

REPORT OF THE NEW YORK STATE AVIAN RECORDS COMMITTEE FOR 2008

The New York State Avian Records Committee (hereafter “NYSARC” or the “Committee”) reviewed 159 reports from 2008, involving 98 separate sightings, and an additional five reports from previous years. Reports were received from all over the state, with 29 of the 62 counties represented. The number of reports accompanied by photographs remains high. The Committee wishes to remind readers that reports submitted to eBird, listserves, local bird clubs, rare bird alerts (RBAs) and *Kingbird* Regional Editors are not necessarily forwarded to NYSARC, and doing so remains the responsibility of the observer. The growing use of the internet and mobile phones has had a very positive impact on the timely dissemination of rare bird sightings and has made it easier for birders to locate birds found by others. The Committee has always held that receipt of multiple independent reports provides a much fuller documentation of the sighting and can in some cases increase the likelihood of acceptance. We therefore urge ALL observers, not just the finder, to submit written reports and/or photographs. The names of the 93 contributors that submitted materials (written reports, photographs and sketches) are listed alongside accepted reports and again at the end of this document. Where possible, the name(s) of the original finder(s) is (are) included in the narratives. Production of this Annual Report is a team effort. In addition to the contributors mentioned above, several *Kingbird* Regional Editors have helped observers to prepare and submit documentation. We also wish to thank Andrew Farnsworth for bringing the Band-tailed Pigeon report to our attention and for encouraging eBird contributors to submit details of NYSARC reportable rarities.

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, a list of species requested for review by NYSARC (The Review List) is provided along with illustrated copies of previous annual reports. The Committee is very grateful to Carena Pooth (NYSOA President and website administrator) for updating and continuously improving the NYSARC web site. An on-line reporting form allows observers to compose a written report and attach up to five digital image files. Documentation (written reports and photographs) and any other correspondence for the Committee can also be sent via email or regular mail to:

Jeanne Skelly, Secretary for NYSARC
420 Chili-Scottsville Road
Churchville, NY 14428
E-mail: nysarc3@nybirds.org

COMMITTEE NEWS

At the end of December 2009, Shai Mitra rotated off the Committee at the end of his term and has been replaced by Tom Johnson. The Committee is grateful to Shai for his dedication and expert input. We look forward to continuing a close collaboration through Shai's role as Editor of *The Kingbird*. Tom Johnson is a native of Pennsylvania but has become a familiar name across the state, especially in central NY. A student at Cornell University, Tom lives in Ithaca but travels widely in search of birds. His superb field skills and knowledge of the distribution and migration of North American birds will be of great value to the Committee.

HIGHLIGHTS

Highlights of the 2008 Annual Report include two new additions to the New York State Checklist: **Band-tailed Pigeon** (*Patagioenas faciata*) and **'Yellow' Wagtail** (*Motacilla tsuhutschensis/citreola*), both on Long Island. Other highly significant records include the second and third **Pink-footed Geese** (*Anser brachyrhynchus*), both on Long Island, the third accepted record of **Anhinga** (*Anhinga anhinga*) from near Cortland and the third **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** (*Calidris acuminata*), an adult at Jamaica Bay. A **Magnificent Frigatebird** (*Fregata magnificens*) on Cayuga Lake was one of very few inland records.

2008 Reports Accepted

Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

2008-3-A/C One, Stony Brook Mill Pond, Stony Brook, **Suffolk**, 9 Feb-22 Mar (Luci Betti Nash, Douglas J. Futuyma, Bill Marrs; ph L. Nash, B. Marrs, sketch D. Futuyma)

2008-86-A/G One, Kissena Park & Corona Park, Flushing, Queens, 27 Dec-2 Jan 2009 (Angus Wilson, Steve Walter, Jacob Drucker, Shaibal S. Mitra, Shawn Billerman, Seth Ausubel, Seymour Schiff; ph A. Wilson, S. Walter, S. Mitra, S. Billerman, S. Ausubel, S. Schiff)

The Stony Brook goose was discovered by Saul Satin on 3 Feb, coming hot on the heels of the well-watched bird near Montauk (NYSARC 2007-53-A/E), which remained until the spring of 2008. The two locations are 66 miles apart; the two birds were simultaneously reported on a number of days and comparison of photos showed clear differences in the patterns of the pink skin at the base of

the bill. The Stony Brook goose was fairly elusive, spending the majority of daylight hours elsewhere (likely the fields and marshes surrounding the Nissequogue Estuary) and only using the mill pond as an overnight roost. The Queens Pink-footed Goose was discovered on 27 Dec by Eric Miller. It was seen repeatedly on the grassy playing fields at Kissena Park or about 1.5 miles away in Flushing Meadow-Corona Park, in both instances feeding with Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*). Again, careful study of the pattern of pink flesh on the bill established that this bird was different from the two seen in the previous winter. This bird remained in the area until 12 Jan 2009. These constitute the second and third records for NYS. Increased protection of Pink-footed Goose populations on their wintering grounds in Western Europe and the ever growing numbers of Canada Geese traveling between western Greenland and the Mid-Atlantic states may account for the recent and unprecedented surge in reports from New York and elsewhere in the northeast.

Black Brant (*Branta bernicans nigricans*)

2008-21-A One, Wolfe's Pond Park, Staten Island, **Richmond**, 6 Apr (Shaibal S. Mitra; ph S. Mitra)

Patricia Lindsay and Shai Mitra came across this handsome male during a zoology class field trip to the south shore of Staten Island. It is likely the same bird that was seen a week earlier by Tom Burke, Gail Benson, and Seth Wollney. Reports of Black Brant in New York stretch back to 1840 and have steadily increased in frequency, typically from the shores of the outer New York harbor (including South Amboy, NJ) or southern coastline of Long Island, areas that are used by large numbers of Atlantic Brant (*B. b. hrota*). A color photograph was published in *The Kingbird* (58(3):262).

Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*)

2008-5-A/B One, Sunken Meadow State Park, Smithtown, **Suffolk**, 8 Jan (Sam Stuart, Brent Bomkamp; ph S. Stuart, B. Bomkamp)

2008-87-A/B One, St. Charles Cemetery, Farmingdale, **Suffolk**, 29 Nov, 6, 14 Dec, 6, 15 Feb 2009 (Shaibal S. Mitra, Brendan Fogarty; ph S. Mitra, B. Fogarty)

Many, but not necessarily all, of the Barnacle Geese observed in NYS during the winter are likely to be of wild rather than captive origins. Neither of the 2008 birds showed physical signs of captivity, and both were from Long Island, an established wintering ground for Canada Geese nesting in Labrador and Greenland. The Sunken Meadow bird was discovered on 7 Jan by Sharon Brody, and the Farmingdale goose was found 29 Nov by Mike Cooper. NYSARC will continue to pay close attention to this species and detailed reports are encouraged.

'Eurasian' Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca crecca*)

2008-7-A One, Massapequa Preserve, pond adjacent to Pittsburg Ave., **Nassau** 25 Feb, (Seymour Schiff; ph S. Schiff)

Careful scrutiny of male 'American' Green-winged Teal (*A. c. carolinensis*) will occasional turn up a nominate Eurasian form (*crecca*) or a hybrid of the two. At

least three were reported from ponds on Long Island in early 2008, but details of only one of these were submitted. No hints of hybridization were evident from the description or photos. An individual was discovered at this locality by Jim Osterlund and party on 21 Jan and was apparently joined by a second bird on 12 Feb. At least one remained until 25 Feb, the date of this report.

Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*)

2008-83-A/B One, Long Point State Park, **Cayuga**, 1-2 Nov (Shawn Billerman, Scott Whittle; ph S. Billerman, S. Whittle)

For the third year in row, a Pacific Loon was present on Cayuga Lake (see NYSARC 2006-4-A/D and NYSARC 2007-67-A). Likely a returning wintering bird, this year it was reported in early November from the vicinity of Aurora, mid-lake. A detailed description by Shawn Billerman and good photographs from Scott Whittle establish the identification and eliminate the similar Arctic Loon by virtue of head and bill shape, posture, and plumage, including the flank pattern and presence of a faint but discernable chin strap.

Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)

2008-9-A/D One, Raritan Bay, Lemon Creek Pier and Park, Staten Island, **Richmond**, 23-30 Mar (Joe Trezza, Doug Gochfeld, Scott Whittle, Seth Wollney; ph D. Gochfeld, S. Whittle)

Since at least 2002, Western Grebe has been reported annually in New York and New Jersey waters, ranging roughly from Deal, NJ to the Rockaways in Queens County, NY. It is unclear how many individuals are involved but the frequency of sightings suggests more than one. In 2008, four reports were received from late March in the vicinity of Lemon Creek Park in Staten Island. The bird was first identified at this location by Seth Wollney. Several identifiable photographs were included, and these as well as some of the written descriptions ruled out Clark's Grebe, which has been recorded a few times in the east but not so far in NYS.

Audubon's Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*)

2008-94-A One, Hudson Canyon, 60 miles off shore, **pelagic**, 21 Sep (Scott Whittle; ph S. Whittle)

This tropical shearwater hails from the Caribbean and follows the warm water eddies that spin off the Gulf Stream into NYS waters. This individual was photographed by Scott Whittle, who traveled aboard a tuna fishing boat to the Hudson Canyon.

Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*)

2008-70-A One, Cold Brook Rd along Homer/Scott town line, **Cortland**, 25 May (Matthew A. Young)

Most Anhinga sightings in NYS have been brief or very distant, making it difficult for observers to discern the critical details needed to firmly exclude Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*), which will sometimes soar in a similar manner. Fortunately, Matt Young was able to study this immature

Anhinga for at least 20 minutes as it soared over a forested ridge. Using both binoculars and a spotting scope, he was able to discern a variety of salient details including the buffy tips of the bird's massive fanned tail. The Anhinga flapped its wings only three times during this lengthy observation—a testament to the remarkable soaring powers of this southern waterbird. Although sightings are reported every few years, this is only the third accepted record for NYS. The date falls neatly between the two previous accepted records: 28 April 1992 (Central Park, New York Co., NYSARC 1992-40-A) and 10 June 1996 (Cornell University Ponds, Tompkins Co., NYSARC 1996-45-A). Likewise, of the 13 accepted records from New Jersey, nine were between late April and early June.

Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*)

2008-51-A One, Mecox Bay to Cupsogue County Park, **Suffolk**, 7 Sep (Angus Wilson, Richard Guthrie; ph R. Guthrie)

2008-56-A One, Myers Park, Lansing, **Tompkins**, 21 Sep (Ryan Douglas, Shawn Billerman, ph R. Douglas, S. Billerman)

Most sightings of frigatebirds occur in the late summer and fall, especially during hurricane season when these gifted aerialists are swept northwards by fast moving weather systems. Tropical storm *Hanna* reached Long Island on the evening of 6 Sep 2008, having made landfall just south of the North/South Carolina border; then it moved north through Maryland, Delaware and New Jersey before swinging over Long Island as an extra tropical cyclone. In anticipation of displaced seabirds, many area birders positioned themselves at suitable vantage points along the south shore of Long Island. In general, the seabird counts were disappointing, the storm having largely dissipated; however an adult male Magnificent Frigatebird was found by Angus Wilson soaring over the northern end of Mecox Bay, midway along the South Fork. He was able to contact other birders by cell phone as the bird held station over the north end of the bay. News spread quickly and a number of birders reached Mecox in time to see the frigatebird begin to drift westward. A multi-vehicle chase ensued, reminiscent of the 1963 screwball comedy “It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World”, as the bird was followed through the Town of Southampton, across Shinnecock Bay and along Dune Road as far as the Moriches Inlet—a distance of 24 miles. A Magnificent Frigatebird was reported from Cape May, NJ, the following day; however it was described as a female, suggesting that a number of frigatebirds had been pushed into the area by this weather system. Frigatebird identification is notoriously difficult. In terms of plumage, male Ascension Frigatebird (*F. aquila*) is almost identical to Magnificent but differs in size, Ascension being smaller and shorter tailed. Given the track of the storm, however, Magnificent Frigatebird, which is common in the Gulf of Mexico, seemed the most likely species.

As if to echo the Long Island record, two weeks late a(nother) male Magnificent Frigatebird was spotted by Tom Johnson and Shawn Billerman soaring over Cayuga Lake in central NY (Johnson and Billerman 2009). Obviously, the species is much rarer away from the coast and this was the first record for Region 5. Again, quick phone calls brought many local observers to

the lake where the frigatebird lingered and eventually settled to roost. A crowd was on site before first light, hoping to see the bird leave the roost, but, to their disappointment, the branch was already empty when it became light enough to see. Tragically, Jeff Gerbracht spotted the corpse of the frigatebird lying below the roost tree and evidently the bird had died during the night. The specimen was salvaged, confirming it as a Magnificent Frigatebird and also revealing it to be severely emaciated. This suggests the bird had wandered inland for some days, unable to find sufficient food. The specimen is housed in the collection at the Cornell Museum of Vertebrates. Color photographs of both frigatebirds by Rich Guthrie and Tom Johnson were published in *The Kingbird* (59(1):53).

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*)

2008-55-A/B One, Vischer Ferry Nature Preserve, Clifton Park, **Saratoga**, 27 & 28 Aug (John Hershey, Ken Harper; ph J. Hershey, K. Harper)

This immature Yellow-crowned Night-Heron was found by John Hershey in a remnant of the Erie Canal at Vischer Ferry in Saratoga County. The written report was supplemented with digiscoped pictures. Yellow-crowned Night-Heron occasionally wanders away from its normal haunts along the coast. NYSARC has accepted 15 previous records from upstate since 1979, most of these adults found from April to June. The NYSARC archives have one previous fall record of an immature bird upstate, in Dutchess County. It is possible that immatures are overlooked among Black-crowned Night-Herons since they are far less distinctive than adults.

White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*)

2008-44-A One immature, Piermont Pier, Piermont, **Rockland**, 10 Aug (Alan W. Wells; ph A. Wells)

Observers Carol Weiss, Glenys Foster Roberts, Della Wells and Alan Wells first spotted this immature White Ibis as it flew over the baseball field at the base of the Pier and then viewed it again as it fed on the muddy edge of the Lower Sparkhill Creek. The ibis vanished as the tide rose and was not seen again. This is the first record for Rockland Co. This species remains rare in NYS, with the majority of records involving immatures. Prior to the Piermont bird, the most recent record is from 1990 (NYSARC 1990-28-A), although in the interim one or two additional sightings have been published but not submitted for NYSARC review. A pin-sharp color photograph by Alan Wells was published in *The Kingbird* (58(4):355).

White-faced Ibis (*Plegadis chihi*)

2008-46-A/B One, East Pond, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, **Queens**, 16 & 19 Aug (Brendan Fogarty, Doug Gochfeld; ph B. Fogarty, D. Gochfeld)

This basic plumage bird was found on 16 Aug by Doug Gochfeld and others during a NYSOA Young Birders Club field trip to the refuge. It was seen several times subsequently until the 19th. Jamaica Bay remains the premiere spot for this western counterpart of the Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*), a reflection perhaps of the large numbers of ibis that use accessible portions of the

refuge to feed or bathe. White-faced Ibis has become increasingly regular, consistent with a general expansion. This is the 17th record for NYS.

Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*)

2008-53-A One, vicinity of Hook Mt., **Rockland**, 8 Sep (Carol A. Weiss; sketch C. Weiss)

This kite was studied for 12-15 minutes from the hawkwatch as it circled over the slopes of Hook Mountain and Rockland Lake. Carol Weiss's report included a sketch, which is useful in situations where a photograph is not possible. Most records from New York and nearby states are from the spring, although the previous accepted record was in August 2007 (NYSARC 2007-79-A) from Monroe County.

Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)

2008-29-A One, adult, Bashakill Preserve, **Sullivan**, 25 May (David Klauber; ph Arie Gilbert)

2008-30-A/B One, Prospect Park, Brooklyn, **Kings**, 18 May (Dale Dyer, Shane Blodgett)

2008-40-A One, Inwood Hill Park, **New York**, 25 May (Ken Allaire)

The bulk of Mississippi Kite records have occurred in the spring, and this year was no exception. The first individual was glimpsed by observers in Prospect Park who viewed the kite through a gap in the woodland canopy. Expecting a Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) or Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), they quickly realized this was in fact a kite. Of interest, a kite was observed on the same day from the hawkwatch at Sandy Hook, NJ, about 15 miles due south of Prospect Park. The adult (or near adult) female at Bashakill was first seen by Dave Klauber and party as it soared over the ridge to the northeast of the main parking lot on Haven Road (see Klauber 2008 for details). It was then seen again an hour later and was studied carefully by telescope. A number of additional birders were reached by cell phone and were able to get on the bird before it disappeared towards the southeast. Almost simultaneously, Ken Allaire found a first-year bird at Inwood Park at the northern tip of Manhattan. This young kite was first seen in flight and then perched in a tall tree. Remarkably, a third individual, another adult, was reported from Derby Hill on the same day (see KB (58(3):273) but unfortunately a report on this bird was not received. A color photograph of the Bashakill kite taken by Peter Post was published in *The Kingbird* (58(3):262).

Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*)

2008-52-A One, Jones Beach, **Nassau**, 7 Sep (Joseph O'Sullivan)

This Wilson's Plover was studied with a flock of Semipalmated Sandpipers (*Calidris semipalmatus*) and Sanderlings (*Calidris alba*) as the birds were sheltered from the wind in a depression in the oceanside dunes. Although the majority of sightings are from the spring and early summer (24 Apr-11 July), a few have been in the fall. For example, there are specimen records from

September: Mecox Bay, Suffolk, 17 Sep 1932 and Moriches Inlet, Suffolk, 19 Sep 1954.

Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

2008-2-A Two, Hook Pond, East Hampton, **Suffolk**, 14 Mar (Karen Rubinstein)

2008-27-A One, West Pond, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, **Queens**, 30 June (Brendan Fogarty, ph B. Fogarty)

The East Hampton Black-necked Stilts were discovered in the late afternoon by Karen Rubinstein as they fed in a muddy area on the edge of the pond where phragmites and other vegetation had been recently cleared. As often happens, they were gone the next morning. This is the earliest occurrence on record for NY. Most sightings have been in mid-to-late May, with the previous earliest date being 10 Apr. The West Pond at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge is the top spot for the species in NYS, and this pattern continued with the discovery of a lone stilt there in mid-summer.

Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*)

2008-20-A One, edge of Lake Champlain, between Little and Great Chazy Rivers, Town of Champlain, **Clinton**, 17 & 21 May (William Krueger)

2008-22-A Two, Branche Rd., Cape Vincent, **Jefferson**, 18 May (David W. Prosser; ph Jerry LeTendre)

This prairie nesting species migrates to the Pacific, Atlantic and Gulf coasts during the non-breeding months and in NYS is generally encountered in the late summer and early fall. These two reports relate to a small influx of Marbled Godwits into northern NYS and Quebec during mid-May. The Lake Champlain bird was studied as it fed on exposed mud and emergent vegetation along the lake margin. The other two birds frequented a small farm pond in an open pasture and the report included photographs taken by Jerry LeTendre.

Red-necked Stint (*Calidris ruficollis*)

2008-42-A/D One, East Pond, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, **Queens**, 1-4 Aug (Brendan Fogarty, Ed Coyle, Robert J. Kurtz, Doug Gochfeld; ph B. Fogarty, E. Coyle, D. Gochfeld)

This Red-necked Stint was found by Doug Gochfeld on the muddy margins of the East Pond. An adult, it retained much of its alternate plumage and was enjoyed by many during its four-day stay. This is the fifth record for NYS. There are two prior records from Jamaica Bay: 27-28 July & 11 Aug 1985 (NYSARC 1985-20-A/B) and 8-30 July 1994 (NYSARC 1994-33-A/C). A color photograph by Ed Coyle was published in *The Kingbird* (58(4):355).

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*)

2008-43-A/E One, East Pond, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, **Queens**, 3-4 Aug (Brendan Fogarty, Ed Coyle, Phil Jeffery, Doug Gochfeld, Robert J. Kurtz; ph B. Fogarty, E. Coyle, D. Gochfeld)

This adult Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was first spotted by Phil Jeffrey at 6:40 AM in the northwest corner of this large, drawn down brackish pond. He immediately

recognized it as something significant and was able to get another birder onto it briefly before it flew further down. About an hour later the sandpiper was relocated by Bob Kurtz and party and its identity firmly established. The well-defined chestnut cap and dense barring on the breast and flanks helped differentiate it from Pectoral Sandpiper (*C. melanomas*), of which several were on hand for side-by-side comparison. The bird continued on the pond for one additional day before disappearing overnight with a cold front. This represents the third accepted record for NYS. The first was also from the East Pond (18-24 Jul 1981, NYSARC 1981-12-A) and like the 2008 sighting involved an adult. Another adult was reported from the East Pond on 16 July 1983 (NYSARC 1983-16-A), but unfortunately insufficient details were provided to adequately document a rarity of this magnitude. Birders had to wait until 10 Oct 2002 for the next confirmed sighting, when a juvenile was viewed and extensively photographed at the south end of Irondequoit Bay, Monroe Co. (NYSARC 2002-38-A/E). A color photograph of the 2008 adult taken by Ed Coyle was published in *The Kingbird* (58(4):355).

South Polar Skua (*Stercorarius maccormicki*)

2008-66-A One, pelagic (39° 54' .914"N, 71° 41' 49"W, 75.6 miles SSE of Shinnecock Inlet, **Suffolk**), 17 Jul (John Shemilt; ph and map J. Shemilt)

2008-67-A One, pelagic (39° 50' 23"N, 71° 44' 46"W, 79 miles SSE of Shinnecock Inlet, **Suffolk**), 7 Aug (John Shemilt; ph J. Shemilt)

The deep waters of the continental shelf edge remain one of the least studied habitats in NYS. Birders make only a handful of visits each year, either aboard an organized pelagic trip or a fishing boat in search of tuna or sailfish. Using his own vessel, John Shemilt was able to explore a productive area known as The Dip on a number of occasions during the summer of 2008. On two of these trips he managed to photograph South Polar Skuas.

Franklin's Gull (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*)

2008-73-A One, Montauk Point, Long Island, **Suffolk**, 16 Nov (Angus Wilson; ph A. Wilson)

There has been steady decline in Franklin's Gull reports over the past two decades. Historically, the preponderance of records has come from western NY, and the species has always been extremely rare on Long Island. The report from Angus Wilson gives a careful analysis of a first-basic Franklin's Gull that was spotted among a large number of Laughing Gulls (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) passing in front of Montauk Point on the changing tide. The photos show the dark hood wrapping around the eyes and back of the head, well-defined white eye crescents, and characteristic white nape separating the hood from the gray mantle.

Mew Gull (*Larus canus*)

2008-64-A One third basic, Niagara River, Adam Beck overlook, Lewiston, **Niagara**, 6 Dec (Willie D'Anna; ph Jean Iron)

A number of New York and Ontario birders studied this Mew Gull from the

Adam Beck overlook on the Canadian side of the Niagara River. Gulls here typically swirl around the area between the Adam Beck Power Station on the Canadian side and the Robert Moses Power Station on the U.S. side, crossing between Ontario and New York waters. Willie D'Anna's written report, supplemented by a photograph by Jean Iron, documented the identification as Mew Gull, but the level of detail the observers were able to obtain wasn't sufficient to establish which subspecies was involved.

