

REPORT OF THE NEW YORK STATE AVIAN RECORDS COMMITTEE FOR 1998

The New York State Avian Records Committee (hereafter NYSARC or the Committee) has reviewed a total of one hundred and twenty-six reports involving claims of forty-eight species or reviewable subspecies. These included one hundred and eleven reports from 1998, eight second-round reports from 1997, six reports from 1996 and one from 1995. Of these reports, nineteen reports will be retained for a second, or in some cases third, round of review and the outcomes will be announced at a future date. A consensus (to accept or not accept) was reached for one hundred and seven reports, of which ninety-two (86% of the total) were accepted. Thus only fifteen submissions were not accepted, in all cases because of insufficient documentation or because the descriptions were inconsistent with known identification criteria for the species claimed. This high degree of acceptance provides a fine testament to the quality of many of the submissions the committee received. Furthermore, the proportion of acceptances compares very favorably with other states or provinces.

Unfortunately, only sixteen sightings (i.e. individual birds) received multiple reports. A much larger number of submissions mentioned the presence of co-observers who could potentially validate the description. It is a common misconception that only the initial discoverer of a bird may submit a report. In actuality, all observers of a rarity (even if the bird is seen by hundreds of people) should submit written descriptions or other forms of documentation (e.g. photos, video or sketches) for inclusion in the official record. A good rule of thumb is to never assume that others will submit anything to the Committee! Likewise, observers cannot rely on Regional editors or local records committees to forward reports to NYSARC. Observers should also not worry about overwhelming the Committee. In general it is actually much easier to review multiple independent reports as these can provide a more compelling and detailed account of the sighting.

The Committee reviewed reports from 30 out of the 61 counties in New York State and these were scattered evenly across the state. In terms of submissions from individual counties, Monroe County led the way with a total of 34 separate reports, followed by Suffolk County (16 reports) and Genesee County (10 reports). Well recognized 'hot-spots' such as the Niagara River, Irondequoit Bay, Fire Island and Jamaica Bay NWR figured strongly in the reports but many also involved private yards or less frequently visited spots. All records are sight records unless otherwise indicated. For accepted reports, the names of observers submitting documentation are given in parenthesis and the names of all contributors are listed in full at the end of the report. Occasionally, the names of the

original finders or co-observers (when known) are given in the narrative. The Committee does not formally decide the age, sex or subspecies of a given bird. However, Committee members often remark on age, sex or subspecies issues when reviewing a record and this may be incorporated into the record as summarized in the annual report.

Since the last annual report, the Committee has undergone several important changes in membership and procedures (see KB 49: 199). The Committee was expanded from five to seven voting members with the addition of Kevin McGowan of Ithaca and Angus Wilson of New York City. The voting guidelines have been modified to incorporate the increased membership (McGowan and Burke, 2000). After more than a decade at the helm, Bob Andrie stepped down as NYSARC chair and was replaced by Angus Wilson. Charles Smith's term expired at the end of 1999 and was replaced by Willie D'Anna of Niagara Falls, NY. We thank Dr. Smith for his service to the Committee.

Willie D'Anna is a leading figure in the birding community of Region 1 and has been a regular contributor to NYSARC. Willie is well-known throughout the state, and is the current compiler of *The Kingbird* Seasonal Highlights. While this report was in preparation, Ken Able's term on the Committee expired. Ken is a long-standing member of the Committee and we will miss his experience and depth of knowledge. Dr. Able is replaced by Gerard Phillips of Cato, NY. For the past three seasons, Gerard has been the official hawkwatcher at Derby Hill and is well-known in local birding circles. Lastly, after six years of dedicated service, Jim Lowe has decided to step down as Secretary and was replaced by Jeanne Skelly of Churchville, NY. We very much appreciate Jim's sterling service to the Committee over the years and wish him well.

Among the highlights of 1998, are three species new to the New York State Checklist: Broad-billed Sandpiper (*Limicola falcinellus*), Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*) and Lazuli Bunting (*Passerina amoena*). With these inclusions, the state list stands at 454 species. Other notable highlights include the second occurrences of Reddish Egret (*Egretta rufescens*) and Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*), and the first Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*) since 1975. The list of species to be reviewed by NYSARC is posted on the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs World Wide Web Site:

<http://birds.cornell.edu/fnysbc/NYSARC/home.htm>

This site also includes information about the composition and functioning of the Committee as well as an extensive photo gallery of rarities observed in New York State including several records described in this report. NYSARC solicits and encourages observers to submit documentation for all species on the review list, as well as any species unrecorded in New York. Questions regarding this list or the review of rare or uncommon forms or subspecies should be directed to Committee Chair at the address given below.

Written documentation supported where possible by photographs, video, field sketches or audio recordings should be sent to: Jeanne Skelly, Secretary for NYSARC, 420 Chili Scottsville Road, Churchville, NY 14428.

1998 ACCEPTED REPORTS

Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*)

1998-58-A, One in first-basic plumage on the Tomhannock Reservoir, Towns of Schaghticoke and Pittstown, Rensselaer Co., on 17 Oct 1998 (Walter Ellison, Nancy Martin). This Pacific Loon came within 200 meters of the observers Walter Ellison and Nancy Martin, allowing critical examination of the head markings, including a narrow dark line between chin and throat. This so-called "chin strap" is diagnostic, a conclusion supported by the absence of a white flank patch. A detailed review of Pacific Loon and Arctic Loon identification can be found in Birch and Lee (1997).

