

Actions of the Michigan Bird Records Committee for 1997

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This is the eighth report of the Michigan Bird Records Committee, covering the Committee's actions in 1997. The members of the Committee for this period were Doug McWhirter (Eaton Co.), Brian Allen (Manistee 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 Adam Byrne (Ingham Co.) and Jack Reinoehl (Hillsdale Co.). McWhirter was Chairman and Reinoehl was Secretary during 1997.

There were two additions to Michigan's state list this year. These were both from Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, a Boat-tailed/Great-tailed Grackle in April and a Brewer's Sparrow in May. Further, Pacific Loon and Black Vulture were documented materially in the state for the first time. As a result of these additions, the Michigan list stood at 409 species on 1 January 1998.

During 1997, the Committee reviewed status definitions and, after debate, adopted certain changes in these definitions. The "Regular" category now consists of species that have either been recorded in 9 out of the last 10 years or recorded 30 or more times in the last 10 years. This replaces the former criterion of having been recorded in each of the last 10 years. The "Accidental" category still includes all species that have been recorded three or fewer times in the last 10 years and the remaining species, which have been recorded more than three times in the last 10 years but do not qualify as "Regular," are placed in the "Casual" category. Changes in species status are listed below.

Status changes as of January 1998:

Casual to Regular

Little Blue Heron
Eurasian Wigeon
Swainson's Hawk
Gyr Falcon
Pomarine Jaeger
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Northern Hawk-Owl

Townsend's Solitaire
Summer Tanager
Lark Sparrow

Regular to Casual
King Rail
Bell's Vireo

Accidental to Casual
White-faced Ibis
Say's Phoebe
Northern Wheatear
Western Tanager
Blue Grosbeak
Painted Bunting
Smith's Longspur

Casual to Accidental
none

The following report discusses 84 records that were resolved by the Michigan Bird Records Committee during 1997. Of these, 59 (70%) were accepted. Names of contributors of written descriptions or of material evidence appear in the heading for accepted records. In voting totals, the first number represents votes for acceptance, the second votes for rejection, and the third, if any, represents members abstaining from voting (MBRC bylaws require committee members to abstain from voting on records for which they have submitted documentation).

The author would like to thank Allen Chartier and Adam Byrne for help in reviewing this manuscript. Both have made many useful suggestions.

Accepted Records:

Pacific Loon

(descriptions: Bill Bouton, Doug McWhirter), vote: 7-0.

One on 13-14 December 1996 at the west end of Muskegon Lake, Muskegon Co. The bird was judged to be 25% smaller than a nearby Common Loon; Bouton distinguished this individual from an Arctic Loon by the necklace of dark markings across the throat and "the lack of white flank patches", which are obvious in the latter species (Dunn and Rose 1992).

Pacific Loon

(descriptions: Jim Lesser, Philip Chu, Allen Chartier; photographs: Jim Lesser, Adam Byrne), vote: 7-0.

One between 21 April and 13 May 1997 at Hidden Lake, Deerfield Twp., Livingston Co. For photo, see Reinoehl (1997). This is the first materially documented record of this species in the state.

Pacific Loon

(description: Phil Chu), vote: 7-0.

One on 27 May 1997 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co.
Pacific Loon
(descriptions: Phil Chu, Adam Byrne), vote: 7-0.

One on 28 May 1997 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. This record and the above three constitute four of the five state records for this species, though a number of previous records, now classified as Arctic/Pacific Loons, doubtless also refer to this form.

Western Grebe

(descriptions: Adam Byrne, Kevin Thomas; photograph: Jim Granlund), vote: 6-0-2.

One on 24-30 November 1996 at South Haven in Van Buren Co. where photographed, and on 17 December 1996 and 4 - 5 January 1997 at Tisconia Beach, St. Joseph, Berrien Co. Though the committee voted separately on the Van Buren and Berrien Co. sightings, there was a general agreement among observers and committee members that both refer to the same individual. The photograph is published in McWhirter (1997); the date for the photograph should be 1996, not 1997.

Brown Pelican

(descriptions: Christina Peterson, Janet Avis Hewett), vote 7-0.

One immature on 27 June 1997 in Marquette, Marquette Co. This is the fifth record of this species in Michigan since 1987.

frigatebird, sp.

(description: Roy Smith for observer Jim Preston), vote: 5-2.

One subadult on 30 September 1988 off Weko Beach, Bridgman in Berrien Co. The observer was approached to within 20 feet by a bird he described as "more than twice the size of a gull" with a white head, white chest, black back, and long swallow tail. The observer, who was fishing, threw fish to the bird causing it to approach very closely several times. One of the dissenting voters regarded this as a "convincing anecdotal account" but due to its second-hand nature, insufficient for a Michigan state record.

frigatebird, sp.

(description: John T. White), vote: 7-0.

One on 2 October 1988 at Warren Dunes State Park in Berrien Co. This individual was observed from a high bluff. As it passed below the observer, the underparts could not be seen; no color except black was noted from above. The "long pointed tail", wingspan "nearly

twice that of nearby gulls" and "sharp elbows in the wings" all indicate that the bird was a frigatebird.

frigatebird, sp.

