

GUIDELINES FOR THE ADMISSION OF EXOTIC SPECIES TO THE NEW YORK STATE CHECKLIST

New York State Avian Records Committee

Roger Tory Peterson, in an article he wrote for *Birder Watcher's Digest* (Peterson 2006) gave a brief history of efforts to introduce foreign bird species into the United States. Prior to 1900, 150 species had been intentionally set free in North America. In New York City, the American Acclimatization Society was just one group that was active in this area. Acclimatization societies sprang up in other cities such as Cincinnati, Ohio and Portland, Oregon. For at least a short time period, some of these introduced species prospered. The Sky Lark and the European Goldfinch were both regarded as established on Long Island (Cruickshank 1942; Bull 1964). The Sky Lark survived for 25 years and the European Goldfinch for nearly 50 years (Bull 1964) before each was extirpated. Other species thrived and expanded and are well known to us today: Ring-necked Pheasant, Rock Pigeon, European Starling, House Sparrow, and a few others. The Lacey Act of 1900 stopped the intentional introduction of exotics but accidental releases continue to this day.

Exotics are defined as non-domesticated birds introduced by humans into areas beyond their natural geographic ranges, through intentional releases or accidental escapes from captivity. Exotic species occur in wild situations in New York by a variety of means, including natural range expansion from populations established elsewhere, state-sponsored introduction programs, accidental or intentional releases from game farms or hunt clubs, and escapes from pet stores, homes, farms, or exotic collections. The key to determining whether exotic species belong on the New York State checklist is the degree to which it can be documented that the species has established a persistent, self-sustaining wild population.

For an exotic species to be recognized as part of an avifauna outside of its natural range, a population must be sufficiently well established in the wild that there is no foreseeable threat of extirpation. Two important supporting points are that the population be able to persist in the wild without direct human assistance and to survive "boom and bust cycles" common to bird populations. In turn, the admission of a particular exotic species to the New York State Checklist depends further on either the presence of established populations within the state, or on the natural occurrence within the state of individuals derived from an established population elsewhere. It is important to keep in mind that "establishment" is not necessarily implied by the presence of active nests in the state, which have been reported in New York for various exotic species over the years. It is also important to note that populations established in one state can furnish acceptable records in another state, via dispersal or vagrancy, as was the case for the acceptance of Eurasian Collared-Dove to the New York State Checklist (NYSARC 2004, p. 295).

To the best of our knowledge, Florida and California are the only states with explicit guidelines on the admission of exotic species to their statewide checklists. The ABA checklist committee has drafted new criteria for judging the status of exotic birds in the ABA area and will publish these in the 7th edition of the ABA Checklist, due by 31 January 2008. The NYS guidelines described here are based on the ABA guidelines, with some minor modifications. Those wishing a more detailed discussion of the rationales supporting these criteria are encouraged to read the updated ABA guidelines once they are published.

CRITERIA FOR THE ADMISSION OF EXOTIC SPECIES TO THE NYS CHECKLIST

1. Occurrence of the species in NYS is well documented in the form of a published photograph, a specimen archived in an ornithological collection, or written documentation from at least two observers, in accordance with existing NYSARC guidelines for any addition to the NYS Checklist.
2. The acceptable NYS record(s) described above are derived from an established population, defined as follows:
 - a. There is a contiguous population of interacting individuals.
 - b. The population is not currently nor is likely to be subject to an eradication effort that is likely to succeed.
 - c. The population is large enough to survive a routine amount of mortality and nest failure, including the expected “boom and bust” cycles. Additionally, there should be no indication that ongoing releases play a substantial role in population maintenance.
 - d. Sufficient offspring are being produced to maintain or increase the population.
 - e. The population has been present for a minimum of 15 years, although some species may require more time for establishment. The precise number of years a species must be present will be determined on a case-by-case basis, depending largely on the demographic characteristics of the species in question, but will always be at least 15 years.
 - f. The population is not directly dependent on human support.
3. A publication describes how, when, and where the criteria stated above have been met.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Records Following Extirpation of an Exotic Species from the State

In the event that an established exotic is no longer breeding or present in the state or if the population falls below some threshold number, NYSARC will review the acceptance of any individuals seen in the state on a case-by-case basis by adding the species to the review list.

Accidental Records of Exotic Populations from other States

Established populations of exotic species in neighboring states will be regarded as potential sources of natural dispersants or vagrants to New York State. Such records may be accepted by NYSARC if they are judged to be derived from the established source rather than a non-established population or recently released captive birds.

Exotic Report Log

Since the recording of any exotic species in the state is considered important information, it is the judgment of NYSARC that the Kingbird Regional Editors should include exotics in their quarterly Kingbird reports. This information will serve as an historic database for any future analysis. Birders are therefore encouraged to report exotic species that they encounter in the field, along with any information on behavior or location that might shed light on a bird's status (e.g., wild, feral, intentionally released, recently escaped, or domesticated).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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LITERATURE CITED

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