Pacific/Arctic Loon (*Gavia pacifica/arctica*)

1998-60-A, One adult in basic plumage on ocean off Dune Road west of the Shinnecock Inlet, Suffolk Co., on 13 Dec 1998 (Angus C. Wilson). Seen in the late afternoon swimming a short distance offshore alongside a Red-throated Loon (*G. stellata*). The observers Angus Wilson and Andrew Guthrie noted the slightly larger size, sharp contrast between the dark upperparts and white underparts, lack of patterning on lower neck, well-defined white auricular patch and smoothly rounded crown. Separation of Pacific and Arctic Loons can be extremely challenging and many birds are best left undifferentiated. In the fading light, the presence or absence of a narrow dark chinstrap could not be safely determined preventing identification to species. The lack of white flank patch, however, was suggestive of Pacific Loon.

Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*)

1998-61-A, One subadult (1st or possibly 2nd year) on Lake Champlain, between Isle La Motte and Point au Fer, Town of Champlain, Clinton Co., on 19 Oct 1998 (William Kreuger); 1998-74-A, One on Lake Ontario, Four Mile Creek SP, Town of Porter, Niagara Co., on 27 Dec 1998 (Willie D'Anna). For much of the year, Northern Gannet is a common species along the Atlantic Coast of New York and is frequently seen within Long Island Sound. Occasionally individuals wander along the St Lawrence River and into the Great Lakes, particularly Lake Ontario. The immature that wandered into Lake Champlain is interesting and provides evidence that this species will travel moderate distances overland.

American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

1998-25-A/B, One on the Cayuga Pool, Iroquois NWR, Genesee Co., from 1 to 18 Apr 1998 (William W. Watson, Robert Spahn); 1998-39-A, One off Rt. 17 west of Owego, Tioga Co., on 25 May 1998 (Dave Russell); 1998-41-A/B, One on Mud Lake, Town of Depeyster, St. Lawrence Co., on 31 May 1998 (Nick Leone, Greg Jackson). Any large white pelican discovered in New York needs to be critically examined, particularly the pattern of black on the flight feathers, to make a correct species identification. There are six species of large white pelicans with varying degrees of black on the primaries and secondaries and all should be kept in mind when encountering a white pelican in New York. At least one of these species, the Pink-backed Pelican (*P. rufescens*), has occurred in Maryland as a zoo escape (Southworth and Southworth 1992) and other escapes are possible. Harrison (1983) provides good criteria for separating the white pelicans.

Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

1998-2-A/B/C, One immature, Irondequoit Bay, Monroe Co., on 24-26 Jan 1998 and on 7 Feb 1998 (Donna Traver, Don Traver, Brett M. Ewald, Robert Spahn, Bob Marcotte); 1998-9-A, One immature on Lake Ontario west of Charlotte Pier in Rochester, Monroe Co., on 22 Feb 1998 (Willie D'Anna); 1998-66-A/B, An adult and first-winter in Oswego Harbor, Oswego Co., on 25 Nov to 5 Dec 1998 (Gerard Phillips, Dorothy Crumb). These records received near unanimous approval on the basis of detailed descriptions, in some case with direct comparison to Double-crested Cormorant (*P. auritus*). Bob Marcotte's report included a helpful sketch of the immature at Irondequoit Bay. Great Cormorant is a common wintering species in coastal New York (Westchester, Richmond, New York, Kings, Queens, Nassau and Suffolk counties) and has become more frequent along the Hudson River. The species is now annual but rare along the shore of Lake Ontario. Oswego Harbor is a regularly favored spot. Given this steady change in status, NYSARC no longer requires reports of Great Cormorant from upstate New York, although detailed reports should still be submitted to Regional records committees. (NYSARC 2000)

Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*)

1998-30-A/B, One on Round Pond, Monroe Co., on 2-5 May 1998 (Dominic Sherony, Robert Spahn); 1998-31-A, One from Island Cottage Road, Monroe Co., on 3 Jun 1998 (Kevin Griffith). It is possible that all three reports pertain to the same individual. A generally coastal species, Tricolored Herons are a common summer visitor to Long Island, but very rare in upstate New York.

Reddish Egret (*Egretta rufescens*)

1998-48-A/B, A dark morph adult seen on two occasions flying over the East Pond at Jamaica Bay NWR, Queens Co., on 5 Sep 1998 (Julian Hough, Paul

Fusco). Seen briefly by two birders visiting from Connecticut searching for the Broad-billed Sandpiper, this is the second record for the state. Julian Hough supplemented his written description with a detailed sketch. The prior record, another dark morph adult, was seen intermittently at Jamaica Bay NWR, Queens Co., between 18 and 26 May 1991. A characteristic species of southern Florida and the Gulf of Mexico, Reddish Egrets are very rare along the Atlantic seaboard north of the Carolinas. Interestingly, a Reddish Egret was observed at Edwin Forsythe NWR Brigantine in NJ the week before, and is possibly the same wandering individual.

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)

1998-29-A, One flying over the Derby Hill Hawkwatch, Town of Mexico, Oswego Co., on 27 Apr 1998 (Gerard Phillips). During the last decade or more, Black Vulture has undergone a major range expansion, particularly in southern parts of the state along the Hudson River Valley. Because of this sustained change in status, NYSARC no longer requires documentation for this species. The species remains very rare in western New York, however, and full documentation should be submitted to appropriate local records committees.

