

Actions of the Michigan Bird Records Committee for 1999

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This is the 10th report of the Michigan Bird Records Committee, covering the Committee's actions in 1999. The members of the Committee at the beginning of 1999 were Adam Byrne (Ingham Co.), Brian Allen (Manistee Co.), Allen Chartier (Wayne Co.), Louis Dombroski (Chippewa Co.), Kip Miller (Berrien Co.), Steve Santner (Oakland Co.), and Kevin Thomas (Ingham Co.), with alternate members Chip Francke (Ottawa Co.) and Jack Reinoehl (Hillsdale Co.). During the year, Santner left the Committee, Francke became a regular member, and Philip Chu joined as an alternate member. Byrne was Chairman and Reinoehl was Secretary throughout the year.

Changes in the bylaws this year had the consequence that first state records are now accepted or rejected by the same standard as other records. This caused the reconsideration of several older records that were possible first state records, but only those that received two or fewer negative votes. Also reconsidered were all records which had been accepted retroactively after previously failing to be accepted as a first state record. As a result of the bylaw change, the practice of accepting records retroactively will no longer be necessary. Changes in the bylaws are discussed fully elsewhere in this issue. The state list increased by four during 1999, to 414, but sightings for all of these records were from 1997 or earlier.

Changes from list of January 1999:

Accidental to Casual:

- Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)
- Rufous Hummingbird (*Selaphorus rufus*)

Regular to Casual:

- Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)

New species:

- Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*)
- Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*)
- Glaucous-winged Gull (*Larus glaucescens*)

Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougalli*)

The records discussed below consist of the 70 reports for which a final decision was reached during the calendar year 1999. Of these, 38 (54%) were accepted. Names of contributors of written descriptions or 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 MBRC members abstaining from voting. MBRC bylaws require members to abstain from voting on records for which they have submitted documentation. To find information on more recent records, view previous annual reports, or to read the bylaws in full, the reader is invited to visit the MBRC web site at: <http://www.umd.umich.edu/dept/rouge_river/MBRCHome.html>

The author thanks Adam Byrne for reviewing this manuscript and offering many excellent suggestions. I'd also like to credit Adam Byrne and

Phil Chu for their very useful compilations of Michigan bird records.

Accepted Records:**Pacific/Arctic Loon (*Gavia sp.*)**

vote: 7 - 0 on the 2nd round
description: **Karl Bardon**

One in alternate plumage on 5 May 1998 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. The bird was watched in good light with a spotting scope at distances of one-eighth to one-quarter mile. Although the record was submitted as a Pacific Loon, the observer stated that "Arctic Loon is not fully precluded in this observation." Thus the Committee accepted the record as Pacific/Arctic Loon after first rejecting the record as Pacific Loon.

Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*)

vote: 6 - 1 on the 2nd round
description: **Jim Granlund**

One on 1 November 1998 at the north jetty, South Haven, Van Buren Co. This individual approached to within

50 to 75 yards of the observer. Direct comparison to Common Loons showed that this bird was small compared to that species. The back was very dark and the underparts light. Distinction from Common Loon was based on size differences and the straight line separating light and dark areas on the neck.

Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)

vote: 6 - 1
description: **Kevin Thomas**

One on 11 October 1998 at Tiscornia Beach, Berrien Co. The bird was observed at close range in calm conditions for about 15 minutes. It was distinguished from a Clark's Grebe by the black crown "which extended down onto the side of the face below the eye."

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias occidentalis*)

vote: 6 - 0
photographs: **Karl Overman, Adam Byrne**

descriptions: **Karl Overman, Adam Byrne, Allen Chartier, Alan Ryff**

One white morph present 18 July–29 October 1999 at Metro Beach Metropark, Macomb Co. The "Great White" Heron, formerly regarded as a distinct species, is now considered a form of the Great Blue Heron. In the United States, it is closely restricted to southern Florida but has been recorded in a number of southeastern states and Pennsylvania (AOU 1998). The full circumstances of this sighting are discussed in Ryff (2000).

Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*)

vote: 7 - 0
description: **Karl Overman**

One on 25 April 1998 at Nayanquing Point, Bay Co.

Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*)

vote: 6 - 0
photographs: **Adam Byrne**

One on 28 April 1999 at Erie Marsh Preserve, Monroe Co.

Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*)

vote: 7 - 0
description: **Phil Chu**

One on 1 June 1999 at Nayanquing Point State Wildlife Area, Bay Co.

Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*)

vote: 7 - 0
photographs: **Brian Johnson**
description: **Brian Johnson**

One 16 June 1999 at St. Ignace, Mackinac Co.

Ross's Goose (*Chen rossii*)

vote: 7 - 0
descriptions: **Adam Byrne, Bruce Cohen**

One on 26–31 March 1999 at the Water Quality Management Ponds on the Michigan State University campus in Ingham Co.

Ross's Goose (*Chen rossii*)

vote: 6 - 1
description: **David Slager**

One on 17 April 1999 at the Muskegon Wastewater Plant, Muskegon Co.

Brant (*Branta bernicla*)

vote: 7 - 0
descriptions: **Adam Byrne, Phil Chu, Karl Bardon**

One on 25 May 1999 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co.

