

REPORT OF THE NEW YORK STATE AVIAN RECORDS COMMITTEE FOR 2003

The Committee reviewed 142 reports from 2003, involving 82 separate sightings, and an additional 14 reports from 2002 or earlier. This high number of reports is typical of the past few years and marks the steady rise in reporting since inception of the Committee in 1977. As usual, the New York State Avian Records Committee (NYSARC) received reports from all over the state, with 29 of 62 counties represented. The three counties with the most reports submitted were Suffolk (22), Monroe (21), and Erie (15). The overall accepted rate remained relatively high at 84%. Interestingly, 35% of the reports involved multiple submissions, meaning more than one independent report pertaining to the same sighting. This is a welcome trend that generally provides a fuller account of the sighting and helps to corroborate important details of observation, especially subjective features such as size, flight style and so on. This is particularly important when birds are seen only briefly such as at hawk or lake watches. In the fleeting moments as the bird passes, observers will notice and recall subtly different features, which in combination may give a more complete picture. The same is true for vocalizations, which are notoriously difficult to transcribe. If you are lucky enough to encounter a rare bird, be sure to encourage additional observers to put their own notes and impressions on paper and, if possible, submit these as independent reports.

A total of 93 contributors provided reports and/or photographs and their names are listed alongside accepted reports as well as at the end of this document. The Committee genuinely appreciates the time and effort that goes into preparing these reports and we hope that the new online submission form available on the New York State Ornithological Association (NYSOA) web site has made this task easier. Many submissions were of a high standard, not only in terms of the level of detail provided in the description but also in the careful analysis of the identification. All too often, observers omit an explanation of precisely how they arrived at their conclusions, perhaps assuming that this will be self-evident from the description or photographs. Unfortunately, this is not always true, and, without exception, a report is much stronger and more compelling when the authors take the time to explain what features convinced them that they were observing the species in question rather than other similar species, including plumage variants, exotics (cage birds), or other rare possibilities.

HOW TO SUBMIT REPORTS

Advice on how to prepare and submit a report is provided on the NYSARC pages within the NYSOA web site:

<<http://nybirds.org/NYSARC/NYSARChome.htm>>

Here you will also find an on-line reporting form that allows observers to compose a written report and attach up to five digital image files. The site also includes a list of species reviewed by NYSARC, information on the composition of the Committee, a small gallery of rare or unusual birds photographed in the state, and copies of previous annual reports. NYSARC encourages observers to submit documentation for all species on the review list, as well as species previously unrecorded in New York State (NYS). We will also consider unusual breeding species and seasonal migrants that are four weeks or more beyond the usual dates of occurrence. NYSARC encourages observers to read the *Kingbird* article by former Committee member Willie D'Anna on the documentation and reporting process (D'Anna 2003). The Committee is grateful to Carena Pooth for regularly updating the NYSARC web site. Those who prefer not to use the online reporting form are encouraged to send us documentation (written and photographic) via email or regular mail. Such reports, as well as correspondence for the Committee, should be sent to:

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OTHER COMMITTEE NEWS

It is with deep regret that we note the passing of Dr. Paul DeBenedictis. At a meeting in 1975 of the Council of Delegates for what was then The Federation of New York State Bird Clubs, Paul first proposed the creation of a rare bird verification committee for the state, in line with committees that already existed in California, Britain, and elsewhere. After two more years of deliberation and planning, the formation of NYSARC was approved and Paul was selected as the first Chair. He served from 1977 to 1984, when he resigned from the Committee to devote himself to Editorship of *The Kingbird*. After almost thirty years, NYSARC remains an important and well-respected arm of the New York State Ornithological Association, a fitting legacy to Paul's many contributions to amateur ornithology in New York and beyond. In other Committee news, Gerard Phillips rotates off the Committee at the end of his five-year term as a voting member. We thank Gerard for his many insightful and sometimes passionate contributions to our deliberations. His knowledge and constant good humor made our work all the more pleasurable. He is replaced by Jeff Bolsinger of Canton, New York. Jeff is a field biologist with particular interest in the ecology of passerines, especially the wood warblers. He has recently taken on the role as Kingbird Editor for Region 6 and has played a major role in gathering data from the St. Lawrence River plain and Adirondack region for the Breeding Bird Atlas. We welcome Jeff as a voting member and will make good use of his knowledge of the birds and birders in northern New York.

The present report represents a collaborative effort by the current, undersigned, Committee members. We are also deeply indebted to Willie D'Anna, who helped to review many of the reports included here. On occasion we also requested assistance from experts outside the Committee, and we would like to express our gratitude to all who have graciously responded. We also wish to acknowledge Berna and Stan Lincoln for contributing information concerning Paul DeBenedictis and his role in the early years of the Committee and Patricia Lindsay for helping to proof-read this long and complex document.

HIGHLIGHTS

This report includes several notable rarities including three new additions to the New York State Checklist: Pacific Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*), Williamson's Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*), and Cassin's Vireo (*Vireo cassinii*). The golden-plover is a long-distance migrant with a proven potential for global vagrancy and has seemed like a good possibility to reach NYS eventually. In contrast, the woodpecker was far beyond any prior vagrant record and truly unexpected. As discussed in the narrative, Cassin's Vireo may occur with regularity in eastern North America but its status as a vagrant is obscured by the difficulty of identification in the field. The Committee also accepted the first NYS occurrence of "Western Flycatcher," a complex formerly recognized as a single species but now regarded by the AOU as comprising two separate, although very similar, species: Cordilleran Flycatcher (*Empidonax occidentalis*) and Pacific-slope Flycatcher (*E. difficilis*). Neither has been recorded in NYS before, but the Committee was not convinced that these two possibilities could be distinguished from the details provided. Including "Western Flycatcher," these additions bring the state list to a total of 466. Other notables include the second accepted records of South Polar Skua (*Stercorarius maccormicki*), Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*), and MacGillivray's Warbler (*Oporornis tolmiei*) for NYS, three Black-capped Petrels (*Pterodroma hasitata*) on or near Lake Ontario, multiple inland Wilson's Storm-Petrels (*Oceanites oceanicus*), Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*), and Ross's Gull (*Rhodostethia rosea*). The Committee also accepted the first NYS occurrences of two subspecies: a Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*) belonging to the western North American subspecies group *swainsonii* ("Western Warbling-Vireo"); and a Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) of the southwestern North American subspecies *chryseola* ("Sonora Yellowthroat"). Finally, the Committee accepted reports documenting the first NYS breeding records for Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*) and Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*).

2003 REPORTS ACCEPTED

Unless otherwise stated, each report number (e.g., Ross's Goose #2003-77-A/C, below) refers to a single individual bird. The letters following the report

number indicate how many independent reports pertained to the bird in question (three in the example just given). County names appear in bold font, and a few standard abbreviations, consistent with those in Kingbird Regional Reports, are employed to save space.

Ross's Goose (*Chen rossii*)

2003-2-A Fairhaven Beach SP, Fairhaven, **Oswego**, 6 Jan (Kevin McGann; ph K. McGann).

2003-38-A Town of Holland, **Niagara**, 22 Apr (William W. Watson).

2003-65-A Lake Ontario Parkway, East of Rt 98, Carleton, **Monroe**, 10 Apr (Robert Spahn).

2003-77-A/C Cayuga Pool, Iroquois NWR, Shelby, **Genesee**, 27 Dec (Gerald Lazarczyk, William W. Watson, Michael Morgante; ph Kurt Fox).

As we have seen in past years, the number of reports of Ross's Goose has steadily increased in line with the overall growth of the population and its spread eastwards. 2003 was no exception to this trend and justifies the Committee's decision to remove the species from the review list. Four reports were accepted. Two of these included photos, and all four provided acceptable descriptions, adequately addressing the Committee's concerns regarding small Snow Geese (*C. caerulescens*) and hybrid Ross's X Snow Geese, which can be identified by careful study of head and bill shape.

Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*)

2003-57-A/D Two to fourteen, Ringneck Marsh, Iroquois NWR, Shelby, **Orleans**, 13 Oct to 9 Nov (Willie D'Anna, Michael Morgante, William W. Watson; ph W. D'Anna).

Western NY and especially the Iroquois NWR seem to be a regular wintering ground for small numbers of Cackling Geese, possibly the same individuals returning from one year to the next. The four reports described between 2 and 14 individuals that were seen over the period from 13 October to 9 November. The one photograph of a single individual was helpful in validating the identification, and combined with the descriptions, left little doubt that these were "Richardson's" Cackling Geese rather than nutritionally-stunted Canada Geese (*B. canadensis*).

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)

2003-3-A Male, Port Kent Harbor, **Essex**, 11-13 Jan (Dana Rohleder).

2003-11-A/C Male, Oswego Harbor, **Oswego**, 2 Mar (Bill Purcell, Barbara Herrgesell, Kevin McGann; ph K. McGann).

John Peterson and Robert Wei found a male Tufted Duck at Port Kent Harbor, **Essex** on 11 January, and David Wheeler later discovered a second male in Oswego Harbor, **Oswego** on 2 March. Since these locations are somewhat distant from each other, it is unclear whether these pertain to one bird or two. In both cases, the Tufted Duck was found with a flock of scaup and descriptions of the tuft, flank pattern, and back color argued against hybrid origin.

Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*)

2003-8-A Pt Vivian, St Lawrence River, Alexandria, **Jefferson**, 12 Jan (Nick Leone).

This female/immature male was observed with a telescope for 45 minutes at 150-250 yards. Some reviews voiced concern that the report did not explicitly

address separation from King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*), the more frequent eider within the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence system. However, several details (general size, head and bill shape plus “feathering of the loreal area extending down the bill and tapering to a narrow, blunt point slightly below the nostril”) were positive for Common Eider and ruled against King.

Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*)

2003-9-A/C Captree SP, Suffolk, 1-3 Mar (Thomas W. Burke, Dale Dyer, Angus Wilson; ph Ken Feustel, A. Wilson).

2003-15-A/B East River, Queens/Manhattan, 1 May (Angus Wilson, Anne Lazarus; ph A. Wilson).

The Captree loon was discovered by Dale Dyer and subsequently seen by hordes of local and visiting birders (Dyer 2003). Two observers submitted a total of eight digital photographs and these proved valuable in documenting the identification. Excellent descriptions also conclusively supported the identification as an adult winter-plumaged Pacific Loon. Anne Lazarus discovered the season’s second Pacific Loon two months later along the East River, a site that generally receives far less birding coverage than the outer coast. The two reports of this bird include seven digital photos and thorough descriptions to conclusively document this record. The bird appeared to be in active molt into summer plumage. It is possible that a “mini-invasion” of Pacific Loons to the east coast in 2003, like the widely documented invasion of Red-necked Grebes (*Podiceps grisegena*) around the same time, was related to the complete freeze-up of the western Great Lakes!

Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)

2003-19-A Riis Park, Queens, 23 Mar (Angus Wilson).

Angus Wilson and Andy Guthrie found this Western Grebe just beyond the surf line on the Atlantic Ocean side of Riis Park. The bird was first seen about noon and relocated at 4 PM. The description clearly indicates an *Aechmophorus* grebe, which was studied for some time from a long distance. The observers had noted several Red-necked Grebes (*Podiceps grisegena*) earlier in the day. The details of the head and neck, with the eye concealed within the cap, and the dark flanks confirmed the separation of Western from Clark’s Grebe (*Ae. clarkii*) and were sufficient to eliminate a possible hybrid. The previous winter, a Western Grebe was present for several months off the southern shore of Staten Island, only a few miles across the entrance of New York Harbor from Breezy Point and Riis Park.