(description: Hal H. Wyss), vote: 7-0.

One adult male observed over a two hour period on 16 October 1988 at Leland, Leelanau Co. A large slender "entirely black" bird with a wingspan "about twice that of nearby Ring-billed Gulls." The feet were "not noticeably different in color from the rest of the bird."

This record and the two above share a similar history. These records along with a fourth, on 28 September 1988 at Port Huron, were submitted as Magnificent Frigatebirds. All were brought to the state by Hurricane Gilbert, which transported dozens of frigatebirds to many eastern states. These records were voted on previously by the committee but their acceptance as frigatebird sp. was not established unambiguously at the time (P. Chu, pers. comm.)

Little Blue Heron

(description: Adam Byrne), vote: 6-0-1.

One adult on 5 - 11 July 1997 at the Karn Plant in Bay Co.

Tricolored Heron

(descriptions: Adam Byrne, Joe Soehnel), vote: 6-0-1.

One adult on 6 - 13 July 1997 at the Karn Plant in Bay Co.

White Ibis

(description: Mindy Walker), vote: 7-0.

One immature seen overhead in flight on 26 October 1996 at the Allegan State Game Area Headquarters, Allegan Co. The description included light underparts, a dark back, and a beak "downcurved" and "pinkish/flesh colored."

Black Vulture

(description: Steve Baker; photograph: Steve Baker), vote: 7-0.

One on 10 April 1997 at Mackinaw City, Emmet Co. This is the first materially documented record for the

state and the fifth state record. The photograph is published in Reinoehl (1997).

Ross's Goose

(description: David Peters), vote: 6-1.

One adult on 31 October 1996 at Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge, Saginaw Co.

Ross's Goose

(description: David Peters), vote: 6-1.

A flock of 10 adults on 14 November 1996 at Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge, Saginaw Co.

Ross's Goose

(description: Jim Granlund), vote: 7-0.

Six on 2 March 1997 at Allegan State Game Area, Allegan Co. These were directly compared to Snow Geese.

Ross's Goose

(description: David Peters), vote: 6-1.

Four on 6 - 7 March 1997 at Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge, Saginaw Co.

Ross's Goose

(descriptions: Keith Westphal, Brian Allen), vote: 6-0-1.

One present between 19 and 26 March 1997 at two locations six miles apart in Benzie Co. and Manistee Co.

During the spring of 1997, remarkable numbers of western geese were seen. Ross's Geese were reported in two locations in addition to the above, and 80 Greater White-fronted Geese were reported from 6 locations.

Eurasian Wigeon

(descriptions: John Baumgartner, Adam Byrne), vote: 6-0-1.

One male between 24 March and 20 April 1997 at the Maple River State Game Area in Gratiot Co. Male Eurasian Wigeons were also seen at this location during the spring in 1995 and 1996.

eid, sp.

(descriptions: Adam Byrne, Curt Powell), vote: 6-0-1.

One female on 25 May 1997 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co.

King Eider

(description: Adam Byrne; photographs: Kevin Thomas, John McDaniel), vote: 7-0.

One first-year male between 27 November 1996 (Chartier and Powell 1997) and mid-May 1997 at the Edison Power Plant on the St. Mary's River, Sault Ste. Marie, Chippewa Co.

Mississippi Kite

(description: Doug McWhirter), vote: 6-1.

One adult on 13 May 1997 near Hopkins, Allegan Co.

Mississippi Kite

(description: Curt Powell), vote: 6-0-1.

One adult on 16 May 1997 at Estral Beach, Monroe Co. This and the above are the eleventh and twelfth accepted records of this species in the state since 1987.

Swainson's Hawk

(description: Kenn Kaufman), vote: 7-0.

One in worn juvenal plumage on 5 May 1997 seen over Warren Woods, Berrien Co.

Swainson's Hawk

(description: Kip Miller), vote: 6-0-1.

One on 24 May 1997 over Warren Dunes State Park, Berrien Co.

Merlin

(description: Louis Dombroski; photograph: Adam Byrne), vote: 5-0-1.

One of the pale *richardsonii* race photographed on 20 May 1997 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. The photographs show the light spots on the primaries which are the most important distinction between this form and the nominate.

Pomarine Jaeger

(description: Joshua Rose; photograph: Joshua Rose), vote: 5-2.

One juvenile photographed on 5 November 1996 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. The photograph, reprinted in Chartier and Powell (1997), shows the projection of the



A Merlin of the pale race (*Falco columbarius richardsonii*) on 20 May 1997 at Whitefish Pt., Chippewa Co.

Photo/Adam Byrne

central tail feathers as "short, broad and rounded... creating a triangular tail shape with the projection barely visible" (Olsen and Larsson 1997).

California Gull

(description: Kip Miller), vote: 7-0.

One in third-winter plumage on 19 April 1997 at New Buffalo, Berrien Co. This bird was picked out by its brown iris and examined for 45 minutes. Ring-billed and Herring Gulls were available for close comparison.