King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*)

vote: 6 - 1
descriptions: **Greg Levandoski, Louis Dombroski**

One female or immature male 12–14 November 1998 at the mouth of the Tahquamenon River, Chippewa Co.

King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*)

vote: 7 - 0
descriptions: **Jim Granlund, Adam Byrne, Phil Chu, John Cassady**

One female or juvenile 15 November–28 December 1998 at Pier Road, Lakeside, Berrien Co. and nearby.

King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*)

vote: 7 - 0
descriptions: **Eugene Kenaga, Gerald J. Ziarno, Ron Annelin, Adam Byrne**
photographs: **Joe Soehnel**

One young male on 2 January 1999 at the Karn Plant, Bay City, Bay Co.

Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)

vote: 6 - 1
description: **Jeff Schultz**

One immature on 5 September 1997 at Lake Erie Metropark, Wayne Co. The plumage was generally dark; the tail showed "3–4 thin whitish lines." With long pointed wings the bird first appeared to be a Peregrine Falcon

until it “kited before doing a semi-barrel roll” in order to catch a dragonfly which it ate while soaring.

Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*)

vote: 6 - 1

description: **Jeff Schultz**

One gray morph adult on 9 November 1997 at 9:54 AM. at Pointe Mouillee Headquarters, Wayne Co. The bird was watched chasing a Mallard and then afterwards soared on flat wings until it gained sufficient altitude to sail off to the south. The head was pale and the mustache mark not too distinct. The wings were very long and broad with slightly rounded tips. Pale flight feathers contrasted with darker underwing coverts and dark wingtips. The dorsal surface was quite uniform, as opposed to the two-toned appearance of a Northern Goshawk, and the underparts were pale.

One member did not feel that the report eliminated the Northern Goshawk noting that “[the description of the wings] could describe Northern Goshawk wings under certain circumstances.” The more general feeling was summarized by another member who stated: “The subtle plumage details provided are consistent with Gyr Falcon and the wing shape described matches my general impression for this bird, as well.” There was some speculation as to whether this bird was the same individual as a separately-described bird seen at 10:37 AM on this date. This second sighting was rejected by the Committee. Details are below.

Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*)

vote: 7 - 0

description: **Allen Chartier**

One in alternate plumage on 9 August 1976 at Sterling State Park, Monroe Co. This individual was observed over a 45-minute period from distances as close as 30 yards. The bird was between Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs in size. The plumage was black below and dark with small white spots above; there was an incomplete white eyering. The legs were dusky orange-red; the bill was black with the basal third a dull reddish color.

The full circumstances of this sighting are discussed in Chartier (2000). This is the first accepted record for Michigan and 1 of 3 for the eastern Great Lakes. The other 2, from Ontario and Ohio, are also adults in early fall.

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)

vote: 6 - 1

description: **Curt Powell**

One male in basic plumage on 12 July 1998 at Pointe Mouillee, Monroe Co. This is the 4th accepted record of this species for 1998. Three of these were at Pointe Mouillee.

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)

vote: 6 - 1

description: **Russ Schipper**

One male in alternate plumage on 18 May 1999 in Kalamazoo Co. This bird had a black ruff with a white eyering and a white ring around the bill.

Pomarine Jaeger

(*Stercorarius pomarinus*)

vote: 5 - 2 on the 2nd round

description: **Karl Bardon**

One on 2 September 1998 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. This was a large dark jaeger seen in pursuit of a Ring-billed Gull and appearing “fully 10-15%

larger” than the gull. The distance of the bird was somewhat in excess of 100 yards at closest approach. No tail projection was detected. The identification was based largely on the size comparison with the Ring-billed Gull; the observer also felt that the combination of “a mostly uniform dark head and conspicuous whitish barring on the rump and undertail” strongly suggests a Pomarine Jaeger. There was some concern within the committee about accepting the record based on a size judgement. One member stated that “there is really no diagnostic plumage character noted in the description, so evaluating this record on subjective characters of size, shape, and flight style could be risky.”

Pomarine Jaeger

(*Stercorarius pomarinus*)

vote: 7 - 0

description: **Louis Dombroski**

One on 7 September 1998 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. The body of this individual was “slightly shorter and slimmer than a Herring Gull in direct comparison.” The bird was largely dark with a pale belly. The central tail feathers were “noticeably longer (perhaps 1 to 1.5 in.) than the rest of the tail” and were “blunt-ended or slightly rounded.”

Pomarine Jaeger

(*Stercorarius pomarinus*)

vote: 6 - 1

description: **Adam Byrne**

One, between juvenile and second winter in age, on 28 October 1998 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. The bird was slightly shorter than and equal in body mass to the Ring-billed Gulls which it was chasing. The back head and upper

breast were dark, and the belly was pale. Most importantly, the central retrices were longer than the others by 1 to 1.5 in. and rounded. Immature Long-tailed Jaeger may also show a similar extension of the central retrices, but this species is substantially smaller than a Ring-billed Gull. The tail extension of an immature Parasitic Jaeger is always pointed to some degree rather than rounded.