Black-capped Petrel (*Pterodroma hasitata*)

2003-28-A/C Two, Lake Ontario, Fairhaven SP, Cayuga, 21 Sep (Kevin McGann, Gerard Phillips, Bill Purcell).

2003-82-A Euclid Ave near Syracuse Ave, Syracuse, Onondaga, 24 Sep (Pete Hosner; ph P. Hosner).

Despite having only distant views of the two birds that flew past Fairhaven State Park, the three reports helped eliminate other petrels, including the very similar Bermuda Petrel (*P. cahow*), by virtue of the bold white collar. Salient field marks and the well-described manner of flight further eliminated other

seabirds, including Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*), Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*), and Greater Shearwater (*Puffinus gravis*)—the latter two species being unprecedented for inland NYS despite their abundance in our offshore waters. This was the first sighting in Region 5 involving seemingly healthy individuals. The report from Syracuse included three photographs and accompanying notes of an “emaciated” female specimen now at the Cornell University collection (CUM #50218). The bird was first discovered alive in a bush on Euclid Avenue in Syracuse, Oneida Co, three days after the passage of Hurricane Isabel on 22 Sep. An attempt was made to capture the struggling bird but it escaped and was unfortunately hit by a car. It eventually died at a local rehabilitator on 24 Sep. Although it is tempting to speculate that this might have been one of the two individuals seen on nearby Lake Ontario the afternoon of 21 Sep, there is no firm evidence either way. The Syracuse bird constitutes the fourth record for Region 5. Along with a number of storm-petrels (see below), it is almost certain that these three gadfly petrels were swept inland from the Gulf Stream by the passage of Hurricane Isabel.

Wilson's Storm-Petrel (*Oceanites oceanicus*)

2003-32-A/C One to two individuals, south end of Cayuga Lake, Ithaca, **Tompkins**, 20-22 Sep (Wesley Hochachka, Pete Hosner, Curtis Marantz; ph P. Hosner).

2003-33-A/E Woodlawn Beach SP, Hamburg, **Erie**, 19-20 Sep (Mike Hamilton, Kurt Fox, William W. Watson, Willie D'Anna, Michael Morgante).

2003-49-A/C One to five, Fairhaven SP, Fairhaven, **Cayuga**, 21 Sep (Kevin McGann, Bill Purcell, Gerard Phillips; ph G. Phillips).

2003-56-A Two, possibly three, Pendergast Pt, **Chautauqua**, 20 Sep (Willie D'Anna).

Hurricane Isabel carried an unprecedented number of Wilson's Storm-Petrels to inland regions including upstate NYS, evidenced by the number of sightings documented and submitted to NYSARC. The Hamburg, **Erie**, bird was seen by a number of individuals, and the written descriptions of this bird, and of the two to three birds at Pendergast Point, **Chautauqua**, firmly establish the identification of Wilson's Storm-Petrel and sufficiently rule out other contenders, in particular Band-rumped Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma castro*) and Leach's Storm-Petrel (*O. leucorhoa*). The Fairhaven, **Cayuga**, sightings were accompanied by both written descriptions and documentary photographs. One of these photographs captured the unpleasant prospects faced by many storm-driven seabirds, in this case being snatched and swallowed alive by a Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*). Cayuga Lake, **Tompkins**, hosted at least two storm-petrels. Extensive observation, written documentation and photographs establish that at least one of these birds could be safely identified as Wilson's Storm-Petrel (see discussion below regarding a candidate Band-rumped Storm-Petrel). Although an abundant summer visitor to the coast, there are only five previous inland records of Wilson's Storm-Petrel for the state (Askildsen 1998a).

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

2003-30-A Hudson Canyon, 39° 33.02' N, 72° 20.09' W, 17 Aug (Jeanne Skelly).

In recent years, late summer boat trips to the submarine canyons and shelf-breaks off New England and south to the Carolinas have found White-
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faced Storm-Petrel to be a regular, albeit scarce, denizen of the warm water currents that move up with the Gulf Stream during the summer. This report is the fifth in the past five years from offshore NYS waters, and the third of these from organized pelagic trips out of Belmar, New Jersey, to the same section of the Hudson Canyon. This bird was found at 39° 33.02' N, 72° 20.09' W, which is 92 miles due south of Southampton, **Suffolk**, and seen very well off the bow of the *Suzie Girl*. It was seen long enough for everyone on board to have excellent views and was last seen at 39° 33.17' N, 72° 20.95' W. The Committee understands that several excellent photographs were taken, but unfortunately they were not submitted, and although a large number of trip participants (and Committee members!) observed the bird, this report was the only one received. This is the eleventh record for New York State.

Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*)

2003-67-A/B Niagara River below flood gates, **Niagara**, 6-7 Oct (William W. Watson, Willie D'Anna; ph W. D'Anna).

The two reports contained solid descriptions, eliminating similar species, and were bolstered by three digiscoped photos clearly showing the bird in juvenile (first year) plumage. Northern Gannet has become sufficiently regular on Lake Ontario as to not require NYSARC review, but this sighting on the Niagara River not far from its outflow from Lake Erie is much more unusual. The fate of the birds that find themselves on freshwater for extended periods is unknown.

American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

2003-64-A Irondequoit Bay, **Monroe**, 8 Sep (Robert Spahn; ph R. Spahn).

This report inadvertently circulated without an accompanying digiscoped photo. However, the brief but adequate description of this highly distinctive species sufficed. Likely this was the same bird first reported from Braddock Bay on 7 Sep and seen again at Irondequoit on the 9th but no additional reports were received.

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

2003-46-A Deruyter Reservoir, **Madison**, 19 Sep (Dorothy Crumb; ph John Kennedy).

Barry Buyea reported a Brown Pelican on the east side of Deruyter Reservoir and his friend John Kennedy was able to obtain recognizable photos of the bird as it flew by. Although the Committee prefers to have some written description, the photos were sufficient to confirm the identification and location. Brown Pelicans remain very rare in NYS away from Long Island.

Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*)

2003-44-A/C Female, Fire Island Hawkwatch, Robert Moses SP, **Suffolk**, 2 Oct (Robert Kurtz, John Gluth, Steven D'Amato; ph S. D'Amato), see Fig. 1 on page 59.

An exemplary set of reports provided superb documentation of this sighting. These included four well-taken photos of the bird in flight plus excellent sketches conveying all the salient features, supporting the identification as a female Magnificent Frigatebird. The thoughtful analyses eliminated other members of

the genus, including the two that have occurred previously as vagrants in North America: Great (*F. minor*) and Lesser (*F. ariel*) frigatebirds.

Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*)

2003-76-A Monroe, 7 June (Kevin Griffith).

Documentation of this medium-sized heron comprised a detailed sketch with notations. A suite of characters, including the distinctive contrasting underwing pattern, was fully consistent with Tricolored Heron, a notable rarity away from marine habitat. The bird was discovered and sketched by Kevin Griffith.

White-faced Ibis (*Plegadis chihi*)

2003-37-A/I Benning Marsh, Montezuma NWR, Seneca, 27 Sep-5 Oct (William W. Watson, Dorothy Crumb, Kurt Fox, Barbara Herrgesell, Pete Hosner, Kevin McGann, Robert Spahn, Curtis Marantz, Jay McGowan; ph Cheri Sassman, P. Hosner, K. McGann, J. McGowan).

Any *Plegadis* ibis is noteworthy away from the coast in NYS. The identification of individual birds can be difficult, particularly for immatures or non-breeding adults, when White-faced Ibis lacks the distinctive white facial feathering that lends the species its common name. This record was extraordinarily well documented, due in various measure to the bird's lengthy stay at an actively birded hotspot, the highly efficient distribution of timely reports over birding listserves, the increased use of 'digiscoping' to capture detailed documentary images, and not least the detailed written reports submitted by multiple observers. This is the seventh record accepted by NYSARC since 1979 (there are four additional sightings of 1-2 birds each listed in Burke 1998), and the first record away from Region 10 since 1908.

Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)

2003-20-A Sub-ad, Ripley Hawkwatch, Site #2, Chautauqua, 20 May (Leonard DeFrancisco).

2003-22-A Sub-ad, Ripley Hawkwatch, Site #3, Chautauqua, 30 May (Leonard DeFrancisco).

Mississippi Kite is an annual but rare migrant in western NY and two sub-adults seen ten days apart is extremely unusual. All of the salient features were noted by the observer, including an incomplete white subterminal tail band, which added a certain authenticity. The observer had good light and saw both birds reasonably closely. Although he does not provide an estimate of size with respect to the Broad-winged Hawks (*Buteo platypterus*) accompanying these birds, he does provide a very detailed description of the plumage and an excellent sketch. His description and drawing of body, underwing pattern, and barred tail all seem to rule out the falcons and Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), the most likely alternatives.

Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*)

2003-26-A Two ads, one chick, Carncross Rd, Savannah, Wayne, 5 June (John Van Neil, John Foust; ph J. Van Neil).

John Van Neil and John Foust kept birders aware of the progress of a Sandhill Crane colt that was discovered in the Montezuma wetlands complex just north

of the main wildlife refuge. The trio was watched anxiously all summer as the immature progressed. Sandhill Cranes have been found in previous years in this area but this is the first confirmed nesting record for NYS.

Pacific Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*)

2003-70-A Mecox Bay, Suffolk, 28 Sep (Hugh McGuinness; ph A. Baldelli), see Fig. 2 on page 59.

Jim Ash, Andy Baldelli, and Hugh McGuinness discovered and provided excellent photographs of an adult Pacific Golden-Plover in rather faded breeding plumage. See McGuinness (2003) for a full account. The long tertials revealing only two exposed primaries and the long tibia were among the field marks separating this species from American Golden-Plover (*P. dominica*). Pacific Golden-Plovers breed on arctic tundra from central Siberia across to western Alaska. The majority of the population winters in coastal areas across southeast Asia, Australia and especially the thousands of islands scattered across the Pacific (Oceania). Small numbers are seen along the Pacific coast of North America and regular vagrancy to Western Europe is well documented. There are surprisingly few definitive reports of Pacific Golden-Plover in eastern North America, perhaps a reflection of the similarity to American Golden-Plover. Pacific Golden-Plover has been recorded in Bermuda, Barbados, the Cape Verde Islands, Europe, and both coasts of Africa (Johnson and Connors 1996, AOU 1998, McGuinness 2003). Prior accepted records from the eastern USA include birds in Maine (11 Sep 1911), New Jersey (4-16 Sep 2001) and Massachusetts (21 Apr-5 May 2002). This is the first accepted record for NYS.

Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*)

2003-21-A/B Mecox Bay, Suffolk, 7-8 June (Angus Wilson, S. S. Mitra, Patricia Lindsay).

The history of this species in NYS has been complex. It probably occurred regularly on Long Island in the early to mid 19th Century (Giraud 1844, Griscom 1923), when it bred commonly in southern New Jersey (Walsh et al. 1999). Extirpated as a breeder from New Jersey in the late 19th Century, records from Long Island lapsed for several decades. By 1942, however, Cruickshank noted a resurgence and was able to list 13 well authenticated Long Island records for the period 1915-1941. Thereafter, the species was noted here only irregularly for half a century. Patricia Lindsay's and Tom Vezo's record (NYSARC #1993-34-A) from 28 May 1993 at Napeague, the site of at least one historical record, might be taken as the harbinger of another, ongoing, period of more regular occurrence, leading up to the present record: Lindsay's discovery, with Shai Mitra, of a male at Mecox Bay, another site that has hosted the species before. See also NYSARC #1999-82-A, discussed below.