Sabine's Gull

(description: John McDaniel; photographs: John McDaniel), vote: 7-0.

One photographed on 2 November 1996 at St. Joseph, Berrien Co.

Northern Hawk-Owl

(photo: Greg Levandoski), vote: 7-0.

One on 3 April 1997 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co.

Northern Hawk-Owl

(description: Philip Chu; photo: Adam Byrne), vote: 7-0.

One on 19 April 1997 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co.

Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird

(descriptions: Adam Byrne, Allen Chartier, Philip Chu, Andrew Spencer; photographs: Allen Chartier, Steve Olesen), vote: 7-0.

One after-hatch-year male present in Iosco Twp., Livingston Co. between 10 September (Chartier and Powell 1997) and 10 December (McWhirter 1997). Several very detailed descriptions and many photographs were submitted for this individual. In brief, it was mostly rufous-orange above with a green cap and upper back; below it had rufous flanks and a complete gorget with apparently only a few iridescent feathers.

The largely rufous back suggests that this individual was probably a Rufous Hummingbird. In communication with the Committee, Mark Robbins (Curator of Birds, University of Kansas Museum) indicated that "we have not examined any Allen's that have more than a few rufous feathers in the back." He continued, however, that "there are potential hybrids, so if you want to unequivocally eliminate the possibility of a hybrid, I strongly suggest that you pluck the rectrices on one side of the bird's tail and record wing length and length of the central rectrix. The combination of those should give you a positive identification."

Three-toed Woodpecker

(description: Adam Byrne), vote: 7-0.

One on 19 October 1994 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. The observer was counting waterbirds and noticed the woodpecker by its unusual call.

Say's Phoebe

(descriptions: Karl Bardon, Adam Byrne; photographs: Adam Byrne), vote: 7-0.

One photographed on 29 August 1997 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. This is the fifth accepted record of this casual species since 1987, and the ninth overall.



Say's Phoebe on 27 August at Whitefish Pt., Chippewa Co.

Photo/Adam Byrne

Western Kingbird

(description: Andy Zuwerink), vote: 7-0.

One on 29 October 1996 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher

(description: Joshua Rose), vote: 7-0.

One on 11 October 1996 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher

(description: L. C. Binford), vote: 7-0.

One on 16 October 1996 at Copper Harbor, Keweenaw Co.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher

(description: Joshua Rose; photograph: Joshua Rose), vote: 7-0.

One seen and photographed on 26 October 1996 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. This photo, reprinted in Chartier and Powell (1997), is captioned with an incorrect date.

Bell's Vireo

(description: Tex Wells), vote: 6-1.

One on 9 May 1997 at Nichols Arboretum, Ann Arbor, Washtenaw Co. Although this species has been nearly annual in Berrien Co. in recent years, it is accidental elsewhere in the state.

Townsend's Solitaire

(photograph: Bill Bouton), vote: 7-0.

One, photographed, was present between 4 February and 17 February 1990 in Houghton, Houghton Co. For photograph, see Powell (1990).

Townsend's Solitaire

(description: Adam Byrne), vote: 7-0.

One on 21 October 1996 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co.

Townsend's Solitaire

(description: Andy Zuwerink), vote: 7-0.

One on 4 November 1996 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co.

Townsend's Solitaire

(description: Joshua Rose), vote: 7-0.

Two between 9 November and 22 November 1996 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co.

Townsend's Solitaire

(description: L. C. Binford), vote: 7-0.

One on 2 June 1997 along the Lake Superior shoreline near Agate Harbor, Keweenaw Co.

Varied Thrush

(description: John Hamel), vote: 7-0.

One on 8 December 1996 at Muskegon State Park, Muskegon Co.

Virginia's Warbler

(descriptions: Adam Byrne, Louis Dombroski, Greg Levandoski, Steve Santner), vote: 7-0.

One on 20 - 21 May 1997 at the sewage treatment plant in Tahquamenon Falls State Park, Chippewa Co. Seen by a large number of observers, this represents the second record for Michigan. The first was in Wayne Co. on 13 May 1993.

Townsend's Warbler

(description: Peter W. Burke), vote: 7-0.

One male on 18 May 1996 at Asylum Lake, Kalamazoo in Kalamazoo Co. This bird was examined for 5 minutes at a distance of 35 to 45 feet. The most decisive features of the lengthy description were of a "jet black throat and upper breast, forming a triangle", a "bright yellow underside, starting from black upper breast down to mid-belly" and "snow white underside from mid-belly back to the undertail." This is the third accepted record of Townsend's Warbler for Michigan; the second was on the same day at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory.

A check of regional reports in *American Birds*: 50, No. 3 shows records of equal rarity during this period in many nearby states: Illinois' first Green-tailed Towhee (20-21 May); Lazuli Bunting (20 May), and 2 Black-necked Stilts in Wisconsin (19 May and 22 May); and Ontario's third Ash-throated Flycatcher at Long Point (18-20 May). Lastly, Michigan's extraordinary White-collared Swift was on 19 May at Tawas Point.

Western Tanager

(descriptions: Philip Chu, Jim Granlund; photograph: Adam Byrne), vote: 7-0.