Long-tailed Jaeger

(*Stercorarius longicaudus*)

vote: 7 - 0

descriptions: **Karl Bardon, Greg Levandoski**

One subadult on 14 September 1998 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. This bird at one point approached the observers to a distance estimated at 50 feet. Identification was aided by the central retrices which were “at least as long as the tail, and sharply pointed.” The upper parts were carefully studied and showed a “very strong (but thin) secondary bar, which contrasted noticeably with the paler coverts.”

California Gull (*Larus californicus*)

vote: 7 - 0

description: **Doug McWhirter**

One adult bird in near-breeding plumage on 7 April 1999 at Charles Mears State Park in Oceana Co. The bird, observed at a minimum distance of about 100 yards, differed from the nearby Herring and Ring-billed Gulls in size and coloration. The mantle in particular was “‘two shades’ deeper gray, definitely not a dark gray like a Lesser Black-backed Gull.” The legs were “somewhat dull yellow with gray overtones,” appearing duller than the legs of the Ring-billed Gulls that were present. The eye was discernibly

darker than that of neighboring birds. There were 8 accepted records of this species during the 1990s in Michigan.

Slaty-backed Gull
(*Larus glaucescens*)

vote: 6 - 1

photographs: **Tom Heatley**

One photographed on 29 November 1981 at the Sault Ste. Marie dump in Chippewa Co. The Committee received copies of 3 photos. One shows the bird standing, 1 is of the bird in flight from below, and the last shows the bird just taking flight showing the upper surface of the wing. The first photo shows an adult dark-backed gull appearing similar in size to nearby Herring Gulls. The head and chest are speckled grayish with a very dark area around the eye. The second photo shows the primaries from beneath. This shows what Grant (1986) calls the “distinctive line of white spots” across the wing tip. The final photo shows the wing pattern from above; the outer few primaries are darker than the rest of the wing.

Although accepted on the first vote, this record was the source of much discussion among Committee members. One member had reservations on the identification, noting that the wing pattern in the photos may not be conclusive. He observed that “[T]here is an interesting photo of a bird found sick on the east coast of the U.S. which has this pattern on the upper and under wing. This individual has been identified as a Great Black-backed x Herring Gull hybrid. The extent of this marking on the bird in the photocopies is not as bold as some seen in Japan, but this feature, as previously mentioned, is extremely variable.”

The prevailing view was stated as follows. “What we are presented with is a dark-mantled gull that appears similar in size to Herring Gulls and possesses the proper wingtip patterning for the species claimed. While the prospect of hybrid origin can always be brought up when dealing with gulls, in this case, we have an adult bird to review . . . [providing] a standard repertoire of field marks to discuss. . . . My feelings are to vote for a record if it fits the ‘classic’ description of the species claimed, which appears to be the case for this record.”

Glaucous-winged Gull
(*Larus glaucescens*)

vote: 5 - 0 on the 2nd round

descriptions: **Phil Chu,**
Adam Byrne

expert commentaries: **Jon Dunn,**
Guy McCaskie

One in second-basic plumage on 29 December 1997 at the Citizens Disposal Landfill in Genesee Co. The bird was viewed at distances estimated at 300 to 400 yards with 20 to 40 power scopes. It was seen briefly in flight once from about 150 yards.

Byrne relates that “Once the bird started to move about, it became obvious that we were not dealing with a typical ‘white-winged’ gull.” The bird appeared a “relatively uniform brown-gray” with whiter head and neck. Chu thought the overall color matched the Herring Gulls that were present, and Byrne thought that the bird in question was “duskier than the Herring Gulls.” In flight “the underwing was completely translucent and the outermost two or three primaries were only slightly darker gray than the innermost primaries.” In Chu’s words, the

most important feature of the plumage was that “the tail, tertials and outer primaries were THE SAME COLOR AS, NOT DARKER OR LIGHTER THAN, the general color of the upperparts and underwing coverts.” (Emphasis in the original.) The bill was wholly dark and the legs were pinkish. The primary projection was short.

The identification of immature-plumaged gulls, with their wide array of plumages, is notably complex and is complicated for large gulls by the possibility of hybrids of different sorts. In his commentary, McCaskie considers the possibilities of Glaucous x Herring, Glaucous-winged x Herring and Glaucous-winged x Western. The entirely black bill and the short primary extension are the features most often cited in leading McCaskie to assert that the bird is “a typical second-winter Glaucous-winged Gull, and appears wrong for a hybrid.” Dunn states in his comments that “there is nothing particularly in the description that indicates that the bird isn’t a Glaucous-winged.” He observed that he was “somewhat relieved not to be on your Committee.”

As Dunn anticipated, members of the Committee found this record difficult. A concern of several members was the substantial distance at which the bird was observed. Another concern was a few slight differences in the 2 accounts. In the first round, a member observed that “for a bird with so many similar possibilities, particularly at this age . . . a closer, more scrupulous description is needed.” A further issue raised concerning this record at a Committee meeting was whether

100% certainty in judgment was attainable with so many possibilities, including some hybrids, which are notoriously variable.

A Glaucous-winged Gull would have been unthinkable in the state not too long ago. When the AOU Checklist was published in 1983, the only records east of Idaho and Arizona were single records in Oklahoma and Churchill, Manitoba. In contrast, this was 1 of 4 records in the midwest during the winter of 1997–1998. The other 3 were seen in Minnesota; all were discovered between 1 December and 18 December (Granlund 1998).

