

Fifth Annual Report of the Massachusetts Avian Records Committee

Marjorie Rines, Secretary

The Massachusetts Avian Records Committee (MARC) was formed to evaluate reports of rare and difficult-to-identify species, as designated on its review list <<http://massbird.org/MARC/MARCreviewlist.htm>>. The MARC also evaluates any new state record, and records of species that are geographically or temporally rare. Previous MARC reports appeared in the October 1995, August 1997, December 1998, and February 2000 issues of *Bird Observer*. In addition to these references, readers may find copies of these reports at the MARC web site at <<http://Massbird.org/MARC/>>.

One challenge for the MARC is the number of review list species that are reported verbally or by e-mail, for which no written documentation is ever sent to the Committee. Many of these reports refer to birds that are seen by multiple observers, and occasionally photographs are even posted on the World Wide Web. This year, the MARC agreed that these photographs, publicly published and available to anyone who wishes to view them, should be treated as MARC submissions, whether or not accompanied by written documentation. Advances in technology need to be embraced, especially when they can substantiate records that would otherwise be simply anecdotal to future ornithologists.

Clearly this is less satisfying than receiving an official (and written) submission from observers. Currently the Committee archives printed copies as well as floppy disks containing images of unusual birds. However, technology is moving at such a rapid rate that the format of these images could someday become obsolete and unusable by newer technologies.

Massachusetts has a long and important ornithological tradition. To maintain this tradition, readers are encouraged to submit written details as well as photographic evidence to the MARC whenever they observe an unusual bird in Massachusetts. The Committee would like to thank everyone who submitted records for this report.

MARC members include Steve Arena, Jim Baird, Rick Heil, Chris Leahy, Jan Ortiz, Wayne Petersen, Jackie Sones, Richard Veit, and Trevor Lloyd-Evans (Chair). Since the last report of the MARC, Blair Nikula retired after serving the maximum of two consecutive three-year terms, and was replaced by Wayne Petersen. Marjorie Rines is the Secretary.

The MARC **accepted** the following reports. County names follow town or community names in parentheses.

Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*) #99-22, Gloucester (Essex), 14 May, 1999, R. Heil. An individual molting from basic to alternate plumage was carefully described and sketched by an experienced observer. A good description was provided for this bird, a species which is becoming almost annual in Massachusetts.

Arctic/Pacific Loon (*Gavia arctica/pacifica*), #98-2, Hull (Plymouth), 11 January, 1998, D. Oliver; #98-6, Plum Island (Essex), 16 May, 1998, J. Baird, M. Rines, et al. #98-6 was a basic-plumaged loon seen and independently identified by two groups of observers as an Arctic Loon. Both groups viewed this bird at a relatively long distance, and since this would have been a first east coast record for North America, the Committee ruled not to accept it as *G. arctica*; instead it was accepted as a loon belonging to the species pair "Arctic/Pacific Loon."

Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*), #99-21, Magnolia (Essex), 12-14 May, 1999, R. Heil. The description of this winter-plumaged grebe carefully noted the dark loreal area, eliminating the similar Clark's Grebe (never recorded in Massachusetts). It was also photographed, but not at close range.

Red-necked Stint (*Calidris ruficollis*), #99-12, Chatham (Barnstable), 4-13 September, 1999, R. Lockwood et al., B. Nikula, J. Sones; #99-13, Plum Island (Essex) 26-27 July, 1999, D. Sandee, J. Hoye, A. McCarthy; #00-10, North Monomoy Is. (Barnstable) 4 June, 2000, B. Nikula. Prior to 1998, there were only two records of this species in Massachusetts, both in 1980. In addition to an individual observed in Plymouth in August and September of 1998 (#98-15, see the fourth MARC published in *Bird Observer*, February 2000), these three records bring the total to an astonishing four records in a two-year period.

Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), #99-18, Arlington (Middlesex), 30 October, 1999, M. Rines. Eleven immature kittiwakes were discovered (and photographed) on a small inland reservoir following a heavy overnight fog. There are only three previous inland sightings of this species in Massachusetts, all pertaining to single birds.

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*), #99-14, South Hadley (Hampshire), 17 June to 18 July, 1999, H. Allen, S. Smolen-Morton et al. This tern in first-summer plumage presented identification difficulties to a number of observers, but the bird's extended stay made possible careful scrutiny, and the detailed report convinced the committee that it was indeed an Arctic Tern. There are only two previous confirmed inland Massachusetts records for this species.

White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*), #99-17, Marshfield (Plymouth), 16 July, 1999, D. Furbish et al. This bird was observed with a flock of Mourning Doves for good comparison, and the timing of the report matches the typical pattern of vagrancy in the region.

Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*), #98-27, Pepperell (Middlesex), 26-29 September, 1998, C. Pearson. An adult male was photographed coming to a feeder.

