

Minutes of the Michigan Bird Records Committee Meeting  
16 August 2024  
Okemos, Michigan

**Members present:** Scott Terry, Chairperson; Brendan Klick; Geoff Malosh; Brad Murphy; Alec Olivier; David Pavlik; Andrew Simon.

**Members absent:** Corey Husic; Matt Hysell.

The meeting was called to order by Terry at 17:00 EDT.

**Discussion and approval of Fall 2023 Meeting Minutes**

Terry asked for any comments or corrections to the Fall 2023 meeting minutes. There were none. Simon moved to accept. Klick seconded. Minutes were approved unanimously.

**Resubmissions**

**Round 198:**

**2023-6050-01 Lark Bunting (5-2)**

Dissenters from the first round of voting were concerned about the distance and lighting, both of which were adverse, and one member pointed out that the description of the call was not entirely accurate. Others argued that the description of the bird was basically correct and that the species is distinct enough, and the observer experienced enough, that the record was probably acceptable, but marginal. Most were in general agreement that they were not entirely convinced one way or the other, either in the first round of voting or in discussion.

**Round 202:**

**1988-1410-01 Cinnamon Teal (4-3)**

All agreed that the fact that notes from 1988 exist (rather than a report written from memory decades later) was a plus for this record. Discussion came down to the exact description of the face and upperparts, which for some was vague enough to leave doubt about the possibility of a hybrid teal. The face was described as “fairly” uniform in color, and the back was described merely as “dark”. One member also commented that the bill was not described as compared to Blue-winged. Another member pointed out that the description was such that the observer was in a good position to note potential hybrid features (the range was 200 yards, not terribly far), and did not mention any hybrid features in his written notes.

**2023-6121-02 Cave Swallow (5-2)**

Those in favor of this record conceded that the photos are not entirely conclusive of Cave vs. juvenile Cliff, but that the written details ironed out these concerns, as well as the fact

that the bird was seen multiple times and that the observers specifically looked for certain features during the subsequent encounters. Those with hesitation were concerned that the forehead color is not actually described, despite the bird apparently being studied quite well. There was some discussion as to whether the mention of the bird being “dark-capped” in the written notes was sufficient to judge the forehead color, but members ultimately interpreted that phrasing differently.

**Round 203:**

**1995-4010-02 “Eastern” American Three-toed Woodpecker (5-2)**

One member cited David Sibley who states that “Eastern” and “Western” are not reliably distinguished in the field and instead are best considered a large single “Taiga” group; therefore to identify this bird to the Eastern subspecies is probably not advisable. Other members pointed out that contra Sibley, the Birds of the World (BotW) account for this species provides photos and identification points for each of the three subspecies. There was some discussion about the extent of this bird’s post-ocular stripe and whether it matches the BotW notes, which describes it as “generally obsolete” in Eastern; one member pointed out that this does not necessarily mean it need be absent entirely, and that this bird’s stripe is very limited. Another concern was raised about the extent of spotting on the forehead and whether it was too extensive for Eastern compared to identification sources (Sibley and BotW). Those in favor of the record also argued that Eastern is certainly the expected subspecies in Michigan and this bird was close enough.

There was a side discussion related to this record where a few members questioned whether we should have reconsidered this record in the first place, since Eastern is the expected subspecies. Terry pointed out that in the past one reason for a subspecies review like this was to address the possibility of future splits. He also mentioned the recent example of reviewing “Eastern” Bell’s Vireo to the subspecies level. No action was taken from this discussion and it was generally just informational, but it may perhaps form the basis for a future discussion if this comes up again (if Bell’s Vireo gets split, for example).

**2024-1770-01 Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (5-2)**

Dissenting votes on the record mentioned that the bird appeared to be exceptionally tame, eating from an apparent bird feeder, presumably at the feet of (or somehow just below) the observer. Considering this behavior, one dissenting member pointed out that one of the two hind toes can’t be seen in the photos, and since the observer did not add any notes to the sighting, there isn’t enough data to confirm the record. If the observer had added even brief notes the record would be acceptable. Others (the majority) argued that wandering Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks often become quite accustomed to humans and exceptionally tame behavior is by itself not an indication of captive origin. Moreover, the species has thoroughly established a pattern of vagrancy to the western Great Lakes that strongly suggests wild origin for this bird.

**Round 204:** no Round 204 resubmissions were available because some ballots from that round were still outstanding.

## **New Items**

### **Website update**

Terry mentioned that he was having issues getting file downloads to work properly on the website. After the conclusion of the meeting he and Malosh stayed behind and tested the process again, which worked, so the issues may merely have been related to the network Terry had been working on. He also reported that the Photo Gallery is up to date. Lastly he made a general call to the committee for anyone willing to help with aspects of the website: things like Taxonomic Order need to be reviewed again and possibly updated, for example. He mentioned that Hysell (not in attendance) had offered to help with the photo gallery.

Terry communicated an issue raised by Byrne, that the policy list on website is out of date. Malosh agreed to reconcile the current published policy list against the handful of meeting minutes that have occurred since the policy list was published online a few years ago.

### **Annual Report Update**

Terry stated that the 2022 annual report is complete and was waiting publication for the website file download issue (mentioned above) to be resolved, which it now appears to be. The 2023 report is a work in progress.

### **Facebook updates**

Terry reported that the facebook account has been updated through Round 200. He again called for volunteers to help keep postings to facebook up to date. He went over the format of the posting and said it's about a 20-minute process to make an update for a round. Olivier agreed to help. There was a brief discussion about whether there was another suitable channel to use instead of/in addition to facebook for regular updates from the committee, but all agreed that facebook was still the best option. Malosh argued against creating an MBRC Discord channel and all agreed not to do it.