Ross's Goose (*Chen rossii*)

1998-10-A, One at Point Au Roche, Clinton Co., on 25 Mar 1998 (David Hoag); 1998-62-A/B, One adult (blue morph) on Lake Champlain off Stafford Road near Point Au Roche, Clinton Co., on 2 Nov 1998 (Bill Krueger, Gary Worthington); 1998-68-A, One adult (white morph) on Savannah Mucklands, Cayuga Co., on 15 Dec 1998 (Gerard Phillips). During the last two decades, reports of this primarily western species have increased dramatically in eastern North America (Ryder and Alisauskas 1995). The first record for NY was in Mar 1983 (Treacy, 1983) and since then the species has become almost annual. Readily separable from Snow Goose with good views, the primary identification challenge is that of Ross's x Snow Goose hybrids. We urge that potential Ross's Geese be carefully documented with an emphasis on bill and head characteristics which are needed to eliminate the possibility of hybrids (Trauger et al., 1971, Roberson, 1993).

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis hutchinsii*)

1998-33-A, Two on Washington Island, Clayton, Jefferson Co., on 12 Nov 1998 (Nick Leone) Photographs supplemented with written notes. Various known as Hutchins's or Richardson's Goose, the northern subspecies *B. c. hutchinsii* has at times been treated as a distinct species known as Tundra Goose (Aldrich, 1946). The committee is interested in receiving carefully documented reports of this taxon and other small Canada Geese so that we can more accurately ascertain the frequency of occurrence in NY.

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)

1998-64-A, One adult male on Saratoga Lake, Saratoga Co., on 14 Nov 1998 (Walter G. Ellison, Nancy L. Martin). Description supplemented by a field sketch. The Tufted Duck population has expanded greatly in western Europe, and migrants, probably from Iceland, are beginning to winter in eastern North America. Tufted Duck has become regular but rare winter visitor to NY and now occurs almost annually on Long Island and in the New York City area where it is no longer a NYSARC review species. The species remains significantly rarer in upstate areas, with only a handful of records. Identification of males is relatively straightforward but still requires care. In particular, hybrids between Tufted Duck and another species of *Aythya* are known and should always be considered. Harris et al. (1989) and Madge and Burn (1988) should be consulted for a thorough review of the characteristics of Tufted Duck and its potential pairings with other waterfowl species. For males, close attention must be given to bill-tip pattern, bill-and-head shape, tuft shape and length, overall size and structure, eye color, back and flank color, and wing stripe (Harris et al. 1989). This well-described individual from Saratoga Lake was fully consistent with a pure Tufted Duck and was accepted unanimously.

Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)

1998-50-A, A dark morph juvenile on Great Gull Island, Suffolk Co., on 18 Sep to 4 Oct 1998 (Joe DiCostanzo, Helen Hays, Lisa Neild). This confiding individual was still present at the end of the field season when the researchers returned to the mainland. Records of Swainson's Hawk are becoming increasingly frequent in New York and eastern North America as a whole (Dodge and Nicoletti, 1998; England et al. 1997). Whether the increase in reports is due to a range expansion, increased vigilance (such as more hawkwatches) or improved knowledge on the part of field observers is unclear. Although there are now more than fifty records for NY, this is the first for Long Island. For a detailed account including photographs see DiCostanzo and Hays 1999. A color photograph was reproduced in *North American Birds* 53(1): p120.

Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*)

1998-56-A, One dark morph immature off Hoag Road, Rome, Oneida Co., on 11 Oct 1998 (David J. Cesari). Identification of large falcons can be quite problematic (Gantlett and Millington 1992). Males and female falcons can differ substantially in size and there is a broad range of individual variation in coloration. Importantly, many reports fail to consider the possibility of falconry birds (including Gyr Falcon) which occasionally escape and/or are seen while being flown by their owner. Eurasian falcons such as Saker (*F. cherrug*) and Lanner Falcon (*F. biarmicus*), or hybrids of these and other species are popular with fal-

coners and are often used for public displays or bird control at commercial airports. The focus on providing large falcons through captive-breeding programs has resulted in many different combinations, of which field identification would prove to be quite a challenge. Escaped exotics are frequently reported in the Northeast.

Purple Gallinule (*Porphyryla martinica*)

1998-55-A, One immature on Irondequoit Bay, City of Rochester, Monroe Co., on 11 Oct 1998 (Jerry Sullivan). There are more than 35 records of this southern species for New York, involving both adults and immatures. All but six or so previous records are from downstate. Although most frequent in April and May, this species can occur in almost any month of year.

Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*)

1998-14-A, One on the Lakeshore Marshes, near Wolcott, Wayne Co., on 28 Mar 1998 (Glen Wolford); 1998-27-A, One off Route 18, Somerset, Niagara Co., on 18 Apr 1998 (Willie D'Anna); 1998-63-A, One adult on the Six Mile Creek Wetlands, Town of Schroepfel, Oswego County on 14 Nov 1998 (Bill Purcell). Reports of Sandhill Cranes have become increasingly common during the past decade or so, especially from western parts of the state and along the southern shore of Lake Ontario. Because of this sustained increase in occurrence, the species was removed from the NYSARC review list at the end of 1999.

Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*)

1998-46-A, One near the mouth of Rush Creek at Woodlawn Beach State Park, Town of Hamburg, Erie Co., on 20 Aug 1998 (William Watson). The inland breeding population of Piping Plover nests on inland beaches from eastern Alberta to the shores of Lake Ontario and is designated as an endangered species by the Federal Government. Because Piping Plovers occur more frequently on Lake Erie than Lake Ontario, it is generally assumed, but not proven, that these records involve birds from the inland rather than coastal population. The most recent breeding record for upstate NY is from 1984.