Sabine’s Gull (*Xema sabini*)

vote: 7 - 0

descriptions: **Steve Minard,**
Frank Schermers

One juvenile on 19–21 September 1998 at the Muskegon Wastewater System, Muskegon Co.

Sabine’s Gull (*Xema sabini*)

vote: 7 - 0

description: **Karl Bardon**

One adult on 21 September 1998 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co.

Sabine’s Gull (*Xema sabini*)

vote: 7 - 0

descriptions: **Karl Bardon, Grag Levandoski, Adam Byrne**

One juvenile present during 6–12 October 1998 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co.

Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougalli*)

vote: 7 - 0

descriptions: **Kip Miller,**
Jim Granlund

One reported on 21 June 1997 from New Buffalo harbor in 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 is the first accepted record of this species for Michigan and one of the few records for the Great Lakes region.

Ancient Murrelet
(*Synthliboramphus antiquus*)
vote: 7 - 0 on the 2nd round
description: **Tim Smart**

One on 15 November 1998 at Marina Point in Lake Erie Metropark, Wayne Co. The report describes a “small black and white bird” having a “short neck” and a “small pale bill.” The bird was observed swimming and diving from a distance of 40 yards. A terrific wind storm a few days earlier had moved many western birds east, most notably Franklin’s Gulls. This is the third record for Michigan.

Rufous Hummingbird
(*Selaphorus rufus*)
vote: 7 - 0
description: **Mickey and Robert Strong**
photograph: **Robert Strong**

One adult male on 16 August 1999 at Lachine in Alpena Co.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
(*Tyrannus forficatus*)
vote: 7 - 0
description: **Mike Petrucha**

One on 16 July 1998 in Missaukee Co. This is the third accepted record of 1998. There were 4 accepted records for 1996, but none in 1997.

Northern Wheatear
(*Oenathe oenathe*)
vote: 6 - 0 on the 2nd round
description and photograph:
Bill Grigg

One on 28 August 1997 at Rogers City, Presque Isle Co. The bird was seen in a rocky area along the Lake Huron shoreline. The body was a uniform rich brown color and the typical rump patch was observed. The photograph was the primary evidence in accepting this record.

Western Tanager
(*Piranga ludoviciana*)
vote: 7 - 0
photographs: **Belinda Collins**

One present 23 November–6 December 1998 in Fayette, Delta Co.

Nelson’s Sharp-tailed Sparrow
(*Ammodramus nelsoni*)
vote: 6 - 0 on the 2nd round
description: **Brian Allen**

One adult on 27 September 1998 at Arcadia Marsh in Manistee Co. The bird was found, via the aid of a kayak, hiding in a sedge marsh. It showed a “wide orange supercilium extending

from the base of the bill to the side of the neck which was gray.” The nape was also gray. The back was dark brown and showed “two or three well-defined white streaks.” The other sparrows showing a bold orange supercilium are LeConte’s Sparrow, which has a reddish, not a gray nape, and Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow, which has an indistinctly streaked back.

Smith’s Longspur
(*Calcarius pictus*)
vote: 6 - 1
description: **L. C. Binford**

One on 18 September 1998 at Copper

Harbor, Keweenaw Co. The bird was described as “much plainer than Lapland but same size and shape.” The face retained a trace of the characteristic Smith’s Longspur pattern, showing a brown cheek patch enclosing a light buff postocular spot and encircled by a thin very pale ring.

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*)
vote: 7 - 0
photographs: **Irene Adams**

One female present 9–14 April 1999 at St. Joseph, Berrien Co. This is the second Michigan record to have been accepted.

Records Not Accepted:
Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*)
vote: 3 - 4
1 description

One reported on 20 December 1998 at St. Joseph, Berrien Co. The bird was observed at a distance of 100 yards. The bird appeared small and the head round in comparison to Common Loons, which were present about 200 yards away. The bill was held in uptilted fashion. The white color on the throat “extended onto the cheek” and the white on the neck was “not marked by indentation as on [a] Common Loon.” The upperparts were described as “dark but not black.”

Committee members felt that the documentation provided did not match a Red-throated Loon very well. For example, the back color of that species is lightest of any loon. One member commented that “[t]his description does not eliminate Arctic/Pacific Loon from consideration. In fact, the sketch provided actually approximates the plumage of a winter Pacific Loon.”

Magnificent Frigatebird
(*Fregata magnificens*)
vote: 0 - 7
1 description

One female reported on 12 October 1998, just north of Ludington in Mason Co. The bird was reported to be flying north about 75 yards offshore and “identification would have been easy with the naked eye.” This submission to the Committee failed to get any votes, since the account did not describe the appearance of the bird under observation.

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)
vote: 2 - 5
1 description

One reported on 8 April 1972 in Berrien Co. The bird was observed “in company with two Turkey Vultures & an Osprey.” It was a “large dark bird with large white patches on . . . wings,” with a “small dark head” and “no white in the tail.”

Some members felt that, given the experience of the observer, the record was acceptable in spite of the brevity of the description. The greatest

concern of Committee members was that the description included no mention of the size of the bird, in spite of the opportunity for direct comparison. A dark-phase Rough-legged Hawk, a member noted, might come very close to matching the description provided.