### **Inclusion and diversity on MBRC**

Husic (not present) had requested MBRC discuss inclusion and diversity on the committee, and pointed to Pennsylvania's committee which currently has four women. All agreed it was a worthwhile goal, but also that this was far from the first time the committee considered and discussed this. Members who have been with the committee multiple times (Terry, Murphy, Pavlik) recounted the many times this has been discussed in the past. There has always been a desire to include women on the committee. In every case in the past when a female candidate has been approached to gauge interest in joining, the answer has always been "no". The committee has never received feedback from any of those candidates that they were not comfortable joining due to any kind of perceived bias, there simply has never been a female candidate with suitable background and skills who was actually interested. Nevertheless, the committee also discussed the upcoming vacancies for 2025 and developed a list of potential candidates to approach, including multiple women. The 2025 vacancies will be addressed in the fall meeting.

### **Distribution of previous vote rationales with Requests for Reconsideration**

Malosh raised this issue and asked when a Request for Reconsideration is made, whether the individual votes from the previous round(s) of voting should also be distributed with the Request. He pointed out that it can happen that there is a subset of members presently on the committee who voted previously on a record now up for Reconsideration, and that those specific members therefore have access to information (the previous opinions) that is not accessible by any other members who were not on the committee at the time of the original votes. Therefore not all members are working from the same base of information in such a case.

Murphy stated that ideally, the Request for Reconsideration should be detailed enough that access to the previous opinions should never be necessary, and he and others also argued that ideally, a Reconsideration should be a completely fresh look at a record. Malosh agreed with all of this but also brought up the recent re-review of a King Eider in which those with access to the previous ballots definitely had data not available to new committee members.

In the end no motion was made nor any change of policy suggested. The King Eider review was agreed as something of a one-off, not a typical Reconsideration, and that such cases in the future could possibly also be discussed as one-offs, rather than making a blanket policy about always distributing previous votes. The discussion also served as a reminder that if a committee member is going to make a Request for Reconsideration, it should be as detailed as possible so as to minimize or avoid this issue in the future.

### **Bylaws Proposal**

Byrne (not in attendance) emailed the following proposal on 2 August to change specific wording in the bylaws:

Bylaw D.1. currently states:

The committee shall maintain a list of species requiring documentation. This list will include all species that have casual or accidental status in the state, possible first state records, and species deemed necessary by the committee. When a species changes from accidental or casual status to regular status, it shall remain on the review list for a period of three years after the year it attained regular status. If, after the **three year** period, the species maintains regular status, it shall be removed from the review list. **The review list will be published regularly in Michigan Birds and Natural History or the current state publication.**

Unfortunately, Michigan Audubon long ago pulled the plug on Michigan Birds and Natural History, leaving no state publication for the actions article to be published. This leaves us with only one option, “publishing” the annual actions article on our website. As an aside, we amended the bylaws for this very problem under Bylaw C.2. back in 2019, but somehow missed D.1. In addition to the factual change, I’ve also inserted a

hyphen between “three” and “year” to make things grammatically correct (see highlighted sections).

So, I propose that Bylaw D.1. be changed to:

The committee shall maintain a list of species requiring documentation. This list will include all species that have casual or accidental status in the state, possible first state records, and species deemed necessary by the committee. When a species changes from accidental or casual status to regular status, it shall remain on the review list for a period of three years after the year it attained regular status. If, after the **three-year** period, the species maintains regular status, it shall be removed from the review list. **Once a year the review list will be updated and uploaded to the committee’s website.**

All were in agreement that the proposed changes are appropriate. Klick moved to send the proposal to the full committee for vote. Pavlik seconded. It passed unanimously. Terry will distribute via email a separate vote to the full committee. For the change to take effect it will require a 2/3 approval by the full 9-person membership and votes are due 30 days after distribution to the full committee.

### **Species Status Changes**

Terry shared species status updates from Byrne:

- American Flamingo – added to state list with Accidental status
- Black-chinned Hummingbird – added to state list with Accidental status
- Limpkin – moved from Accidental to Casual
- Southern Lapwing – added to state list with Accidental status
- Black-billed Magpie – moved from Casual to Accidental
- Green-tailed Towhee – moved from Accidental to Casual

### **Committee Members’ rare bird documentation**

Terry reminded the committee to get documentation of any review species they have seen to the Secretary in a timely fashion.

### **New Business**

1. **Group photo:** a group photo has not been taken since Summer 2022. A photo was taken at the conclusion of this meeting.
2. **Membership replacement cadence:** Terry mentioned that he and Byrne determined a way to get the replacement of new members back to no more than 3 in a single year, and 2 in the majority of years. It appears the most direct way to accomplish this would be if a member who is completing their second year of being a full member voluntarily resigns at the end of 2025. This will be reconfirmed, discussed and clarified again at the fall meeting.

- 3. Upcoming vacancies:** there was an open discussion about the upcoming vacancies for 2025, of which there will be three. (Malosh, Murphy, and Simon roll off at the end of 2024.) Several promising names were mentioned, including at least two women. This will again be revisited at the fall meeting.
- 4. Thanks:** Terry formally thanked all in attendance for making the effort to drive to Okemos. It's not easy to make time for these meetings (and the commutes to and from) so everyone's dedication to the committee is much appreciated.

The meeting was adjourned at 18:45 EDT.

Respectfully submitted,  
Geoff Malosh, MBRC 2021-24