

REPORT OF THE NEW YORK STATE AVIAN RECORDS COMMITTEE FOR 1999

The New York State Avian Records Committee (hereafter NYSARC or the Committee) made decisions on a total of 94 reports involving 44 species. These included 75 reports from 1999, 2 third-round reports from 1997, 17 second-round reports from 1998. In all, 65 reports (69%) were accepted. This is slightly lower than average but reflects the unusually large number of reports in this batch that were undergoing second or even third review cycles. Twenty-five submissions were not accepted because of insufficient documentation or because the descriptions were inconsistent with known identification criteria. Multiple reports were received for only 20% of sightings, although co-observers were often mentioned. All records reviewed by NYSARC (including descriptions, photographs, videotapes, audio recordings, and Committee comments) are archived at Cornell University in Ithaca. Reports are reviewed by the seven voting members of the committee and voted upon as outlined in McGowan and Burke 2000.

How complete is our coverage? An informal survey of the ten Regional Reports in *The Kingbird* identified more than 70 reports of species or subspecies on the NYSARC review list that were not submitted to the Committee. This included a large number of multi-observer sightings. As we endeavor to make it easier for birders to submit reports via electronic media, it is hoped that the mediocre submission rate will improve substantially. Local bird clubs can help us in this regard by distributing information about the review process to members and all Regional Editors should demand submission of documentation before incorporating state rarities into their reports.

Counties best represented by accepted reports are Niagara and Suffolk, both with 15, Seneca following with 10. In total, the committee reviewed reports from 32 counties. 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 (when known) are given in the narrative. The records in this report are arranged taxonomically following The AOU Check-List of North American Birds (AOU 1998). Those contributing photographs, video or sketches, are given special mention in the narrative. With the rapid advances in affordable camera equipment, we anticipate an increase in the number of scarce or rare species documented by photographs or video. Photographs do not need to be 'magazine quality' for them to be extremely useful in supporting a written description. Similarly, we will gladly accept copies of video or audiotapes accompanied by a written report.

A common misconception persists 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) are urged to submit written descriptions or other forms of documentation (e.g. photographs, video or sketches). As a rule of thumb, one should never assume that others will submit a report or any other documentation. This may account for the large number of multi-observer sightings that go

undocumented. Submission of multiple independent reports provides a much more compelling and detailed account of the sighting, increasing the likelihood of acceptance.

Information on how to prepare and submit a report, together with an up-to-date list of species reviewed by NYSARC, is posted on the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs web site (<http://birds.cornell.edu/fnysbc/NYSARCHome.htm>). This site includes information about the Committee and a photo gallery of recent submissions, including some of those published in this report. NYSARC encourages observers to submit documentation for all species on the review list, as well as species unrecorded in New York. Documentation or correspondence for the Committee should be sent to:

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Churchville, NY 14428
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Among the highlights of 1999 were two species new to the New York State Checklist, Black-tailed Gull (*Larus crassirostris*) and MacGillivray's Warbler (*Oporornis tolmiei*). With these inclusions, the state list rises to 456 species. Other notable highlights include the second live occurrence of Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*) and the second record of Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*). A Mew Gull (*Larus canus*) of the Eurasian subspecies *canus* constitutes the first record away from the Niagara or St. Lawrence Rivers and first state record documented by photography or other physical evidence. Photo-documented records of two or perhaps three White-faced Storm-Petrels (*Pelagodroma marina*) off Long Island mark an exceptional season for this species.

NYSARC is indebted to the seventy-three observers who contributed the reports discussed here. Several individuals put forth considerable effort to document important sightings for the permanent record and where possible, their efforts are acknowledged in the narratives below. Unfortunately, these seventy-three contributors represent a tiny minority of the many hundreds, if not thousands, of active birders and feederwatchers in the state. Hopefully we will see increased participation in the reporting process in future years.

1999 Reports Accepted

Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*)

1999-2-A/B/C/D/E One in West Canada Creek below the Hinkley Reservoir Dam in Town of Trenton, Oneida Co. and Town of Russia in Herkimer Co., 20-30 Jan (Dorothy Crumb, Gerry Rising, William W. Watson, Yolanda Garcia, David J. and Candis C. Cesari). This magnificent bird was documented with an excellent series of reports and supported by an informative color sketch by Yolanda Garcia and photographs by David Cesari. The loon was first discovered on 18 Jan, by Matt

Perry, in the narrow confines of an ice-free stretch of the West Canada Creek shortly after it emerges from the Hinkley Reservoir Dam. . This is the third record for New York State and second live sighting. Many birders from the Northeast enjoyed this rare sight. The previous winter, a juvenile or possibly first-basic Yellow-billed Loon visited Oswego Harbor, also in Region 5 (Phillips, 1998). The extreme rarity of this species in the Northeast and relative proximity of the two sightings (less than 70 miles apart) led to speculation that the same individual was involved. The Oswego loon appeared to be in juvenile plumage, while the Hinkley Dam bird was a sub-adult, most likely a second-year, judging by the absence of small white spots on the wing-coverts, which are inconsistent with definitive-basic 'adult' plumage.

Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)

1999-47-A One on Niagara River off McFarland Point Ontario and Village of Youngstown, Niagara Co., NY on 27 Nov (Donald Ford). This well-described bird was first spotted from the Ontario side of the Niagara River. Although *Aechmophorus* grebes are fairly distinctive, the identification of birds as either Western or Clark's Grebe (*A. clarkii*) is not always straightforward. The two are sufficiently similar that some may be unidentifiable, particularly non-breeding birds. However, the observers of the Niagara grebe noted that the dark cap extended below the lores and the eyes which is consistent with Western Grebe.

White-faced Storm-Petrel (*Pelagodroma marina*)

1999-30-A One or possibly two, at sea over the Hudson Canyon (39.6931; -72.5819) 28 Aug (Shawneen Finnegan); 1999-31-A One at sea approximately 20 miles due south of Montauk Point, Suffolk Co., 9 Sep (Jack Passie). The summer of 1999 marked a banner year for White-faced Storm-Petrels off the eastern seaboard. Both reports from New York waters were accompanied by excellent descriptions and supported by video by Shawneen Finnegan (1999-30-A) and color photographs by Jack Passie and Dave Johnston (1999-31-A). In spite of the lone report, the Hudson Canyon bird(s) was enjoyed by a large number of New



White-faced Storm-Petrel 9 Sep 1999
20 mi. south of Montauk Pt.
Jack Passie

York birders participating in an organized pelagic trip. This unique species breeds on remote islets in the eastern North Atlantic as well as in the southern oceans. Two subspecies occur in the North Atlantic; *P. m. hypoleuca* which breeds on the Selvagen archipelago in the northern summer and *P. m. eadesi* which breeds on the Cape Verde Islands off West Africa. Which subspecies occurs in New York waters remains an interesting and unanswered question. Those breeding on the Selvagens return to their colonies in February where most remain until September. In contrast, *P. m. eadesi*

breeds during the northern winter arriving at the breeding sites from November onwards. Although this would suggest New York records pertain to Cape Verde birds, the movements of nonbreeding *hypoleuca* remain completely unknown.

Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*)

1999-19-A One, southern end of Motor Island in the Niagara River, Town of Tonawanda, Erie Co., 2 Jun (William Watson); 1999-22-A One on Tschache Pool at Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, Town of Tyre, Seneca Co., 8 Jul (Benjamin Fambrough). A predominantly coastal species, Tricolored Herons are common summer visitors to Long Island, but very rare elsewhere, particularly in northern and western parts of the state.

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)

1999-20-A One over Derby Hill, Town of Mexico, Oswego Co. on 31 Mar (Bill Purcell); 1999-40-A One over Wooley Hill Hawk Watch, West Burlington, Town of Burlington, Otsego Co., 21 Oct (Tom Salo). Two well-described birds observed from hawkwatches. Tom Salo's comprehensive report of the Wooley Hill bird included helpful field sketches of the head and underwing pattern, clearly eliminating Turkey Vulture (*C. aura*). During the last decade, Black Vultures have undergone a major range expansion, particularly in southern parts of the state such as along the Hudson River Valley. Because of this sustained change in status, NYSARC has dropped this species from the review list (NYSARC 2000). This said, the species remains very rare in western New York, and full documentation should be submitted to local records committees from that area.

Ross's Goose (*Chen rossii*)

1999-35-A One in field near Point au Roche State Park, Town of Beekmantown, Clinton Co., 8 Oct (David J. Hoag); 1999-37-A/B One on May's Point Pool, Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, Town of Tyre, Seneca Co., 14 Oct (William W. Watson, Michael F. Galas); 1999-39-A One to three Treadwell Bay, Point au Roche State Park, Clinton Co., 29 Oct (David J. Hoag); 1999-43-A One at Monty Bay, north of Point au Roche State Park, Clinton Co., 11 Nov (David J. Hoag). Each fall and winter, David Hoag searches the thousands of Snow Geese that pass through the upper reaches of Lake Champlain (both in New York and Vermont) for color-marked birds. As a by-product of these valuable studies, Hoag has revealed the regular occurrence of small numbers of Ross's Geese as well as numbers of possible Ross's x Snow Goose hybrids. Reports of this primarily western species have increased dramatically in eastern North America during the last two decades (Ryder and Alisauskas 1995). The first record for NY occurred in March 1983 (Treacy 1983) and the species has become annual. With good views, Ross's Goose is readily separable from Snow Goose (*C. caerulescens*) and the primary identification challenge is that of Ross's x Snow Goose hybrids. We urge that potential Ross's Goose reports 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).

Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)

1999-26-A One on Great Gull Island, Suffolk Co., 26 Jul (Dick Young). Detailed description (supplemented with sketch) of an adult or perhaps subadult seen flying over the large Common Tern colony. Great Gull Island covers 17 acres and lies 7 miles east of Orient Point. The island serves as a regular stepping stone for migrant raptors, including a long-staying Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) in 1998 (NYSARC 1998-50-A). This is the second record of Mississippi Kite for Great Gull Island, the first being an immature on 25 May 1991 (1991-41-A/B).

Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*)

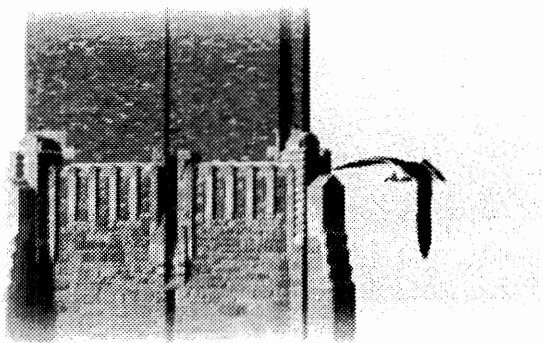
1999-9-A One near the Montezuma Wetlands Complex Headquarters, Town of Tyre, Seneca Co., 11 Apr (Catherine I. Sandell); 1999-11-A Two near intersection of Rt 63 and Dunlop Road, Town of Shelby, Orleans Co., 29 Apr (Richard Sowinski); 1999-12-A One off the Klossen Marsh trail in the Tonawanda Wildlife Management Area, Town of Alabama, Genesee Co., 1 May (Willie D'Anna); 1999-21-A One on West River at the south end of Canandaigua Lake, Town of Italy, Yates Co., 28 Jun (Catherine I. Sandell). 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 (NYSARC 2000).

Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*)

1999-25-A Adult in alternate plumage, near Dune Road east of the Ponquogue Bridge, Shinnecock, Suffolk Co., 19 Jul (Rex G. and Birgit Stanford). The Spotted Redshank was discovered at high tide as it roosted with several Greater Yellowlegs (*T. melanoleuca*) and American Oystercatchers (*Haematopus palliatus*) in the salt marsh east of the Ponquogue Bridge. After several minutes of observation, during which time it was photographed, the redshank flew into longer marsh grass and could not be relocated. Aberrantly dark (melanistic) Greater and Lesser yellowlegs (*T. flavipes*) and potential vagrants such as Common Redshank (*T. totanus*) were excluded by the combination of blackish plumage, white uppertail coverts and lower back, deep red legs and lack of white secondaries or inner primaries. A detailed written description was supported by a distant, but helpful, color photograph taken by Rex Stanford using a conventional single lens reflex camera held to the eyepiece of his telescope. This is the first acceptable record of this attractive Eurasian shorebird since the individual that spent two consecutive winters (1992/93 and 1993/94) in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, Kings Co.

Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*)

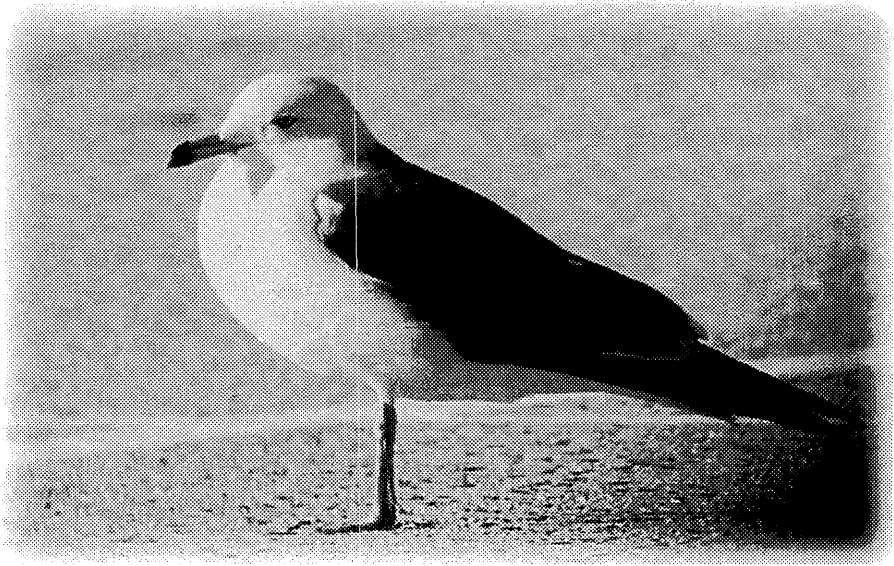
1999-32-A One Point Peninsula Shoal, Town of Lyme, Jefferson Co., 30-31 Aug (Nick Leone, photographed by Lee Chamberlaine). Annual in small numbers on Long Island, Marbled Godwit remains rare elsewhere in the state. The Point



Black-tailed Gull 1 Feb 1999
Jones Beach, Nassau Co.
Rex Stanford



Mew Gull (*Larus c. canus*)
14 Mar 1999
Shinnecock Inlet, Suffolk Co.
Rex Stanford



Black-tailed Gull 1 Feb 1999 Jones Beach, Nassau Co.
Rex Stanford

Peninsula bird frequented a small island with a limestone shoreline, short sections of sandy beach and stagnant pools. The bird was studied at close range over a two-day period and also photographed by Don Johnston. This excellent report included a careful description of the cinnamon underwing coverts and axillaries thereby eliminating all other species of godwit.