American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*)

1998-49-A/B/C, One molting into basic plumage on the shore of Lake Champlain near Champlain, Clinton Co., on 14-21 Sep 1998 (William Krueger, Charlie Mitchell, Gary Worthington); 1998-82-A, Two flying over Lake Ontario past the mouth of Braddock Bay, Monroe Co., on 10 Aug 1998 (Mark Romanofsky). A regular wanderer to the state, especially during late summer and early fall, this species is annual in small numbers to coastal NY, especially Long Island where it is not subject to NYSARC review.

Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*)

1998-52-A, One at Oak Beach, Suffolk Co., on 23 Sep 1998 (John Fritz). Long-billed Curlews are very rare visitors to the Atlantic Coast north of North Carolina, with most recent records pertaining to fall migrants. Long-billed Curlews were a regular migrant to Long Island before the middle of the 19th Century, but have since undergone a dramatic decline in the east. This is only the second accepted record for the state since 1938, the first occurring from 4-30 Jul 1975 on the North Line Islands, Nassau Co., only a few miles from the present location.

Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*)

1998-44-A, One on the Klossen Marsh, Tonawanda WMA, Genesee Co., on 9 Aug 1998, (William Watson); 1998-81-A/B, One on Charlotte Beach, City of Rochester, Monroe Co., on 10 Aug 1998, (Katheleen Dalton and Frank Dobson). Although annual in small numbers on Long Island, Marbled Godwit remains rare elsewhere in the state. It is possible these two records refer to the same restless individual. The Charlotte Beach bird was studied for a few minutes before taking flight and heading northwest.

Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)

1998-45-A/B, One adult at Montezuma NWR, Town of Tyre, Seneca Co., on 12 Aug 1998 (Gerard Phillips, Karl David). Although not photographed, the detailed descriptions (supported by an informative sketch by Gerard Phillips) indicate an adult in molt from alternate to basic plumage. The vast majority of New York State's Curlew Sandpiper records (in excess of 100) are from Long Island where the species is close to annual. As a whole, Curlew Sandpipers appear to have been less common along the East Coast during the 1990's compared to the 1970-80's. The Montezuma record is only the third for upstate New York. Prior records are from Seneca Falls on 15 May 1982 and Iroquois NWR in 30-31 July 1990.

Broad-billed Sandpiper (*Limicola falcinellus*)

1998-7-A/B/C, One on West Pond Jamaica Bay NWR, Queens Co., on 29 Aug 1998 (William Benner, Rex Stanford, Angus C. Wilson). The first record for New York State and also first for the lower 48 states. This unique and little-known Eurasian sandpiper was first discovered by Bill Benner, and subsequently enjoyed by hundreds of observers from all over North America. It was even featured in several national newspapers (e.g. Hampson, 1998). The sandpiper remained on the West Pond until 4 Sep 1998 where it was seen to occupy and defend small feeding territories. In spite of detailed study it is unclear whether the Jamaica Bay individual belonged to the very similar European (*L. f. falcinellus*).

lus) or the Asiatic (*L. f. sibirica*) subspecies. For detailed accounts of this astounding record see Benner (1998a, b).

California Gull (*Larus californicus*)

1998-4-A, One at Chemung River Dam, Elmira, Chemung Co., on 21 Feb 1998 (Dave Russell); 1998-65-A, One adult in basic plumage on the Niagara River in the Town of Lewiston, Niagara Co., on 15 Nov 1998 (Willie D'Anna). The comparatively pale mantle of the Niagara River individual suggests the subspecies *L. c. albertensis*, which breeds in the northern Great Plains.

Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*)

1998-13-A, One in definitive basic plumage on the Niagara River near Goat Island, Niagara Falls, Niagara Co., on 15 Mar 1998 (Willie D'Anna). In New York, Thayer's Gulls are regular along the Niagara River during the winter, where adults or near-adults predominate. From a practical standpoint, the Committee accepts reports that document the full suite of all appropriate field characters. The identification and taxonomy of Thayer's Gull is one of the thorniest topics in North American birding. The reasons are twofold. First, there is intense debate among taxonomists as to whether Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*) and Kumlien's Iceland Gull (*L. glaucoides kumlieni*) belong to separate species or represent two points on a complex cline (gradient) with nominate Iceland Gull (*L. g. glaucoides*). Second, like all large gull species, both Thayer's and Iceland exhibit a high degree of individual variation and this greatly complicates the identification of out-of-range birds. For example, Garner and McGeehan (1998) have suggested that the phenomenal extent of variation in the wingtip pattern of Kumlien's Gull ("almost no two individuals look the same") compared to the less variable patterns of Thayer's and nominate Iceland, indicates that Kumlien's might be a product of hybridization between Thayer's and nominate Iceland. It is unlikely that this debate will be resolved without extensive analysis of genetic markers in birds studied on the breeding and wintering grounds.

Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*)

1998-8-A/B/C/D/E, One adult male visiting a sugar-water feeder in a private residence in Binghamton, Broome Co., on 18-22 Nov 1998 (Kevin J. McGowan, Dorothy Crumb, Gerry Rising, Robert Grosek, Yolanda Garcia). This is the first record for New York. Harriet Marsi first observed a hummingbird using a nectar feeder at the home of Bernice Greenmun and brought it to the attention of local birders, including Bob Grosek. An estimated two hundred or more birders came to see the hummingbird which remained until 11 Dec 1998 when it was captured and taken into captivity by a licensed rehabilitator. The ethics of this intervention was hotly debated and provided a controversial twist to a fascinating record. For detailed accounts and photographs see Grosek (1998) and Pantle (1998).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*)

1998-57-A, One adult female at the junction of Rt 51A and Rt 29 south, Oswego Co., on 12 Oct 1998 (Tony Shrimpton) Written description supported by a sketch. Scissor-tailed Flycatchers regularly wander to the northeast from their established breeding range in the central and southern US. Most are discovered during late spring and early summer (May-July) or during the fall (Sept-Nov), and the well-described Oswego bird falls neatly into the latter peak of occurrence. The Committee felt the tail length and salmon-pink flanks were more indicative of an adult female than an immature as suggested by the observer.

Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*)

1998-59-A, Two on the boundary of Riis Park and Fort Tilden, Queens Co., on 28 Nov 1998 (Angus C. Wilson). This is the second record for New York and first to be documented with photographs (published in *The Kingbird*, *North American Birds* and even *Birding World*, a UK publication). The only prior record was a single individual observed a couple of miles from Riis Park at Jamaica Bay NWR in May 1990. The species has become regular at Cape May, New Jersey in the late fall and the Riis Park record may involve the same wandering individuals. Two subspecies of Cave Swallow occur in North America, the southwestern form *P. p. pallida* which breeds in southern Texas and northern Mexico and the nominate Caribbean race, *P.p. fulva*. Some authorities suggest these should be treated as discrete forms. Although NYSARC did not vote on the subspecific identification, the detailed plumage descriptions and photographs of the Riis Park birds appear consistent with the southwestern subspecies. For a detailed account of this record, see Guthrie and Wilson (2000).

Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*)

1998-71-A/B, One off Onion Avenue, Town of Wawayanda, Orange Co., on 20 Dec 1998 (John P. Tramontano, Mary Ann Cairo); 1998-72-A, One at an uncertain location, Dutchess Co., 28 Dec 1998 (Peggy Fasciani); 1998-73-A, One on SUNY Purchase Campus, Westchester Co., 30 Dec 1998, with color sketch (Yolanda Garcia). An interesting cluster of reports from a radius of 30 or so miles. The discovery of each of these bluebirds was associated with local Christmas Bird Counts and it is possible had been present prior to their discovery. Although only one report was received for review, the SUNY Purchase bird was seen by many birders from New York and neighboring Connecticut and remained well into Jan 1999.

Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*)

1998-76-A, One adult in the Glenview Court area near Town of Webster, Monroe Co., on 16 May 1998 (Donna Traver, Don Traver). Although a regular spring

overshoot to NY State, most frequently western New York, the Delaware River Valley and urban parks in the New York City area, this well-described individual from the Lake Ontario shore is notable.

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)

1998-38-A, One, Point Gratiot Nature Walk, Dunkirk, Chautauqua Co., on 26 May 1998 (William W. Watson). A frequent spring overshoot into New York State, this species occurs annually in small numbers on Long Island and the NYC metropolitan area but is decidedly less common in more northerly parts of the state. This well-described individual was studied alongside Scarlet Tanagers (*P. olivacea*).

Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*)

1998-67-A, An adult or possibly first-winter male in Jamesport, Town of Riverhead, Suffolk Co., on 27 Nov 1998 (Beverly Prentice, Anthony Prentice); 1998-70-A, One in the Village of McGraw, Cortland Co., on 24 Dec 1998 to 4 Jan 1999 (Bill Toner). As its name suggests, a western species that occurs as a vagrant to the northeast, predominantly in late fall and early winter. Nov and Dec are the peak months of occurrence in NY. Identification of Western Tanagers in basic plumage must be accomplished using multiple characteristics. Some Scarlet Tanagers (*P. olivacea*) show relatively prominent wing bars, so this character is not a sufficient field mark for species identification. Any claimed sighting of this species should include a description of the wings, head, back, rump and if possible, underwing coverts. Pyle (1997) discusses the identification of *Piranga* species in detail.

Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow (*Ammodramus nelsoni*)

1998-78-A, One at Island Cottage Woods, Town of Greece, Monroe Co., on 17 May 1998, (Marty DeHart). The precise status of each of the three subspecies of Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow in New York remains poorly understood and NYSARC strongly encourages detailed documentation of this species, especially when recorded away from Long Island and the metropolitan area.

Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*)

1998-35-A, One adult male in Galway, Saratoga Co., on 3 May 1998. Brief written description supported by photographs. Responded to a tape by breaking into song. (Alison Van Keuren, Jane Graves). A distinctive arctic breeder that migrates through the central plains to winter in the midwest as far south as Texas and Louisiana. Harris's Sparrow is a rare wintering species throughout the eastern United States (Norment and Shackleton 1993). In New York, there are more than fifty prior records, most from the winter months. Some have remained through the winter and molted into alternate plumage in the spring.

Blue Grosbeak (*Guiraca caerulea*)

1998-36-A, One subadult male in village of Canastota, Madison Co., on 13 May 1998, (Carolyn J. Keefe). This well-described individual visited a seed feeder in the observer's yard for a single day only. The date is fully consistent with a spring overshoot of this more southerly species and the report was accepted unanimously.

Lazuli Bunting (*Passerina amoena*)

1998-6-A/B/C/D/E/F/G, One immature male coming to a private feeder on Silver Road, Town of Bethany, Genesee Co., on 23 Mar 1998 (Dorothy Crumb, Gerry Rising, Steve Kelling, Kurt Fox, Robert Spahn, Willie D'Anna, Betsy Potter, William Watson). The written documentation was supported by video submitted by Betsy Potter. This is the first record for New York and one of very few confirmed records of Lazuli Bunting from eastern North America. The bird was first seen by homeowners Don and Virginia Tiede on 16 Mar and was identified by Gail Seamans on 21 Mar. The bird remained into the first week of April and was seen by hundreds of local birders. The western counterpart of the Indigo Bunting (*P. cyanea*), the two species will hybridize where their ranges overlap on the Great Plains (Sibley and Short, 1959), and claims of extralimital Lazuli Buntings require sufficient documentation to eliminate these hybrids from consideration.