Willet (*Catophthoropus semipalmatus*)

2003-83-A/B Bird Island Pier, La Salle Park, Buffalo, Erie, 12 Dec -3 Jan (William W. Watson, Willie D'Anna; ph W. D'Anna).

Per these reports, a Willet was observed at LaSalle Park, Buffalo from August 2003 until 1 January 2004. The descriptions of the distinctive wing pattern,

leg color and plumage were certainly indicative of Willet, and the photograph provided by Willie D'Anna confirmed the identification. Willets are rare in winter anywhere in NYS, and winter birds generally show characters consistent with the prairie nesting "Western Willet" (*C. s. inornatus*).

Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*)

2003-48-A Onondaga Lake, Geddes, Onondaga, 8 Sep (Kevin McGann).

Viewed at a great distance through a spotting scope, the less than favorable conditions, including heat shimmer, hindered a straightforward evaluation. Some concerns were raised that other godwits were not considered and that details of the head were described quite well yet the bill was not perceived as being bi-colored. However, in the second round, the considerably larger size compared with Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) and Blue-winged teal (*Anas discors*), extremely long "pale" bill and overall buff coloration of the plumage were enough to convince the Committee.

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)

2003-35-A Juv, Hamlin Beach SP, Monroe, 30 Aug (Dominic Sherony; ph D. Sherony).

Dunlin in full juvenal plumage are rather rare in NYS, even on the coast where the species occurs in huge numbers. Unlike most shorebirds, in which southbound adults arrive in NYS dramatically earlier than juveniles, a few juvenile Dunlin are often among the vanguard of Dunlin arriving on Long Island during September, but even these are usually already molting into first basic plumage. The present individual was carefully studied and photographed and is notable both for the relatively early date and for the fact that it appeared to be in full juvenal plumage.

Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*)

2003-62-A Massapequa Preserve, Nassau, 27 Nov (Seth Ausubel; ph S. Ausubel).

This species is unusual on Long Island even during its expected periods of occurrence, and it is extremely rare anywhere in the state after September. The present record, which consists of a well-described bird in winter plumage that was also nicely photographed, comes from a notable late-season shorebird hotspot that is often used by wintering Long-billed Dowitchers (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) and Wilson's Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*). This exceeds the previous late date of 20 Nov (Able 1998).

California Gull (*Larus californicus*)

2003-78-A/B Ad winter, Robert Moses Power Plant, Niagara River, Niagara, 6 & 16 Dec

(William W. Watson, Willie D'Anna; ph W. D'Anna).

California Gulls continue to be reported annually from the Niagara River, where they are consistently found at the Adam Beck Power Station overlook. In years when one or more turn up, they can usually be located sitting on the rocks just down river from the Robert Moses Power Station on the American side of the river. Willie D'Anna was able to photograph this adult California Gull from the dam overlook. The description and photograph were sufficient for acceptance.

Ross's Gull (*Rhodostethia rosea*)

2003-1-A/F First winter, Irondequoit Bay, Penfield, **Monroe**, 9-13 Jan (Sharon Skelly, Jeanne Skelly, Jeff Gerbracht, Dominic Sherony, Robert Spahn, William W. Watson), see Fig. 3 on page 60.

Bob Spahn discovered this first-winter Ross's Gull at the south end of Irondequoit Bay on 9 January and to the delight of many birders, this winter jewel remained in the same area until it was last seen on 13 Jan (Spahn 2003). The following day, the entire bay was frozen over and presumably the gull was forced to look for food elsewhere. Dozens of people from all over the state and beyond came to view this spectacular rarity and six reports were submitted, two supplemented with sketches. Matt Victoria's excellent photo of this bird appeared in the cited *Kingbird* article. In these reports, the similarly sized and patterned Little Gull (*Larus minutus*) was adequately eliminated. This is the sixth record for NYS.

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

2003-42-A/B Cayuga Lake, Ithaca, **Tompkins**, 19 Sep (Pete Hosner, Curtis Marantz).

The occurrence of Arctic Tern in NYS has been historically difficult to document due to the difficulty of field identification, particularly separation from Common Tern (*S. hirundo*), and the often problematic conditions (e.g., distant and fleeting views) under which most sightings occur. The Common and Arctic Tern species pair has been popularly dubbed 'Commic' Tern, reflecting the reality that many sight records are best left unidentified. As a result, although Arctic Tern no doubt occurs annually as an offshore migrant within NYS waters, Cooper (1998) listed only six fully documented records for the state. These include three old specimens (**Suffolk** 7/18/1884, Long Island 10/7/1897, and Cayuga Lake 5/20/16), and two more recent records accepted by NYSARC (**pelagic** 8/13/1980 and **Erie** 11/12/1989). Cooper (1998) also mentions an "additional half dozen or so records . . . seen by observers intimately familiar with the species and . . . undoubtedly correct." Since Cooper's summary was published, four more records have been accepted by NYSARC: **Suffolk** 6/16/1996 (#1996-48-A); **Clinton** 5/10/1999 (#1999-14-A); **Monroe** 10/5/1999 (#1999-69-A); and **Suffolk** 6/13/2000 (#2000-64-A).

It is interesting to note that few of these documented NYS records accord with the species' regular migratory periods in nearby Massachusetts, northbound from mid to late May and southbound (really eastbound, toward the central Atlantic) from early to mid August (Veit and Petersen 1993). Most NYS records are more easily assigned to two other categories: non-breeders at coastal inlets during June and July (see #1999-80-A, below); or, as in the case of the present record, fall occurrences, sometimes associated with storms.

The present record involves an adult, apparently deposited on Cayuga Lake by Hurricane Isabel, although it's not clear whether it would have been brought in from the ocean or forced down while migrating overland. Two of the four observers submitted reports to NYSARC. The Committee felt that the detailed reports submitted satisfactorily established the identification as Arctic Tern, based on careful descriptions of the critical underwing and upperwing patterns and other supporting marks, as well as direct comparisons of shape and flight

style with nearby Common Terns. Including the specimens cited by Cooper and #1999-80-A (below), this represents the eleventh documented record for the state, and the fifth inland record.

Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*)

2003-51-A/C Juv, Oswego Harbor, Oswego, 20 Sep (Kevin McGann, Bill Purcell, Gerard Phillips; ph K. McGann).

Another storm-blown vagrant deposited upstate by Hurricane Isabel. Four written reports were received, accompanied by documentary photographs which clearly show a juvenile Black Skimmer. This is the second record for Region 5 and the seventh record away from the immediate coast. It is preceded by a 1987 record (NYSARC #1987-25-A) of a juvenile on the tidal section of the Hudson River at Croton Point, **Westchester**, which is much closer to the species' normal haunts.

Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

2003-58-A/C Pine Island, Orange, 1-2 Dec (Warren Cairo, Mary Ann Cairo, John Tramontano; ph W. Cairo).

Three reports were received for this sighting of a species that is only slowly expanding into the Northeast from more established populations to the south. The observers are familiar with this species and its primary confusion species, Ringed Turtle-Dove (*S. risoria*), from the populations in Florida. In addition to the written descriptions, the accompanying photographs showed the contrasting dark primaries, an important feature of the identification. Although the observers did not hear the dove vocalize, a local resident provided a description of the song. This is the first record for **Orange** and Region 9 and the second accepted record of the species in NYS following a bird (NYSARC #2002-26-A/F) that spent several months near Hamlin, **Monroe**.

Northern Hawk Owl (*Surnia ulula*)

2003-5-A/D Corbin Hill Rd, Root, **Montgomery**, 26 Jan to 12 Apr (Tom Salo, Joanne Shultz, Rex Stanford, Curtis Marantz; ph J. Shultz, R. Stanford, Peter Doherty), see Fig. 4 on page 60.

This accommodating and popular owl was present for at least three months, in the process establishing a record late spring date for NYS. A diurnal hunter with a predilection for exposed perches, Northern Hawk Owl is more likely to be discovered as a vagrant than the similarly irruptive but more secretive and nocturnal Boreal Owl (*Aegolius funereus*). Many of NYS's Northern Hawk Owl records have occurred during years in which large numbers of northern owls move southward from their normal year-round ranges. Some years have resulted in multiple individuals being found across NYS and in neighboring states. The winter of 2002-2003 was a poor year in this regard, with very few Northern Hawk Owls found in southern Canada and central and eastern US, making it even more unusual that this bird lingered so far south for as long as it did. This well described and photographed individual represents the 16th documented record for NYS and the second record for Region 8.

Chuck-will's-widow (*Caprimulgus carolinensis*)

2003-18-A/C County Rt 10, Pennellville, Oswego, 20 & 24 May (Dorothy Crumb, Robert & Kayla Fisk, Gerard Phillips, sound recording by G. Phillips).

This was the first record of the species for Region 5. Credit goes to Mr. Fisk's young daughter Kayla, who initially heard the bird, then went on the internet and identified it to species! During its stay from 20 May to 2 June, it was heard by as many as 72 birders and was seen only once (28 May). Written descriptions of the vocalizations were submitted along with an audio sample taken from a sound recording made on 24 May.

Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*)

2003-29-A/B Ad male, Washingtonville, Orange, 31 Jul-2 Aug (Rick Horn, Lloyd Spitalnik, video by L. Spitalnik).

2003-47-A Ad male, Route 4, Oxford, Chenango, 4 Nov (Fred von Mechow).

Over the past 20 years or so, *Selasphorus* hummingbirds have occurred with increasing frequency in eastern North America, including NYS (Mitra and Bochnik 2001). Growing awareness of the tendency of these vagrants to appear in late fall and winter has prompted birders to scrutinize late season ornamental plantings, and hummingbird feeders are often left hanging well into November on the chance that a western stray might appear. Bucking this trend slightly, an "early" adult male Rufous Hummingbird was observed by Rick Horn in Washingtonville over a three-day period at a sugar feeder and video taped by Lloyd Spitalnik. The tape showed an all rufous-colored hummingbird with red gorget and a cap of the same rufous tone as the body. This combination is fully consistent with the identification and excludes other species, notably Allen's Hummingbird (*S. sasin*), which has been recorded in Delaware, Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Virginia.

The Oxford hummingbird was present for a short while into early November, more in line with the recent pattern. The color description in the report initially left the Committee divided on this record, but follow-up clarification resolved the Committee's concerns and also ruled out Allen's. These two occurrences, however, do point out that any records of *Selasphorus* hummingbirds must be carefully scrutinized to establish the identification and that it is not safe to assume these are Rufous Hummingbirds. Written reports should endeavor to explain the basis of the identification. Females and immatures present a particular challenge and of the ten accepted records of *Selasphorus* hummingbirds, half have been accepted as "*Selasphorus* species" only, rather than assigned to either Rufous or Allen's. In these cases, it is imperative to photographically document the shapes of the tail feathers, a difficult and challenging task.

Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*)

2003-59-A Ad, Fresh Kills Landfill, Staten Island, Richmond, 24 Nov (Phillip A. Brown).

Three photos support the identification of Ash-throated Flycatcher. This bird's dark tail tip, pale belly, and overall appearance were typical of Ash-throated Flycatcher and inconsistent with the other *Myiarchus* flycatchers. The lack of a large bill and large crest further rule out Great Crested (*M. crinitus*) and Brown-crested (*M. tyrannulus*) flycatchers.