One on 12 - 14 May 1997 at Saugatuck, Allegan Co.

Western Tanager

(descriptions: Brian Allen, Donald Kogut), vote: 7-0.

One on 20 - 23 May 1997 at Cadillac, Wexford Co. There are now six records for this species in the state; there were also two in the spring of 1995.

Lark Bunting

(description: Leah Knapp), vote: 6-1.

One male on 6 May 1997 two miles south of Olivet, Eaton Co.

Brewer's Sparrow

(descriptions: Adam Byrne, Philip Chu; photographs: Adam Byrne, Ronald Hosner; video: Bill Bouton), vote: 7-0.

One present on 24 and 25 May at the feeders at WPBO. Circumstances for viewing this individual were optimal, and it was very fully documented. Commenting on the documentation and photographs, Peter Pyle stated: "factors in favor of Brewer's Sparrow are the full eye ring, the indistinct median crown stripe..., the moderate to heavy streaking through the pale nape collar, and the undistinguished plumage overall... These combine to clearly eliminate Clay-colored and Chipping Sparrows (even individuals in first basic plumage)." Pyle indicated that the subspecies could not be definitively determined.

This was a first state record for this sparrow. According to Ron Weeks' survey, this species has been recorded in only two of the states and provinces bordering the Great Lakes, Minnesota and Illinois. A full account of the discovery and identification of this individual, with photographs, is available in Dombroski (1998).

Golden-crowned Sparrow

(descriptions: Jack Wyckoff, Robert B. Payne; photographs: published (Payne 1979); expert opinion: Peter Pyle), vote: 6-1.

One immature trapped, banded and photographed on 12 January 1978 in Johnstown Township, Barry Co. where it was seen until 3 April 1978. This record was first published as a Golden-crowned Sparrow (Wyckoff 1979), Michigan's first at that time. One year later, based on further examination of the photographs, this individual was identified as a hybrid between Golden-crowned Sparrow and White-crowned Sparrow (Payne 1979). Committee member Brian Allen, on the basis of his own research, asked that the Committee consider this record, which had not previously been voted on, as a Golden-crowned Sparrow rather than a hybrid.

In his article, Payne listed five plumage features suggesting that the bird should be considered a hybrid. These were: whitish supercilium, distinct malar stripe, whitish throat, yellow above the eye, and bright rufous scapulars. On the basis of examining 25 examples of first-basic Golden-crowned Sparrows at the California Academy of Sciences, Pyle had the following remarks: "All first-basic Golden-crowns had the yellow spot above the eye and fairly bright rufous scapulars"; "the whitish throat and distinct malars (combined in most cases) varied quite a bit... [but several] seemed to have pale or even 'whitish' throats, which stood out as a throat patch resembling that shown by White-throated Sparrows"; "the supercilium... match[ed] many if not most of specimens of Golden-crowned in paleness." Of the 25, one bird "matched the photographed bird quite closely in all five characters." In conclusion, Pyle recommended "either acceptance as a pure Golden-crowned Sparrow, or an opinion indicating that the identification as a hybrid... has not been fully established."

Besides plumage, measurements were taken of tail length and wing cord. Both fell within the range of both species, though the wing cord was at the extreme lower end of the range for Golden-crowned Sparrow.

The fact that every feature observed on this individual was consistent with the identity of Golden-crowned Sparrow was satisfactory to most Committee members. One member pointed out that Pyle's comments had not eliminated the possibility of a hybrid completely, remarking: "To me, [Pyle's] point is that such a hybrid would require much better documentation and that this individual cannot be confidently called a hybrid. This does not mean that the bird has to be a pure Golden-crowned Sparrow."

Hybridization is an extremely complex and involved process and there is no predicting what the resulting offspring will resemble." Payne himself, in a 1997 letter to Committee Chairman McWhirter stated his present opinion that the bird was "most likely a Golden-crowned Sparrow."

Golden-crowned Sparrow

(photographs: Kevin Thomas), vote: 7-0.

One adult present between 26 -31 October 1995 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co.

Blue Grosbeak

(descriptions: Philip Chu, Ted Black; photograph: Elaine Davis), vote: 7-0.

One present 9 - 13 May 1997 in Okemos, Ingham Co. The photograph is published in Reinoehl (1997).

Blue Grosbeak

(description: Julie Craves), vote: 6-1.

One male on 17 May 1997 at the University of Michigan-Dearborn in Wayne Co. This record and the above are the fourth and fifth accepted records for the state. The first record accepted was in 1991, though there were many prior reports.

Painted Bunting

(description: Jon Spieles), vote: 7-0.

One male on 28 April 1997 at the Tahquamenon Falls State Park residence, Chippewa Co.

Dickcissel

(description: Joshua Rose), vote: 6-1.

One on 12 October 1996 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co.

Great-tailed/Boat-tailed Grackle

(descriptions: Adam Byrne, Louis Dombroski, Greg Levandoski, Nathan McNett), vote: 7-0.

