

2002 Report of the North Carolina Bird Records Committee

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This report enumerates the decisions of the Carolina Bird Club's North Carolina Bird Records Committee during 2002. During the past year, Keith Camburn and Wayne Forsythe were added to the Committee, replacing Roger McNeill and Simon Thompson. Committee voting information is referenced in parentheses (i.e., year report received, reference number).

Accepted as valid

The reported identification is judged to be accurate, and the bird is judged to be of wild origin. Photographs and/or written descriptions of all accepted records have been deposited in the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences.

White-faced Ibis (*Plegadis chihi*) (02-05). One was observed by unknown persons in early July 2002 in a ditch at South Nags Head, Dare County. Jeff Lewis made the report public, and it was subsequently seen by many observers for at least a week. The Committee accepted photos taken by Will Cook and a description from Harry LeGrand. This is the first accepted record for the state, and the species is placed directly on the Official List. There was a previous mention of this species, a breeding-plumaged adult at Pea Island in mid-May 1973, in *American Birds* (31:979). However, no other details were ever seen by this or a previous Committee, and that report was thus considered as an Unaccepted Sighting by this Committee in 1990 (N.C. Bird Records Committee 1990). If a description of this 1973 report surfaces, the Committee will review the new information.

Black-tailed Gull (*Larus crassirostris*) (02-03). A winter adult was seen by Paul Sykes at Pea Island, Dare County, on 28 December 2001. There were no other observers, nor was a photo taken. This report was considered as inadequately documented by the Committee on a first vote and was sent for outside review. The record was then accepted on the second vote. This is the first record of the species for the state, and acceptance of the description places the species on the Provisional List. There are a handful of recent records of this Asian/Pacific species from the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel in nearby Virginia. Though there has been concern about the origin of these Atlantic coast birds, the American Birding Association (2002) has accepted the species onto its list of birds in the ABA area. There were no "questionable origin" votes from the Committee.

Snowy Owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*) (02-04). One was first found by Bruce Smithson at Fort Fisher, New Hanover/Brunswick County on 24 November 2001. It was seen and photographed by numerous observers over the next

week. The Committee reviewed, and accepted, photographs taken by Will Cook. There are at least ten previous records of the species for the state, nearly all from the coast, and thus the species is already on the Official List. However, this is the first record that has been well documented by photos and multiple observers.

Calliope Hummingbird (*Stellula calliope*) (02-06). An immature male was seen at a feeder of Charles and Ann Williams in Winston-Salem in December 2001, and was seen by a large number of birders through the winter. It was banded by Susan Campbell, and the Committee accepted photos taken by Campbell of the bird in the hand. This is surprisingly the fourth accepted record for this Western hummingbird, and the species is already on the Official List.

Pacific-slope/Cordilleran Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis* /*Empidonax occidentalis*) (02-02). An individual was discovered by Harry LeGrand and Jeff Phippen near Jordan Lake, Chatham County, on 15 January 2000. The bird, identified as a Pacific-slope Flycatcher based on calls heard, was seen by many observers for the next week. The Committee reviewed a description written by LeGrand and Phippen, photos taken by Derb Carter, and sonagrams (and voice recordings) of calls taped by Will Cook. The Committee did not accept the species to Pacific-slope Flycatcher, because of the extreme difficulties in separating calls from the very similar Cordilleran Flycatcher, not surprising as the former Western Flycatcher (*E. difficilis*) was recently split into these two species. Several Committee members felt that they couldn't be absolutely sure of the identification. However, the Committee did accept Pacific-slope/Cordilleran Flycatcher (i.e., the Western Flycatcher complex). This is the first record of the complex for the state, and acceptance of the photos and sonagrams (along with the description) to the Western Flycatcher complex places the species pair onto the Official List. Because the bird in question was identified as a Pacific-slope Flycatcher, that species is listed first on the Official List.

Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) (02-08). One was found by Joshua Rose at Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, Dare County, on 16 December 2001 and was subsequently seen by many birders through the winter. The Committee accepted the description provided by Rose and photographs taken by Will Cook. This species is already on the Official List, and this is the fifth accepted record. However, this is a first report for the winter season.

Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) (02-07). One was observed by numerous birders at Pea Island in November 2001. The Committee accepted a written description, including call notes, submitted by Ricky Davis, and several photos taken by Will Cook. Prior to this vote, the Tropical/Couch's (*T. couchii*) Kingbird complex was on the Official List, based on acceptance of a description and photos (with no voice recording) of a bird identified as a Tropical (based on calls heard) near Lake Mattamuskeet in December 1985. On this current vote, the Committee determined that the photos convincingly ruled out Couch's Kingbird. Acceptance of the 2001

record changes the Official List from Tropical/Couch's Kingbird simply to Tropical Kingbird.