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)

vote: 2 - 5

1 description

One reported on 20 May 1974 in Leelanau Co. This individual was observed by several people soaring with a Turkey Vulture. This bird differed from the Turkey Vulture “by having a patch of white on the tip of the wings and a tail much shorter than a Turkey Vulture.”

The great brevity of this report concerned most members of the Committee. Members suggested that the description fails to eliminate the possibility of a Golden Eagle or a dark-phase Rough-legged hawk.

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)

vote: 3 - 4

1 description

One reported on 7 July 1984 three miles south of Whitefish Point in Chippewa Co. The bird was observed overhead and was “not very far up.” The report describes a “large, black, vulture-like bird” that was “very dark” except for “tip[s] of outer primaries under [the] wings, which were white.” A short tail gave the bird a “slightly compressed appearance” and the “wings had only a slight dihedral.” As it “circled lazily” over the road, it “flapped regularly.”

This record received significant support. One member stated that the report, though sketchy, “still

provide[s] the necessary information to substantiate the record.” Other members still thought that the report lacked enough detail and 1 noted that the location of the white in the wings did not match what is observed in this vulture.

Greater White-fronted Goose

(*Anser albifrons*)

vote: 0 - 7

1 description

One of the Greenland race reported on 11 April 1987 at Fish Point, Tuscola Co. This goose showed a bill that was “distinctly yellow-orange rather than pink” and was “relatively dark, showing reduced contrast between neck and head.”

This previously accepted record was reconsidered due to the observations of Kaufman (1994). In this article Kaufman stated that “until definite field marks are established, I would recommend that subspecific names not be applied to sight records of Greater White-fronted Geese in north-eastern North America.” In view of this, the Committee decided that the identification of this individual to subspecies could no longer be accepted.

Ross’s Goose (*Chen rossii*)

vote: 2 - 5 on the 2nd round

1 description

One reported on 13 February 1999 at Marshville, St. Clair Co. This was a small white goose that was observed in the company of Canada Geese from a distance as close as 75 feet. It had a “short stubby bill” with a “very small grin patch.”

The primary concern with this sighting was the presence of the grin patch which should not be present on Ross’s

Goose. The fact that a grin patch was seen suggests that the bird could have been a hybrid of Ross’s Goose and Snow Goose. One member expressed his concern noting that “the location where this was reported is notorious for having domesticated and hybrid waterfowl.”

Brant (*Branta bernicla*)

vote: 1 - 6

1 description

One reported 9–14 November 1998 in Escanaba, Delta Co. The bird was observed from close distance grazing with a flock of 40 Canada Geese. The report said only that the bird looked “like the picture in Peterson” with no further description of the bird’s appearance.

Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*)

vote: 1 - 6

1 specimen

One immature female collected on 25 October 1974 at Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge, Saginaw Co. The specimen was placed in the collection of Central Michigan University. See Wolinski and Fauver (1976) for a photograph of the 1974 specimen and further details

The identity of the bird was not in question. Instead, Committee members felt that the origin of the record was uncertain. The issue of origin of Barnacle Goose sightings is discussed in Ryff (1984). Though genuine vagrancy to North America has been proven by banding returns (ABA 1996), the coastal wintering habitat of the species (Snow and Perrins 1998) makes inland records in North America particularly suspect.

King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*)

vote: 2 - 5

1 description

One female reported on 2 January 1999 near Petoskey in Emmet Co. The bird was described as a stocky brown duck “about the size of a Mallard;” it showed a “thick beak with feathering on top of beak about same distance toward tip as feathering on side of beak.” There was also an “appearance of hood on back of head and down nape.” The bird was observed diving frequently “with wing flips.”

The lack of detail about the plumage concerned the Committee. While some members did feel the bird was an eider, another stated “It would be nice to know that female Canvasback was eliminated from consideration.”

White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*)

vote: 0 - 7

1 description

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. The bird’s size was thought to be “similar to a Red-tailed Hawk” but the shape was “more streamlined and aerodynamic.” It was described as a largely white raptor. The body was pale underneath. The underside of the wings showed a “medium gray towards the wingtips, which gave way to black.” The tail appeared pale and no bands or markings were detected; the feet were yellow, and bill and eyepatch were dark. The bird was seen flying back and forth over a corn field at one time briefly stalling in its flight. Committee members felt that the report did not adequately eliminate a Northern Harrier and that in fact that species was indicated by the estimated size.

White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*)

vote: 3 - 4

1 description

One reported on 15 May 1999 at the University of Michigan-Dearborn in Wayne Co. This was described as a falcon-shaped bird that was 200 feet high when noticed and gaining altitude by soaring with intermittent flapping. The underparts were very light. The secondaries were lighter than the primaries and dark wrist marks were observed. The size was about the same as a Broad-winged Hawk and the wingspread was slightly larger than for that species. The underside of the tail appeared pure white. The bird was once observed "banking and alternately flapping in a nighthawk-like flight as if feeding on the wing."