MacGillivray's Warbler (*Oporornis tolmiei*), #99-19, Boston (Suffolk), 28 November to 19 December, 1999, R. Stymeist, photos by D. Crockett. No written report was submitted for this sighting, but photographs published on the internet were convincing to the Committee.

Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*), #00-03, Orleans (Barnstable), 5-13 February, 2000, A. MacPhail, photos by D. Crockett. A winter-plumaged male bird was reviewed via photographs on the internet. A Western Tanager, most probably the same individual, was reported nearby over a period of several weeks the previous winter.

Lark Bunting (*Calamospiza melanocorys*), #99-20, Weymouth (Norfolk), 5 September to 6 October, 1999, fide K. Vezpazziani, photos by M. Rines and E. Neilsen. Photographs published on the internet. This rare visitor to Massachusetts fits the typical pattern of fall occurrence along the coast.

Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*), #00-04, Amherst (Hampshire), 13 to 14 May, 2000, W. Lafleche (details submitted by M. Lynch). A bird originally discovered by a Massachusetts Audubon Bird-a-thon team was later refound and photographed.

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*), #00-07, Montague (Franklin), 8 April, 2000, M. Fairbrother, G. Witman. While this bird was only briefly seen by observers previously unfamiliar with the species, they immediately recognized that it was something "different," and carefully studied and unequivocally documented the important field marks. There are at least four previous records of Brambling in Massachusetts, as well as an individual in Connecticut during the winter of 2000.

Not Accepted:

Yellow-nosed Albatross (*Thalassarche chlororhynchus*), #00-06, Nantucket (Dukes), 5 June, 2000. In early summer of 2000 there were a number of credible reports of this species along the northeastern Atlantic coast, and while it is very likely that this was, indeed, a Yellow-nosed Albatross, unfortunately the details of the written report were unconvincing.

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*), #99-16, Plum Island (Essex), 4 August, 1999. The identification of this bird was not in question, but the Committee could not find a convincing pattern of wild occurrence in this species to eliminate the possibility of captive origin.

Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*), #96-27, Agawam (Hamden), 21 December, 1996. The description of a large hawk seen on a Christmas Bird Count did not definitively eliminate Northern Goshawk, in particular a reference to yellow eyes, which is not consistent with Gyr Falcon in any plumage, and description of white spots on the back, which is more typical of young accipiters.

Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*), #98-18, Chatham (Barnstable), 16 August, 1998. Details on this sighting were consistent with Spotted Redshank, but minor details were missing. Since this would have represented only the third state record for this species, the Committee did not accept this report.

California Gull (*Larus californicus*), #00-02, Eastham (Barnstable), 26 February, 2000. As with a California Gull not accepted in the Fourth Annual Report of the MARC (February 2000 *Bird Observer*), the Committee set a very high standard for this difficult-to-identify species, and believed the written description did not

sufficiently eliminate other species. Even through this individual was photographed, the images were not sufficiently clear for positive identification.

Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*), #00-01, Provincetown (Barnstable), 14 March, 2000. Gulls are always problematic, and Thayer's Gull is one of the most difficult, even being considered conspecific with the very similar (and variable) Iceland Gull by some authorities. The description could not eliminate a dark Kumlien's Iceland Gull.

Ross's Gull (*Rhodostethia rosea*), #98-5, Barnstable (Barnstable), 13 May, 1998. The description of a small gull with a pinkish breast was compelling, but the size difference between this individual and the nearby Bonaparte's Gulls should have been more obvious, and there was no description of the wing and tail pattern, or tail shape.

Gull-billed Tern (*Sterna nilotica*), #99-23, Plum Island (Essex), 31 July, 1999. Although this report was at the right season for this species to appear in Massachusetts, it lacked a description of mantle color and distinctive flight pattern, and the description of a "strong, black bill" did not convey the short, stubby appearance of the bill in this species.

Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*), #00-08, Ashby (Middlesex), 17 March, 2000. A songbird was discovered trapped in a cage, and the observer was able to view it for a minute before the bird escaped. With the help of field guides, it was identified as a Redwing. Unfortunately, the details were sparse, and could not rule out other species.

Henslow's Sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*), #99-15, Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, Concord (Middlesex), 31 December, 1999. As with any rare and difficult-to-identify species, and Committee was extremely conservative in treating this report. The lack of mention of a few key field marks, such as eye ring, post-ocular stripe, and crown stripe weighed against this report.

Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*), #00-05, South Quabbin (Hampshire), 15 May, 2000. A bird reported as an immature male Black-headed Grosbeak included the description of white wing "bars" in flight, instead of the very conspicuous white wing patch of this species. Other details were sketchy, and spring is an unlikely time for this rare vagrant.

Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*), #98-12, Bolton (Worcester), 12 October, 1998. #98-28, Greenfield (Franklin), 27 December, 1998. The details of both reports did not adequately eliminate other species. 