Hoary Redpoll (*Carduelis hornemanni*)

1998-5-A, Two at a feeder on Baum Road, Hastings, Oswego Co., on 3 Mar 1998 (Bill Purcell); 1998-12-A, One near Krull County Park, Village of Olcott, Town of Newfane, Niagara Co., on 1 Feb 1998 (Willie D'Anna). A more northerly counterpart of the Common Redpoll (*C. flammea*), Hoary Redpolls of the subspecies *exilipes* are subject to periodic irruptions into New York and surrounding states (reviewed in Brinkley, 1998). The two Hastings individuals were with a flock of fifty or so Common Redpolls at the observer's feeder. In his very careful description of both individuals Bill Purcell makes a convincing case for subspecific identification as *exilipes* rather than *hornemanni*.

1998 REPORTS ACCEPTED BUT ORIGINS UNCERTAIN**Trumpeter Swan** (*Cygnus buccinator*)

1998-21-A/B, Three at Salmon Creek, Braddock Bay, Town of Greece, Monroe Co., on 3 Jan 1998 (Bob Marcotte) and almost certainly the same individuals at the Irondequoit Bay Outlet, Monroe Co., on 18 Jan 1998 to 14 Feb 1998 (Robert Spahn); 1998-22-A, four individuals, including a marked bird, near Sodus Bay, Monroe Co., on 12 Jan 1998 (Donna Traver, Don Traver). Although breeding has occurred in NY since 1996, Trumpeter Swan has not been added to New York

State Checklist. While identification is not an issue, the wild origins of these birds remain open to question due to occasional escapes of captive birds from private waterfowl collections and a major reintroduction program in neighboring Ontario. All of the 1998 records are thought to arise from these sources. The Sodus Bay group included a color banded individual (#308) indicating that it comes from the Canadian reintroduction program. The New York breeding population is expanding and reports are likely to become more frequent. For a detailed account see Carroll and Swift, 2000.

REGARDING REPORTS NOT ACCEPTED

A number of factors may contribute to a record being denied acceptance. The most common is that the material submitted was judged as insufficient or simply too vague to properly document the reported occurrence and eliminate all other similar species. It is worth pointing out that written documentation or descriptions prepared entirely from memory weeks, months, or years after a sighting are seldom voted on favorably and the Committee cannot overstate the importance of taking field notes. These should be written while the bird is under study or if not possible, immediately afterwards. The fact that NYSARC does not accept a particular record does not mean the Committee, or any of its members, feels the record did not occur as reported. The non-acceptance of any record simply reflects the opinion of NYSARC that the documentation did not meet the rigorous standards appropriate for inclusion in the formal historical record. We make every effort to be as fair and objective as possible. If the Committee is unsure about any particular submission it tends to err on the conservative side, preferring not to accept a good record rather than validate a bad one. It is quite uncommon for records to be rejected because the bird was obviously misidentified. All records, whether accepted or not, remain on file and can be re-submitted to the Committee if additional substantive material is presented. This reinforces the need for as many observers as possible to submit reports.

1998 REPORTS NOT ACCEPTED

Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

1998-40-A, One, Cossackie Harbor, Greene Co., on 27 May 1998. This brief report provided almost no description of the bird and received no positive votes.

Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*)

1998-51-A/B, One near the Town of Champlain, Clinton Co., on 20 Sep 1998. Aspects of the description seemed incompatible with Cinnamon Teal in any plumage. Both reports referred to a horizontal white bar visible on the wing

coverts when the bird was at rest. This is not typical of Cinnamon Teal and suggests other duck species such as Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) or Cape Shelduck (*T. cana*). For this reason, the Committee voted by six to one against accepting these reports.

Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)

1998-26-A, One at Frisbee Hill, Town of Greece, Monroe Co., on 14 Apr 1998. The Committee voted unanimously against accepting this report. The brief description of a dark raptor seen soaring with Red-tailed Hawks did not satisfactorily eliminate other species such as Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*).

Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*)

1998-28-A, One at Lowes Pond Wetland-Big Flats, Chemung Co., on 22 Apr 1998. Identified on the basis of a single call and not seen. The committee was concerned by the brevity and nature of this encounter. Although the 'kik-e-do' call is distinctive, other rails species will produce similar vocalizations on occasion.

Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*)

1998-23-A, One at Long Pond, Town of Greece, Monroe Co., on 10 Mar 1998; 1998-77-A, One at Braddock Bay, Town of Greece, Monroe Co., on 17 May 1998. Both reports involved first-year birds and unfortunately the descriptions lacked sufficient detail to be acceptable for the permanent record. It should be stressed that immature gulls are highly variable (even more so than adults) and reports of uncommon species require very careful descriptions of feather markings and coloration. With potential first or second year Thayer's Gulls, it is important to describe in some detail the exact patterning and relative intensities of brown coloration of the tail band and the tertial, secondary, and primary feathers. Given these difficulties, every effort should be made to photo document candidates – if possible showing the upper surfaces of the spread wings and tail. Several committee members felt the description of the Braddock Bay individual was more consistent with a darkish Kumlien's Gull in transition between first-basic and first-alternate plumage. Darker than average Kumlien's Gulls are not uncommon and present a very significant complication in the identification of Thayer's Gulls. This possibility needs to be addressed carefully in any report (see examples in Zimmer, 1991 and Garner and McGeehan, 1998).