The feeling of many members was summarized by 1 who stated that "[t]here are many important field marks of a White-tailed Kite in the description but there are also many omissions . . ." A particular concern was the failure to observe the large dark mark on the upper wing when the bird banked. Another member noted that the aerial feeding behavior described is regularly observed in gulls but would be most unusual for this kite.

Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)

vote: 1 - 6 on the 2nd round

1 description

One reported on 14 May 1998 at Estral Beach, Monroe Co. This individual was observed to have a pale, unmarked head; the breast and belly were "uniformly gray with no noticeable marks." The underwings were also uniform with no barring; the secondaries "looked really pale when

backlit." The tail was grayish with thin white bands. The bird was slender with "fairly long and pointed wings;" the tail was long and square cut towards the end. While observed, the bird was primarily soaring in "a lazy circle" before it moved off to the north.

The primary concern was that the plumage reported does not match any known plumage of the kite. For example, the pale head is seen in adults only, but the adult kite has an unmarked black tail. Secondly, only an adult Mississippi Kite has pale secondaries and these are not visible from below. One member observed that "from below, the secondaries are often the darkest part of the wing." The lack of any mark on the face was also cited as a problem by Committee members.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)

vote: 3 - 4

1 description

One reported in Isabella Co. on 20 December 1998. The bird was observed in flight from a moving car. The description states that the bird was blue-gray hawk the size of a Blue Jay and the tail was "long with 3-4 black bars." The wings "tapered to a point, long" and the bird had a streamlined appearance. The underparts were not seen.

Although this sighting received some support, several members felt that a Sharp-shinned Hawk was not adequately ruled out. The long tapered wings suggest a falcon, but the Merlin has narrow white stripes on its tail while the male Sharp-shinned Hawk has black bars on a gray tail.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)

vote: 2 - 5

1 description

One reported on 26 December 1998 from Kalamazoo Co. This individual was described as kestrel-sized with a "very dark back and heavy, dark streaking on [a] creamy breast." The bird had no facial pattern and a barred tail. This report was rejected since the description does not distinguish between a Merlin and a small *Accipiter*.

Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*)

vote: 3 - 4

1 description

One gray-morph immature reported on 9 November 1997 at 10:37 AM at Lake Erie Metropark in Wayne Co. This bird flew overhead at a height of 20-30 yards against a cloudy sky. The "long tapered" wings showed "dark wing tips" and "pale flight feathers." The tail was wide with a "slight taper" and "many narrow bands." The possibility of goshawk was thought to have been eliminated by the lack of white eyeline and barring on wings and tail. Peregrine was eliminated by the lack of a heavy mustache, and Prairie Falcon by lack of dark axillaries.

The description provided was "too brief" to satisfy Committee members. One pointed out that while no large mustache was seen, "no details of face pattern were provided, making me question how well the head was actually seen." This record should be compared with an accepted record of this species on the same date at the same location in the previous section.

Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*)

vote: 0 - 7 on the 2nd round

2 descriptions

One reported on 10 September 1989 from Raspberry Island in Isle Royale National Park in Keweenaw Co. The bird was seen overhead in a group of 15 Sandhill Cranes. It stood out from these by the fact that it was "completely white with black primaries."

To explain the difficulty with this record, we quote the comments of a Committee member at length. "I have seen countless Sandhill Cranes in migration through Michigan, and it is not uncommon to see very pale individuals mixed into large flocks. In fact, I have even been asked in the field why a specific individual wasn't a Whooping Crane. These pale birds have darker primaries, replicating the general pattern of a Whooping Crane. While none of the birds have been purely white, they sure appear white in bright lighting, etc." Such a pale bird is identifiable as a Sandhill Crane because Whooping Cranes are distinctly larger, with a wingspread of 87", about 20% larger than the 73" of a Sandhill Crane (NGS 1983). Failure to mention any size difference convinced the Committee that the observed bird could well have been a pale Sandhill Crane.

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)

vote: 2 - 5 on the 2nd round

1 description

One reported on 21 August 1998 at Pointe Mouillee, Monroe Co. This bird was smaller than a Lesser Yellowlegs, but similar in shape. The bill was longer than the head with a slight droop to the tip. The bird was bright buffy above and "the back and scapular feathers had bright pale edges." There was a bright buffy wash across the breast which extended "down to but not over the belly" and

this area was without visible streaks. The belly and undertail coverts were white.

This record was rejected primarily based on the experience of a member of the Committee who the next day observed what was possibly the same individual. He noted that “[w]hile looking for this Ruff the following day, an oddly plumaged Pectoral was noticed by some observers (and even initially thought to be the Ruff). It had a slightly more upright posture than other Pectorals, lacked any noticeable streaking on the breast, but was otherwise a Pectoral Sandpiper. The lack of streaking on the breast was puzzling, I don’t believe I have ever seen such a washed out Pectoral prior to this.” The Committee agreed that the description did not rule out an anomalous Pectoral Sandpiper.

Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*)

vote: 1 - 6
1 description

One reported on 22 December 1996 at St. Joseph in Berrien Co. The description records the bird as “jaeger, sp.” instead of a Pomarine Jaeger. This record was presented to the Committee as a Pomarine Jaeger at the request of the observer in order to repudiate an appearance of this sighting in print (LeBaron 1997) as a Pomarine Jaeger.