Black-tailed Gull (*Larus crassirostris*)

1999-79-A Adult near Parking Lot 6, Jones Beach State Park, Nassau Co., 31 Jan-1 Feb (Wilson and Guthrie 1999). This constitutes the first record for New York State. The Black-tailed Gull was discovered loafing on the ocean beach late in the afternoon on 31 Jan by Andrew Guthrie and Angus Wilson. As dusk descended it moved further down the beach and then onto the ocean to roost with several thousand other gulls. To the relief and enjoyment of many local birders, the Black-tailed Gull was still present the following day, squabbling for handouts in Parking Lot 6 amid the usual Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*) and Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*). With records from Nova Scotia to Florida (Lethaby and Bangma 1999), the regular occurrence of this Asiatic gull on the East Coast of North America remains puzzling.

Mew Gull (*Larus canus*)

1999-4-A/B/C One in first-basic plumage at the Shinnecock Inlet, Suffolk Co., 6 Feb-23 March (Anthony J. Lauro, John J. Fritz, Joan L. Quinlan). Although there are four subspecies of Mew Gull, the Shinnecock individual showed a suite of characters consistent with the European subspecies *L. c canus*, a distinctive form known in the European literature as the "Common Gull". Brief written descriptions were supported by a series of color photographs taken by John Fritz, Joan Quinlan and Angus Wilson. Separation of Mew Gulls and Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*) is subtle and must take into account a combination of structural and plumage features. Key features in the identification of the Shinnecock bird were the smaller size, structure and color of the bill, sharply demarcated black subterminal tail band, relatively muted upperwing pattern and precise patterning of the upper wing coverts. The gull made irregular appearances at the inlet for several weeks and was seen by many observers. Where it spent its time when not at the inlet remains a mystery. For a more detailed account with photos see Guthrie et al., 1999. Common Gull is a rare but increasing regular visitor to eastern North America. The majority of records come from the maritime provinces of Canada suggesting immigrants from Iceland (first colonized in 1955) or the Faeroe Islands. This hypothesis is supported by an individual in Newfoundland that was banded as a chick in northern Iceland. The Shinnecock bird constitutes the first record of Mew Gull in New York away from the Niagara or St. Lawrence rivers. This is also the first New York occurrence to be documented by photography or other physical evidence.

California Gull (*Larus californicus*)

1999-41-A/B One adult on lower Niagara River, Devils Hole State Park, Town of Lewiston, Niagara Co., 7 Nov (Willie D'Anna, Brendan Klick); 1999-42-A/B One adult Niagara River, Devil's Hole State Park, Town of Lewiston, Niagara Co., 8-9 Nov (Michael F. Galas, William Watson); 1999-45-A One adult on lower Niagara River, Robert Moses Power Plant, Town of Lewiston, Niagara Co., 21, 26, 27 Nov (Willie D'Anna); 1999-49-A One adult on lower Niagara River, Robert Moses Power Plant, Town of Lewiston, Niagara Co., 4, 11-12 Dec (Willie D'Anna); 1999-53-A/B One adult and one third-basic on 'roosting' rocks in the lower Niagara River, Devils Hole State Park, Town of Lewiston, Niagara Co., 26 Dec (Willie D'Anna, Brendan Klick). The Niagara Frontier remains the premier locality for this western species in New York State. It is unclear exactly how many individuals were involved in this year's series of nine reports – certainly a minimum of two. On 26 Dec, D'Anna and Klick observed an adult and a third-basic standing close to one another on exposed rocks in Devils Hole State Park, a short distance upstream of the Robert Moses Power Plant, a favored locality. Following the first record in 1992, one or two California Gulls have been logged each winter on the Niagara River, the majority involving adults (reviewed in D'Anna 2000).

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

1999-14-A One Chazy River Landing (or Chazy Riverlands) on Lake Champlain, Town of Champlain, Clinton Co., 10 May (William E. Krueger). Careful study of this lone tern roosting with Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*) noted the unmarked red bill and projection of the tail beyond the primary tips. Presumably this individual was following an inland route towards its breeding grounds in arctic Canada. There are only a handful of acceptable records for this species in spring or early summer.

Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*)

1999-44-A One at Fort Tilden, Queens Co., 20 Nov (Dale Dyer). Studied by a group of twenty or more observers but only one report submitted. Fortunately, this clear description ruled out other *Myiarchus* flycatchers. The late fall date is fairly typical for this western species.

Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*)

1999-36-A/B/C/D One on Overlook Lane, Hamlet of Meadowdale, Town of Guilderland, Albany Co., 11-17 Oct (Lawrence Alden, Barbara Putnam, Robert E. Budliger, Walter G. Ellison). Present for at least a week, this Western Kingbird was studied by numerous local birders and described in detail in the four reports received, supplemented with field sketches and notes by Ellison. All four reports noted the white outer rectrices, a distinctive feature of this species that is not found in other North American kingbirds. Cassin's (*T. vociferans*), Couch's (*T. couchii*) and Tropical Kingbird (*T. melancholicus*) were further eliminated by the lack of a sharp contrast between the whitish malar area and pale gray breast, relatively slender bill and paler green coloration on the mantle. Lack of emargination on the outer primaries noted by Ellison, indicates a first-year bird. Western Kingbirds are regular fall migrants to coastal New York but remain much rarer inland.

Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*)

1999-38-A One in the Rocky Point Natural Resources Management Area, Suffolk Co., 27 Oct (Joel L. Horman). A female-type accompanied by several Eastern Bluebirds (*S. sialis*) studied for a few minutes in an open clearing.

Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*)

1999-17-A One Golden Hill State Park, Town of Somerset, Niagara Co., 15 May (Willie D'Anna); 1999-46-A One at private residence, East Main Street, West Winfield, Herkimer Co., 24 Nov (C. Kendall Zoller); 1999-55-A One visiting feeders in two private yards in Skaneateles, Onondaga Co., 13-27 Dec (Dorothy W. Crumb, photos by Robin Jowaisas). The Skaneateles bird was observed at two different feeders (1.5 miles apart) on East Lake Road. Although not seen by experienced birders, the homeowners supplied good verbal descriptions to Dorothy

Crumb who submitted the report. Most importantly, the record was documented by color photographs taken by Robin Jowaisas, whose feeder hosted the bird from 13-18 Dec. On the night of the last sighting when temperatures fell below zero, the warbler was seen by homeowner Linda Pietroski as it huddled near a suet feeder. Its ultimate fate is unknown. The Golden Hill State Park bird was found by Michael Morgante and Michael Turisk. The report from Herkimer Co. required two rounds of review due to the brevity of the description. The information supplied is, however, consistent with Yellow-throated Warbler and the tendency of this species to appear in the fall is also supportive. An earlier report of this bird from October was too vague to evaluate. This southern species is a regular spring overshoot to New York State, most frequently to the Delaware River Valley and urban parks in the New York City area. Records anywhere from more northern parts of the state or from the late fall and winter remain notable.

MacGillivray's Warbler (*Oporornis tolmiei*)

1999-52-A/B One, Mohlenoff Nursery, Victory Boulevard, Staten Island, Richmond Co., 15-28 Dec (Richard R. Veit, Michael Higgiston). This constitutes the first record for New York State. Discovered by Dick Veit as he searched for Orange-crowned Warbler (*Vermivora celata*) and Nashville Warbler (*V. ruficapilla*) reported from the nursery a few days earlier. The MacGillivray's Warbler frequented weedy vegetation growing in and around some disused greenhouses but regularly ventured into scrubby vegetation surrounding a stand of Norway Spruce. Although elusive, the bird could be tracked through the vegetation by its regular calls. Mourning Warbler (*O. philadelphia*) was eliminated by the call note, throat color and shape of the white eye crescents. After review of museum specimens, Veit tentatively identified the bird as a hatching year male on the basis of the blackish rather than grayish lores. Over the next few days, the bird was seen by many local birders and recording made of the call note. See Veit and Taylor, 2000 for a detailed account of this sighting including two photographs by Steve Nanz. This species was long overdue in New York. In the Northeast, MacGillivray's Warbler has been recorded in Massachusetts (seven records) and New Jersey (one record). Specimen records from Rhode Island and Connecticut await ratification by the appropriate state committees.

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

1999-33-A/B/C One on Esker Brook Trail, Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, Town of Tyre, Seneca Co., 11 Sep (Patricia Kocinski, Randi Minetor, Diane Henderson). Cumulatively these three descriptions made a convincing case for a first-year Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, adequately ruling out Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow (*A. caudacutus*), LeConte's Sparrow (*A. leconteii*) and basic-plumaged Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*). Due to minor differences between the three descriptions, the reports required two rounds of review and the Committee was unable to conclude which subspecies of Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow (*nelsoni*, *alterus* or *subvirgatus*) was involved. The status and distribu-

tion of Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow in New York remains poorly understood and very little is known about the occurrence of each subspecies. NYSARC strongly encourages detailed documentation of candidates with special attention to subspecies. Photographic documentation is especially encouraged.

Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*)

1999-23-A One at Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, Town of Tyre, Seneca Co., 9 Jul (Brendan Klick). An outstanding report which provided a careful analysis of the identification, in addition to the detailed description of the bird itself. The rusty coloration seemed consistent with the nominate subspecies *P. i. iliaca*, which is found commonly through the state during migration and near the coast during winter. Fox Sparrows are rare in New York after April and before October.

Blue Grosbeak (*Guiraca caerulea*)

1999-18-A Adult male at a private feeder near Hwy 96, Town of Spencer, Tioga Co., 30 May (Tom Dudones). The dates of this report suggests a spring overshoot of this more southerly species. The record was supported by several minutes of video by the homeowner. A second bird (possibly a female) was reported but no specific details were provided to the Committee. Interestingly, the summer of 1999 saw the second documented nesting record for the state, which occurred in Suffolk County, Long Island (Birol 1999).

Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*)

1999-8-A/B One in Prospect Park, Brooklyn, Kings Co., 25-30 Mar (Peter Dorosh, Dale Dyer). The detailed descriptions and supporting color photographs by Steve Nanz indicate an adult female or perhaps 1st winter male or female Painted Bunting. The bird showed no evidence of captivity such as band, long toe nails or damaged feathers, a concern given the popularity of this species as a cage bird in Mexico and elsewhere. During the last decade, most New York records of Painted Bunting have occurred during the winter, often in association with feeders. Presumably the early spring date of the Brooklyn bird is more unusual and suggests it might have wintered north of its normal range.

Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

1999-1-A One adult male in private yards, Neutral Avenue, Staten Island, Richmond Co., 31 Jan to 28 Feb (Henry F. Flamm). This cooperative adult male stayed in the same suburban setting for more than a month and was frequently heard singing from exposed positions such as treetops or roofs. The written report by finder Henry Flamm was supported by two color photographs, illustrating diagnostic features such as the shape and length of the bill and the contrasting green and purple sheens of the breast and head feathering. Thus Rusty Blackbird (*E. carolinus*) and other glossy icterid species could be eliminated. Although many local birders saw this individual during its extended stay, only one report was submitted.

Hoary Redpoll (*Carduelis hornemanni*)

1999-51-A One visiting a suburban yard, Winding Brook Drive, Guilderland, Albany Co., 10 Dec (Walter G. Ellison, Nancy L. Martin). Described in detail and supported by field sketches by Walter Ellison which carefully compared its structure and plumage to the accompanying Common Redpolls (*C. flammea*). A more northerly counterpart of the Common Redpoll, Hoary Redpolls of the subspecies *exilipes* are subject to periodic incursions into New York and surrounding states (Brinkley, 1998).

1999 Reports Accepted But Origins Uncertain

Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)

1999-54-A One at the Fresh Kills Landfill, Staten Island, Richmond Co., 18 Dec (Richard R. Veit). A boldly marked and highly distinctive estuarine duck from western Europe. Details of the sighting were supported by color photographs by Dick Veit. Other colorful waterfowl including other shelducks could be readily excluded. In 1998 this individual was observed at the landfill at the same time of year but not reported in the interim. Common Shelducks are a familiar sight in coastal areas of Western Europe and have reached Iceland, the Azores and other Atlantic islands. The species is therefore a reasonable candidate for vagrancy to North America. Unfortunately, many are also kept in captivity, leaving the origins of the Staten Island bird uncertain. That said, NYSARC still welcomes documentation for this and similar Eurasian species.

1998 Reports Accepted

Black-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides arcticus*)

1998-53-A One adult male in a private yard on Point Street, Cape Vincent, Jefferson Co., 3 Oct (Mary and Brian Wood). This woodpecker was observed at close range and in good light as it moved from tree to tree. Although this is a relatively straightforward identification, the brevity of this report necessitated two rounds of review. Although the description was minimal, key points for acceptance were the solid dark back, pronounced yellow crown patch and constant loud 'pic' call.

Hoary Redpoll (*Carduelis hornemanni*)

1998-16-A One at the intersection of Rts 15A and 20A, Town of Livonia, Livingston Co., 10 Jan (Dave Tetlow); 1998-17-A One visiting a feeder on North Hamlin Road, Town of Hamlin, Monroe Co., 22 Jan (Paul Spindler). After two rounds of review, the Committee concluded that the key features were in place (Czaplak, 1995).

1997 Reports Accepted

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)

1997-19-A One over the Braddock Bay Hawk Watch, Greece, Monroe Co., 5 May. Due to the brevity of the description, this report endured three rounds of review. Although some key features were missing, those given were correct for this species. Black Vultures are no longer a great rarity in the state and have been removed from the review list (NYSARC 2000).

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. 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 taken while the bird is under study or, if not possible, immediately afterwards. It is very helpful to include a photocopy of these notes with the formal report.