California Gull (*Larus californicus*)

1998-18-A, One on the east side of Genesee River at its mouth in Charlotte, City of Rochester, Monroe Co., on 10 Jan 1998. The committee voted by five to two against accepting this brief report. Several members commented that the size, mantle shade and leg color were more consistent with Lesser Black-backed Gull (*L. fuscus*) than California Gull.

Marbled Murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*)

1998-69-A/B, One on Lake Ontario, Town of Webster, Monroe Co., on 20 Dec 1998. A small alcid-like bird was observed flying eastwards along the Lake Ontario shoreline during a Christmas Bird Count. Given the brevity of the sighting and several inconsistencies in the description, the committee voted by six to one against accepting this record even at the level of murrelet species.

Veery (*Catharus fuscescens*)

1998-32-A, One suspected to be of the western subspecies *C. f. saliculus* Braddock Bay, Monroe Co., on 7 May 1998. Trapped as part of a banding project, this individual was initially identified as a Swainson's Thrush (*C. ustulatus*) due to the near absence of rufous coloring and faint eye ring. Unfortunately, the bird was not photographed and supportive descriptions (including measurement data) were not provided by the banders. In a recent review of *Catharus* identification, Lane and Jaramillo urge caution in the identification of Veery subspecies as the differences are poorly known (Lane and Jaramillo, 2000). Although the record was not substantial enough to be accepted, this western subspecies could occur in NY and NYSARC commends the observer for bringing this interesting observation to the Committee's attention.

Hoary Redpoll (*Carduelis hornemanni*)

1998-15-A, One in a weedy field on North Hamlin Road, Hamlin, Monroe Co., on 3 Jan. 1998; 1998-19-A, One on Grandview Lane, Greece, Monroe Co., on 28 Mar 1998; 1998-20-A, One on North Hamlin Road, Hamlin, Monroe Co., on 7 Mar. 1998. Separation of Hoary and Common redpolls (*C. flammea*) can be difficult and while the committee feels these reports are probably of Hoary Redpolls, the documentation provided does not supply sufficient detail for acceptance into the permanent record. Common Redpolls show more variation in size and color than is generally appreciated and with any suspected Hoary Redpoll, observers should carefully examine and record the patterning on the undertail coverts as well as the size and shape of the bill; preferably in direct comparison to Common Redpolls. For further discussion of this identification challenge and its potential pitfalls, observers are encouraged to consult the text and photographs in David Czaplak's excellent review articles (Czaplak, 1995).



1997 ACCEPTED REPORTS

Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*)

1997-52-A/B, One adult over the hawkwatch at Robert Moses State Park, Fire Island, Suffolk Co., on 4 Nov 1997 (Herbert Roth, Lore J. Schore). This report of a Brown Booby seen feeding close to shore and then flying over the hawkwatch, was accepted by six votes to one on the second round of review. The Committee was initially concerned by the absence of discussion of how this bird differed from Northern Gannet (*S. bassanus*). However, both submissions make reference to a yellow bill and dark upper breast separated from the white underbody by a sharp division which firmly eliminate immature Northern Gannet and Masked Booby (*S. dactylatra*). Together with other minor details, these reports provided a convincing picture of an adult Brown Booby. More typical of late summer and early to mid-fall, this represents one of the latest dates for New York.

Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)

1997-58-A, One light-morph adult over the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve, Town of Danby, Tompkins Co., on 18 Oct 1997 (George Kloppel). The observer provided an excellent description of an adult light morph Swainson's Hawk but was reticent to identify it to species. NYSARC debated the consequences of accepting a record that had not been formally identified to species by the contributor. In the end, the committee voted unanimously in favor of acceptance.

Mew Gull (*Larus canus*)

1997-64-A, One in first-basic plumage of the western subspecies *brachyrhynchus* on the Chadakoin River in Jamestown, Chautauqua Co., on 21 Dec 1997 (Robert A. Sundell). The observer provided a detailed and generally convincing description of the North American subspecies *L. c. brachyrhynchus*. Pertinent details included the small size relative to Ring-billed Gull (*L. delawarensis*), brownish underparts, darker mantle, dusky tail and heavily barred upper tail coverts. Several committee members were troubled by the description of 'very long and spindly legs'. After two rounds of voting, the record was accepted by six votes to one. Difficult records such as this underscore the importance and utility of obtaining supportive photographs. Often interesting gulls can be attracted by the promise of food and it is possible to obtain extremely useful pictures using a standard camera.

California Gull (*Larus californicus*)

1997-2-A, One adult in basic plumage on the Niagara River above the Horseshoe

Falls, Niagara Co., on 9 Jan 1997 (Dean DiTommaso). This record was accepted by six votes to one on the second round of review. The bird was viewed in flight as it coursed over the churning water off Goat Island, Niagara Falls. Committee members were troubled by the lack of critical details such as the leg and eye color, however, it was felt that the weight of supportive detail on wing tip and bill patterning was sufficient to accept this record.

1997 REPORTS NOT ACCEPTED

Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*)

1997-18-A, One on Lake Ontario off Durand Eastman Park, City of Rochester, Monroe Co., on 27 Apr 1997. A number of details in this report seemed inconsistent for Pacific, or for that matter the very similar Arctic Loon. The crown and nape were described as slightly darker than the rest of the dark parts of the head and hindneck. If anything, Pacific Loons should show a paler crown and nape. On a second round of review, this record received only one positive vote.