One female on 15, 17, and 18 April 1997 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. This bird was first noticed in flight accompanied by two Common Grackles. It was roughly similar in shape, but 10 to 20 percent larger with a

proportionally longer tail. Over its stay in the vicinity of Whitefish Point it allowed close examination on several occasions. Its plumage was generally brown with a lighter underside and darker wings and tail. It showed pale eyes. No vocalizations were heard.

Observers did not regard identification of this individual to species as possible. Although eye color does in general permit these species to be distinguished, female Boat-tailed Grackles from the Atlantic Coast also have pale eyes. The differences between these forms are otherwise very slight. Probabilities do strongly favor the expanding Great-tailed Grackle over the other species, which, away from Florida, is closely restricted to coastal regions.

Orchard Oriole

(descriptions: Adam Byrne, Louis Dombroski), vote: 7-0.

One female on 30 May 1997 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. This constitutes the second record for Whitefish Point (Louis Dombroski, pers. comm.).

Records Not Accepted:

Western/Clark's Grebe

(one description), vote: 2-5.

One reported on 2 November 1996 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. This report is based on an individual seen twice in flight, the closest approach being 200 to 250 yards. The bird was viewed through a 20-power scope. The bird was described as a "very large grebe." During one viewing, a "white triangular patch extending into [the] greater primary coverts was visible." This and the different posture in flight were felt to distinguish this species from the Red-necked Grebe, which is abundant at this location.

The Committee was concerned with the lack of detail for this sighting, which included no description of the plumage other than the wing pattern described above and the fact that the bird was "dark" above and white below. An additional concern was that other observers present at the time were not convinced of the bird's identity.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron

(one description)

vote: 1-6 on second round.

One immature plumaged bird reported on 11 August 1996 from Pte. Mouillee, Monroe Co. This bird was flushed from a dike, circled in front of the observer and flew towards a reedy area 150 yards away from the observer where it disappeared. The identification was based on two features: firstly, "the legs extended much farther beyond the tail than is the case with the Black-crowned Night-Heron" and secondly, "the flight feathers were much darker than the upper wing coverts."

Committee members' first concern was that the American Bittern was not discussed as a possibility. Both features described apply to that species as well as the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. Even if the bittern is ruled out, members noted that the marks cited are both quite variable in application; one member pointed out that "black-crowns do have some contrast between coverts and flight feathers." Distinction between the immatures of these two species is notoriously difficult, with the thicker bill of the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron being perhaps the least subjective of the differences.

Turkey Vulture

(one description), vote: 2-5.

Two reported on 21 December 1996 in Casco Township, St. Clair Co. from the Anchor Bay Christmas Count. These were reported to be "two all dark large birds circling... overhead"; "no white or

other coloring [was] observed" and there was "not much wing beating." The birds were in view for 3 to 5 minutes.

Committee members felt that this description did not sufficiently rule out other species of large dark birds. Without information on the size and shape of the head, this description could just as easily apply to two dark-phase Rough-legged Hawks as to Turkey Vultures.

King Eider

(one description), vote: 2-5.

One female or subadult on 10 October 1996 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. A "large brown duck with striking white underwings" was seen in flight at an estimated distance of 30 meters. It was shaped like a scoter but much larger. The head could not be observed.

Committee members felt that they could not be confident of an identification based on color of wing linings alone, with no description of bill shape, feathering about the head and other features. One suggested that the sighting was an eider but that identification to species was not demonstrated.

Barrow's Goldeneye

(one description)

vote: 3-4 on second round.

One female reported on 30 December 1996 at the mouth of the Tawas River in Iosco Co. This bird was described as a female-type goldeneye with an "oversized box-head" which made this individual immediately recognizable as different from the others. Additionally "the body coloration was darker and the entire bill was yellow-orange."

Committee members were generally concerned by the lack of detail in this report. Though a rare occurrence, female Common Goldeneyes will occasionally have all yellow bills. Thus a detailed description of the size and shape of the bill and the appearance of the head above the bill is most important and that was

lacking in the documentation provided. One member stated that "[a]lthough suggestive, the details given are not thorough enough to rule out Common Goldeneye."

White-tailed Kite

(one description)

vote: 5-2 on second round.

One reported on 13 April 1997 from Kent Co. The bird was observed for 5 minutes with no optical equipment at distances estimated to be as close as 15 yards. It was described as a largely white raptor that was mostly white underneath. The underside of the wings showed a "medium gray towards the wingtips, which gave way to black." The upperside of the wings was gray with black shoulder patches. "The pure white tail was blunt and without any bands or markings." The feet were yellow, and bill and eyepatch were dark.

The bird was observed in flight over a corn field. At one point, the bird "appeared to stop or stall in mid-air, about 8 feet from the ground... This hovering lasted only a short time... Unlike the kestrel, which hovers in a fairly rapid determined nature, the kite's wings were slow and they appeared to bend unnaturally at the wrist, as if the primaries might almost meet in the middle..."