The bird was similar to a gull in shape and “entirely blackish except for a very prominent whitish flash on the undersurface of the primaries.” Although the observer thought that shape and flight style suggested a Pomarine Jaeger, he stated that “I am not claiming this as a Pomarine Jaeger because I am not convinced that shape and flight style are infallible.”

Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)

vote: 1 - 5 on the 2nd round
1 description

One reported on 27 August 1994 at Pointe Mouillee, Monroe Co. The observer had a “20–30 second look” at the bird, primarily as it was flying away. The three or four “outmost primaries were black, the rest of the underwing was gray,” and it showed “the remains of a black hood which came midway down to the back of the neck.” There was no tail band. The pattern on the upperparts were poorly seen and bill and leg color could not be determined.

The main concern with this record, was that the description of the underwing pattern is not accurate. The outer 2 primaries of this gull are white and the remaining primaries dark. This inaccuracy combined with the inadequate look at the bird led most members to vote against this record, even though few other gulls show dark undersides of the wing.

California Gull (*Larus californicus*)

vote: 2 - 4 on 2nd round
1 description

One second-basic plumage bird reported on 4 November 1998 in Charlevoix Co. The bird was first picked out by its small size compared to the numerous Herring Gulls. It was “100–300 yards” from the observer and was examined under an overcast sky. The primary plumage feature in this individual that suggested an identity of California Gull were the “smooth even gray back and scapulars” that were darker than all Herring Gulls present. The eye appeared dark and the pale eye of nearby Herring Gulls was discernible. The legs

appeared “grayish and colorless compared to the pink legs of adjacent Herring Gulls.”

As the observer pointed out in his report, the main problem with this sighting is the great variability of Herring Gulls. This variability extends to all traits noted above that suggest a California Gull. He suggested that the combination of so many different traits suggestive of California Gull on a Herring Gull is significantly less likely than the observation of a California Gull. Several Committee members felt however that certainty of identification was not established.

Western Gull (*Larus occidentalis*)

vote: 1 - 5
1 description and photographs

A single individual reported on 30 November 1997 from Port Huron, St. Clair Co. The bird was a dark-backed, pink-legged gull, photographed standing next to a Great Black-backed Gull; the latter gull was estimated to be 4 to 5 in. larger than the bird in question. The head was white except for “very fine streaking” on the nape and some dark around the eye. The bill had a large dark smudge near the end of the lower mandible.

Committee members did not consider the evidence conclusive for Western Gull. An alternate identification which was considered possible by Committee members was a Lesser Black-backed Gull in somewhat anomalous plumage. One member suggested, after examining the slides, that the “the proportions of the head, bill, and the very long-winged look seem more proper for Lesser Black-backed than for Western Gull.” A particular source of confusion according to Grant (1986) would be the

fourth-winter Lesser Black-backed Gull. Some of these “have blackish to a variable extent on the bill.” In addition “a few (as high as 3% in some samples) have adult plumage but fleshy or greyish legs.”

Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*)

vote: 1 - 6 on the 2nd round
1 description

One seen in flight on 29 May 1998 at Pt. LaBarbe, Mackinac Co. The bird was described as having “black legs” and a “plain yellow beak.” The wing tips were black and “sharply delineated with no white” and the bird was “[q]uite white underneath.” Otherwise the bird was “much like a Ring-billed Gull.”

One member stated his discomfort with this record as follows: “I have seen many Ring-billed Gulls called kittiwakes at close range, and am not convinced that this record is any different. Determining leg color on flying gulls is not easy (but is possible, rarely) and the effects of shadowing are hard to determine.” Second-summer Ring-billed Gulls, in particular, resemble an adult gull but often show no white at all in the wing tips, and observers should be very familiar with this form before identifying a gull as a kittiwake. As of 1993, there were only 3 known records of kittiwakes in spring in Michigan (McPeck and Adams 1994).

Ivory Gull (*Pagophila eburnea*)

vote: 3 - 4
1 description

One immature reported on 24 January 1949 in the Trenton Channel, Wayne Co. The description reports a white-winged gull with black legs that was “smaller than the [nearby] Ring-bills,

more like a pigeon.” In addition, “dusky spots in the body and wings were very noticeable.”

Committee members were concerned with the second-hand nature of this record. There was no direct communication with any observer until 2 months after the sighting. Further, due to the vague nature of the report, some members felt that the possibility that the bird was a Rock Dove was not fully eliminated.

Sage Thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*)

vote: 3 - 4

1 description

One reported on 8 April 1999 near Marshall in Eaton Co. The bird was reported to be the size of a Red-winged Blackbird and be a dark brownish-gray color overall with a “plain back, faintly streaked head, boldly streaked breast, white throat [and] slightly decurved bill.” Additionally it showed “faint wing-bars, central tail feathers dark, outer tail feathers with white spots [and] tail rounded.”

Some committee members felt the report did suggest a Sage Thrasher. One member noted that he “[could not] rule out Sage Thrasher from this brief description” but he could not support the record “without more details.” Committee members suggested that more information was needed concerning the bill length and the distribution of white on the tail.

