

Delaware Bird Records Committee Annual Report for 2012

Frank Rohrbacher

on behalf of the Delaware Bird Records Committee

This is the sixteenth report of the Delaware Bird Records Committee. The Committee members for 2011-2012 were Jim White (President), Frank Rohrbacher (Secretary), Anthony Gonzon, Chris Bennett, Jean Woods and John Janowski. At the 27 August 2012 Annual Meeting, Anthony Gonzon stepped-down as a review member and was replaced by Frank Rohrbacher. Frank Rohrbacher continues as Secretary and Jim White continues as President. The Committee updated the Delaware State List of Bird Species, the Delaware Review List and the Index of all records adjudicated as of 1 November 2012 and has distributed these documents to the birding community via the DOS Website, DE-birds and the 2012 *Delmarva Ornithologist*.

This year's summary includes 39 reports forming 26 records involving 19 different species. Among them are first state records for Barnacle Goose, White-tailed Tropicbird and Common Raven, which increases the official Delaware Bird State List to 410 species. After fifteen accepted records, most in the past four years, the Committee voted to remove Lark Sparrow from the Delaware Review List. During the past year, a census of the size of the Eurasian Collared-Dove population in Selbyville was completed and as of May 2012, it appears that only three individuals remain, down from 19 in 2005. An investigation into the reported Pacific Loon skeleton (found in Delaware and stored at the Department of Birds, Division of Vertebrate Zoology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution (USNM)) was completed and it appears that it will not be possible to assign the skeleton uniquely to either Arctic Loon or to Pacific Loon. Thus, it has been classified as a Pacific/Arctic Loon species.

For the summary below, date, location, DBRC reference number, and documentation received are listed for all records; photographers and reporters are credited only for accepted records. The summary follows, beginning with accepted records using the standard taxonomic order in effect in December 2012. The DBRC emphasizes that reports listed as "not accepted" do not necessarily mean that the Committee believes the reported species were misidentified, but rather that the documentation submitted was insufficient to adequately establish the

claimed identity.

Accepted Records

Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*)

21-24 November 2010

Bombay Hook NWR

DBRC #10/21

Notes, Photographs (FR, CDC, CB, BF MM, JS)

The origin of Barnacle Geese in North America from a birding standpoint during the 1980s and 1990s was problematic. A rogue aviculturist in Ontario allowed numerous pets to escape and that, coupled with the very low number of actual wild birds that came naturally, made all birds suspect. The result was that all Barnacle Geese found in the wild were thought to be escapees and routinely rejected by state Rare Bird Committees. In the last five to ten years, reports of Barnacle Geese have skyrocketed during the winter months in Canada, New England, New York and New Jersey and at the same time the breeding population in Greenland has risen dramatically. It became obvious that the new influx was real, particularly when in 2005, a bird banded in Scotland as a juvenile in 2002 was found in New York. Delaware's turn for adding this species to the state list came in November 2010 when Joe and Ellen Sebastiani found one in Bear Swamp bringing the official Delaware Bird State List to 408. The Committee had great photographs and write-ups that established beyond a doubt that this was in fact a Barnacle Goose. Establishing provenance was more difficult because no one saw or photographed the bird's legs. Based on its apparent wildness, association with Canada Geese, its arrival with a very large flock of Canada Geese, its departure when the Canada Geese left a week later and the near association in that flock of a "Greenland" White-fronted Goose, the Committee accepted its provenance on a 4-1 vote.

Green-winged "Common" Teal (*Anas crecca crecca*)

20 March 2011

Broadkill Beach Road

DBRC #11/08

Notes (FR)

19 April 2011

Ted Harvey WMA

DBRC #11/28

Notes, Photographs (SM)

In 2004 the Committee decided to make the European Green-

winged Teal a review species. These two records bring the total to six accepted records. The Europeans have separated the American and the Common Green-winged Teal subspecies into two distinct species though the American Ornithologist Union has not. The two subspecies are easy to separate from each other in the field, but it is more likely that the low number of records that we are seeing is more because few observers are searching than the fact that this subspecies is rare.