This record received substantial report as the first state record of this unique species. The largely white color, the black shoulder patches and the habit of hovering all suggest a White-tailed Kite. Other members felt that the description lacked sufficient precision to confirm the identification. For example, the underwing pattern as described also fits a male Northern Harrier quite closely. The black mark on the top of the wing, a crucial feature, was mentioned only in passing, leading a member to remark that "the black shoulder patches are intriguing, but the failure to elucidate their exact shape and positioning is unfortunate."

Ferruginous Hawk

(one description), vote: 2-5.

One reported on 27 March 1997 from Port Crescent State Park, Huron Co. This bird first struck the observer as a Rough-legged Hawk: it was noted to be the "same size" and to have a "noticeable wrist mark." Further examination showed a "grayish head" and pale body. The body was "lightly marked"; the legs seemed to "form a distinct V shape, and orangish color was visible." The tail was "white in color" with no bands or spots.

The most common point concerning this record, made by different Committee Members independently, was that the report does not rule out Red-tailed Hawk. This species has great variability, and a paler western form that is occasionally seen in Michigan. Another member commented on the failure to mention the large white patches on the upper wing surface that are an important feature of this species.

Peregrine Falcon

(one description),

vote: 0-7 on second round.

One reported from Ottawa Co. on 21 December 1996 from the Hudsonville Christmas Count. This individual had wings "sharply pointed; not buteo-like by comparison with a rough-leg." The "[l]eading edge of the wing was darker, with 2/3 of wing lighter." A "Peregrine helmet was observed on top of the head" and the "neck and breast were very light or white." The "flight was darting" and "bird appeared to hover at one point." The bird was slightly but not appreciably smaller than the rough-leg that was present in the area.

This report had several problematic aspects. Some members focused on the report of hovering behavior, which is frequent in several species of hawks but not reported in the Peregrine. One species that does hover occasionally is the Red-tailed Hawk, which also has a white

breast and appears to have a "helmet", though it lacks the moustachial marks of the Peregrine. Several species of hawks hold their wings more narrowly than usual when flying into a strong wind. One member summarized his opinion by stating that "all in all, the description is not adequate to rule out other more common raptors."

Snowy Plover

(one description)

vote: 3-4 on second round.

One reported on 27 October 1996 on Lake Michigan at New Buffalo, Berrien Co. The description included a "white face, very light sandy colored head with a faint 'ear patch' & very light partial breast band." Overall color was a "very light sandy"; the individual was "smaller than other plovers I have observed" including a nearby Semipalmated Plover. The "thin" bill and legs were black. In behavior, the bird "moved quickly across the beach, working the edge of the water coming towards me. It moved quickly, stopping abruptly to feed."

This record received some support, one committee member noting that the marks described separate the Snowy Plover from the similar Piping Plover and that a Semipalmated Plover was present for comparisons of size and shape. Other members were concerned that the individual described was a pale sandpiper of some sort that the observer incorrectly assumed to be a plover.

Curlew Sandpiper

(one description), vote: 1-6.

One reported on 3 October 1996 from Pte. Mouillee, Monroe Co. Described in the report is a small sandpiper that was gray above and white below, in the fashion of a Dunlin or Curlew Sandpiper in winter plumage. The rump was not seen, but the bird had a slender bill that was "fairly long and very strongly downturned from the midpoint to the tip."

In NGS (1983) the bill of a Dunlin is described as "sturdy" and "curved at the tip" while that of the Curlew Sandpiper "is evenly curved, not drooped at the tip." Since the rump color, the primary distinction in plumage between these two species in basic plumage, was not seen, the committee felt that the description was consistent with Dunlin as well as Curlew Sandpiper.

Curlew Sandpiper

(one description), vote: 3-4 on second round.

One reported on 20 October 1996 on Loon Lake in Newaygo Co. This bird, on first viewing, struck the observer as a Dunlin, but it seemed to be "more erect and with a longer neck and legs." Measurement of a plant stem next to which the bird was standing suggested that the bird might stand as much as 8" high. Observation at very close range showed a buff crown with a pale nape, and a notably scaly back pattern, the feathers being gray with chestnut brown edges. Flying away, this bird showed a white rump. Underneath this individual had a buffy breast and a white belly. The legs were black and the bill was "black, curved throughout, and about 1/2" longer than the head."

Opinion was split about this record within the Committee. The prevailing opinion was that Stilt Sandpiper was quite strongly suggested by some features of the report. One member noted that "Curlew Sandpipers do not have a very upright posture and the height of the stick was only an inch greater than the length measurement for a Curlew Sandpiper." Since most features of the description are shared by the Stilt Sandpiper, one member stated that "the description is not thorough enough to eliminate Stilt Sandpiper."

Pomarine Jaeger

(one description), vote: 0-7.

One reported on 7 September 1996 from Whitefish Point Bird Observatory,

Chippewa Co. This individual was observed through a scope with 20x magnification at an estimated distance of one-half mile. Plumage characteristics could not be observed; the individual was identified by its "sharply pointed wings which appeared wider, relative to the body, than even a Herring Gull." The committee members felt unanimously that too little detail was observed to identify this individual to species.

Pomarine Jaeger

(one description), vote: 1-6 on the second round.