Few vagrants have increased in frequency in NYS as dramatically as has Ash-throated Flycatcher. Fritz and Quinlan (1998) cited only nine acceptable records prior to 1996, of which only one was reviewed and accepted by NYSARC (11/2/1993, **Nassau**, #1993-62-A). Then, on 10 Nov 1996, three Ash-throated Flycatchers were reliably reported from two widely spaced sites in **Suffolk** and one in **Nassau**, along Long Island's ocean shore! Since the publication of their review, no fewer than six additional records have been accepted by the Committee for the four years 1999-2002: 11/20/1999 **Queens** (#1999-44-A), 9/5/2000 **Queens** (#200037-A), 12/6/2000 **Queens** (#2000-49-A), 11/27/2000 **Kings** (#2000-75-A), 11/25/2002 **Queens** (#2002-54-A), 11/21/2002 **Nassau** (#2002-59-A). The present record's November date and coastal setting conform closely to the pattern emerging from these records.

Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*)

2003-45-A SE edge of Brocton, Portland Township, **Chautauqua**, 28 Jun (Terry Mosher).

This bird was studied by Terry Mosher and Dick Miga, and the very detailed description of the bill, head and body plumage, and tail convinced the Committee of the identification as a Western Kingbird. The description of the shape and coloration of the tail feathers was particularly important in ruling out other yellow-bellied *Tyrannus* and hybrids. This species is very rare away from the coast in NYS, and this record's June date is also unusual. Most coastal sightings occur during the fall (September-November), but there have been two additional recent records from late May and June (25 May 2001, NYSARC #2001-77-A and 19 Jun 1998, NYSARC #1998-90-A). Most unusual and intriguing in the present instance were very detailed second-hand descriptions of breeding activities attributed to this Western Kingbird, presented and analyzed in commendable detail by Mosher (2004). Mosher concluded that the available evidence fell short of confirming actual breeding, and the Committee did not review the report in this context. Nevertheless, even the possibility of extralimital breeding raises many fascinating issues, including the possibility that a vagrant breeder might not find a conspecific mate, but instead hybridize with a related species that is locally prevalent. For instance, Western Kingbird has been known to pair with Eastern Kingbird (*T. tyrannus*) where one or the other is scarce (Gamble and Bergin 1996), and pioneering Clay-colored Sparrows (*Spizella pallida*) have been known to hybridize with both Field (*S. pusilla*) and Chipping Sparrow (*S. passerina*) in the Northeast (Hoag 1999). In view of these issues, and considering New York birders' recent experience with a presumed hybrid Scissor-tailed Flycatcher X Couch's Kingbird (see NYSARC report #2003-60-A, below), extra care should be applied in identifying suspected vagrants in the genus *Tyrannus*.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*)

2003-31-A Imm, Ward Pound Ridge Reservation, **Westchester**, 5 July (Thomas W. Burke; ph Gail Benson).

The written report and color photographs firmly establish the identification as an immature Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher has been known to hybridize with Western Kingbird (Tyler and Parkes 1992, Regosin 1998), and

New York birders have recent experience with a presumed hybrid Scissor-tailed Flycatcher X Couch's Kingbird (see NYSARC report #2003-60-A, below). In light of these considerations, the Committee considered hybrid origins as well as the standard identification criteria in reviewing this report, but there was no evidence of hybridization. Whereas 30 of the first 40 NYS records came from Long Island (Koenike 1998), nine of the last ten accepted records have come from elsewhere in the state. This record is the second for Westchester County, 58 years after the county's first was found by Helen Cruickshank in Rye on 7 May, 1945.

***Tyrannus* flycatcher**

2003-60-A River Rd, Town of Leicester, Livingston, (Robert Spahn) 17-25 Nov.

Gary Chapin discovered this *Tyrannus* flycatcher hawking insects from the fence running along Chandler Road near Geneseo. The bird remained in the area until 2 Dec and was viewed and/or photographed by many people. Only one report was received and this is extremely unfortunate because the identification proved controversial and ultimately very interesting. In his initial internet posting, Chapin identified the bird as a Western Kingbird (*T. verticalis*), citing the yellow underparts and white outer feathers seen when the bird landed. A week later, Willie D'Anna saw and digiscoped the kingbird at this same locality but after studying his photos, D'Anna raised some questions about the identification. In particular, the relatively heavy bill, extensively yellow upper breast and green hints on the mantle pointed away from Western Kingbird. The arrangement of feathers in the tail was also unusual and initially interpreted as active molt. The vocalizations D'Anna heard corresponded to a very loud sharp single-syllabled call and in an internet posting, Matt Victoria stated that he heard the bird give a distinct "WICK!" call several times. This is consistent with Western or perhaps Couch's Kingbird (*T. couchii*) but seemed to exclude Tropical Kingbird (*T. melancholicus*). The photos were posted on Angus Wilson's web site (www.oceanwanderers.com) and discussed extensively on ID-Frontiers. Whilst many expert commentators felt the bird more closely resembled a Couch's or Tropical rather than Western, others felt that these species were not quite right either. A short way into the debate, Bruce Anderson of Winter Park, Florida made the insightful observation that this might in fact be a hybrid between Western Kingbird and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*T. forficatus*), a known hybrid combination (Tyler and Parkes 1992, Regosin 1998). This idea gained favor, and Kevin McGowan and Bob Spahn, both of whom studied the bird in life, developed a robust argument in support of a somewhat different hybrid hypothesis. These authors concluded that the most likely parentage was in fact a hybrid between Couch's Kingbird and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher—potentially the first example of this combination (McGowan and Spahn 2004). Their thoughtful and informative analysis of the plumage and structural details is highly recommended. The breeding range of the two species overlaps narrowly in southern Texas and northern Mexico and the two species are known to form mixed flocks at times. An important lesson from this fascinating bird is that identification of scarce or rare species needs to be made with great care. Not only is it important to use a suite of positive characters but also to heed aspects that don't quite fit.

Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

2003-13-A Rt 63 and E Lakeshore Rd, Shadigee, Orleans, 15 Apr (Kurt Fox).

Loggerhead Shrike formerly bred in western NY but is now only found as a rare migrant. Kurt Fox found this Loggerhead Shrike on the Lake Ontario plain in mid April, an early date for this species. The field marks provided, especially the black feathers going over the bill, are a clear and diagnostic indication of Loggerhead Shrike rather than the much commoner Northern Shrike (*L. excubitor*). The lack of barring on the breast and the location of the black mask with respect to the eye are also appropriate for Loggerhead Shrike. The date of this occurrence falls among the latest dates for Northern Shrike, emphasizing the importance of careful study when reporting either species during periods, such as April and November, when either might occur.

Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*)

2003-72-A Five, Hamlin Beach SP, Monroe, 24 Nov (Robert Spahn).

The sighting of five swallows on Lake Ontario in late November is unusual in itself. Past records indicate that late swallows often turn out to be wandering Cave Swallows, an essentially central American species. Following a spectacular population increase in the late 20th Century, during which Cave Swallows began nesting under bridges and culverts and greatly expanded their breeding distribution north of Mexico (West 1995), Cave Swallows have begun to make regular incursions into the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada during late fall, especially in November (McNair and Post 2001). David Tetlow discovered these birds and he and Bob Spahn identified them by their buffy throats, square tails and overall appearance.

Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*)

2003-27-A/B Hempstead Lake SP, Nassau, 15-20 Mar (Alvin Wollin, Angus Wilson; ph A. Wilson).

Discovered by Alvin Wollin, this interesting but at times elusive bird was seen by many observers, photographed and well described in the reports. The bird was very unusual in that it behaved like a male (heard singing on three occasions) but lacked a strong breast band, which is at odds with plumages of either sex. Geographic variation apparently is weak, clinal and based almost entirely on plumages of females (general color of underparts/upperparts). Hybridization has not been recorded in this species. For more discussion of this unusual Varied Thrush see Wilson 2003.

Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*)

2003-61-A/B Male, Riverfront Park, East Water Street, Elmira, Chemung, 3 Dec (Anne Thurber, Bill Ostrander; ph Mike Powers).

Both the descriptions and the photographs were convincing concerning the identification of this species. This bird was observed in Elmira over a four-day period and, at one time, was seen in an abandoned Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) nest, which it presumably used as a roost site. The occurrence in early winter is not atypical of this species.

MacGillivray's Warbler (*Oporornis tolmiei*)

2003-24-A Male, Braddock Bay Bird Observatory, Monroe, 4 June (Cindy Marino; ph Laurie Zagmester), see Fig. 5 and 6 on page 61.

This MacGillivray's Warbler was banded on 4 June 2003 by Cindy Marino, providing NYS with its second record (Marino 2003). Ten photographs were provided, including one with side-by-side comparisons with a Mourning Warbler (*O. philadelphia*). All of the field marks of this bird are those of a breeding-plumaged male MacGillivray's Warbler. In particular, the bold, white eye crescents and black lores extending over the bill are not expected in Mourning Warbler. Furthermore, the broken black mottling on the lower portion of the hood above the breast and the extensively olive flanks are more characteristic of MacGillivray's than of Mourning. When examining the photographs at high digital magnification, it is also clear in several of the photos that this bird has a very small area of white feathers on the chin just under the center of the lower mandible. This feature is referred to in Dunn and Garrett 1997 (p. 494) as "a tiny spot of white feathering on the extreme upper chin on spring male" MacGillivray's Warblers. The same authors describe this feature as "deep gray" in Mourning Warbler.

Two concerns raised regarding the identification involve the crescent above the left eye, which seems less pronounced than expected for this species, and the relatively short tail length (49 mm) associated with a relatively large value of flattened wing minus tail (13 mm)—both somewhat unusual values for MacGillivray's and within the ranges shown by Mourning. It should be noted that the upper crescent on this bird's right side appears entirely normal, and that the upper eye crescents are often finer than the lower eye crescents in MacGillivray's Warblers—as is the case for this bird. Therefore, it appears that this somewhat anomalous feature is most likely a part of the normal variation that can occur in any bird of any species, rather than an indication of hybridization. This bird's structural intermediacy is worth noting, but does not place it outside the range of variation observed in MacGillivray's Warbler. Most importantly, there are no other marks indicating possible hybridization with Mourning Warbler or any other species.

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

2003-40-A/F Two, Amherst Bike Path, Amherst, Erie, 6 Oct (William W. Watson, Gerald S. Lazarczyk, Gerry Rising, James Pawlicki, Willie D'Anna, Michael Morgante).

Six commendable reports conclusively documented what eventually turned out to be two individuals together in a small swale, the first discovered by James Pawlicki on 6 October. The reports described the species in detail, with due consideration given to potentially confusing species such as Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed (*A. caudacutus*), Le Conte's (*A. leconteii*), Henslow's (*A. henslowii*), and Grasshopper (*A. savannarum*) sparrows. Key field marks covered were "striking orange-buff upper breast and face...fine brown streaks on the orange-buff upper breast and along the breast sides." The gray median crown stripe flanked by two brown lateral crown stripes was also noted.

Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*)

2003-17-A Poughkeepsie, Dutchess, 4 May (Pat Gabel).

Even though this report provided few details, the combination of an all blue bird about the size of a Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) and with decidedly brown wingbars seemed adequate to specify Blue Grosbeak. The observer took particular care to rule out Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*) and Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*), the most likely confusable species.

Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*)

2003-73-A Male, feeder on River Rd, Cuylerville, Livingston, 4 Dec (Robert Spahn).

Diane Henderson and Lucretia Grosshans found this male Indigo Bunting in basic plumage at a feeder in Cuylerville, NY on 30 Nov. The bird was seen by a number of observers over the following days and was reported and photographed by Bob Spahn on 4 Dec. This species is rare in NYS after October, even on the coast, and Lindsay (1998) lists just four winter records later than early December.

Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*)

2003-85-A Ad male, Derby Hill Bird Observatory, Oswego, 26 Apr (Gerard Phillips; ph G. Phillips).

The report included a diagnostic digiscoped photo of this adult male. The bird was first heard singing among a small chorus of blackbirds at the top of a tall maple beside the observatory cottage. With the prospect of a poor hawk watching day due to no wind and drizzle, the bird was enjoyed by a handful of lucky observers visiting the observatory.

Hoary Redpoll (*Carduelis hornemanni*)

2003-10-A DeRuyter, Madison, 16 Jan (Charles C. Spagnoli).

One of the most important field marks separating Hoary from Common Redpoll (*C. flammea*), the lack of streaks on the undertail coverts, was noted in this report. The remaining field marks provided were observed in comparison to the Common Redpolls present and were also good indications of this species. With improved understanding of the important field marks and better photo documentation, NYS has seen a sustained increase in acceptable reports of this species, and NYSARC will no longer require documentation for reports from northern and central parts of the state. Hoary Redpoll remains exceedingly rare in coastal NYS, and sightings there should still be carefully documented and submitted for review.

2003 REPORTS ACCEPTED BUT ORIGINS UNCERTAIN

As its name suggests, this category involves records where the identification to species is clearly established but the provenance (wild origins or otherwise) of the birds in question is uncertain. Most often this involves waterfowl which are commonly kept in captivity, exotic gamebirds that are frequently released for hunting, and popular cagebirds such as parrots.

Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*)

2003-7-A Baiting Hollow, Suffolk, 2 Feb (Angus Wilson; ph A. Wilson).

2003-53-A/C Four, Mountain Rd, La Grange, Dutchess, 27-31 Oct (Chester Vincent, William Case, Binnie Chase; ph W. Case).

The first report above is that of a single bird discovered by Andy Guthrie, Tom Burke, and Gail Benson in Suffolk on 18 Jan and later photographed by Angus Wilson. The second report is of four Barnacle Geese seen together in Dutchess. The descriptions and photographs leave no doubt about the identification of these Barnacle Geese. The observer in the first report correctly points out that the origin is the issue. Breeders do not necessarily band their birds, so these could be escapes. There is a large breeding population of Barnacle Geese in eastern Greenland, but little consensus exists concerning the interpretation of records of this species in northeastern North America. For example, Szantyr (1988) proposed that many occurrences represent wild birds, but Ryff (1984) concluded that most or all Barnacle Geese reported in the US are escapes. Although some North American records of Barnacle Geese are undoubtedly authentic (individuals banded in the Old World have been shot in Newfoundland and Ontario), NYSARC continues to apply a conservative standard to individual reports while awaiting stronger evidence of a regular pattern of natural vagrancy to our region.

Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*)

2003-12-A Three, Little Sodus Bay, Fairhaven, Cayuga, 2 Mar (Bill Purcell).

2003-39-A Dunkirk Harbor, Erie, 5 Jan (William W. Watson).

Trumpeter Swan is not a straightforward identification but the details provided in these two reports of the bill shape and the eye and bill pattern confirmed the identifications. In the first report above, the swan was also calling, further establishing the identity. Many of the Trumpeter Swans in NYS are known to have come from the introduction program in Ontario (often marked with collars or wing tags) and from captive birds known to have escaped in Wayne. They have continued to breed in NYS and wander widely across central and western NYS during the winter months. NYSARC is following the progress of this feral population closely but does not yet accept unmarked individuals as established.

Chukar (*Alectoris chukar*)

2003-14-A Bristol, Ontario, 26 Apr (Gail Wiechmann; ph K. Wiechmann)

This submission and accompanying photographs indicate an Old World partridge of the genus *Alectoris*. Various species, in particular Chukar and Red-legged Partridge (*A. rufa*), are commonly raised on game farms and accidentally or intentionally released into the wild. These species share a similar overall appearance and can, at times, be difficult to identify with certainty, particularly since hybrids are common. The description and photographs provided strong support for the identification as Chukar, excluding even the extremely similar and considerably less familiar Rock Partridge (*A. graeca*).

Although Chukar is occasionally reported from NYS, there is no evidencethat a sustainable breeding population exists in the state or nearby. It therefore seems most likely this individual represents an intentional or accidental release, presumably for hunting.

Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*)

2003-23-A Two, Lakeshore Rd, Hamburg, Erie, 4 May (Stephen McCabe; ph S. McCabe).

The description and photograph provided clearly show two Monk Parakeets, a South American species that is locally well-established in the New York City area (especially Brooklyn), suburban sections of coastal Connecticut (Bull 1971), and upper Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island. Another established population exists well to the west in Chicago, Illinois (Moskoff 2003). Although vagrancy from known populations is theoretically possible, the Committee felt this was unlikely in this case, given the distance of the sighting from known populations and the fact that the species appears to be non-migratory in North America. For instance, this species is very unusual even short distances from established stations in the New York City area. The fact that the species remains a popular cage bird leaves room for spontaneous appearances (i.e. escapees) away from established feral populations.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*)

2003-41-A Two, feeder in Harrisville, Jefferson, May (Kathy Luther).

Two individuals were observed visiting a feeder in May (exact date unknown) and one was photographed. They were not seen subsequently. The color photograph clearly showed the plain chestnut cap and prominent dark spot on the ear coverts that distinguish this species from House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) and other Old World Sparrows. Eurasian Tree Sparrows were introduced to North America in 1870 when birds of German origin were released in St. Louis, Missouri. That population has persisted to this day but remains localized to eastern Missouri, west-central Illinois, and southeastern Iowa (reviewed in Barlow and Leckie 2000). The species is essentially non-migratory both in North America and its natural range across Europe and temperate Asia. Some individuals may wander, especially in winter, although these movements tend to be over relatively short distances. There are a scattering of reports from other parts of North America which might involve escaped cage birds imported from Asia. The Committee accepts the identification but could not determine if these birds had wandered from their rather localized mid-western range or were more recent escapes. These uncertainties aside, the Committee strongly encourages the reporting of so-called "exotics," especially if they are carefully documented and photographed. Only by collecting this type of valuable information can we hope to establish patterns of colonization by introduced species or, in some cases, previously unsuspected occurrences of true vagrancy.

2001 REPORTS ACCEPTED

South Polar Skua (*Stercorarius maccormicki*)

2001-82-A Democrat Pt, Suffolk, 23 June (S. S. Mitra, Patricia Lindsay)

This skua was studied carefully from shore and gave sufficiently good views for it to be identified with confidence as a South Polar Skua (Mitra and Lindsay 2001). It was identified as a large skua ("*Catharacta*") by the combination of its size compared to some Greater Shearwaters, conspicuous upperwing flashes, wedge-shaped tail, gray-brown plumage without barring on the wing and tail coverts, and pale yellowish nape. It was separated from immature Great Skua (*S. skua*) by a detailed analysis of its plumage. Although South Polar Skua probably occurs fairly regularly in NYS's pelagic waters during late spring and summer, the present record is just the second documented occurrence in NYS, and one of very few shore-based records from northeastern North America. Observers are strongly encouraged to publish or submit documentation for all observations, including past ones, so that the status of this species, and also of Great Skua, might be understood more clearly.

Cassin's Vireo (*Vireo cassinii*)

2001-83-A Hatching year, Fire Island Lighthouse, Suffolk, 19 Oct (P. A. Buckley, S. S. Mitra; ph Patrick Doyle).

Banded by Shai Mitra, this bird represents the first accepted record for NYS of this cryptic western relative of the familiar Blue-headed Vireo (*V. solitarius*). Prior to 1997, Cassin's, Blue-headed (*V. solitarius*), and Plumbeous (*V. plumbeus*) vireos were considered a single species, termed Solitary Vireo. They were subsequently split into three species based on a variety of criteria (AOU 1997). The individual in question was carefully studied in the hand, measured and photographed (see Buckley and Mitra 2003). In its deliberations, members of the Committee reviewed the specimen collections at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City and collectively agreed that the Fire Island bird showed plumage features outside the range of variation expected among Blue-headed Vireos. It is conceivable that as the identification criteria become better understood, Cassin's Vireo will join the ranks of the more regular strays to New York from western North America. However, until such a pattern has been firmly established, submission of exhaustive documentation, preferably with color photographs, will be necessary for acceptance of future reports.

2000 REPORT ACCEPTED

***Selasphorus* hummingbird**

2000-85-A Port Byron, Cayuga, last two weeks of Sep (Donna Jeanne Trumble)

Originally submitted as a video recording to a Committee member and subsequently presented to the committee for review. The bird visited a private

hummingbird feeder for at least two weeks in late September 2000 along with Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (*Archilochus colubris*). The Committee was able to assemble a crude description after study of twenty still images prepared from the video by Kevin McGowan. Evidently, a female or immature male *Selasphorus* hummingbird, the detail was unfortunately insufficient to identify the bird to species.

1999 REPORTS ACCEPTED

Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*)

1999-82-A Male, Pike's Beach, east of Moriches Inlet, Suffolk, 4 May (S. S. Mitra)

As noted above for NYSARC #2003-21-A/B, Wilson's Plovers have been reported from NYS more frequently in recent years. In the present report, Shai Mitra provided belated documentation for a bird originally discovered by biologists engaged in Piping Plover (*C. melodus*) research and conservation. It is worth noting that these biologists also reported a Wilson's Plover at the same site two years earlier, in spring 1997, but that documentation submitted to NYSARC in that instance was not considered adequate (#1997-24-A, not accepted). The vicinity of Moriches Inlet, like Napeague and Mecox Bay, has proven attractive to this species in the past.

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

1999-80-A Second year, Democrat Pt, Suffolk, 13 Jun (S. S. Mitra, Patricia Lindsay).

Whilst studying a flock of terns feeding in the Fire Island Inlet, Shai Mitra noticed one individual with a noticeably buoyant flight compared to the Common Terns (*S. hirundo*) around it. The bird was relocated with a group of Common and Roseate Terns resting on the edge of a lagoon at Democrat Point and scrutinized carefully. Soft parts colors and the presence of a strong carpal bar suggested a one year-old bird (= first summer). The convincing description noted a suite of features including extremely short blackish legs, small bill, narrow black trailing edge to the underwing, lack of a dark secondary bar on outstretched wing, and uniformly gray uppersides to the folded primaries. In eastern North America, Arctic Terns breed as far south as the Gulf of Maine (abundantly) and southeastern Massachusetts (a few pairs), where they arrive in mid to late May and depart in early August. Although the majority of one and two year-old Arctic Terns are believed to remain in the Southern Hemisphere during the boreal summer, observations from Cape Cod suggest that some immature Arctic Terns migrate north and summer at favorable coastal sites not necessarily associated with breeding colonies (Veit and Petersen 1993). Careful scrutiny of terns in late spring and summer along the ocean shore of Long Island suggests that this phenomenon might occur regularly, though rarely, here as well. See NYSARC #2003-42-A/B above.

Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*)

1999-81-A/B Cornell Biological Field Station, Bridgeport, Madison,

5 Nov (Pete Hosner, Scott Haber)

This swallow was found dead by Connie Adams and donated to the Cornell

University collection (CUM # 50066), where it was identified as a Cave Swallow by Pete Hosner. Three color photographs of the prepared specimen were submitted. The bird had an empty stomach and was in an emaciated condition. Although submitted as belonging to the Caribbean subspecies *P. f. fulva*, wing cord measurements by Scott Haber were more consistent with the southwest race *P. f. pallida*, in keeping with other specimens from late fall incursions into the northeast (McNair and Post 2001). See NYSARC #2003-72-A above.

1998 REPORT ACCEPTED

“Western” Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus swainsonii*)

1998-91-A Hatching year, Fire Island Lighthouse, Suffolk, 29 Sep (P. A. Buckley, S. S. Mitra; ph S. S. Mitra).

Warbling Vireos are very scarce during migration on Long Island’s barrier beaches, and all examples are worthy of close inspection. Thus, when this individual was captured near Fire Island Lighthouse, its tiny bill and buffy wingbars were carefully noted (Buckley and Mitra 2003). The bander, Shai Mitra, was aware of on-going research concerning molt and vocal differences between eastern and western subspecies groups (Voelker and Rohwer 1998), specifically that hatching-year birds from western North America retain juvenal greater coverts during their first south-bound migration, whereas eastern birds typically do not. The combination of these retained feathers, a strikingly small bill, and, to a lesser extent, several features of the dorsal coloration, were all consistent with the western subspecies group *swainsonii*. This is the first accepted record of this taxon for NYS and possibly only the fourth for eastern North America (Buckley and Mitra 2003).

1997 REPORT ACCEPTED

Common “Sonora” Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas chryseola*)

1997-73-A Second year male, Fire Island Lighthouse, Suffolk, 18 May (P. A. Buckley, S. S. Mitra; ph S. S. Mitra)

This large and strikingly patterned Common Yellowthroat was mist-netted by Shai Mitra at the Fire Island Lighthouse banding station and identified as belonging to the southwestern subspecies *chryseola*, known colloquially as “Sonora Yellowthroat” (Buckley and Mitra 2003). The report consisted of the description, measurements, photographs, and analysis provided in the above publication. In considering such an unusual report, the Committee focused on the degree of confidence with which other North American subspecies could be excluded—and this confidence was necessarily held to a very high standard given the improbability of long-distance vagrancy in a partially resident taxon from the southwestern corner of the continent. Examination of specimens at the American Museum of Natural History, conducted independently by Buckley and Mitra, and then again by members of this Committee, confirmed that

the combination of plumage characters and measurements shown by the Fire Island bird closely matched the distinctive taxon *chryseola*. Furthermore, its completely yellow underparts and very broad forehead band (white with a trace of yellow) was not approached by any of the specimens of other yellowthroat taxa. Finally, the Fire Island bird's wing length and tail length were typical for *chryseola* and significantly longer than those of male *trichas* measured by the same bander (male spring migrants at Fire Island and male breeders in Rhode Island). Although the improbability of such an exceptional occurrence was considered very seriously by all reviewers, and although one reviewer voted against acceptance in the final round of review, other reviewers were impressed by the distinctiveness of *chryseola* relative to other yellowthroat taxa, the close resemblance of the Fire Island bird to the typical appearance of this taxon, documented vagrancy by *chryseola* to northwestern and eastern Texas, and precedents among other partially resident southwestern North American species, such as Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*), Painted Redstart (*Myioborus pictus*), and Black-throated Sparrow (*Amphispiza bilineata*), as vagrants to the Northeast.

1996 REPORT ACCEPTED

Williamson's Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*)

2003-86-A After hatching year female, Fire Island Lighthouse, Suffolk, 22 Jun (P. A. Buckley, S. S. Mitra; ph S. S. Mitra), see Fig. 7 and 8 on page 62.

Mist-netted by Shai Mitra at the Fire Island banding station and photographed by him in the hand, this female woodpecker's identity was never in question (Paxton et al. 1996a). In reviewing the photographs and other documentation presented by Buckley and Mitra (2003), the Committee focused on the extraordinary nature of the record. In addition to being the first occurrence in NYS, this remains by far the most easterly record of the species anywhere. Williamson's Sapsucker breeds in mid- to high-elevation evergreen forests in western North America, primarily in the Rocky Mountains, Cascades, Sierra Nevada, and scattered ranges in the Great Basin, southwestern California, and northern Baja California. It winters, generally at lower elevations, from the southern portions of the breeding range (northern California, northern Arizona, and northern New Mexico) south to Jalisco and Michoacán in central Mexico (Dobbs et al. 1997). Northern breeders (e.g., from British Columbia, Idaho, and Montana) migrate fairly long distances, and females migrate farther than males (Howell 1953, Davis 1962). There are a scattering of records away from the normal range, including Minnesota, Illinois, eastern Texas, and Louisiana (Remsen 1991), and Buckley and Mitra (2003) cite recent records from Kansas and Oklahoma. Although the June date of the present record falls outside of the conventional late fall/early winter window for western vagrants in NYS, it is nevertheless matched by a surprisingly long list of vagrant landbirds of western origin observed in NYS between mid-May and mid-July, including Lewis's Woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*), Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*), Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*), Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*), Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*), Townsend's Warbler (*Dendroica*

townsendi), and Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*). The Committee duly considered the possibility of assisted origins (this species winters widely in Mexico, where there is an extensive bird trade), but this was deemed unlikely.

1995 REPORT ACCEPTED IN REVISED FORM

Pacific-slope/Cordilleran Flycatcher

(*Empidonax difcilis/occidentalis*)

2003-54-A/B Fire Island Lighthouse, Suffolk, 14-16 Sep (P. A. Buckley, S. S. Mitra; ph P. A. Buckley and Angus Wilson).

This report was published as Cordilleran Flycatcher. Although the Committee agreed the bird in question was referable to the “Western Flycatcher” complex (e.g., that it was either a Pacific-slope Flycatcher (*E. difcilis*) or a Cordilleran Flycatcher), we concluded that it could not be safely identified further. The flycatcher genus *Empidonax* contains a number of exceptionally difficult identification challenges. In many instances, silent birds in the field are best left unidentified. Even in the hand, distinguishing between cryptic sibling species, not only Pacific-slope and Cordilleran, but also Willow (*E. traillii*) and Alder (*E. alnorum*), is frequently impossible. In recent years, the number of western North American *Empidonax* documented in the East has increased dramatically, including records of Pacific-slope, Hammond’s (*E. hamondi*), Dusky (*E. oberholseri*), and Gray (*E. wrightii*), mainly in late fall and early winter. These species, plus the regular eastern *Empidonax*, must be carefully considered before arriving at a firm identification. In particular, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (*E. flaviventris*), closest in appearance to the “Western Flycatcher” complex, presents a significant identification challenge (Heindel and Pyle 1999).

Somewhat earlier than the now-expected date range for such vagrants, this individual was first captured by Randy Moore, then recaptured several times by Moore and P. A. Buckley over the next two days. This report was reviewed primarily based upon an article summarizing vagrants encountered at the Fire Island Lighthouse banding operation (Buckley and Mitra 2003). Other resources included a black-and-white photograph by Angus Wilson that was published in *Field Notes* (Paxton et al. 1996b) and a series of color slides, again by Angus Wilson, which were available during the later stages of review. In addition to consulting a number of reference materials (notably Whitney and Kaufman 1986 and Heindel and Pyle 1999) and Ned Johnson’s analysis of the bird (summarized in the original article), the Committee solicited the opinions of several outside experts. Pyle’s (1997) authoritative banding manual, published subsequent to this record, contains a complex series of criteria for the separation of *Empidonax* in the hand. Unfortunately, the measurements taken in 1995 were insufficient to fully apply these criteria. One of the criteria available for review, wing length minus tail length, was actually more indicative of Yellow-bellied Flycatcher than either member of the “Western Flycatcher” complex. Despite this wrinkle, the Committee was convinced that the weight of the descriptive and photographic evidence—including the slightly tear-drop shaped eye-ring, the distinct crest, the brownish wing coverts and flight feathers, and the overall color—was sufficient to indicate either

Pacific-slope or Cordilleran Flycatcher, but not adequate to further narrow the identification to either of these two species.

Currently accepted in-hand identification criteria incorporate multiple wing measurements which were not available for this record. Cordilleran Flycatcher is typically longer-winged than Pacific-Slope Flycatcher, and the proposed identification was based on the measurement of the longest primary of the banded bird, 70 mm. This measurement, however, was just within the range of measures provided in Pyle (1997) for Pacific-slope (59-70 mm). Given uncertainties concerning the exact age of the bird and the methods of measurement employed, the Committee felt that the wing measurement alone was insufficient to establish an identification of Cordilleran Flycatcher.

As summarized by Lowther (2000) and Buckley and Mitra (2003), Pacific-slope Flycatcher has been recorded in eastern North America on several occasions: three Louisiana specimens; two Pennsylvania records from Dec 1990 and Dec 1991 (which may represent a single returning individual); and one North Carolina record from 15 Jan 2000. The latter three were identified by call notes (and in the case of the North Carolina bird, its responses to recordings of both species), and Lowther (2000) cautions that call notes given outside the breeding season may not be diagnostic for Pacific-Slope. Cordilleran Flycatcher has been recorded only twice in eastern North America, two specimens from Louisiana. Through 2003 there were six additional reports of "Western" Flycatchers in the East, not identified to species. The Fire Island bird represents the first record of this species pair in New York State.

1990 REPORT ACCEPTED

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)

1990-31-A Two ads and one juv, Brookhaven National Laboratory, Suffolk, 6, 21, and 25-27 Jun (James Clinton).

This report concerns the first documented breeding record for NYS. The original version of this report was not accepted (see NYSARC 1990 Annual Report, #1990-31-A) because the materials provided focused on breeding evidence and neglected to document the identification of the adults. Fortunately, this critical information has now been provided and the report accepted after re-review.

REPORTS NOT ACCEPTED

A number of factors may contribute to a report being denied acceptance. By far the most common is that the material submitted was considered insufficient or too vague to properly document the occurrence and/or eliminate similar species. For example, written documentation or descriptions prepared entirely from memory (sometimes weeks, months, or years) after a sighting are seldom voted on favorably and the Committee cannot overstate the importance of taking field notes of uncommon or rare birds. These notes should be taken while the bird is under study or, if this is not possible, immediately afterwards.

It is very helpful to include a photocopy of your notes with the formal typed or neatly written report. This helps the Committee to know what was seen at the time of the observation, before field guides or other sources of information were consulted. If you feel your handwriting is illegible, especially with the excitement of finding a good bird, it is a good idea to add a key that explains or decodes your notes. Crude field sketches are often very useful in illustrating what you saw and should always be submitted as part of the report, even if they are drawn on a napkin!

