co. near the Independence Bridge. The observers submitted a report which included a sketch made in the field. The most outstanding point of their observation was a hawk of "long-winged buteo proportions" that had "black flight feathers and white wing linings." The observers regretted that their observation lacked details concerning the wing, tail and head pattern. Members of the Committee felt some disposition to accept this record. One noted that "The underwing pattern of a Swainson's is striking and unique in

North America outside of Florida (Short-tailed). Osprey [was eliminated] on the spot." Another stated that the long wings are suggestive of a Swainson's Hawk. The Committee finally felt however that whatever the observers had actually seen, the description that was submitted was too sketchy. One committee member stated that, even though the observers were sure that the bird was not an Osprey, the failure to mention a dark chest or any dark on the head in the report made this description more suggestive of an Osprey than of a Swainson's Hawk.

Ferruginous Hawk (one description) vote, 2 - 5. A sighting on 23 October 1994 in Newaygo Co. This report described a large hawk, very white below with "bright rust on shoulders; brown back, wings...tail mostly gray with wide pinkish band;" in flight "only the back was seen." Committee members felt that this sighting had some merit, noting that "rusty shoulders don't point toward red-tails." However several committee members remarked that the Ferruginous Hawk shows much more red than just on the shoulders. The most serious problem was that the observation was not sufficiently thorough to rule out the highly variable Red-tailed Hawk. One committee member commented on the difficulty of hawk identification by citing the comment of David Bohlen from Illinois that "This hawk is probably much rarer...than the records show."

Willow Ptarmigan (one description) vote, 0 - 7. One reported from Big Powderhorn Ski Mt. in Gogebic Co. on 3 October 1994. This individual was described as of grouse size and "brown with white sidewings." The very brief description did not allow members of the committee to rule out Ruffed Grouse or Sharp-tailed Grouse.

Curlew Sandpiper (one description) vote, 2 - 5. This was reported from Tuscola Co. on May 15 1995. This bird, picked out of a flock of 20 to 30 Dunlins,

was observed to have a "chest of...a nice rich chestnut type color with back somewhat of a different color" and a "distinctive downward curved bill." Committee members were primarily concerned by the failure of the observer to rule out Sanderling in this description. This latter species shows a bright-colored chest during the latter part of its spring migration in Michigan.

Barn Owl (one report) vote, 1 - 3 - 3. The reported Barn Owl was picked up in a weakened state in Cass Co. in early April and died on 6 April 1994. The committee received no description of the specimen. Until better evidence is received, the committee cannot accept the record.

Three-toed Woodpecker (one description), vote: 1 - 6 on the second round. One on the 1980 Anchor Bay Christmas count in Macomb Co.; from an account written on 4 January 1995. The head was described as generally black with a yellow crown and white malar; the back was described as black with a white central streak; the underparts were described as white with black barring on the flanks. The primary concerns of the committee concerning this record were two. The first was that the report was a second-hand description; the writer of the report had not observed the bird that was the subject of the report. The most serious concern about the description itself was the back pattern. This typifies the Rocky Mountain race (*dorsalis*) but not the race of the eastern U.S. (*bacatus*) (Winkler, et al. 1995), which is the expected race in Michigan. Also missing from the report was any mention of the strong pattern on the back of the head that characterizes all North American races of this species.

Yellow-throated Warbler (one description) vote, 2 - 4 - 2 on the second round. One reported on 9 September 1994 in Ludington State Park, Mason Co. This bird was described as having a "bright yellow throat...white underparts...bright white wingbars...white stripe over the

eye...some stripes on the side" and was said to have been "fresher looking" than most warblers. The committee's primary concern was whether the possibility of a fall Blackburnian Warbler had been properly ruled out. One committee member noted that "this is a perfect description of a female Blackburnian Warbler." Though the latter species usually has a yellow eyebrow, one committee member mentioned that he had observed a Blackburnian Warbler with a very pale eyebrow the previous fall. Another concern was the bright wingbars. The Blackburnian Warbler has broad white wingbars against a strongly contrasting dark background while the Yellow-throated Warbler has narrow wingbars which are relatively inconspicuous against their gray background.

Pine Warbler (one description) vote, 1 - 5 - 1. This bird was reported from Berrien Twp. in Berrien Co. on 17 December 1994 with a flock of small birds. The size was slightly smaller than a titmouse. Perched directly overhead it showed a thin warbler-type bill, uniform yellowish on the throat and breast and somewhat darker upperparts with no obvious markings. Although several members thought this report was probably correct, the documentation was judged insufficient to rule out other warblers. One member was particularly concerned by the lack of mention of wingbars, which are quite conspicuous on this species.

Sharp-tailed Sparrow (one description) vote, 1 - 6 on the second round. One reported from Vermilion Ecological Station, Chippewa Co. on 29 May 1995. This was described as a "small DARK sparrow-like bird" with a "solid gray-black crown" and a "dark area behind and below the eye...surrounded by an orange triangular patch." It also was said to have a "STRONG DARK sub-mustachial line." The back was described as "dark gray/brown." A "faint insect-like call started with a soft chip note before a non-buzzy

series." The Committee had several concerns about this record. These included the description of the sub-mustachial line, which is not a feature of the Sharp-tailed Sparrow's plumage; the vocalization, which is not known to be typical of either LeConte's or Sharp-tailed Sparrow, and the back, which should have prominent streaks. Because of this inaccuracy, the Committee did not feel that this individual was properly distinguished from LeConte's Sparrow, which was known to be present at the same location at that time.

Lincoln's Sparrow (one description) vote, 2 - 5. This individual was reported from Midland Co. on 17 December, 1994 on a Christmas Count. It was observed on a lawn very near an open-water ditch with Tree Sparrows and a Song Sparrow. It was noted to have a "buffy breast with white to medium streaks," a very white belly and crown quite streaked. The side of the head was gray and there was a notable malar streak. Committee members were primarily concerned by the failure of the observers to rule out the Swamp Sparrow. Immatures of this species match the description that was provided very well. They also linger into early winter in southern Michigan much more frequently than the Lincoln's Sparrow.

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