1996 ACCEPTED REPORTS

Audubon's Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*)

1996-92-A, One flying east seen from Democrat Point, Robert Moses State Park, Suffolk Co., on 7 Sep 1996, Written documentation supported by sketch (Angus C. Wilson). Seen during a dawn seawatch following the passage of Hurricane Fran. This warm water shearwater probably occurs regularly off New York during the summer months but is rarely encountered from land. The observers Angus Wilson, Andrew Guthrie and Shai Mitra noted the dark undertail coverts, and diffuse rather than crisp boundary between dark upperparts and light underparts.

Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*)

1996-88-A, Three (adult and two subadults) in Fire Island Inlet off Robert Moses State Park, Suffolk Co., 30 May 1996 (Angus C. Wilson); 1996-89-A One subadult off Robert Moses State Park, Suffolk Co., on 7 Sep 1996 (Angus C. Wilson). Jaeger identification is notoriously difficult and many individuals, especially in fall or winter cannot be identified with certainty. The spring record involved two subadults and a breeding-plumaged adult flying east through Fire Island Inlet towards the Robert Moses Causeway Bridge. The fall record involved a subadult (probably first-year) associated with oceanic disturbances due to the passage of Hurricane Fran. The observers Angus Wilson, Andrew Guthrie and Shai Mitra based their identification on the absence of a white primary flash on the upper surface of the wing, strong horizontal barring on the

uppertail coverts, washed out brownish coloration, elongated body shape and light bouncy flight style.

Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*)

1996-93-A, One at Montauk Point, Suffolk Co., on 8 Sep 1996 (Angus C. Wilson). The written documentation was supported by color photographs by Angus Wilson. First spotted by Tony Lauro in a large tern flock feeding in the rips off Montauk Point, the tern was relocated as it roosted with Common Terns (*S.hirundo*) and Roseate Terns (*S. dougallii*) along the beach. The presence of a dark subterminal bar across the central secondaries and reduced tail fork suggest a first-summer subadult (Olsen and Larsson 1995).

Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*)

1996-90-A, One in Fire Island Inlet off Robert Moses State Park, Suffolk Co., 7 Sep 1996 (Angus C. Wilson); 1996-91-A, One juvenile off Montauk Point, Suffolk Co., 2 Sep 1996 (Angus C. Wilson). Both Sooty Terns were a casualty of hurricanes. The Fire Island Inlet bird, first spotted by Paul Buckley, was coursing up and down the north side of Democrat Point. Later in the day it was seen to land on the sandy point (very unusual for this aerial species) and could be easily approached and photographed. The half-eaten remains were discovered at this location the following morning by Shai Mitra (pers. comm).

1995 ACCEPTED REPORTS

Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*)

1995-66-A, One subadult at Mill Pond, Town of Centerport, Suffolk Co., on 25 Dec 1995 (Angus C. Wilson). Discovered by Dan Brady as he stepped out to collect his morning newspaper, this immature Gyr Falcon seen by a handful of local birders during its two-day stay. On the first day it was seen to kill a male Mallard which it later consumed. Detailed description and a series of color photographs eliminate other similar species, including Saker Falcon or hybrids.

REPORTS WITHHELD FOR ADDITIONAL REVIEW

The following reports received a split vote and are being recirculated for second, or in two cases a third, round of review.

Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*)

1998-75-A, One, Black River Bay, Township of Hounsfield, Jefferson Co., 29 Dec 1998.

Yellow-nosed Albatross (*Thalassarche chlororhynchos*)

1998-43-A, One, 21 miles SE of Fire Island Inlet, Suffolk Co., 12 Jul 1998.

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)

1998-24-A, One, Braddock Bay, Monroe Co., 27 Mar 1998.

1997-19-A, One Braddock Bay, Monroe Co., 5 May 1997.

Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*)

1998-34-A, One, Route 78 between N. Java and Stryersville, Monroe Co.,
10 July 1998.

Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*)

1998-54-A, One, East Quogue, Suffolk Co., 5 Oct 1998.

Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*)

1998-79-A, One, Mendon Ponds Park, Mendon, Monroe Co., 17 May 1998.

1998-80-A, One, Brockport, Monroe Co., 23 May 1998.

American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*)

1998-47-A, Two, Myers Point, Tompkins Co., 24 Aug 1998

Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*)

1998-1-A, One, Oswego, Oswego Co., 25 Jan 1998.

1998-11-A, One, Seneca River, Baldwinsville, Onondaga Co., 28 Jan 1998.

1998-23-A, One, Long Pond, Greece, Monroe Co., 10 Mar 1998.

1998-42-A, One, Shinnecock Inlet, Suffolk Co., 6 Jun 1998.

California Gull (*Larus californicus*)

1998-3-A, One Seneca Lake, Schuyler Co., 11 Feb 1998.

Black-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides arcticus*)

1998-53-A, One, Cape Vincent, Jefferson Co., 3 Oct 1998.

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)

1998-37-A, One, Cape Vincent, Jefferson Co., 15 May 1998.

Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

1997-16-A, Mecklenburg, Schuyler Co., 7-10 Apr 1997.

Hoary Redpoll (*Carduelis hornemanni*)

1998-16-A, One, Livonia, Livingston Co., 10 Jan 1998.

1998-17-A, One, North Hamlin Road, Monroe Co., 22 Jan 1998.

Submitted on behalf of the members of New York State Avian Records Committee.

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Thomas W. Burke
Willie D'Anna
Kevin McGowan
Robert O. Paxton
Gerard Phillips
Jeanne Skelly (Secretary)
Angus Wilson (Chair)

Former Committee members involved in the review of submissions described in this annual report:

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