Bicknell's Thrush (*Catharus bicknelli*) (02-09). One was captured in a mist-netting operation at Weymouth Woods Sandhills Nature Preserve, Moore County, on 27 September 2001 by Susan Campbell and Chris Helms. The bird was not photographed, but Campbell provided a written description, including measurements and weight of the bird, that was accepted by the Committee. This becomes the first accepted record of Bicknell's Thrush, a recent split from Gray-cheeked Thrush (*C. minimus*), for the state, and thus the species is placed on the Provisional List. Lee (1995) reported that a North Carolina specimen of Bicknell's Thrush exists at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington. The Committee earlier indicated that a confirmation letter from the Museum would be needed to confirm the species' presence in the state and place the species on the Official List. Such a letter has yet to be requested by the Committee. There are a handful of reports from the state of Bicknell's Thrush, not surprising in that the species nests in New England and the Canadian Maritime provinces, and winters in the West Indies and thus undoubtedly migrates regularly (in small numbers?) through North Carolina. As identification of the two species is extremely difficult, the Committee should review any and all such reports. However, the Committee has not yet seen descriptions of such reports to review.

White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba alba*) (02-10). An apparent immature was found by Jill Froning and Karen Bearden at Falls Lake in Wake County on 22 October 2002. The Committee reviewed the description by Ricky Davis and additional comments from Will Cook, and reviewed Will Cook's photographs. The Committee not only accepted the bird as to the full species but accepted it to the Western Europe subspecies *alba*. This was done in case of any future split of the species, and also to establish that the bird was from a European subspecies rather than from an eastern Asian subspecies (which also nests in Alaska). Thus, the White Wagtail is placed directly onto the Official List, and this is the first record for North Carolina. This Committee earlier (N.C. Bird Records Committee 1990) accepted Black-backed Wagtail (*M. lugens*) to the Official List (based on photos but no written description). That bird was mentioned in print as being of the Black-backed race of White Wagtail in *Chat* (46:121), but since that report was made, the Black-backed Wagtail was split off from White Wagtail as a valid species. Thus, both the White Wagtail and the Black-backed Wagtail are on the Official List of North Carolina birds.

Green-tailed Towhee (*Pipilo chlorurus*) (02-01). One was initially found by Greg Massey near Southport, Brunswick County, in early January 2002 and was seen by dozens of other birders into the spring. The Committee accepted photos by Harry Sell and text written by John Buckman and Harry LeGrand. This is the first accepted record for the state, and acceptance of photos places the species directly onto the Official List. Details from a sight report mentioned in *Am. Birds* (30:53) at Bodie Island on 28 November 1975 were apparently never submitted to the magazine's

regional editor nor to a Bird Records Committee. That report was thus considered as an Unaccepted Sighting by this Committee in 1990 (N.C. Bird Records Committee 1990). If a description of this 1975 report surfaces, the Committee will review the new material.

Discussion

There were no votes of reports that yielded verdicts of Unaccepted Sighting or Unaccepted Origin for the 2002 voting period. As mentioned above, the Black-tailed Gull report was sent for outside review and was accepted as valid on the second vote.

The review of reports by the North Carolina Bird Records Committee for 2002 resulted in adding four species to the North Carolina Official List. White-faced Ibis, Pacific-slope/Cordilleran Flycatcher, White Wagtail, and Green-tailed Towhee have been directly added to the Official List. Tropical/Couch's Kingbird now becomes Tropical Kingbird on the Official List. The current Official List now stands (as of the end of 2002) at 439 species. Black-tailed Gull and Bicknell's Thrush have been added to the Provisional List, which now stands at 14 species. This gives a total Accepted List of 453 species. The Bicknell's Thrush was formerly considered as Unresolved. No species were elevated from the Provisional List to the Official List.

Acknowledgments

In addition to the many people named above who provided written material and photographs for the Committee to review, we thank Russ Tyndall for placing a few of the photographs on the Carolina Bird Club's website for Committee review. The Committee also wishes to thank other birders for posting photographs of rare species listed above to either the Carolinabirds mailing list or to their own personal websites. Many of these photos were likely seen and reviewed by Committee members prior to and during the voting process, though they were not strictly used in the voting. These people include Van Atkins (Green-tailed Towhee), Wayne Irvin (White-faced Ibis), Brian Murphy (Snowy Owl), Steve Shultz (White-faced Ibis, Green-tailed Towhee), Donald Stokes (Tropical Kingbird), and Mike Tove (Pacific-slope/Cordilleran Flycatcher).

Literature Cited

- American Birding Association. 2002. ABA Checklist: Birds of the Continental United States and Canada, Sixth Edition. American Birding Association.
- Lee, D. S. 1995. Status and seasonal distribution of Bicknell's and Gray-cheeked Thrushes in North Carolina. *Chat* 59:1-8.
- North Carolina Bird Records Committee. 1990. Report of the North Carolina Bird Records Committee – 1990. *Chat* 54:53-58.