California Gull (*Larus californicus*)

2008-74-A/C One adult, east side Cayuga Lake, Aurora, **Cayuga**, 1-4 Nov (Thomas Brodie Johnson, Mark Chao, Shawn Billerman; ph T. Johnson, M. Chao, S. Billerman)

2008-78-A/B One second basic, Niagara River, Adam Beck overlook, Lewiston, **Niagara**, 23 & 30 Nov, 6 Dec (James Pawlicki, Willie D'Anna; ph Jean Iron)
Rigorous study of the gulls wintering on the Niagara River by D'Anna and others has found California Gull to be close to annual in recent years, and the trend continues. The second-basic gull found by Jim Pawlicki and Willie D'Anna in late Nov was last reported on 7 Dec. On 1 Nov, Tom Johnson, Ann Mitchell, Chris Wiley and Shawn Billerman were checking the gulls gathered at the outflow of the Paines Creek into Aurora Bay on the eastern shore of Cayuga Lake when Johnson picked out this adult California Gull standing with American Herring (*L. smithsonianus*) and Ring-billed (*L. delawarensis*) Gulls. The gull returned to the creek mouth for the next three days and was seen by many local birders. It is the first record for Region 3 and one of only a handful away from the Niagara River; see Johnson 2009 for more details A color photograph of the Aurora bird by Kevin McGowan was published in *The Kingbird* (59(1):53).

Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*)

2008-1-A/G One, Stevenson Road compost piles & Stewart Park, Cayuga Lake, Ithaca, **Tompkins**, 16 Jan-1 Feb (Anne Marie Johnson, Ryan Douglas, William W. Watson, Gerald S. Lazarczyk, Alison Van Keuren, Doug Gochfeld, Shawn Billerman; ph A. Johnson, R. Douglas, A. Van Keuren, D. Gochfeld, S. Billerman)

This 3rd-cycle Slaty-backed Gull was found by Jay McGowan and during its two week stay afforded excellent views, sometimes appearing alongside a Lesser Black-backed Gull (*L. fuscus*). Interestingly, an adult or near-adult Slaty-backed Gull was found on the Ithaca compost piles on 21 Dec of the following winter and might conceivably be the same bird. Unfortunately a report on this latter bird was not received.

Ross's Gull (*Rhodostethia rosea*)

2008-4-A/C One adult, Niagara River near Goat Island, Niagara Falls, **Niagara**, 27-30 Jan (William W. Watson, Willie D'Anna, Shawn Billerman; ph W. D'Anna)

This handsome adult was found at 2:00 pm on 27 Dec by Willie D'Anna, Betsy Potter, Jean Iron and Kevin McLaughlin. The observers were viewing the river near the control gates from the Canadian side when D'Anna noticed a small gull on the ice at some considerable distance. Wishing for better views, D'Anna and Potter drove to Goat Island, where they managed to relocate it. Unfortunately it promptly disappeared and was not resighted until the following day, but it remained until 1 Feb, allowing a number of observers to catch up with this classic 'must see' bird. Although the identification was firmly established by the photographs provided, the Committee appreciated the fact that all three reports included careful descriptions. This is the third record for the Niagara River. See D'Anna 2008 for a full account. Two color photos taken by Michael Harvey on 30 Jan were published in *The Kingbird* (58(2):153) and a photograph by Willie D'Anna appeared in *North American Birds* (62(2):224).

Sandwich Tern (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*)

2008-23-A Two adults, Cupsogue County Park, near Moriches Inlet, **Suffolk**, 8 Jun (Shaibal S. Mitra, ph S. Mitra)

2008-24-A One, first summer, Cupsogue County Park, near Moriches Inlet, **Suffolk**, 12 Jun (Shaibal S. Mitra; ph S. Mitra)

2008-38-A Two, one male, one female, Cupsogue County Park, near Moriches Inlet, **Suffolk**, 29 Jun (Shaibal S. Mitra; ph S. Mitra)

The sand flats just inside the Moriches Inlet remain the premiere spot in NYS for rare terns. Repeated visits by Shai Mitra and company during June and July resulted in the documentation of five Sandwich Terns and at least ten Arctic Terns (see below). The season began with the discovery of two adult Sandwich Terns by Andy Baldelli, who kept the birds in sight until Shai Mitra and Patricia Lindsay were able to join him. One was in alternate plumage and wore a USFWS band on the right leg, and the other was in basic plumage and was unbanded. Color photos of all Sandwich Terns taken by Shai Mitra were published in *The Kingbird* (58(4):358).

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

2008-25-A One, 1st-summer, Cupsogue County Park, Westhampton Dunes, **Suffolk**, 14 Jun (Shaibal S. Mitra; ph S. Mitra)

2008-31-A One, 1st-summer, Cupsogue County Park, Westhampton Dunes, **Suffolk**, 21 Jun (Shaibal S. Mitra; ph S. Mitra)

2008-32-A One, Cupsogue County Park, Westhampton Dunes, **Suffolk**, 21 Jun (Shaibal S. Mitra; ph S. Mitra)

2008-34-A One, adult/near-adult, Cupsogue County Park, Westhampton Dunes, **Suffolk**, 11 Jul (Shaibal S. Mitra; ph S. Mitra)

2008-35-A One, mud flat north of Cupsogue County Park, Westhampton Dunes, **Suffolk**, 21 Jul (Seth Ausubel)

2008-36-A One, 2nd-summer, Pikes Beach, Westhampton Dunes, **Suffolk**, 12 Jul (Seth Ausubel; ph S. Ausubel)

2008-37-A One, 1st-summer, Pikes Beach, Westhampton Dunes, **Suffolk**, 20 Jul (Shaibal S. Mitra; ph S. Mitra)

2008-98-A One, adult/near-adult, Cupsogue County Park, Westhampton Dunes, **Suffolk**, 8 Jun (Shaibal S. Mitra; ph S. Mitra)

2008-99-A One, 1st-summer, Cupsogue County Park, Westhampton Dunes, **Suffolk**, 27 Jun (Shaibal S. Mitra; ph. S. Mitra)

2008-100-A One, 1st-summer, Pikes Beach, Westhampton Dunes, **Suffolk**, 13 Jul (Shaibal S. Mitra; ph S. Mitra)

A series of ten Arctic Terns was documented on the exposed sandflats at Cupsogue County Park and nearby Pikes Beach during June and July. In addition to Shai Mitra, finders included Tom Burke, Patricia Lindsay and Seth Ausubel. This area is a short distance inside the mouth of the Moriches Inlet. Each individual was carefully described, tentatively aged by plumage, and photographed. For the most part, this was sufficient to establish that different individuals were involved, even on consecutive days. See Mitra 2009 for a full account. Color photographs by Shai Mitra illustrating two of the 2008 birds were published in *The Kingbird* (59(1):58).

Common Murre (*Uria aalge*)

2008-97-A Forty-nine, pelagic (from 10-25 miles SW of Jones Inlet, **Nassau**), 3 Feb (Scott Whittle; ph S. Whittle)

This record count of Common Murres was made during a pelagic organized by Paul Guris (See Life Paulagics) aboard the *Capt. Lou VII* out of Freeport. In recent years, alcids have become more common in the inshore waters around Long Island. Previous trips to this area at the same time of year have also turned up multiple Common Murres, suggesting this might be a consistent phenomenon.

Razorbill (*Alca torda*)

2008-88-A One, Lake Ontario off Irondequoit Bay, **Monroe**, 14 Dec (Dominic Sherony; ph Jessie Barry)

This first-basic Razorbill was found by Mike Tetlow on the west side of the inlet during the Rochester Christmas Bird Count and many count participants were able to see it. The species remains a major rarity away from saltwater.

