

Minutes of the Michigan Bird Records Committee Meeting
27 November 2023
Brighton, Michigan

Members present: Scott Terry, Chairperson; Adam M. Byrne, Secretary; Brendan Klick, Geoff Malosh, Brad Murphy, Andrew Simon

Members absent: Louis Dombroski, David Pavlik, Chace Scholten

The meeting was called to order by Terry at 1714 EST.

Resubmissions

From Round 197:

2022-2695-01 Southern Lapwing

Minutes from a virtual meeting led by Pavlik:

Southern Lapwing Resubmission Discussion

11/28/23

Start Time: 8:11pm

End Time: 9:13pm

Voters Present: David Pavlik, Matt Hysell, Dave Slager, Marc North, Sean Williams, Joe Kaplan, Skye Haas

Most members thought that the Hickman documentation was the best documentation for us to consider but it was limited by the time frame and countries that the flight logs were requested for. Burden of proof on the observers. A few members agreed that it would be nice to have flight histories dating back to March and April to see if other flights from countries in the *cayennensis* range came into the Oscoda Airport, especially since there is said to be evidence of the bird present at the Oscoda airport before the known Bogota flight that Hickman references. Several members mentioned it would be nice to have this information and it might sway their decision. Some members felt that without this information, the record can't be accurately assessed and is what originally resulted in their "no" votes.

Some members found it hard to believe the bird could get on a plane that got cleaned in FL and stay on and then continue to Michigan. These birds are large shorebirds and typically very vocal which would draw much attention. It was also brought up that if riding in planes was common, or at least occurring more regularly than we think, why doesn't this happen more? Why doesn't this happen more in Miami or other locations? The airport location seems to be a distraction. However, one member mentioned the fact that the airport in Bogota has many breeding birds and a lot of eBird records and it wouldn't be completely unheard of for a bird to get on a plane. They mentioned that, while the plane was cleaned in FL, the layover is short according to the information provided by Hickman and it wouldn't be the first time an airline screwed something up.

One member brought up the possibility of ship assistance for this bird's arrival. They mentioned that SOLA is mostly non-migratory and hard to believe it could have

moved 1000+ miles and then suddenly stay sedentary for the rest of its life once it got to Michigan. They had trouble believing the bird travels thousands of miles and then stays at the airport in Michigan for the rest of its life. Another member mentioned that some birds get to the UP in fall and stay until they succumb, so it might not be totally unheard of. There was a brief discussion about the possibility of ship assistance, and if that would even matter given that the ABA accepts ship assisted birds if there is no human involvement. It was mentioned that ABA and MBRC do not have the same acceptance criteria.

It was mentioned that SOLA are moving northward in the current range expansion. Some members were concerned with the lack of vagrancy pattern, why aren't these birds showing up more, and in the Southern US? Some felt the SOLA showing up in the Yucatán could be considered vagrants, but others thought that was just natural range expansion. The Maryland bird could be considered vagrant, but that wasn't accepted. One mentioned that while SOLA are solitary for most of their life, the fact they are getting hundreds of km to new locations to colonize does show they can move. Another example was brought up of typically sedentary birds making large dispersals northward in what we are seeing for Limpkin, but most likely through a different mechanism. Those birds are showing up all throughout the eastern US, though, unlike SOLA. One member mentioned that while SOLA isn't a long distant migrant, other crazy records like Common Redshank and Flamingo happened as well. But others argued that the mechanism driving the Flamingo records is known, with reports throughout the eastern US. If flamingo showed up two years from now, with no other records between here and Cuba, it likely would not get accepted.

One member stated that the bird could have moved through "suitable" habitat on its way to Michigan. Both short and long-distance dispersals and vagrancy do happen. There is habitat all the way to MI, open area and open habitat. Perfect location would be an airport to show up.

Overall, members comfortable with the record were convinced by their recent range expansion northward and find the possibility of the bird moving by plane unlikely, while dissenting members felt the lack of information regarding flight history into the Oscoda Airport preceding the record was concerning and the documentation therefore incomplete, and suggested other human-assisted methods such as ship-assistance that could explain the appearance.

2021-5280-01 "Greater" Common Redpoll (17 birds)

Documentation consists of a series of photographs and written details. The photos show a group of Common Redpolls that all look similar in size, so no helpful size comparisons were possible. Many of the individuals show extensive red coloration to the plumage, a feature that is supposed to be very subdued, at best, in "Greater" Common Redpoll. Members also felt the black throat patches were not extensive enough and that the impression of pale superciliums was inconsistent with "Greater" Common Redpoll. All agreed that the birds didn't seem especially long-tailed or feel large and that some individuals looked pretty standard for Common Redpoll. So, with plumage details that were atypical, all individuals were similar in size, and some individuals seem to be strong fit for typical Common Redpoll, members felt the documentation didn't provide conclusive evidence.