One reported on 3 October 1996 at Pt. Edward, St. Clair Co. At one point the observers noted a larger bird joining 7 light phase Parasitic Jaegers circling overhead. Due to its size and dark coloration, it was at first assumed to be an immature Herring Gull. It was then noticed to be "all dark with white at the base of the primaries and a long thick tail." The bird then flew off "at an angle" making further observations difficult. It was distinguished from the Parasitic Jaegers by its larger size and the fact that its flight "seemed more labored."

The main issue for Committee Members concerning this record was whether size alone was sufficient for distinction between these two species. Members were disturbed partly by the fact that there was no discussion of just how much larger than the Parasitic Jaegers this bird was, and more generally by the brief and sketchy description of the plumage. As Kaufman (1990) remarks with respect to jaegers, "an identification based on general size impressions alone is not likely to be accepted; more solid criteria are needed."

Pomarine Jaeger

(one description)

vote: 2-5 on the second round.

One reported on 2 November 1996 from Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. A bird estimated to be 100 yards offshore was observed for three to

five minutes with 8x binoculars. The temperature was near 0°F with a wind estimated at 20 mph. It was described as "primarily dark with white patches at the base of the primaries"; its "tail streamers were short and squared off, not pointed." It "flew strongly and with little effort despite the stiff headwind." Since the "Parasitic Jaeger has pointed tail streamers" and "Long-tailed Jaeger immatures have rounded tail streamers which are much longer than the immature Pomarine's", the observer identified the bird as a Pomarine Jaeger.

Committee Members were concerned primarily with the brevity of the description and the difficult viewing conditions. No details of size and shape were provided at all, so the tail streamers were the only distinction provided between the different species. One member stated that he was "not convinced that a young Long-tailed Jaeger couldn't give the impression of squarish central tail feathers. It sounds like the observer saw a jaeger, but which one is not firmly established."

Long-tailed Jaeger

(one description), vote: 0-7.

One reported on 3 September 1996 from Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. Only the back and wings were seen well. The bird appeared "uniformly dark chocolate-brown, superficially like a Sooty Shearwater. Wings were long, thin and sharply pointed . . . [and] lacked any trace of a white primary patch." It flew with "very quick deep wingbeats." The observer eliminated Parasitic Jaeger by the lack of white wing patches and by the fact that Parasitic's flight is "more powerful and falconlike." The Committee's opinion on this record was summarized by one member who stated that "nothing in the description is diagnostic of Long-tailed Jaeger."

Long-tailed Jaeger

(two descriptions), vote: 3-3-1 on second round.

Two adults reported on 24 September 1996 from Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. These individuals when first seen gave the impression of terns, "their bodies bouncing up and down with every stroke" as they "banked from side to side in the waves against the wind." In contrast to Parasitic Jaegers the observers had recently seen, their wings "were very narrow and looked long." No white was seen above or below on the primaries. "The overall color of the upperside of the birds seemed to be a pale brown with the flight feathers being dark brown." The observers felt that the "lack of breast band and white patches on its primaries, and its narrow wings and ternlike flight" distinguished these birds from a Parasitic Jaeger.

The primary concern of some of the members of the Committee was the lack of note in the description of the most decisive field marks for Long-tailed Jaeger. This includes particularly the dark trailing edge to the secondaries. One member stated that "the wing-pattern described is wrong or at least lacking in important details which should have been seen." Other factors, while suggestive, were not thought to be conclusive: "this sighting hinges on the assessment of the flight style of these birds, which I feel is incredibly variable across all three jaeger species and may be dependent on many factors (winds, etc.)."

Mew Gull

(one description), vote: 1-6.

One reported on 27 October 1996 along Lake Michigan 10 miles south of South Haven in Van Buren Co. Watched for 20 minutes, this bird was stated to have a "thin yellow and unmarked bill", "prominent eye", "bright white tail" and "pink legs and feet." Since an adult Mew

Gull, the only age which has an unmarked yellow bill, also has yellow legs, the Committee felt that the description did not strongly indicate this species.

Sabine's Gull

(one description), vote: 2-5.

One reported on 12 April 1997 at Nayanquing Point, Bay Co. At a distance of 250 to 300 yards, a gull was noted "with wings solid black on a distinct 45 degree angle or so." The black extended to the wrist; the wing was otherwise white and the body was gray. "Conditions were bad [rain, snow and sleet] and the only look was of a bird going away." The tail was pure white; the size was estimated as that of a Ring-billed Gull.

Committee members noted that the pattern described is shared by other gulls: first winter Little Gulls and kittiwakes, and second year Ring-billed Gulls. Given that the Sabine's Gull has been recorded only once in the state in the spring (Chu 1994), and that the bird was seen in poor conditions, the documentation was regarded as inadequate to establish identification as this species.

Roseate Tern

(two descriptions), vote: 6-1 on second round.