Hermit Warbler (*Dendroica occidentalis*)

vote: 2 - 5

1 description

One reported on 19 May 1994 from Nichol’s Arboretum in Ann Arbor,

Washtenaw Co. The bird was observed actively feeding with other warblers for 2 minutes and was similar in size and behavior. During this time, only the head and upper body of the bird were visible. The face was “clear, bright, lime-green tinged yellow” and showed no eye ring or other marks. The crown and nape were black and the throat was also black. The back was dark with a wing bar visible and the breast was white.

Concerns with this record included first the pattern of black on the head. The drawing shows the black of the throat connecting with the black on the crown, matching the pattern of a Hooded Warbler. This pattern is not observed in the Hermit Warbler. There was also concern about what the face color actually was, since it is noted as yellow in the drawing but described as lime-green in the written description. Based primarily on these concerns, Committee members did not feel confident that the bird was a Hermit Warbler. One stated the opinion that “[w]hile intriguing, the report does not rule out a hybrid Townsend’s x Hermit Warbler. In fact, a couple of the features described are more suggestive of a hybrid than a pure Hermit Warbler.”

Kirtland’s Warbler (*Dendroica kirtlandii*)

vote: 2 - 5 on the 2nd round

1 description

One reported on 13 June 1998 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Chippewa Co. From a distance of 15 feet, the bird showed a “yellow front and dark blue-gray back” along with “dark streaks along the sides.” Also noted was a broken eye-ring and a white rump.

The general consensus among members of the Committee was that the observers could have been describing a female Magnolia Warbler. The Kirtland’s Warbler would be distinguished from a female Magnolia Warbler by its uniformly dark gray streaked back and larger size.

Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*)

vote: 1 - 6

1 description

One reported on 22 December 1997 in Ann Arbor, Washtenaw Co. This individual was described as a “small, small-headed, thin-billed sparrow” with a “fairly bright narrow white or whitish eyestripe” and no red on the crown. It was seen for two or three seconds, about 20–25 feet away. The observer also stated that he “had the impression of a central spot but was inclined to discount it.”

Committee members noted that the narrow eyestripe and lack of red in the crown are consistent with Chipping Sparrow. In rejecting this record, members of the Committee were most concerned with the failure to describe more features that separate the Chipping Sparrow from the American Tree Sparrow, which is much more common in winter. These include important differences in bill color and face pattern. Other objections were the quite brief look, the impression of a central breast spot, and the failure to distinguish between Chipping Sparrow and other members of the genus, especially Clay-colored Sparrow.

Blue Grosbeak (*Cyanocompsa cyanooides*)

vote: 3 - 3

1 description

One reported on 17 May 1999 from Lost Nation SGA, Hillsdale Co. The bird was heard singing about 5 times, but no call notes were heard and the bird was never glimpsed. The song was described as “loud, lengthy [and] warbled.” Moreover “[t]he latter part of the song, about the final one-third or one-quarter, took on a burry quality like a Scarlet Tanager but not as strongly burry as that species.” The observer did not recognize the song with certainty at the time, but when a recording of a Blue Grosbeak was consulted later that day the observer felt that it “very precisely matched what I had heard in the field just an hour ago.”

The concern of the committee was expressed by a member who stated that “evaluating a record based on a recording is much easier than evaluating a description of a vocalization, which is what we have here.” It was also felt problematical that the song was not identified with certainty in the field.

Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)

vote: 2 - 5 on the 2nd round

1 description

One reported on 19 April 1992 at South Haven, Van Buren Co. This bird, which appeared at a feeder, was described to be “the size of a small slender crow.” It “looked like a Common Grackle” with a “larger, longer tail” and had the “same iridescent plumage” as a grackle. The voice was “unbelievable” and it displayed “several different vocal variations.”

Committee members generally felt that much critical detail was missing

from this description. There was concern about how the size of the bird was determined. Though members agreed that the call of the Great-tailed Grackle is indeed bizarre, the description provided was felt to be too vague. One noted in sum that “[t]here is not enough detail here to confidently identify this as anything other than a grackle.”

Great-tailed/Boat-tailed Grackle
(*Quiscalus* sp.)

vote: 3 - 4

1 description

One thought to be an adult female reported on 8 May 1999 in Manistee Co. The report was produced by a second party, based on a discussion with the observer 2 hours after the sighting. This bird was observed at a backyard feeder over a 30 minute period. It was first noticed from its “extremely long tail” which, compared to the body length, was “more like a pheasant than any song/feeder bird” the observer had ever seen.” The bird was “much larger than any Common Grackles around the feeder that day.” The overall color

was brown or grayish brown and the observer saw “no distinct markings . . . no wing bars, eye rings, dark caps [or] markings on the tail” during the observation period.

Aside from concern about the second-hand nature of the report, members noted that a some details above do not match either species of large grackles. First, females of these species have tails proportioned similar to those of a Common Grackle, thus the comparison with a pheasant did not seem appropriate. Second, females of the larger grackles are not completely unpatterned as in the description, but show a light chest and a pale eyeline.

European Goldfinch
(*Carduelis carduelis*)

vote: 0 - 6

description and photographs

One reported in Marquette, Marquette Co. on 24 March 1999. The identity of this individual was not an issue. This species has not been recorded in North America except from the release of captive individuals, which are regularly reported (AOU 1998).

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