Advice on report preparation is available on our web site (see above) or in Dittmann and Lasley 1992. The key elements are the description of the bird (as detailed a description as possible), the names and contact details of the observers, location and date of the sighting and lastly an explanation of how the identification was made. This last category is most frequently omitted. Ask yourself the following: What features led you to this conclusion? What other species might this bird be confused with and how can these possibilities be eliminated? By necessity, the preparation of a good report takes some time and effort. It is not enough to scribble a few disjointed lines of description. Once the description of what you saw is down on paper, it may be necessary to consult reference books or tapes. Can you determine the age and sex of the bird? Are there identifiable subspecies? Are there similar species? Re the latter it is worth considering and discussing exotic possibilities (e.g. other species of white pelican, exotic finches or wild fowl).

It is relatively uncommon for records to be rejected because the bird was obviously misidentified. We make every effort to be as fair and objective as possible but 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. All records, whether accepted or not, remain on file and can be re-submitted to the Committee if additional substantive material is presented. In such cases, please contact the Secretary at the address given above.

1999 Reports Not Accepted

Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*)

1999-16-A One near Iona Island, Rockland Co. 15 May. A moribund loon was initially spotted some fifty yards offshore but drifting to the shoreline with the tide where it died. The observer and spouse took some close-up color photographs (four submitted) of the live bird and also recovered the specimen, which was taken to the Croton Point Nature Center. After reviewing the photographs, the committee concluded that this bird was in fact a Red-throated Loon (*G. stellata*) in basic-plumage with a slightly deformed bill. This conclusion is based on the pale gray cap which did not reach the eye, the very slender bill, the extensive white sides to the neck, extensive white speckles on the wing and uppertail coverts and distinctive peak at the rear of the head, evident in most of the photos.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

1999-10-A One on the Weesuck Creek and Shinnecock Bay in East Quogue, Suffolk Co. 25 Apr. This was a single observer report of a species that would constitute the first record for New York State, submitted without photographs or other supporting documentation. Seen only once at a distance, the description could not definitely rule out an aberrantly plumaged Snowy Egret (*E. thula*).

Ross's Goose (*Chen rossii*)

1999-6-A Two or three Fort Miller, Washington Co. on 21 Mar. This report lacked sufficient detail to exclude hybrid Ross's x Snow Goose (Trauger et al. 1971; Roberson 1993).

Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*)

1999-3-A One at Phoenix, Oswego Co., 3 Feb 1999-7-A One on the Chemung River at the Elmira Dam, Chemung Co. 25 Mar. Perhaps more than any other species, Thayer's Gull presents unique difficulties. To quote a recent article on this perplexing taxon, "field identification [of adult Thayer's Gull] is among the most problematic issues facing birders in North America and Europe" (Howell and Elliott 2001). Most significantly, these authors have suggested that the criteria outlined in classic treatments (such as Zimmer 1990, 1991) and also reiterated in popular field guides, may not be sufficient for accurate identification of this species. Subadult plumages are similarly confusing. The Committee has engaged in extensive debate in the hope of establishing firm criteria for the evaluation of Thayer's Gull reports. A detailed announcement of NYSARC's policy towards sight reports of Thayer's Gull will be published in the near future. The Committee has followed a conservative approach, accepting only extremely well-documented individuals that match the classical Thayer's Gull profile in all respects.

Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*)

1999-15-A One at the Mohonk Lake, Ulster Co., 11 May. This brief description of a highly contrasting flycatcher relied on reference to a field guide illustration and did not clearly eliminate (or mention) Eastern Phoebe (*S. phoebe*). There are currently no accepted records of Black Phoebe for New York State or northeastern North America.

Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*)

1999-28-A One near the intersection of Mineah and Mt. Pleasant Roads, Town of Freeville, Tompkins Co., 13 Aug. This report from a traveling birder lacked several critical details and could not satisfactorily eliminate commoner species such as Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) or Eastern Kingbird (*T. tyrannus*) with aberrant tail feathers.

Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

1999-34-A One Forked Lake Campground off North Point Road, Town of Arietta, Hamilton Co., within the Adirondack Park, 4 Oct. Several details of this very brief report were inconsistent with a wheatear of any kind.

Le Conte's Sparrow (*Ammodramus leconteii*)

1999-27-A One in East Quogue, Suffolk Co., 10 Aug. This *Ammodramus* sparrow was described in detail, although it was studied for an estimated total of six seconds. The Committee was troubled by the surprisingly early date (assuming a fall migrant) and felt that the report did not adequately address the likely potential for confusion with juvenile plumages of other *Ammodramus* species also present in this area in late summer.

Blue Grosbeak (*Guiraca caerulea*)

1999-13-A One at a private residence Town of Chatham, Columbia Co., 9 May. This weak report provided almost no detail of the bird's plumage, bill or size and made it impossible to exclude similar species such as Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*).