Advice on report preparation is available on our web site (see above), and in several published articles. We recommend the article by Willie D'Anna (2003), as well as the benchmark article by Dittmann and Lasley (1992). The key elements to a good report are (i) the description of the bird with as much detail as possible, (ii) the names and contact details of the observers, (iii) location and date of the sighting, and lastly (iv) an explanation of how the identification was made. This last category is frequently omitted but is extremely important. Ask yourself the following questions: What features led you to this conclusion as to the species involved? What other species might this bird be confused with and how were these possibilities ruled out? By providing this information, you invariably build upon the basic description and present a much more compelling case. By necessity, the preparation of a good report takes time and effort. It is not enough to scribble a few disjointed lines of description and leave it at that. Once the description of what you saw has gone down on paper, it is a good idea to consult reference books, audiotapes and so on. From the details you recorded, can you determine the age and sex of the bird? Are there identifiable subspecies that might tell us where the bird came from? What similar species are there and how can these be ruled out from the details you recorded? The latter is especially important. Sometimes it is worth considering and discussing exotic possibilities. Escaped waterfowl, birds of prey, parrots and finches are relatively common and can resemble North American species.

We do not reject records because the observer is unfamiliar to us or has had records rejected in the past. Likewise, it is relatively uncommon for records to be rejected because the bird was clearly 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.

2003 REPORTS NOT ACCEPTED

Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*)

2003-4-A Corona Park, Queens, 19 Jan.

This report predates the recent split of Cackling Goose from Canada Goose (*B. canadensis*; see NYSARC #2003-57-A/D, above) and was submitted as *B. c. hutchinsii* (alternately called, then and now, "Richardson's Goose"). With the increase in interest in 'white-cheeked' geese since the split, the

identification criteria, and potential pitfalls, have become somewhat clearer. This bird, while appreciably smaller than the Canada Geese it was associated with, differed from typical "Richardson's" Cackling Goose in that the bill and head proportions were not as small as expected. In addition, the upperparts color was closer to that of Canada Goose than the silvery-gray color of "Richardson's." The Committee felt that these problems with critical identification points precluded the proposed identification. Although a detailed written description and excellent photographs were provided, the uncertainty in assigning individual birds within the "white-cheeked" goose complex is such that the Committee felt this bird could not be confidently assigned to any of the forms.

Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*)

2003-63-A Hamlin Beach SP, Monroe, 14 Apr.

This loon was studied briefly as it flew past the lakewatch and was already heading away from this experienced observer when first spotted. A number of details including fast wing beats and two relatively narrow checkered stripes along the back were suggestive of the closely related Pacific and Arctic (*G. arctica*) loons. However, in mid-April many loons are in odd, transitional plumage and the Committee was not convinced that one of the commoner species could be adequately ruled out.

Band-rumped Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma castro*)

2003-36-A/B Cayuga Lake, Ithaca, Tompkins, 21-22 Sep.

Hurricane Isabel transported a number of small, dark storm-petrels to upstate NYS. Most of these individuals were identified as Wilson's Storm-Petrel (*Oceanites oceanicus*, see species account above), but the identification of some birds was less certain and Cayuga Lake became the unexpected focal point for discussing the intricacies of storm-petrel identification. Birders scouring the lake after passage of the hurricane turned up at least two storm-petrels. Debate over their identification lingered into a second day as the birds remained land-locked at the southern end of the lake and allowed extended viewing opportunities for a large number of birders. Several observers felt that two individuals could be distinguished in the field, and that one was larger and longer-winged than the other. In flight, the longer winged bird was perceived to spend more time gliding, and less time flapping. These marks would favor Band-rumped over Wilson's Storm-Petrel, and the observers are commended for their attention to these and other details listed in the extensive reports. Image captures from video made of the birds was also submitted, but the distance involved precluded a firm analysis. After reviewing the submissions, the Committee felt that in accordance with the typically distant views and the inherent difficulties in separating Band-rumped and Wilson's Storm-Petrels, the identification was not fully established. Although Leach's Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*), historically the best candidate for hurricane transportation in our region (Askildsen 1998a,b), could be ruled out, the Committee felt there were no sightings that could be confidently assigned to Band-rumped. Factored into the decision was a concern that transported birds, perhaps weakened by the storm or

faced with difficulty feeding over unfamiliar fresh water, might exhibit different behavioral tendencies than typically encountered over open ocean. Indeed, at least one observer commented on the apparent weakening of the birds from one day to the next. It was also noted that some experienced observers at the site felt only Wilson's Storm-Petrels were present, highlighting the difficulties involved. Given these uncertainties, the Committee was unable to accept these reports as Band-rumped Storm-Petrel, a species that has not yet been accepted onto the NYS Checklist.

King Rail (*Rallus elegans*)

2003-25-A East Quogue, Southampton, Suffolk, 4 May.

This rail was studied for a few seconds after being flushed from a stand of *Phragmites* on the edge of a saltwater marsh. The observer was immediately struck by the bright and well-patterned plumage that argued against Clapper Rail (*R. longirostris*), the common species in the marsh, and raised the possibility of King Rail. Some Committee members were concerned by the extent of detail provided in the description considering that the bird was seen under such fleeting circumstances and by the "contrasting gray on the face," a feature more consistent with Virginia Rail (*R. limicola*). Given strong similarities between King and Virginia Rails in appearance and the inconclusive description, with the identification hanging entirely on the observer's perception of this fleeing bird's size, the Committee after discussion declined to accept this report.

Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*)

2003-66-A First basic, Irondequoit Bay, Monroe, 3 Feb.

2003-75-A First basic, Irondequoit Bay, Monroe, 1 Jan.

Understanding the status and identification of Thayer's Gull in NYS remains a perplexing, and often frustrating, challenge to the Committee, regional editors, and serious field birders alike. The contributors of these two reports are to be commended for their valiant attempts to document these challenging birds and for doing so in this unfortunate climate of taxonomic confusion. As outlined in previous Annual Reports, there is great uncertainty among ornithologists about the relationship between Thayer's Gull and the two generally recognized subspecies of Iceland Gull (nominate *glaucoides* and "Kumlien's" Iceland Gull, *L. g. kumlieni*). Whereas many authorities, including the AOU (1998) regard Thayer's as a species distinct from Iceland, others contend that Thayer's and nominate Iceland are two ends of a west to east gradient, with *kumlieni* referring to birds that fall somewhere in the middle. There is a variety of evidence to suggest that the two extremes were isolated during the last Ice-age but have come together in recent times, allowing intergradation. Until expensive and time-consuming genetic and ecological studies are performed on the breeding grounds, it seems unlikely that these muddied waters will clear. With regard to field identification, the challenge is to agree on what distinguishes a nominal Thayer's Gull from a Kumlien's Gull. Based on careful studies in California and Newfoundland, a reasonable set of criteria has been developed which relies on the careful evaluation of multiple criteria (Howell et al. 1999, Howell and Corben 2000, Howell and Elliott 2001, and Howell and MacTavish 2003). In general

most of the reports received by NYSARC simply do not reach this high bar and thus defy unambiguous assignment to one form or the other. Many of the reports we receive, including these two from 2003, do sound like excellent candidates but simply lack the feather-by-feather descriptions necessary for acceptance. It cannot be overstated how important it is to photograph the candidate Thayer's Gulls as extensively as possible. With the power of digiscoping, this is not nearly as challenging as it once was and allows birds that are quite distant to be documented. Very detailed field sketches may substitute but should be made in the field and should strive to record the exact patterning and colors of all the major feather groups, in addition to the colors of the legs, bill, and iris.

Elegant Tern (*Sterna elegans*)

2003-43-A Woodlawn Beach SP, Erie, 16 Oct.

This moribund tern was discovered on a beach overlooking Lake Erie when it was accidentally flushed by the observer. It was studied briefly in flight before settling again behind some driftwood, where it was viewed for about 10 min at a distance of 20 feet or so. Unfortunately, no effort was made to photograph the bird. The detailed description is consistent with one of the crested terns (sub-genus *Thalasseus*), a notoriously difficult group, represented in North America by Royal Tern (*S. maxima*), Elegant Tern, and Sandwich Tern (*S. sandvicensis*)—the last including the yellow-billed Cayenne Tern (*S. s. eurygnatha*), which is casual along the US Atlantic Coast. Elegant Tern is essentially confined to the Pacific Coast from southern California down to Chile. There are, however, a handful of accepted records away from the Pacific, notably singles from Massachusetts (Rines 2003) and Virginia (Wilds 1985) and several from western Europe (Lewington et al. 1991). The separation of Elegant from Royal Tern in the field relies on a suite of subjective features. The bill was described as long with a pronounced droop and with generally a red color with hint of orange. The black feathering on the head was restricted to the hind crown and nape. The observer felt the tern was larger than a Common (*S. hirundo*) or Forster's (*S. forsteri*) Tern and smaller than Caspian (*S. caspia*) or Royal. Although this intermediate size seems a favorable point, some reviewers were concerned that the unusual circumstances in which it was studied and absence of side-by-side comparison to other terns or gulls meant that accurate assessment of size would be inherently difficult. Overall, given the lack of photographic or specimen evidence and reliance on subjective impressions from a single observer, the Committee was unanimous in its view not to accept this as a first occurrence for the state and one of extremely few for eastern North America.

Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*)

2003-16-A Hamlin Beach SP, Monroe, 27 Apr.

Roseate Tern is uncommon and local along the coast in NYS and in spring is rarely seen away from breeding locations. Inland, it is an extraordinary rarity. Hays (1998) recounts Bull's (1974) summary of upstate records, none of which were documented with physical evidence at the time of Bull's writing. Only one of the six inland records he describes was supported by a specimen and even this had been lost. Thus Bull's characteristic skepticism of sight

records was heightened in his reviews of *Sterna* tern records, and he regarded the sight records listed as unreliable. Although improvements in optics and field identification techniques have mitigated some of the historical concerns with sight records, the separation of the mid-sized *Sterna* terns remains one area where caution is still very much the rule. The relevant field marks are subtle, and applying them can be made even more difficult by distance and lighting conditions. Documentation may also be hampered by the standard difficulties of sea or lake watching, where most sightings are fly-bys offering only limited opportunity for observation and documentation. Consequently, the Committee felt that given the extreme rarity of Roseate Tern anywhere away from the coast, more complete documentation of the relevant field marks would be required to accept a sight record. The date was also a concern as it would represent a record early date (by two days) for the species anywhere in the state, including Long Island. Since publication of Hays' summary in 1998, NYSARC has accepted only one sighting away from the coast (NYSARC #1996-42-A). Elsewhere, Roseate Tern remains a major rarity inland. Hays (1998) lists two records from Indiana, one a bird collected in August 1916 and deposited in the Field Museum in Chicago, and the second a record of an adult found in August 1957, which had been banded as a chick on Bird Island, Massachusetts. Oddly, the species account in *The Birds of North America* omits the first Indiana record entirely and considers the second unconfirmed (Gochfeld et al. 1998).

Bridled Tern (*Sterna anaethetus*)

2003-34-A Hamlin Beach SP, Monroe, 20 Sep.

Two terns were studied carefully flying east along the shore of Lake Ontario two days after the passage of Hurricane Isabel. One was a Common Tern and the other was identified as a Bridled Tern by virtue of the dark primaries, brownish secondaries and back, distinct line through the eye and white forehead. The Committee agreed that Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*) was ruled out but were not convinced that these brief details could properly exclude Sooty Tern (*S. fuscata*).

Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*)

2003-68-A Hamlin Beach SP, Monroe, 23 Sep.

This tern was observed shortly after the passage of Hurricane Isabel, a time when sightings of marine terns on inland bodies of water might not be entirely unexpected. Unfortunately, this bird was seen only very briefly and critical details such as the undersides of the wings and tail were not visible to the observer. Although several reviews were initially favorable to the identification, the Committee agreed that the unavoidable brevity of the sighting and difficult viewing conditions, combined with the limited details in the description, made it difficult to exclude other species with certainty.