Atlantic Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*)

2008-93-A Two, pelagic (40 and 60 miles SW of Jones Inlet, **Nassau**), 3 Feb (Scott Whittle; ph S. Whittle)

These puffins were photographed during a See Life Paulagics offshore trip. One individual was a first-year and the other an adult. It is likely that Atlantic Puffins are fairly numerous in offshore waters during the winter and spring but are rarely documented because so few birders manage to get into suitable areas at the appropriate times of year.

Band-tailed Pigeon (*Patagioenas faciata*)

2008-101-A One, Artist Lake, Brookhaven, **Suffolk**, 14 Nov-11 Dec (Michael Scope; ph M. Scope)

This Band-tailed Pigeon made daily visits to a feeder behind an apartment
The Kingbird 2010 September; 60 (3)

complex close to the kettle hole pond known as Artist Lake. It typically spent several hours at the feeder in the late morning and early afternoon before disappearing for the rest of the day. Unfortunately, other birders were unaware of this remarkable sighting during its month-long stay, and it only came to light when eBird reviewer Andrew Farnsworth received diagnostic color photos from the observer Michael Scope in June of the following year. The photos show a snowy scene with the pigeon perched on a platform feeder. By chance, a parked vehicle with a NYS license plate is clearly visible behind in one of the images. The bicolored bill, double neck collar and other features clearly established the identification and ruled out other pigeons including domestic forms. This represents the first record of Band-tailed Pigeon for New York. Considered long overdue, the species has been recorded in New Jersey (Stokes SF, Sep 1980; West Cape May, Jan 2007), New Brunswick (Machias Seal Island, 1974), New Hampshire (Conway, Mar 1991), Massachusetts (Brookline May-June 1995), Maine, Pennsylvania and Ontario (at least five records, Port Hope, 1970; Dorion, 1978, Long Point, Rondeau, London, Nov-Dec 2003). A relatively widespread New World species, Band-tailed Pigeons are found in montane forests of western North America and the highlands of central Mexico, continuing south into Central and South America. The North American coastal population breeds from central California north into Canada and Alaska, moving into Baja California during the colder months. In the interior, a migratory population breeds in upland areas of southern Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico and is perhaps the most likely source of vagrants to the east.

Northern Hawk Owl (*Surnia ulula*)

2008-79-A/I One, Clark Rd, Peru, **Clinton**, 18 Dec-5 Mar 2009 (Dana C. Rohleder, Devin Bosler, Justin Bosler, Neal Reilly, Brendan Fogarty, John M. C. Peterson, Ken McDermott, Donna Gooley, Will Raup; ph D. Bosler, B. Fogarty, Curt McDermott, D. Gooley, W. Raup)

2008-82-A One, Potsdam, **St. Lawrence**, 29 Dec & 1 Jan 2009 (Jeff Bolsinger; ph J. Bolsinger)

The Peru Hawk Owl, the second Clinton Co. record, was seen by a large number of observers during its seven week stay and reported almost daily on the internet. It was discovered on 14 Dec by John Brown and Judith Heintz during the Plattsburgh Christmas Bird Count. The Potsdam Hawk Owl was discovered by MaryBeth Warburton on 29 Dec in a swampy area close to the shopping plaza on Rt. 11. It continued into the New Year and on 21 Jan 2009 was captured and banded by Mark Manske, who deemed it to be a first-basic female. The last reported sighting of the owl was 2 Feb 2009.

Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*)

2008-15-A One, Smith Rd, Potsdam, **St. Lawrence**, 24 Mar (Jeff Bolsinger; ph J. Bolsinger)

This spectacular owl was studied by Jeff Bolsinger and several others as it perched on a bird feeder a short distance from the living room window of a house in Potsdam. American Tree Sparrows (*Spizella arborea*) fed on the snowy

ground below the feeder, seemingly unconcerned by the owl, which was actively hunting voles instead. The owl remained until 27 Mar. A color photograph by Jeff Bolsinger was published in *The Kingbird* (58(3):259).

Boreal Owl (*Aegolius funereus*)

2008-28-A One, Mahoney Rd, Brasher Falls, **St. Lawrence**, 3 Mar (Karla Young; ph Dave Rockwood)

This Boreal Owl was seen several times in the week prior to 3 Mar when it was found roosting in the open on some farm equipment and allowed itself to be photographed at close range.

Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*)

2008-68-A/B One adult male, private residence, West Nyack, **Rockland**, 24, 26, 27 Sep (Alan W. Wells, Beverly Simone; ph A. Wells)

2008-96-A One, Woodhull Place, Northport, **Suffolk**, 9 Nov (Scott Whittle; ph S. Whittle)

The hummingbird in West Nyack was a full adult male, nicely photographed during its visit to a private feeder. The Northport hummingbird visited sugar feeders maintained by Norm Klein and stayed until 11 Nov. In the winter of 2006/07, a similar female, nicknamed 'Ilsa', established a territory in Norm's yard, staying for just over two months (NYSARC 2006-59-A).

Say's Phoebe (*Savories saya*)

2008-63-A One, Batavia Water Treatment Plant, **Genesee**, 22 Oct (Brad Carlson)

Brad Carlson and Bill Carlson stumbled upon this Say's Phoebe during a visit to the water treatment plant ponds, but unfortunately it disappeared within 20 minutes of discovery. This is the first record for Region 1.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*)

2008-41-A/B One adult male, Rockefeller Rd, Moravia, **Cayuga**, 18 Nov (Shawn Billerman, Bill Purcell; ph S. Billerman, B. Purcell)

2008-45-A/C One adult, Galeville Park, Shawangunk Grasslands, **Ulster**, 15-17 Aug (Gene McGarry, Richard Guthrie, Alison Van Keuren; ph Peter Schoenberger, R. Guthrie A. Van Keuren)

Gene and Jeffrey Ward found and identified the Moravia flycatcher in a scrubby field on the east side of Owasco Lake. They forwarded photographs to Kevin McGowan at Cornell, and a number of observers were able to see the bird before it likely succumbed to harsh conditions. The richness of the salmon color of the breast and the tail length indicate a male. Several digiscoped photographs supported the description. There are comparatively fewer sightings of Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in the fall compared to the spring and the majority of records are from the coastal areas, which makes this sighting particularly unusual. Earlier in the year, an adult was found by Gene McGarry at the Shawangunk Grasslands NWR (former Galeville Airport) in Ulster County, where it lingered for two more days.

Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*)

2008-61-A One, West Gilgo Beach, **Suffolk**, 18 Nov (Shaibal S. Mitra)

2008-71-A Six, Fair Haven State Park, **Cayuga**, 11 Nov (Bill Purcell; ph B. Purcell)

2008-80-A Fourteen to twenty-two, Lake Ontario shore, Wilson, **Niagara**, 3 Nov (Willie D'Anna)

2008-95-A Two, Jones Beach West End, **Nassau**, 11 Nov (Scott Whittle, ph S. Whittle)

2008-102-A Eight, Breezy Point, **Queens**, 11 Nov (Doug Gochfeld)

Cave Swallows once again staged their now annual late fall incursion into the state, with sightings from both the south shore of Lake Ontario and the barrier beaches on the southern coast of Long Island. These areas are, broadly speaking, the most reliable locations for the species. This year's reports ranged in date from November 3 to 18, consistent with the overall pattern from prior years—23 of the 26 separate accepted reports through 2008 (many of multiple individuals) are from mid-October to mid-December. Given the well-established pattern of occurrence during this period for Cave Swallows in New York, and the Northeast in general, NYSARC will no longer review records from mid-October through December. Cave Swallow remains on the review list for any dates outside this limited range.

Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

2008-72-A/C One, Lowville, **Lewis**, 15 Oct (Bill Purcell, Jeff Bolsinger, Scott Whittle; ph B. Purcell, J. Bolsinger, S. Whittle)

This female or immature male Northern Wheatear was found by Tom Magarian in front of the farmhouse he was renting. He got the word out immediately, and a number of birders were able to reach this relatively remote spot in time to watch the wheatear hunting insects from atop piles of cut wood, fence posts, stones and other vantage points. Scott Whittle traveled the furthest, having rushed from Brooklyn as soon as he heard the news. As is often the case, the Northern Wheatear was gone by the next morning. This represents the first record for Lewis County and Region 7.

Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*)

2008-6-A One, Thompson Lake Road, near Thompson Lake State Park, **Albany**, 20 Feb (Richard Guthrie)

This Townsend's Solitaire was studied by Rich Guthrie, Jory Langner and LeRoy Suess for about 10 minutes as it fed on wild grapes growing among sumacs in a brushy field. It was not seen subsequently.

“Yellow” Wagtail (*Motacilla tschutschensis/flava*)

2008-85-A One, Plum Beach, Brooklyn, **Kings**, 7 Sep (Doug Gochfeld; ph D. Gochfeld)

Shortly after sunrise on 7 Sep 2008, the observer Doug Gochfeld began checking the edge of the salt marsh at Plum Beach. At about 7:20 AM he spotted

a pipit-like bird flying low over the vegetation. It gave an unfamiliar call that did not register as an American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*) or a Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*). The bird continued over the dunes and dropped down out of sight. Making his way over to that area, Gochfeld unintentionally flushed the bird but fortunately it landed on the edge of a muddy pool. He had the foresight to put his scope on the bird right away and snatch a few photos with a digital camera. Knowing this was not a familiar species, he checked his field guide and soon came to the realization that it was most likely a wagtail and used a cell phone to call Shai Mitra and Shane Blodgett. After about 15 minutes the wagtail took flight and headed out over the water in a southerly direction towards Fort Tilden and Breezy Point, but a limited search could not relocate it.

Gochfeld's detailed report was accompanied with photographs and these clearly showed a wagtail. Committee discussion centered on (i) the ramifications of the 2004 AOU split of Eastern Yellow Wagtail (*M. tschutschensis*) from the Yellow Wagtail (*M. flava*) which breeds in northwest Europe, and (ii) the apparent discrepancy between the photos and the observer's written description in terms of the color of the throat, breast and belly. Accurate recording of the underpart coloration, specifically the extent of yellow wash, is a major component of the identification. The Committee concluded that this uncertainty was likely due to a combination of the properties of the point and shoot digital camera used to take the photographs through a telescope, the early morning light and vegetation that partly obscured the bird. In its deliberations, the Committee reviewed proposed criteria for separating Eastern Yellow Wagtail from the very similar western European forms and discussed the value of further expert review or study of museum skins. The observer's recollection of the call notes was also discussed. Given that no firm criteria for the identification of immature 'Yellow' Wagtails have been established, the Committee concluded by a 7-0 vote that the bird should be best recorded as a 'Yellow' Wagtail (*Motacilla tschutschensis/flava*). This is the first accepted record of any wagtail for NYS and is likely the first documented example of a 'Yellow' Wagtail of any kind from eastern North America. A color photograph by Doug Gochfeld was published in *The Kingbird* (59(1):51).

Blue-winged Warbler (*Vermivora pinus*)

2008-59-A One, Prospect Hill Road, Horseheads, **Chemung**, 30 Oct (Michael Powers)

Although Blue-winged Warblers are widespread breeders across NYS, they quickly disappear in late summer. This late October date is very unusual away from the coast.

Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*)

2008-57-A One, Central Park, **New York**, 21 Sep (Lloyd Spitalnik; ph L. Spitalnik)

This attractive western wood warbler was discovered by David Speiser and seen by a number of observers able to get to the park in time. Based on the photographs, Peter Pyle concluded that this was an adult male. This is the 14th

record for NYS. Eight of the previous records have occurred in the fall and winter (Sep-Dec).

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)

2008-18-A One male, Woodland Dr, Salt Point, **Dutchess**, 10 May (Robert Bowler)

2008-75-A One male, Sullivan Street, Wurstsboro, **Sullivan**, 29 Apr (John H. Haas, ph Renee Davis)

2008-89-A One, Hoyt Lake, Forest Lawn Cemetery, Buffalo, **Erie**, 11 Dec (Darrell Stevens, ph D. Stevens)

Apart from nearly annual early spring overshoots and a few breeding period records from Long Island, Summer Tanager has a generally bimodal distribution in NYS. The majority of records occur during spring migration, from mid-May to early June, with a second much smaller peak in late November and December. Because it is of regular occurrence downstate during spring migration, the species is only on the review list for upstate. This year's upstate records follow the overall pattern, with spring records in Sullivan and Dutchess Counties and a mid-December record in Erie County. These are the 12th–14th records from upstate accepted by NYSARC since 1981. Although the provenance of the late fall birds is unknown, their arrival during the same general period as southwestern species such as Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) and Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fluva*) suggests that some or all originate from southwestern North America.

Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*)

2008-90-A One, Central Park, Manhattan, **New York**, 27 March (Scott Whittle, ph S. Whittle)

Many Central Park birders got a chance to see this tanager during its three-week stay but only one report reached the Committee. The bird was discovered by Matt Pelikan on 26 March and reported almost daily until 12 April. The bird fed on a number of occasions from fresh sap wells drilled by a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*). Plumage wear suggests a second-year, but sexing at this time of year is difficult. Most coastal records have occurred in the fall and winter (October to January) or in May, with a couple of over-wintering individuals that lingered to the beginning of April (Bull 1964). The late March discovery of the Central Park bird suggests that it over-wintered somewhere in the eastern US.

Lark Bunting (*Calamospiza melanocorys*)

2008-77-A/B One female or immature male, Robert Moses State Park, **Suffolk**, 18-19 Sep (Douglas J. Futuyma, Brendan Fogarty; ph B. Fogarty)

Judged to be either a female or immature male, this Lark Bunting was discovered by Doug Futuyma on 16 Sep and remained in the area until 21 Sep, during which time it was seen by many. This is the first occurrence on Long Island since 9 Sep 1992 (NYSARC 1992-25-A).

Le Conte's Sparrow (*Ammodramus leconteii*)

2008-60-A/D One, Plum Beach, Brooklyn, **Kings**, 8 Oct (Doug Gochfeld, Arie Gilbert, Seymour Schiff, Scott Whittle; ph D. Gochfeld, A. Gilbert, S. Schiff, S. Whittle)

This LeConte's Sparrow was found by Doug Gochfeld in dune grass at Plum Beach in Brooklyn. Rapid dissemination of the information allowed many observers to see this normally skulking species over the course of its two-day stay. Four reports were submitted, all with excellent photographs, and observers carefully described the bird and eliminated similar species, notably Nelson's Sparrow (*Ammodramus nelsoni*). This is the eleventh record accepted by NYSARC. Interestingly, the most recent prior record was just under a year earlier about 1.5 miles away, at Fort Tilden, Queens (NYSARC 2007-72-A) and there are several documented sightings from Sandy Hook, NJ, suggesting that migrants pass down the Hudson River.

Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*)

2008-19-A One, Woodlawn Beach State Park, Hamburg, **Erie**, 11-14 May (Gerald S. Lazarczyk, James Pawlicki, Michael Morgante, Willie D'Anna, Gerry Rising; ph W. D'Anna)

This immature male was discovered on 10 May by David Wheeler. Although regular on Long Island, the species remains rare upstate, and this well-documented immature male marks the first record accepted by NYSARC from Region 1. Woodlawn Beach State Park is along the shoreline of Lake Erie, a few miles south of Buffalo. The misidentification of Indigo Buntings (*P. cyanea*) as Blue Grosbeaks is a common mistake made in the spring, even by experienced birders. For this reason, the committee appreciates strong documentation for this species, especially reports with photos and multiple reports, if possible.

Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*)

2008-76-A One female, Oxford Ct, Cedarhurst, **Nassau**, 6 May (Cindy Wodinsky; ph C. Wodinsky)

A combination of alertness, diligence, and experience allowed this birder to carefully identify and photograph the nondescript female-type Painted Bunting that visited her feeding station so briefly. After her first observation, she suspected this species and decided to wait for its return, camera in hand. Her diligence finally paid off after two hours with another very brief visit. It was enough for her to snap several excellent photos, firmly documenting this rare southern finch.

Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*)

2008-12-A One adult male, Fiddlehead Lane, New Scotland, **Albany**, 28 Mar (Alvin Breisch)

2008-48-A One, Deep Hollow Ranch, Montauk, **Suffolk**, 22-24 Sep (Victoria Bustamante; ph V. Bustamante)

2008-58-A One adult male, Anthony Beach Road, Torrey, **Yates**, 21 Dec (Glenn

Groet)

Since being added back to the review list in 2003, NYSARC has received about one report a year, so the three reports from 2008 are above average. The reports from New Scotland and Torrey both described adult males visiting feeders. The Montauk bird was a female-type found and photographed by Victoria Bustamante in a mixed flock of icterids and European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) at the Deep Hollow Ranch, a hotspot for vagrants on the east end of Long Island.

2008 Reports Accepted But Origins Uncertain or Unnatural

Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*)

2008-13-A One adult, Wallkill River NWR, Oil City Rd near Pine Island, **Orange**, 16 Apr (Ken McDermott; ph Curt McDermott, Ken Kijewski)

Trumpeter Swan continues to increase in NYS, but sightings are still unusual outside the core areas (mainly Jefferson and Wayne Counties), so this report from the Wallkill River NWR in Orange County is noteworthy. The detailed report from Ken McDermott carefully ruled out other swans and was supplemented by a series of excellent photographs from Curt McDermott and Ken Kijewski. A review of the species' history and its current status in New York was published in *The Kingbird* in 2007 (Sherony & Bolsinger 2007). Although this long-lived species now breeds annually in the state, it is difficult to determine how many of the sightings refer to originally escaped birds, or their offspring, or whether any individuals originate from reintroduction programs in Ontario, Michigan, or other mid-western states. The Committee welcomes additional reports, particularly of tagged birds that may possibly be traced to determine origin.

Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)

2008-8-A One adult, Upper Lisle Park, Whitney Point, **Broome**, 3 Apr (Robert Grosek; ph R. Grosek)

Waterfowl present a perennial problem for records committees because of their popularity with collectors. This individual was observed at close range and photographed. Details were sufficient to rule out juvenile Cape Shelduck (*T. cana*), which also lacks the whitish head of Ruddy Shelduck. Some members were troubled by the fact that the report did not specifically address the question of an escape. Was it banded? Could it fly? These concerns aside, the Committee acknowledges that Ruddy Shelduck is a candidate for vagrancy to North America. The species is found throughout central Asia and many populations are migratory. Historically, there is precedent for irruptions well out of the normal range, with birds reaching western Europe including the British Isles, Iceland and even Greenland. That said, a westward irruption has not been documented in recent years, although the picture has become greatly confused by a burgeoning feral population in the Netherlands and southern England. From a North

American standpoint, the most provocative sighting is that of six birds that were photographed by a research team working in the Canadian arctic (Allard *et al.* 2001). Despite this remarkable record, the AOU has not added Ruddy Shelduck to the North American Checklist, citing lingering concerns of unnatural origins. Indeed, two or more Ruddy Shelducks have been observed on many occasions within NYS under circumstances that seem unlikely for natural vagrants.

Chukar (*Alectoris chukar*)

2008-14-A One, E 7th St & Church Ave, Kensington, Brooklyn, **Kings**, 16 Apr (Miabi Chatterji; ph M. Chatterji)

This unbanded bird was only five to ten feet away from the observer, walking on a Brooklyn sidewalk. The identification is not in question but the provenance is highly suspect. The extreme tameness is very unlike that of a wild bird. Chukar is a Eurasian species that has been introduced and established in parts of the western US and Canada. It is essentially non-migratory and so is a highly unlikely candidate for natural vagrancy to the east. Chukars are occasionally released by hunting groups and hunting dog-trainers, but this is hard to reconcile with this sighting from an urban area. The origin of this bird, while certainly unnatural, remains a mystery.

Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*)

2008-47-A/B One, Allenhurst Rd, Amherst, **Erie**, 21-22 Aug (Gerald Rising, Gerald S. Lazarczyk; ph G. Rising, G. Lazarczyk)

This attractive dove was initially identified by the homeowner Carole Levine when it came to feeders a week earlier. The report by Gerry Rising included definitive photographs. Spotted Dove is a wide spread Asian species introduced into California, where it is established. Given that there are no other established populations in North America, that the species is not known to wander, and is widely available for purchase, the Committee felt this individual was most likely a local escapee.

European Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)

2008-84-A One, Alley Pond Park, **Queens**, 23 Dec (Jean Loscalzo)

This European Robin was first identified by Eric Miller. Some unnamed observers had seen the bird earlier. Northern populations of European Robin are considered short-distance migrants. However, there are upwards of 900 records from Iceland, indicating a reasonable but unfulfilled potential to reach North America. Surprisingly, this insectivorous species is widely advertised for sale, opening the possibility of an escape.

2007 Report Accepted

Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*)

2007-81-A One, Hither Hills State Park, west of Montauk, **Suffolk**, 23 Nov (Angus Wilson)

This Cave Swallow was seen flying westwards along the beach front on a crisp November morning, following a night of steady northwest winds. Later that day, Shane Blodgett and Doug Gochfeld found three or four Cave Swallows going to roost at Mecox Inlet, 19 miles to the west of Hither Hills (NYSARC 2007-73-A), and it is conceivable that this bird was among them.

2006 Report Accepted

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)

2006-77-A One, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, **Queens**, 10 Jul (Doug Gochfeld; ph D. Gochfeld)

This black-and-white male Ruff, molting out of breeding plumage, was found by Shane Blodgett at Jamaica Bay. Doug Gochfeld submitted this report including several photographs documenting the sighting. It was early in the fall shorebird season at Jamaica Bay, so water levels were high, but despite this the bird remained to at least 20 July. In the past Ruff occurred annually in NYS, primarily along the coast, but reports have decreased substantially in recent years. Since 2001, NYSARC has accepted three records: Suffolk County, 23 Sep 2001 (NYSARC 2001-84-A); Seneca County, 7 May 2004 (NYSARC 2004-16-A); and Madison County, 25 Aug 2007 (NYSARC 2007-70-A).

2006 Report Accepted But Origins Uncertain or Unnatural

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*)

2006-78-A One, Camman's Pond, Merrick, **Nassau**, 30 Oct (Seymour Schiff; ph S. Schiff)

This Black-bellied Whistling-Duck spent several weeks on a suburban duck pond where local people frequently feed the waterfowl. As a consequence many birds become quite tame, even those of almost certain wild origins. The color photograph submitted with the report clearly showed the bird to be unbanded and to have at least one of its hind toes, but the condition of its wings was not discussed. Although these attributes are consistent with a wild bird, concerns about the natural origins remain. Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks are very popular with waterfowl collectors and a single escape or deliberate release is hard to rule out.

1999 Report Accepted

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)

1999-83-A/B One, Leslie Rd, Cutchogue, **Suffolk**, 28 Aug (Paul Gillen, Jr., Anthony J. Lauro)

Paul Gillen found this male Ruff, retaining remnants of breeding plumage, in a flooded sod field in Cutchogue. Tony Lauro was able to arrive at the scene shortly thereafter. Both reports included relevant details on the identification and a sketch from Gillen.

