

2003 Annual Report of the North Carolina Bird Records Committee

**Harry E. LeGrand, Jr.¹, Chairman, Keith E. Camburn,
Samuel Cooper, Richard J. Davis, Eric V. Dean,
Wayne K. Forsythe, Russell L. Tyndall**

¹ *NC Natural Heritage Program, 1601 MSC, Raleigh, NC 27699-1601*

This report enumerates the decisions of the Carolina Bird Club's North Carolina Bird Records Committee during 2003. During the past year, Russ Tyndall was added to the Committee, replacing Susan Campbell. 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 NC Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh.

Ross's Goose (*Chen rossii*) (03-02). Two were seen from 22 to 25 January 2003 along Hooper Lane in Henderson County. Wayne Forsythe and others observed the geese, and the Committee accepted details provided by Forsythe. The species is already on the Official List, and this is the second mountain record.

Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) (03-01). One was seen on 14 and 15 December 2002 by Tim Lewis and several other birders at Lake Julian, Buncombe County. The Committee accepted a description provided by Lewis. This is the first record for the mountain region. The species is already on the Official List, with this being the fourth record accepted by the Committee. There are about 10 other published reports for the species that have not been reviewed by the Committee.

Clark's Grebe (*Aechmophorus clarkii*) (03-09). Ricky Davis and several others observed one in the surf at Cape Hatteras Point, Dare County, on 15 March 2003, and it was seen on 19 March at nearby Hatteras by several other birders. The Committee accepted written details provided by Davis, and as this is a first record for the state, the species is placed on the Provisional List. However, the Committee did not accept still photos from a video taken by Derb Carter, as the photos were not definitive enough for Committee members to rule out the similar Western Grebe or a possible hybrid. Acceptance of photos would have elevated the species to the Official List. Because a video exists of the grebe, the Committee hopes to review it in 2004 to determine if it provides the necessary documentation to elevate the species to the Official List.

Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*) (03-14). A sick bird was found on the beach at Ocracoke, Hyde County, on 11 May 2003. The Committee accepted a photo of the bird, in a cage, taken by Elizabeth Hanrahan. The species is already on the Official List, and there are now close to a dozen state records.

Brown Booby (03-21). Another sick bird was found on the beach at Emerald Isle, Carteret County, on 30 July 2002. The Committee accepted a photo taken by Elizabeth Hanrahan. Both of these Brown Boobies failed to survive, and they are now specimens at the NC Museum of Natural Sciences (John Gerwin, pers. comm.).

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) (03-15). An adult was seen at Lake Junaluska, Haywood County, from 31 May to early June 2003 by several birders. The Committee accepted written details submitted by Beth Brinson. This is the third known record for the mountain region, though it is the first to be reviewed and accepted by the Committee.

Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) (03-11). An immature was seen from 23 to 28 March 2003 at Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in Dare County. The Committee accepted a written description from the initial observer, Mike Tove. The species is already on the Official List; this is the sixth accepted record for the state.

Thick-billed Murre (*Uria lomvia*) (03-06). One in winter plumage was seen in the surf at Fort Macon State Park, Carteret County, from 10 to 16 March 2003. The Committee accepted a description from Stuart Pimm, the initial observer, and photos taken by Will Cook and Harry Sell. The species is already on the Official List, and this is at least the eighth state record; however, this is one of the few that has been seen by a large number of birders and documented at close range.

Black Guillemot (*Cepphus grylle*) (03-05). One in transition (winter changing to breeding) plumage was seen by Scott Baron in the surf at Kill Devil Hills, Dare County, on 15 February 2003. The Committee accepted his written description and sketch. This is the second accepted state record, both from the immediate coast (as would be expected). However, because both are sight records only, the species remains on the Provisional List.

Long-billed Murrelet (*Brachyramphus perdix*) (03-07). One in winter plumage was seen in the surf at Atlantic Beach, Carteret County, on 15 December 2002 by Eric Dean, Sharon Funderburk, and Tom Wade. The Committee accepted Dean's sketch and written description. Surprisingly, this is the second state record. The other record was from an inland site (Jordan Lake). However, as neither has been accompanied by photograph, nor is there a specimen, the species remains on the Provisional List.

Green Violet-ear (*Colibri thalassinus*) (03-16). One was seen at a feeder in Newland, Avery County, from 6 to 11 October 2003; it was identified by Wayne Forsythe and Keith Camburn on 11 October. The Committee accepted a written description and photos provided by Forsythe. This is surprisingly the third state record, all from the mountain region in fall. As one of these was documented with a photograph, the species is already on the Official List.

Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*) (03-20). An adult male was seen by Jeff Lewis at his feeder in Manteo, Dare County, on 27 March 2003. The species is already on the Official List, with now at least 10 records, but this is one of the few birds in adult male plumage.