Eared Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*)

5 February 2012
DBRC #12/02

Cape Henlopen Point
Notes (FR)

Eared Grebes are not very common in Delaware but they are reported and documented every two or three years. This, the eleventh accepted record, is typical. The small grebe is found in coastal or bay waters, seen by a small number of people and documented usually without photographs and the bird is never seen again. The bird in question was thought to winter but finding the one Eared Grebe in the literally hundreds of Horned Grebes wintering in Rehoboth Bay, for instance, is a challenging task. This particular bird was found at Cape Henlopen Point by five birders while searching for the Western Grebe reported in Lewes Harbor at the time. Extremely close scope views resulted in a well written report that convinced the Committee the bird was an Eared Grebe in basic plumage.

Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)

1 January – 14 February 2012
DBRC #12/01

Henlopen Point/Lewes Harbor
Notes, Photographs (BGP, MCM, FR, MB)

The number of Western Grebes that have been reported in New York, New Jersey and Delaware has exploded over the past few years, but the number of actual birds wintering in the region is very difficult to determine. On 26 December 2011, a Western Grebe was reported at Manasquan Reservoir in Monmouth County, New Jersey and never seen again in that region. On 1 January 2012, Bruce Peterjohn discovered and reported a Western Grebe on the ocean side of Cape Henlopen Point. A week later it was relocated at Lewes Harbor at the Cape May Ferry Terminal by Michael Moore where it was regularly seen and photographed by many until 25 February 2012. On 26 February 2012, a

Western Grebe was reported at Cape May and remained until 8 March. Obviously, the bird in Delaware was the same as the one in Cape May. It is also possible that the bird in Monmouth New Jersey could have relocated to Delaware in six days and that only one bird accounted for all of the sightings in Delaware and New Jersey in the winter of 2012. Nevertheless, this most cooperative visitor was well documented with great written descriptions and photographs.

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

19 August 2011

38° 28' 33" N, 73° 09' 12" W

DBRC #11/20

Notes (PAG)

Band-rumped Storm-Petrels are becoming very common after summer/fall storms and on August pelagics to the Baltimore and Wilmington canyons. The summers have been warm and the water temperatures have been warmer than normal for the last decade encouraging the warm water birds that inhabit the Gulf Stream to move north and west into Delaware waters. Therefore, it is surprising that this is only the third Delaware state record – two written reports and a specimen. The difficulty is they are fast, usually distant and hard to photograph and describe. Fortunately for the Committee, Paul Guris knows Band-rumped Storm-Petrels and really knows how to describe every detail of the species so that there was no doubt that the bird reported here was correctly identified.

White-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon lepturus*)

29 August 2011

Fowler Beach

DBRC #11/23

Notes (AG)

Making it to Fowler Beach directly after Hurricane Irene, several birders were lucky enough to witness the havoc that nature can force on ocean bird species. Anthony Gonzon spotted one of these waifs 500 yards from shore and followed the bird for 2-3 minutes with his scope. It was too far away to see every detail such as bill color but it was “all white except for black markings on the head and back”. When the bird banked several times, he saw “a distinct, black “Λ”” on the wings. These details plus additional information established for the Committee that the bird was an adult White-tailed Tropicbird, one of many driven ashore by Hurricane Irene from New Jersey to New England. This was

a first for Delaware and becomes the 409th species on the Delaware State Bird List.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

22 May 2011

DBRC #11/13

Fowler Beach Road

Notes, Photographs (EPS, BGP)

Little Egret is a spectacular bird for Delaware. Bruce Peterjohn and Ed Sigda found one on 22 May 2011 at Fowler Beach and alerted the birding community. During the week or so that it moved around Fowler Beach and Prime Hook Road area it wasn't very cooperative. Many local birders searched but only a few managed to see this bird and when they did it was distant. Diagnostic photographs and an excellent written description eliminated any possibility of a Snowy X Little Egret hybrid. This was the fourth state record of this species.

Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)

30 May 2011

DBRC #11/15

Bombay Hook NWR

Notes (FM)

Mississippi Kite is one of those birds that is reported on DE-birds or e-birds fairly often but most of those reports will vanish into oblivion because no meaningful description appears and no documentation is sent in to the Delaware Bird Records Committee. Frank Marengi, a frequent supplier of rare bird documentation, sent a detailed description of his sighting to DE-birds. I thought it was good enough as it was for the Committee and I got his permission to use it. This documentation easily passed Committee review for only the ninth state record.

Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)

23 April 2011

DBRC #11/11

Little Neck Road

Notes, Photographs (FR, BGP, CPB)

11 September 2011

DBRC #11/24

Ashland Hawk Watch

Notes (JU, RR)

30 September 2011

DBRC #11/25

Cape Henlopen Hawk Watch

Notes, Photographs (SC)

Swainson's Hawk has moved rapidly from that first state record by Forrest Rowland in November 2008 at the Cape Henlopen Hawk Watch to six accepted records now with an amazing three records in 2011 alone. Four of the records, including the last two above, were of birds flying over the state's hawk watches – one at the Ashland Hawk Watch and three at the Cape Henlopen Hawk Watch. The first spring record above appears to be an extremely rare event. For the past 10 years, I can find no records of a Swainson's Hawk reported anywhere near the coast in New Jersey or New York in spring. Swainson's Hawks winter in South America and flow up into the US from Mexico and a few are reported almost yearly at the hawk watches around the Great Lakes as far east as the New York side of Lake Ontario. This bird, found on the ground eating earthworms on Little Neck Road in April, was a first year bird. It may have just gotten lost when it came up from Mexico, but it seems more likely that this was one of the very few Swainson's Hawks that occasionally winter in Florida.

Franklin's Gull (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*)

4 September 2011

DBRC #11/22

Wicke's Potato Farm, Rt 9

Notes, Photographs (FM)

17 December 2011

DBRC #11/32

Cherry Island Landfill

Notes, Photographs (FR)

There are thirteen accepted records of Franklin's Gull for the state, including these two. Nine were found between Pickering Beach and Bombay Hook, three at the Port of Wilmington and the Cherry Island Landfill and one on Broadkill Beach Road, all between late May through mid-December within a mile or so of the Delaware River. There are likely many more mixed in with the thousands of Laughing Gulls that visit our coast in the summer but to find one is quite a challenge.

Sooty Tern (*Onychoprion fuscatus*)

28 August 2011

DBRC #11/19

Fowler Beach

Notes, Photographs (CPB)

The history of this bird in Delaware is rather odd in that this highly warm-water pelagic bird has never been recorded by boat in Delaware

waters no matter how warm the water. In fact both of the specimens and the four sight records were seen essentially from or on the land (I know that at least one was seen from the Cape May Ferry but I can't think of that as a pelagic craft). This bird seems to shun Delaware and only the most severe of coastal storms seem capable of forcing them in. Hurricane Irene was one of those storms powerful enough and Chris Bennett was at Fowler Beach to record its presence with photographs and a well written report.

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

2 June 2010
DBRC #11/09

Fowler Beach
Notes (BGP)

Arctic Terns migrate in great numbers through Delaware waters well offshore each year but they do not often stop along the coast. Even at sea they usually pass far from boats and are tough to separate from Common Terns and to document. On land they can also be tough to identify. Bruce Peterjohn spent an hour and a half watching and comparing this bird with Common and Forster's Terns. Ultimately, he established that it was a second summer Arctic tern. His thorough well written report convinced the Committee to accept this, the sixth record for Delaware.

White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*)

30 May 2011
DBRC #11/16

Rehoboth Beach
Notes, Photographs (LS)

3 August 2011
DBRC #11/18

Talleyville
Notes (MS)

In both 2010 and 2011, two White-winged Doves were documented in Delaware in one year. That is amazing considering that only a total of seven records for this species have ever been accepted. Maybe we have a trend. The first six White-winged Dove records including the 30 May record above were all found between Lewes and Rehoboth Beach but the 3 August record was found in Talleyville meaning, I guess, that they can be found anywhere in the state?

Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

6-7 November 2011

DBRC #11/31

Bennett's Pier Road

Notes, Photograph (CMF, FR)

This particular Loggerhead Shrike was reported and documented in the same area sitting on the same shrubs as one reported in March 2010 and again in February 2011. This time it was different. Chuck Fullmer took some great photographs of this bird and they showed that the bird was banded. He searched the internet and found out that it was banded in Ontario a few months earlier. Ontario is trying to save its small breeding population of Loggerhead Shrike and this bird is one of the twenty breeding pairs left. With the demise of the New England breeding population, Loggerhead Shrikes are very rarely seen in Delaware.

Common Raven (*Corvus corax*)

5 November 2011

DBRC #11/30

Ashland Hawk Watch

Notes, Photographs (FR, KS)

At the Ashland Hawk Watch over the years, several Common Ravens were reported but were never documented because of the extreme distances and short viewing times associated with the sighting. All that changed when a big black bird glided over the Ashland Hawk Watch and hesitated at the owl decoy and then flapped a few times and glided away. It took a few minutes to process Common Raven because it wasn't the finest specimen ever seen. First, it was silent through the entire time and second it was missing its central tail feathers. Fortunately, Kim Steininger is not only a great hawk watch leader; she is also a fantastic photographer. She managed to get some spectacular photographs. The very large bill, a tail that would have been wedged shaped were it not missing a few of the central feathers, wide wings and hawk-like flight convinced the Committee to accept. This is the first accepted record for Delaware and becomes the 410th species on the Delaware State Bird List.

Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*)

23 August 2011

DBRC #11/21

Rehoboth Beach

Notes, Photographs (LS)

10 September 2011

Port Mahon Road

DBRC #11/27

Notes, Photographs (D&JP)

10 September 2011

Bombay Hook NWR

DBRC #11/29

Notes, Photographs (CPB, KAB)

These three records, in three different parts of Delaware in well less than a month, show why the Committee decided at this Annual Meeting to remove Lark Sparrow from the Delaware Review List. However, it remains a very good find in the state of Delaware. All three of these records shown here were extremely well documented with photographs and written notes making the Committee's work extremely easy.

Records Not Accepted

Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*)

20 April 2011

Cape Henlopen Hawk Watch

DBRC #11/10

Notes, sketch

This record was rejected on the third round of voting by a 3-2 positive vote. During the first two rounds the vote must be unanimous to accept/reject. On the third round, the vote must be 4-1 or 5-0 to accept, otherwise it is rejected. Historically, this species has been reported four times and rejected each time and in three of these records the vote went three rounds.

Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*)

1 July 2010

Ingram Branch Road

DBRC #11/12

Notes, Sketch

Normally, the Committee has a soft spot in its heart for hand drawn sketches of birds made at the time of the sighting. In this case the entire documentation consisted of the sketch of a bird sitting in a tree with only a minimum of notes describing what the sketch purported to represent. Ultimately, the Committee rejected the documentation for lack of specificity. Unfortunately, the artist did not see the bird fly and couldn't make a sketch of a flying Swallow-tailed Kite which would have been a slam-dunk.

Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*)

28 April 2009

DBRC #09/04

Bombay Hook NWR

Notes, Photographs

A Sandhill Crane should be any easy bird to identify. This bird seen in the field outside of Bombay Hook NWR was well photographed but unfortunately, Delaware abuts New Jersey where a small flock of Common X Sandhill Crane hybrids have moved around for years. The photographs showed a bird with some anomalies such as yellow on the bill. Ultimately, after three rounds, a sufficient number of the Committee members had enough doubt that the bird was a hybrid to reject this record.

Reporters

Chris P. Bennett, Karen A. Bennett, Michael Bowen, Chuck Brandt, Colin Campbell, Seth Cutright, Bert Filemyr, Chuck M. Fullmer, Anthony Gonzon, Paul A. Guris, Jeff Holmes, Glen Lovelace, Frank Marenghi, Shaibal Mitra, Michael C. Moore, Bruce G. Peterjohn, Dave & Joy Peters, Frank Rohrbacher, Robert Rufe, Joe Sebastiani, Ed P. Sigda, Lynn Smith, Michael Smith, Kim Steininger, Tom Stock, Jeff Uhlenburg.