One reported on 21 June 1997 from New Buffalo harbor, Berrien Co. The bird in question was an adult medium-sized tern showing a solid black cap. The bill was "almost entirely black, with only a small amount of dark red at the base" and thinner than the bill of nearby Forster's Terns. The upperparts were "a pale gray that showed little contrast with the underparts." Instead of showing a white rump, "there was little or no contrast between the back, rump and tail." The wings were the same pale gray as the back except that the "outer [two or three] primaries were very dark and contrasted noticeably with the outer primaries and the rest of the wing." Further "there was no dark trailing edge to the secondaries or

primaries." The underparts were very pale; a "slight tinge of pink" on the chest was noted by both observers. In flight, the wingbeats were "noticeably faster and shallower than those" of nearby Forster's Terns. The bird was observed for 15 minutes in the morning and about 60 minutes in the evening from distances as close as 15 feet. No vocalizations were heard. Both legs were banded.

This record met general approval among Committee Members. One noted "[t]he observers describe the bird well, including wing pattern, plumage coloration, and soft part features." Another stated: "convincing details... by two experienced observers."

One member, however, dissented. His argument was based first on the extreme scarcity of inland records of this species. The number of accepted records from states bordering the Great Lakes is very few. These include an adult male collected on 14 August 1916 in Lake Co., Indiana and three records from the Niagara area in New York (Gochfield et al. 1998). Robbins (1991) also notes unaccepted sight records from Wisconsin and Minnesota. Moreover, this record goes against established vagrancy patterns since "non storm derived birds from the Great Lakes and especially Lake Michigan, from the Atlantic Ocean come from Hudson Bay (Purple Sandpipers, King Eider, Common Eider, probably even Gannets) or the Gulf of Mexico (Laughing Gull, Brown Pelican), not from the northeast coast."

Second, a specimen or photograph is desirable since "experience has taught birders that even perfect descriptions of a species have been proven invalid once photographic evidence or specimen evidence has been brought to light." While based on the descriptions of the observers, "there is a good probability that [the bird] was a Roseate Tern", this member felt that the record did not

achieve "the level of certainty that should accompany the first state record of such an unprecedented bird."

Western Flycatcher

(one description), vote: 1-5-2.

One reported on 6 October 1996 from Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. The bird was described as similar to a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, but "slimmer looking with a relatively smaller head" and a "large broken eye ring" that was "off white color, not yellow." Since 1989, the species known as Western Flycatcher has been split into two species: the Pacific-slope Flycatcher and the more easterly Cordilleran Flycatcher (A.O.U. 1989). No attempt was made to distinguish between these two species, which are separable only by vocalization of males (Kaufman 1990). Committee members felt that much more information would be necessary to distinguish among these three nearly identical species.

Mountain Bluebird

(one description), vote: 2-5 on the second round.

One reported on 16 - 17 October 1996 in Bear Lake Twp., Manistee Co. The description was of a bird about the same size as an Eastern Bluebird and all blue except for a "gray-blue" belly and a "black line on wings." Committee members found this report suggestive of Mountain Bluebird, but the black line on the wings does not fit this species. This combined with the lack of specific detail in the report led most members to reject this record.

Sprague's Pipit

(one description), vote: 0-7.

One reported on 1 August 1996 from Pte. Mouillee State Game Area, Monroe Co. This bird was described as having a scaly-looking back and an unpatterned crown and nape; it was examined for about an hour, during which it was completely visible about 25% of the time.

Committee Members feel that this sighting almost certainly refers to an immature Horned Lark. Distinction between these two species is discussed in Lehman (1997).

Hooded Warbler

(one description), vote: 0-7.

One reported on 30 May 1996 from Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. The sighting was of a bird seen briefly flying "almost directly overhead... with a solid black throat and bright yellow belly." The outer tail feathers "appeared extensively white when the tail was spread" but "the face, back and upper side of the wings were not visible." Committee Members felt that this description was too incomplete to be acceptable, lacking even a mention of the bright yellow face that is the most prominent feature of the Hooded Warbler's plumage.

Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow

(one description), vote: 0-7.

One reported on 27 April 1997 near Estral Beach, Monroe Co. One seen in flight for five to seven seconds before it dropped out of sight into a grassy field. As it flew toward the observer, "the thicker finch-like bill became obvious, as did the bright orangey-buff face and upper breast." This color was thought to be a brighter color than would be shown by the LeConte's Sparrow.

Committee Members were concerned with the accuracy of an identification based on such a quick look. As one member stated, the sighting was "too short for a good view of the fieldmarks to separate this from a LeConte's." Another noted that "LeConte's often look orange-yellow to my eye." The soundest distinction between these two species is the color of the central crown: pale in the LeConte's and gray for sharp-tailed sparrows.

Hooded Oriole

(one description), vote: 2-5.

One reported on 17 May 1969 at the Huron Portland Country Club Lodge, Alpena, Alpena Co. The described individual was one of a flock of four orioles which immediately caught the eye of the observer by the "all orange head and crown." This bird additionally had a "black chin" and more black on the lower face. It was also "orangish on the lower back." At a different point, the bird is described as having a yellow crown "tending to shade into reddish towards the bill." Committee Members were concerned with the conflicting details within the description. In particular, if the bird was in fact yellow instead of orange, the description would fit a young male Orchard Oriole.

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