Round 198:

2023-2060-01 “Lesser” Sandhill Crane

Members were divided on this record. Some felt the bird's small size, gray plumage, short bill, and reduced red on its head all supported the identification. While dissenters agreed with those impressions, the exact distribution of red on the head was not discernible in the photos. This feature is described as an important field mark to assess when trying to distinguish between Sandhill Crane subspecies.

2023-2310-01 Short-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus griseus griseus*)

This well-photographed dowitcher has extensive spotting throughout its underparts and limited orange coloration, much different from the expected *L. g. hendersoni* that normally frequents Michigan. Some members noted retained older wing coverts and body feathers, feeling the final impression could be different if in full alternate plumage. Another concern was how to safely eliminate the western subspecies *L. g. caurinus*. Others, though, felt this bird's very pale background coloration and extensive spotting were a strong match for *L. g. griseus*.

2023-0530-01 California Gull

All present felt there were several features that felt wrong for California Gull. It has a large bill, yellow legs, and a very dark mantle. Members questioned how a Herring Gull x Lesser Black-backed Gull hybrid could be eliminated from consideration.

2023-5370-01 Smith's Longspur (4 birds; 5 already accepted)

Members agreed that the photos showed at least five individuals, which were already accepted in the first round, but that it was not possible to safely identify additional individuals from the photos. The written details state the flock that contained five identifiable individuals flew north and then back south, before landing and going undetected for over an hour. Later, a group of four birds were observed in a different area and felt to be different from the first flock. However, members were unconvinced that the details provided safely ruled out the possibility that these new individuals couldn't have been part of the initial flock.

Round 199:

2023-0380-02 Long-tailed Jaeger

The documentation consisted of several photos and a written description. Most members were troubled by how contrary the photos and description seemed to be. The report mentions a narrow-winged, long-tailed jaeger with limited white flash on the under wings, but the photos show a bird with broad looking wings and rather noticeable white on the under wing. Given the very different impressions portrayed by the documentation, most felt the photos carried more weight than the description and just wasn't enough for a conclusive identification.

2023-4900-02 Fish Crow (1 bird; 1 already rejected)

All agreed that one Fish Crow could be heard at the end of the audio file recorded on 21 June at Saugatuck Dunes State Park.

2023-4900-06 Fish Crow (1 bird; 1 already accepted)

All agreed that a second, fainter (or more distant) Fish Crow could be heard at the end of the recording, supporting the presence of two individuals.

2023-4900-08 Fish Crow (1 bird; 1 already accepted)

Members reviewed the audio files and could not clearly hear more than one individual. A claim of two individuals nearly two weeks after the recording stated two smaller crows were seen with larger American Crows and that they each gave short, nasal calls. Most members felt these details were not enough to be sure, especially in light of the number of other Fish Crow records recently submitted with audio evidence that turned out to be American Crows.

New Items

Discussion, nomination, and election of three new members

At the end of 2023, the terms of Byrne, Dombroski, and Scholten will end. Five individuals were nominated for consideration – Zach Gayk, Matt Hysell, Corey Husic, Alec Olivier, and Ethan Urban. From this slate, Hysell, Husic, and Olivier were elected to the Committee, with Hysell starting as a regular member, Husic as first alternate, and Olivier as second alternate.

Nomination and election of Chairman and Secretary for 2024

Terry and Byrne were unanimously elected to serve again as Chairman and Secretary, respectively, in 2024; Byrne will serve as a non-voting member in 2024.

Species status update

Byrne shared status changes as of the completion of 2023:

- 1) Pink-footed Goose was added to the state list with Accidental status.
- 2) Yellow-crowned Night-Heron moved from Regular to Casual status.
- 3) Ruff moved from Casual to Regular status and will remain on the review list through 2026.
- 4) White-winged Tern was added to the state list with Accidental status.
- 5) Say's Phoebe moved from Casual to Regular status and will remain on the review list through 2026.

Barrow's Goldeneye and Arctic Tern completed their 3-year probationary periods and retained Regular status. Byrne pointed out that despite maintaining Regular status, there has only been 12 accepted Arctic Tern record in the past 10 years. Byrne motioned to retain Arctic Tern on the official review list. The motion was seconded by Malosh and passed with a 5-1 vote. Barrow's Goldeneye will come off the review list starting in 2024.

Website update

Terry has continued to work on the website. There are some issues with download links working correctly that he hopes someone can help remedy. Byrne will work to get the searchable database updated again before the end of the year.

Annual Report Update

Terry is almost done with the 2023 actions article.

Facebook updates

Results have been posted through Round 196. Terry requested assistance to help keep up with these posts, which remains the best option for informing the birding community of recent committee decisions.