White-throated Swift (*Aeronautes saxatalis*)

2003-55-A/B Mount Peter, Warwick, **Orange**, 7 Nov.

While conducting the hawkwatch at Mount Peter, **Orange**, two observers studied a distant “boomerang” shaped bird wheeling around in the sky. The bird gave the impression of being slightly larger than a Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*), a familiar sight at the hawkwatch, and had a white throat continuing as a vee-shape onto the chest and belly. The sides of the neck were white with a buffy area through the eye and across the forehead. One report described the back as very dark blue and that the underwings were not as dark as the upperwings. The bird was visible for an estimated five to ten minutes but remained distant at all times. Regrettably, it was not photographed. Two other watchers who were present at the time were unable to locate the bird against the sky, an indication of the distance involved. The Committee found this to be a highly intriguing report with some significant strong points but also some troubling flaws. Both observers were familiar with White-throated Swift from hawkwatching in the western US and are warmly commended for their open-minded approach to the identification. When considered together the descriptions were sufficiently compelling to gain some positive votes in the initial round of review. The Committee’s subsequent deliberations and ultimately its decision not to accept the identification hinged on a number of key discrepancies and omissions. Both descriptions referred to a “white rump,” which is not correct for White-throated Swift. Acknowledging this discrepancy, one observer made the valid point that the white feathering of the flank patches is separated by a rather narrow strip of dark feathers and can thus give the (mis)impression of a rump patch when viewed in the field. Several reviewers empathized with this assertion based on their own experiences. A more serious concern was that the broad white tips of the secondaries were not noted in either description nor was the relatively long tail, a useful distinction from partially leucistic Chimney and Vaux’s (*C. vauxi*) Swifts. Given the gaps listed above, the Committee was unable to accept this as an unequivocal White-throated Swift, a species so far unrecorded east of Michigan, Missouri, and Arkansas. In the southern portion of its range, White-throated Swift is essentially resident (barring localized movements to avoid extreme weather), but birds from the northern portions are genuine migrants, probably moving southwards into the range of resident birds. Described as casual to Kansas and Texas, there are a handful of records from as far east as Missouri and Arkansas with a specimen record from Michigan (AOU 1998).

Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*)

2003-81-A One male, one or two females, Chester, **Orange**, 25 Aug.

The report comprised two photographs of a female *Archilochus* hummingbird without further written description of this bird or the reported male. The Committee concluded that these were more likely to be Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (*A. colubris*).

Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*)

2003-69-A Hamlin Beach SP, Monroe, 20 Sep.

This kingbird was seen for 15 seconds as it flew along the lakeshore. The description noted the bright yellow underparts, dark and barely notched tail and darkish back. The Committee agreed that this was most likely one of the yellow-bellied *Tyrannus* flycatchers but felt there was not enough in the report to identify it to species.

Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*)

2003-71-A Near Sodus, Wayne, 28 Sep.

The observer spotted this unfamiliar bird perched on a roadside wire whilst he was driving and immediately turned the car around. By the time he had reached the spot, the bird had moved but he was able to see it briefly a couple of more times in the nearby field. After consulting references later that evening, he concluded that this must have been a Fork-tailed Flycatcher that was missing the long tail extensions. These distinctive feathers are often dropped or broken. The report described the pure white underparts and gray back contrasting with darker wings and tail. The observer also noted that the head shape was wrong for Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*), although this key point was not addressed in detail. Given the limitations of the sighting, the Committee felt that Eastern Kingbird could not be ruled out on the basis of the brief details provided.

Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii*)

2003-54-A/B Mariner's Marsh, Richmond, 4 Nov.

This greenish passerine was studied for a few minutes and identified after the fact. Bell's Vireo is considered by many as a particularly difficult bird to identify by virtue of its strikingly non-descript appearance and similarity to Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*) as well as several other vireos. The effects of wear, immaturity and continuous movement only serve to further compound the difficulties. In their reviews several Committee members highlighted the fact that the description of the eye-ring and the bright yellow fringing to the flight feathers were counter-indicative for Bell's Vireo and more consistent with other vireos, notably an immature White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*). Other important details such as the bill shape, body posture and so on were not described in sufficient detail. There was general agreement that the reports would have been strengthened by explicit discussion of the identification in reference to other more likely species, notably White-eyed Vireo.

Eurasian Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)

2003-84-A Two, Bayard Cutting Arboretum, Oakdale, Suffolk, 11 Oct

This was a perplexing report involving two birds studied at a very close range ("started at two feet of distance"). Most Committee members agreed that the description and sketch were highly suggestive of Jackdaw, as was the description of the contact call. At the same time, the limited experience of the observer and curious circumstances left room for other possibilities, such as

Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*). For the reviewers comfortable with the corvid identification, it was agreed that wild origins were very unlikely.

Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*)

2003-80-A West Dryden, Tompkins, 22 Sep.

Female Western Tanagers can present a significant identification challenge because of their similarity to some female Scarlet Tanagers (*P. olivacea*). This individual was carefully studied and photographed. It showed fairly broad yellowish upper wingbars and whitish edges to the tertials, both suggestive of Western Tanager. The color of the breast and bill were also supportive. Although uncommon, some Scarlet Tanagers can show noticeable wingbars due to retained juvenal greater coverts. Unfortunately, the extent of contrast between the crown and back—a critical field mark—was difficult to evaluate in the photographs, which showed the bird perched on high branches. The fact that the pro-Western features were not particularly well developed and the date was on the early side, the Committee opted for caution in making a firm identification. These concerns were shared by the observers, who cautiously referred to this as no more than a “probable Western Tanager.”

“Slate-colored” Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca schistacea*)

2003-74-A Hamlin Beach SP, Monroe, 7 Dec.

The taxonomy of the Fox Sparrow complex is involved and unsettled. The AOU currently recognizes a single species (*Passerella iliaca*), and Pyle (1997) describes 17 subspecies allocated among four main groups. Some authorities consider each of these main groups to be separate species. The Hamlin Beach bird was thought to be either *P. i. schistacea* or *P. i. altivagans*. To add to the taxonomic confusion, *altivagans* has been placed by some authorities in the *schistacea* group (“Slate-colored” Fox Sparrow) and by others in the *iliaca* group (“Red” Fox Sparrow, which includes the birds which normally occur in NYS). Under either interpretation, *altivagans* appears to be an intermediate form between “Red” and “Slate-colored” Fox Sparrows. It should also be noted that “Red” Fox Sparrows vary clinally in color, with western birds (*P. i. zaboria*, which breeds into Alaska, and which occurs rarely in NYS) tending to have a grayer head and nape and browner ventral streaking than eastern birds. The Committee recognizes that the pattern and overall color of the bird described in the report suggest a Fox Sparrow unlike the typical “Red” Fox Sparrows that occur in eastern North America. But apart from the confusion engendered by taxonomic issues, the Committee was concerned that certain details of the head pattern and bill as reported were not correct for any subspecies of Fox Sparrow. Given these discrepancies, and the additional possibility that a hybrid combination or color aberration could be responsible for the unusual appearance of this bird, the Committee felt that this record could not be safely assigned to any subspecies of Fox Sparrow. There is one previous record of an *altivagans* Fox Sparrow for NYS, a bird captured and collected at a banding operation at Fire Island Lighthouse, Suffolk on 12 May 1971—the first, and perhaps still the only, record from the Northeast (United States National Museum #566277; Buckley 1974).

Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

2003-6-A Feeder in West Chazy, Clinton, 24 & 27 Jan.

The brief description lacked sufficient detail, concerning shape and posture in particular, to safely exclude Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*).

2000 REPORT NOT ACCEPTED

Pink-sided Junco (*Junco hyemalis mearnsi*)

2000-84-A Fire Island Lighthouse, Suffolk, 19 Oct.

Captured by Shai Mitra at the Fire Island banding station, photographs and a description of this junco were published by Buckley and Mitra (2003). The juncos represent a notoriously difficult group in terms of assigning individuals to particular populations, subspecies or even species. The taxonomy is not fully understood and divisions are blurred by genetic mixing and individual variation. For an up-to-date discussion of these issues see Dunn (2002) and Neal (2003). After careful review and comparison to specimen collections, the Committee was not satisfied that this individual could be safely assigned to a named population. Notably, it lacked the characteristic blackish lores and extensively pink flanks expected of a Pink-sided Junco, and the demarcation of the gray breast leading to a very pale whitish belly is not typical of Pink-sided.

1995 REPORT NOT ACCEPTED

White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*)

1995-25-A Derby Hill Hawkwatch, Oswego, 24 Apr

This submission concerns a large eagle that was seen by an assemblage of observers as it passed over the hawkwatch at Derby Hill at the southeastern corner of Lake Ontario. The eagle was studied at relatively close range and for at least two minutes. Several of the observers were intimately familiar with both Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and were immediately convinced they had something different. One of the observers contributing a report was also able to study the bird through a telescope. Initially, three reports were submitted to NYSARC: two regarded the bird as a White-tailed Eagle (#1993-25-A and B), whereas the third regarded the bird as a Steller's Sea-Eagle (*H. pelagicus*; #1993-24-A). In an unusual step, reports #1993-25-A and B were withdrawn by the observers prior to review, and only #1993-24-A was reviewed. This report was not accepted (see NYSARC 1994). The observers who withdrew their reports did so in reaction to conflicting responses from international experts in raptor identification whom they had approached, rather than a change of heart. After extensive correspondence and literature review, these two observers resubmitted their original field notes and descriptions, again concluding the bird was a White-tailed Eagle, and added the voluminous results of their research. Documentation of the eagle consists of written descriptions and drawings and a single photograph of very limited utility. All these materials were scrutinized carefully by the Committee, several of whom have field experience with all the species under consideration.

The Committee also consulted additional reference material that has become available in the interim.

The bird was described as huge, with long, broad, straight-edged wings, a massive yellow bill, yellow feet and tarsi, and a long, wedge-shaped tail. Unlike adult Bald Eagle, the head was described as mostly dark, and the rectrices as mostly dark, with white centers on at least some of the individual feathers. The body and wings were uniformly very dark, or blackish, with hints of brown tones on the underwings. Although the bird was seen and described very well, there was no indication of any white visible on the underwings, including the axillaries. Both observers described counting seven clearly-defined primary tips.

Though the Committee found the level of detail in these reports admirable, and despite considerable evidence that many details of plumage and structure were consistent with a White-tailed Eagle, the final combination of characters was difficult to reconcile with this identification. According to the most current literature on the identification of this species (e.g. Forsman 1999), essentially all non-adult White-tailed Eagles will show at least some prominent white markings on the axillaries. Although this trait is subject to much individual variation, as in Bald Eagle, the total absence of white markings on the underwings of the Derby Hill bird was of serious concern, especially as the tail and body plumage were not fully adult. In summary, the anomalous or unexpected combination of an adult-like bill color, adult-like uniformity of the underwings, non-adult tail, and non-adult dark body color does not correspond neatly with any typical, well documented plumage of White-tailed Eagle. Given these difficulties, the Committee decided that even better documentation, preferably involving high quality photographs, would be necessary to support such an exceptional record. White-tailed Eagles have occurred and sometimes bred in Alaska (principally the Outer Aleutians). There is also a significant resident population in Greenland (Boertmann 1998), presumably the source of three early to mid 20th Century records from Massachusetts, the most recent being from 1944 (Veit and Petersen 1993).

CONTRIBUTORS

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