2008 Reports Not Accepted

Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*)

2008-11-A One, Lake Ontario Shore Rd (Route 3), Henderson, **Jefferson**, 30 Mar

This report described two large birds that were seen flying inland from Lake Ontario. The observer considered the silhouette to be similar to that of a Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) but larger. One bird hovered briefly and both were described as having a magpie-like black and white chest. The Committee was unsure of the correct identification but felt that shape and behavior of the birds were inconsistent with any frigatebird species. Although this marine species is capable of wandering far inland, as exemplified by the individual found over Cayuga Lake later in the year, the early spring date would be exceptionally early.

Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*)

2008-54-A One, Robert Moses State Park, **Suffolk**, 24 Oct

This large falcon was seen flying west over the dunes at Robert Moses State Park. Due to lighting conditions, the observer was not able to see details of the plumage, and the identification was made primarily on indirect comparison of size relative to Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*). The date is early for Gyr Falcon, although not unprecedented for the Northeast. The Committee felt that a large female Peregrine Falcon, or large falcon hybrids, could not be ruled out based on the information provided.

Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)

2008-50-A/B One, Gilbert Brook Marina, Chazy, **Clinton**, 16 Sep

This shorebird was seen on the edge of Lake Champlain in the company of single Pectoral (*C. melanotos*) and Least (*C. minutilla*) Sandpipers. The two reports were consistent in their descriptions and several field marks supported the identification. However, neither report commented on the age of the bird nor could this be unambiguously discerned from the descriptions. As a result Committee members were split on whether this bird was a basic plumaged adult or a juvenile. Ageing is an important step when identifying any shorebird, especially one as rare as this species. Furthermore, some aspects of the description were not consistent with Curlew Sandpiper in either plumage, for example “traces of barring towards the rear” and neither report explicitly compared the bird to the two other shorebirds present, making it difficult to gauge the size and shape. Unfortunately, the bird was not photographed. In the

first round of voting, the Committee was split on accepting the record but the second round vote was 6-1 against acceptance.

Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*)

2008-91-A One adult, Adam Beck Power Plant, Niagara River, **Niagara**, 30 Nov

Although regularly reported from the Niagara River in late fall and early winter, Thayer's Gull remains a highly contentious identification problem. The subject bird was seen at what is considered by many to be the best place in the eastern US to see this species. It was also admirably photographed in flight, quite an achievement given the distances involved. While the plumage looked spot-on for this species, the size could not be determined from the photographs and it was not clearly described in the report. Some Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) have wingtip patterns practically replicating that of a Thayer's Gull. While such birds are rare, they occur with enough frequency to leave the committee unconvinced that an aberrant Herring Gull could be ruled out.

Bridled Tern (*Onychoprion anaethetus*)

2008-81-A One, Democrat Point, **Suffolk**, 7 Sep

Birding Democrat Point following the passage of Tropical Storm Hanna, the observer saw a dark-backed, medium sized tern fly in from the ocean and fly overhead, disappearing to the east into the sun as it circled higher. Given the circumstances of the sighting, the Committee was concerned that the similar-appearing Sooty Tern (*Onychoprion fuscatus*) could not be ruled out based on the description provided. Both species have occurred in NYS after the passage of tropical systems, although there hasn't been an accepted report of Bridled Tern since 2000 and Sooty Tern since 2006.

Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*)

2008-10-A One, Fort Covington, **Franklin**, 19 Mar

This owl visited the observer's yard during the night, first appearing on the railing of the deck and then moving into some nearby trees when some outdoor lights were on so it could be viewed. Although the brief description was suggestive of a Great Gray, the detail was insufficient to firmly rule out other species.

Broad-billed Hummingbird (*Cynanthus latirostris*)

2008-62-A One, Sterling Forest, **Orange**, 25 May

This male hummingbird was retrospectively identified from photographs. At the time of observation the photographer assumed it to be a Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*A. colubris*) but later noticed that the tail appeared strongly forked tail in one of the images and that the underparts appeared dark, suggestive of Broad-billed Hummingbird. However, the Committee felt that these features were not sufficient to support the identification. The tail of male Ruby-throats can appear notched and shadow could give a misleading

impression of dark underparts. Furthermore, the bill appeared to be all black, lacking the expected red base and dark tip of Broad-billed.

American Three-toed Woodpecker (*Picoides dorsalis*)

2008-17-A One, John Boyd Thatcher State Park, **Albany**, 17 May

This black-and-white woodpecker was observed for a few seconds in a forested park to the west of Albany and thus well outside the Adirondack Park where a few American Three-toed Woodpeckers linger. The observer noted a 'ladder back' pattern on the bird's back and the absence of a white wing patch. No yellow or red feathering was seen on the head. The ladder back certainly argues against Black-backed Woodpecker (*P. arcticus*) but does not entirely fit with Three-toed. Given the limited views and unlikely date for a wandering boreal woodpecker, the Committee recommends that this bird be left unidentified. It is worth keeping in mind that some populations of Hairy Woodpecker (*P. villosus*) have very limited areas of white on the wing coverts.

Yellowhammer (*Eberiza citrinella*)

2008-69-A One, Boland Pond, Binghamton, **Broome**, 1 May

This small songbird was studied at a distance of about 70 feet with binoculars as it perched on top of a bush before flying a short distance and disappearing. No photographs were obtained. Based on the entirely yellow head, sparrow-like (conical) bill and pattern of head and breast streaking, the observer concluded that it was likely a female-type Yellowhammer. There are occasional reports of this species from the northeast and Chicago area. After consideration, the Committee felt that the description lacked sufficient detail to support the identification. Several key details were not recorded, including the color of the rump, patterning of the scapulars and the tail. A number of exotic finches have yellow heads, and the possibility of a North American sparrow with abnormal pigmentation also needs to be excluded. Although widespread in Western Europe, Yellowhammer is not considered a long-distance migrant, and the potential for vagrancy to North America is relatively low. There are no accepted records from North America (AOU).

American Dipper (*Cinclus mexicanus*)

2008-49-A One, between Gardener & New Paltz, **Ulster**, 21 Aug

This bird was watched for about three minutes and seen flying from a stream area into thick brush. The beginning birder who saw it looked in a field guide and concluded it was a Dipper. This essentially non-migratory species is an unlikely candidate for vagrancy to New York and flying into thick brush would be very atypical behavior. While the brief description was not inconsistent with American Dipper, it did not rule out the much more likely Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*), and it appears that this species was not considered.

Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

2008-16-A Centre Island, **Nassau**, 26 Apr

The identification of this bird apparently relied very heavily upon a "white tail

with a black T” and “dark wings”. The length was given as about seven inches and the bird was said to be flying from tree to tree in an open woods, fanning the tail prominently during short flights from branch to branch. Clearly, this was not enough description to accept this rarity, which is especially unusual in spring. Indeed, the behavior would be very atypical for a Wheatear and much more like an American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*), which would have been migrating through the region at that time.

Pearly-eyed Thrasher (*Margarops fuscatus*)

2008-65-A One, Margaretville, **Delaware**, 21 Jul

This bird ran into a window and was held by the provider of this report. The bird was revived after striking the window and released, but no photo was taken. There were three other observers present. Pearly-eyed Thrasher is a Caribbean species and is considered a very unlikely vagrant to NYS and is rarely, if ever, kept in captivity. Also, the very limited description made it impossible to draw any firm conclusion about the identity of this bird. Thus, while it seems unlikely to have been a Pearly-eyed Thrasher, it was a mystery to the committee as to what it could be.

1983 Report Not Reviewed

South Polar Skua (*Stercorarius maccormicki*)

1983-42-A One, east of Montauk, **pelagic**, 11 June

This South Polar Skua was seen during an organized pelagic trip from Montauk, NY to Cox’s Ledge, at that time a popular offshore destination for New York birders. Cox’s Ledge and the surrounding offshore waters are now treated as being within Rhode Island’s pelagic waters. Therefore the report was not reviewed as a New York record.

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