Michigan Audubon Society update

This year, Malosh has published two articles in the Jack Pine Warbler, one on the Pink-footed Goose and another about the Ferruginous Hawk that traversed the state in 2023. Future articles are in the works, including one on the massive incursion of Limpkins in 2023. Michigan Audubon Society seems appreciative of these efforts to contribute and recently covered the expense to retain our website through 2025.

Southern Lapwing situation and impending outcome announcement

The Southern Lapwing record will be distributed for the second round of review in the next round, with a final outcome by the end of the 2023. Peter Pyle from the ABA checklist committee indicated that they were waiting for our final decision before considering the record. Members agreed that a couple of options were appropriate for sharing the review outcome: 1) a post on the MBRC Facebook page; and 2) adding a new page to the website that details the review process and decision.

Slaty-backed Gull record 2022-0480-02 from Muskegon County

Byrne pointed out that the recent review of this record resulted in the acceptance of only one individual. However, he felt buried in the many photographs were images that clearly showed different primary patterns, supporting the presence of two different individuals. This was a unique situation, since no observer ever claimed more than one individual and none submitted documentation indicating they felt there were two distinct birds. Some members that agreed they overlooked the presence of two distinct birds and a request for reconsideration will be prepared to correct this oversight.

King Eider record 2023-1620-01 from Muskegon County

Malosh and Terry (on behalf of Dombroski) shared concerns over the circumstances of this recently accepted King Eider record. Much of the concern centered on the lighting conditions and metadata associated with the lone photo. Malosh pointed out that the lighting conditions captured in the photo don't fit the time of day the sighting was reported. Also, the metadata for the photo has been altered, such that the f-stop of 0.4 is not possible for the lens used. This discussion swayed some of the members that voted for acceptance and a request for reconsideration will be prepared to possibly reevaluate this record.

The classification of the returning Bell's Vireo from Berrien County

Terry pointed out that some years the recent, long-staying Bell's Vireo was considered as an "Eastern" Bell's Vireo and other years as just a Bell's Vireo. Byrne

shared that subspecific review has traditionally been triggered by observer claims, so if not claimed to the subspecific level, they are typically reviewed at the species level. If this species is ever split into multiple species, some of the records would need to be looked at more closely to determine if the documentation is detailed enough to distinguish between the new species.

European Goldfinch status change in Wisconsin and our review situation

Byrne shared that Wisconsin recently declared European Goldfinch to be an established species. This could have implications on sightings in Michigan. While there are still likely to be true escapees, Byrne felt there is also a strong likelihood that birds from this established Wisconsin (and northern Illinois) population could arrive in Michigan. Assuming the American Birding Association also recognizes this as an established population, members felt we should be ready to start addressing future sightings in Michigan. Michigan certainly doesn't have anywhere near the numbers present on the western shore of Lake Michigan, but for how long? Simon agreed to reach out and get more details on the Wisconsin situation, including overall numbers, subspecies represented, etc.

Possibility of Zoom meetings

Klick inquired about the statement "members who are physically present for the resubmission discussion..." in the bylaws and what it would take to change this requirement. He felt the requirement to be physically present should be removed and remote attendance to meetings considered. This topic has been discussed almost annually, with one year resulting in a trial basis. Some members pointed out that the trial results were less than ideal, with participation in one case being compromised by the remote nature of the attendee. Several members expressed their strong preference to retain the requirement to hold in-person meetings, stating that engagement, interactions, ability to share resources, etc. were all enhanced when meeting in person. While the bylaw mentioned above refers only to being physically present to have precedence when voting on resubmissions, Byrne shared that the Committee also has a policy stating participation in meetings requires members to be physically present. Minimally, a majority opinion would be required to overturn this policy, but the majority present were not in favor of such action.

Can we stop reviewing Fish Crows?

Terry raised his frustration with dealing with so many Fish Crow records and inquired if we should remove Fish Crow from the review list. Byrne reminded everyone that at the end of 2022, Fish Crow finished its 3-year probationary period and that the Committee voted to review any records away from Berrien County. In 2023, the Committee reviewed 13 Fish Crow records, with acceptance of at least one individual occurring from only five of those 13 records. This low acceptance rate, many of which members felt were clearly American Crows, emphasized the need to continue monitoring reports away from Berrien County for at least another year.

New Business

Terry pointed out that the current policy to approve minutes shortly after the meeting seemed to have no real benefit. Once approved, minutes are posted on the website, but does fast-tracking that process really add any value? Byrne felt the review of the minutes was less thorough with this remote process and that having it as a discussion point at the next meeting forced better discussion and consideration of the content. Byrne motioned to do away with the policy requiring minutes to be approved via an email vote following meetings and to return to approving them at the next meeting. The motion was seconded by Murphy and passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 2045 EST.

Respectfully submitted,
Adam M. Byrne, Secretary, MBRC