1998 Reports Not Accepted

Yellow-nosed Albatross (*Thalassarche chlororhynchos*)

1998-43-A One approximately 21 miles southeast of Fire Island Inlet (coordinates 26435.1, 43676.5) Suffolk Co., 12 Jul. This report was submitted by a birder on a scuba diving trip. The bird approached the anchored dive boat and was studied for about two minutes before flying off. The report did not describe the flight style and made a casual reference to a 'second bird' which was not described further. After two rounds of review, the Committee concluded that the details provided were insufficient to unequivocally identify this as an Yellow-nosed Albatross. That said, several Committee members felt that the description was consistent with one of the small albatrosses.

Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*)

1998-79-A, One at Mendon Ponds Park, Mendon, Monroe Co., 17 May. This report comes from an experienced observer and may well have been correct. However, the bird was heard calling several times but not seen. While the vocalizations of Sandhill Cranes are relatively distinctive, Committee members were troubled by the description of this call as 'rattling'. It is also unclear whether exotics such as Common Crane (*Grus grus*) or Common x Sandhill Crane hybrids can be eliminated on call alone.

Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*)

1998-34-A One off Route 78 between Java Village and Strykersville, Co., 10 Jul. This was a very brief sighting made from a moving vehicle. Relatively common during the winter months, records of this species in the summer are exceptional. The Committee felt that under these unusual circumstances the details supplied in the report were insufficient to eliminate other buteos, particularly first-year Red-tailed Hawk (*B. jamaicensis*).

Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*)

1998-54-A One in East Quogue, Town of Southampton, Suffolk Co., 5 Oct. This bird was observed very briefly as it flew past the observer using shallow flaps interspersed with longish glides on set wings. The Committee was troubled by the relatively early date, the incomplete description and failure to consider alternatives such as Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) or escaped falconry birds.

American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*)

1998-47-A One on Myer's Point, Tompkins Co., 24 Aug. Although this should be a straightforward identification, the Committee was forced to reject the report after two rounds of review. The stumbling block was the perplexingly thin description. Neither the written description nor the sketch that was provided made any reference to an upturned bill, a hallmark of this species. Sadly, this bird was seen by multiple observers but no additional reports were received. This is a prime example of why multiple submissions, when possible, are so essential.

Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*)

1998-1-A One first basic at Oswego Harbor, Oswego Co., 25 Jan; 1998-11-A One adult on the Seneca River, Baldwinsville, Onondaga Co., 28 Jan; 1998-23-A One immature bird on Long Pond, Greece, Monroe Co., 10 Mar; 1998-42-A One at the Shinnecock Inlet, Suffolk Co., 6-8 Jun. As discussed above, the identification of Thayer's Gulls presents a unique problem for birders in eastern North America. The criteria needed for separation of true Thayer's Gulls from intergrades with the Kumlien's form of Iceland Gull (*L. glaucooides*) are still poorly understood. It is the belief of the Committee that a feather by feather analysis, preferably supported by a suite of photographs, is required for safe identification. A more thorough analysis of this vexing identification and taxonomic problem and justification of the rigorous stance taken by the current Committee will be published at a future

date. We wish to commend the observer of the Oswego and Seneca River birds for a notably valiant attempt at documenting these difficult but fascinating gulls.

California Gull (*Larus californicus*)

1998-3-A One at the southwest corner of Seneca Lake, Schuyler Co., 11 Feb. Described as an adult in transition from basic to alternate plumage. After two rounds of review, the Committee concluded that the report contained insufficient description of wing tip pattern and head/neck streaking and relied too heavily on the bill pattern and presence of a dark eye, neither of which are definitive. The Committee was also concerned by the similarity of the bird's size and mantle coloration to Ring-billed Gull (*L. delawarensis*).

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)

1998-37-A One Point Street, Cape Vincent, Jefferson Co., 15 May. Described as an immature male, the identification was based primarily on bill size. No details of the wings, mantle color or bill shape were provided.

1997 Reports Not Accepted

Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

1997-16-A One near Mecklenburg, Schuyler Co., 7 and 10 Apr. The Committee was troubled by causal references to multiple occurrences of this species and the subspecies of Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula stonei*), sometimes referred to as the "purple" grackle, which is rare so far inland. Although the bird was photographed, copies have not been made available to the Committee.

Reports Pending

The following reports are retained for a third circulation. This means the Committee has not yet reached a final decision on these reports:

Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*)

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

American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

1999-24-A Two over Cornell University, Ithaca, Tompkins Co., 12 Jul 1999.

Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*)

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

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)

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

Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*)

1999-48-A Two on Niagara River, Robert Moses Power Plant, Town of Lewiston, Niagara Co., 29 Nov 1999; 1999-50-A One on Niagara River, Goat Island, Niagara Falls, Niagara Co., 6 Dec 1999.

Ivory Gull (*Pagophila eburnea*)

1999-5-A One at Kenny's Beach, Town of Southold, Suffolk Co., 13 Mar 1999.

Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

1999-29-A One off Road 60, Town of Van Buren, Onondaga Co., 13 Aug 1999.

Submitted on behalf of the New York State Avian Records Committee,

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