Allen's Hummingbird (*Selasphorus sasin*) (03-10). An immature male spent the period from 19 January to 29 March 2003 at Elayne Kodroff's feeders in Manteo, Dare County. It was seen by dozens of birders and was banded by Susan Campbell. The Committee accepted photos of the bird in the hand, taken by Campbell. This is the first state record, and acceptance of the photos places the species on the Official List.

Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) (03-17). One, apparently an adult female, was found by Dick Blee at Connestee Falls (community), Transylvania County, on 14 October 2003. The Committee accepted a written description and photographs provided by Wayne Forsythe. The species is already on the Official List; this is the fourth accepted state record, the second from the mountains. All state records are from the fall season, with the others being from the immediate coast.

Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) (03-04). An immature male visited the feeders of Shirley Remaley in Elizabeth City, Pasquotank County, from 6 February to 22 April 2003. It was seen by dozens of birders during that period. The Committee accepted Remaley's written description and photos taken by Will Cook. The species is already on the Official List, and the state now has approximately 10 records.

Unaccepted Sighting

The bird is judged to be a species other than that reported, or the bird is insufficiently documented to identification of the species reported.

European Storm-Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) (03-18). A storm-petrel photographed on 27 May 2003 from the Gulf Stream east of Cape Hatteras by Brian Patteson was circulated for comments on his website. This bird was reported as a "mystery storm-petrel" on the website, though he asked birders to submit comments on whether the bird might be a European Storm-Petrel, as a distinct white stripe is visible under one of the wings. There was no submission of the photo/report to the Committee. However, as many outside reviewers commented favorably (and some unfavorably and others with uncertainty) on the website for European Storm-Petrel, and as the photo and some details were subsequently mentioned in *North American Birds* (57:334), the Committee Chair felt that a vote was needed by the Committee. Most members did not accept the photo as documenting this species, which has been conclusively documented from the western Atlantic only once, from Nova Scotia, in 1970 (American Birding Association 2002). Also, most members felt that the photo angle was inconclusive to positively document the report. In addition, there is no indication that any birders on board the boat noticed an unusual storm-petrel at the time; the photo was not viewed or studied until a few months after the trip was taken.

Brown Booby (03-13). A report of four flying together over the surf in Dare County in May 2003 was not accepted. The Committee felt that the observation period—just a few seconds—was too brief, and the fact that Northern Gannets (*Morus bassanus*), particularly immature birds, are commonly seen flying along beaches and over the inshore ocean throughout May, led most to feel that gannets were not convincingly eliminated.

Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii*) (03-03). One reported from Wake County in October 2002 was not accepted. Several field marks were not reported, and other parts of the description do not seem to be consistent with Bell's Vireo. This is a very difficult species to identify, especially if not singing or calling, and no vocalizations were heard. The species remains on the Provisional List, with one state record.

Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*) (03-08). One was reported from Mecklenburg County in December 2002. Though the report may well have been correct, there were only very sketchy details that lacked a description. The species is already on the Official List, with four accepted sight records. However, there is still no specimen or photograph to provide tangible documentation.

Unresolved

Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*) (03-19). One or two, in winter plumage, seen in the surf at several places along the Dare County coast in July 2003, and briefly described with at least four sets of details, were not accepted but received enough acceptance votes for a "Send for Outside Review" verdict. A few Committee members felt that the descriptions did not completely rule out other loon species. The report will be sent to several outside experts, with a second vote to be conducted later.

Swainson's Hawk (03-12). One observed near Chapel Hill in Orange County in April 2003 was not accepted but received enough acceptance votes for a "Send for Outside Review" verdict. Several members felt that because the bird was seen from a moving vehicle and the observer had no binoculars with him, the report (of an adult, light-morph bird) left some room for doubt. The report will be sent to several outside experts, with a second vote to be conducted later.

Discussion

The review of reports by the North Carolina Bird Records Committee for 2003 resulted in adding two species to the state's Accepted List. Allen's Hummingbird was added directly to the Official List, and Clark's Grebe was added to the Provisional List (and will be added to the Official List if the video is accepted). The current Official List is now 440 species, and the Provisional List is now 15 species, for a total of 455 species on the state's Accepted List. The Committee will conduct second votes on the Pacific Loon and Swainson's Hawk reports; and potential new-to-the-state reports expected to be reviewed are Gray Flycatcher (*Empidonax wrightii*) and

Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*). A review of a 2003 record of Barnacle Goose (*Chen leucopsis*) is anticipated, to determine if the species should be added to the Official List or if this and previous sightings should be retained as Unaccepted Origin.

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 number of the photographs on the Carolina Bird Club's website for Committee review.

Literature Cited

American Birding Association. 2002. ABA checklist: Birds of the continental United States and Canada, sixth edition. American Birding Association.