

Delaware Bird Records Committee Annual Report for 2009

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on behalf of the Delaware Bird Records Committee

This is the thirteenth report of the Delaware Bird Records Committee. The Committee members for 2008 – 2009 were Nick Pulcinella (President), Frank Rohrbacher (Secretary), Jim White, Anthony Gonzon and Chris Bennett. At the 27 August 2009 Annual Meeting, Nick Pulcinella stepped-down as a review member and as President and was replaced by Jean Woods as review member and Jim White as President. Clay-colored Sparrow was removed from the Delaware Review List. The Committee updated the Delaware State List of Bird Species, the Delaware Review List and the Index of all records adjudicated as of 1 September 2009 and has distributed these documents to the birding community via the DOS Website, DE-birds, the 2009 Delmarva Ornithologist and The Flyer.

This year's summary includes 70 reports forming 26 records involving 18 different species. Among them are first state records for Lesser Goldfinch and Swainson's Hawk which increases the official Delaware Bird State List to 402 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 on 1 September 2009. The DBRC emphasizes that reports listed as "not accepted" do not necessarily imply 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

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

15 – 20 August 2008 1000 Acre Marsh
DBRC #08/17 Notes, photographs (LJ, JD, FR)

17 June 2008 Prime Hook NWR
DBRC #08/26 Notes, Photographs (MP)

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks are occurring outside of their typical range with greater frequency. While the resident Florida population

is doing well and likely expanding, vagrancy is increasing and astute observers may encounter this species almost any place within the Atlantic Flyway, particularly in coastal freshwater ponds and marshes. There has always been some skepticism with regard to provenance with these birds, but more often than not, they are encountered with no bands or signs of captivity. In both records for 2008, no observations were made to suggest that these were not wild, natural vagrants. In fact, most observers now include information in reports that would eliminate provenance as a cause for concern with records of this species. Two ducks were observed in June at Prime Hook and the report included diagnostic photos. Only a single bird was reported from Thousand Acre Marsh in August, also with photos. While there is some chance that the August bird was part of the two observed in June, the increasing vagrancy of this species leaves doubt and these observations were considered two distinct records.

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

3 August 2008 38° 27.069'N 73° 40.770'W
DBRC #08/18 Notes, Photograph (MF, FR)

One of the rarest storm-petrels expected off of the East Coast of United States, this small pelagic bird is the nemesis of many birders. Recently, with more deep water trips being conducted from ports in New Jersey and Delaware, there is some expectation that White-faced Storm-Petrels will be encountered more often. Not only is this species very uncommon, it is also difficult to detect and can be especially challenging when weather conditions create larger swells and whitecaps. A small white bird that hops like a kangaroo, observers often first see this bird once it has come within only feet of the vessel. On this particular trip, an overnight 22 hour trip to the Wilmington Canyon, observers encountered this bird as the boat was returning to port at approximately the Delaware/Maryland boundary. Travelling northward, the storm-petrel travelled clearly into Delaware waters. A written description and photos from Mike Fritz and a written description from Frank Rohrbacher provide great documentation of this infrequently encountered pelagic bird.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

7 Jun – 18 Jul 2008 Bombay Hook NWR
DBRC #08/16 Notes, Photographs (DM, FR, HB, JD, BS,
JVH, MS, DB)

Little Egrets can be very difficult to separate from Snowy Egrets

and even other white herons and can often co-occur with other similar species. However, there appears to be a pattern of vagrancy that has been increasing along the Atlantic Flyway in the past several years. This particular bird appeared first on 7 June 2008 and multiple observers submitted records and reports in the following days, including several diagnostic photographs. The fourth accepted record of this species for Delaware, seven years had passed since the last report of one. Careful observation of white herons and egrets, especially during the period of post-breeding dispersal, may yield even more records in the near future.

Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)

17 October 2008
DBRC #08/25

Cape Henlopen SP
Notes, Photographs (FRo)

This long overdue first state record was spotted at the Cape Henlopen Hawk Watch by Forrest Rowland. As the hawk counter for the watch, Forrest immediately recognized something different about this bird as it approached Cape Henlopen. Interestingly, earlier that day a Swainson's Hawk was observed at Cape May and it is possible these observations represent the same bird. Fast action by Forrest to digiscope a couple of shots of the hawk as it passed over along with a detailed written description provided excellent documentation of this first state record for Delaware.

Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*)

7 May 2008
DBRC #08/13

Cape Henlopen SP Hawk Watch
Notes (SG)

6 September 2008
DBRC 08/21

Millsboro
Notes (SCa)

Swallow-tailed Kites are always a great bird to find in Delaware and 2008 was no exception. The spring hawk watch at Cape Henlopen State Park (CHSP) is quickly becoming the place to be in Delaware to find a migrating Swallow-tailed Kite in May. Sue Gruver spotted this bird as it came in low over the Point at CHSP and easily observed all of the confirming field marks. The second record is quite interesting as this kite was observed as Tropical Storm Hanna was passing by the Delmarva Peninsula. Although a wayward Swallow-tailed Kite can potentially be found anytime from late spring through early fall, it is possible this bird was assisted by the storm. Observed and described by

local raptor bander Steve Cardano, this record was described well enough to establish the identity of the bird.

Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*)

22 January 2006
DBRC #06/02

Fowler Beach
Notes (ES)

This record of Yellow Rail went through three rounds of consideration with the committee. Although the record occurred at an unusual date and under less than optimal conditions, the majority of committee members believed that Ed Sigda provided adequate detail to eliminate other species and establish the identity of this bird. Yellow Rails are becoming increasingly rare in the mid-Atlantic and may soon be lost from Delaware's fauna. More effort by birders should be placed in searching for this species in coastal marsh habitats, especially during spring migration when it would be most likely to occur.

Sandhill Crane, (*Grus canadensis*)

November 2007 – 28 February 2008
DBRC #08/05

Taylor's Bridge
Notes, Photographs (TL, AD, BSh, CC, FRo, FR)

Sandhill Cranes are becoming an increasingly regular species and it was of no significant surprise that one was observed near Taylor's Bridge in southern New Castle County. However, this particular bird was interesting given the amount of time it remained in the general location that it was first encountered. Reported first by Al Dager to Thom Lewis of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the bird was observed by many over the course of several weeks. With other reports from earlier in the season, it is very likely that this crane was present for at least three months. Photographs and written descriptions from a variety of sources confirmed that this crane was not an apparent hybrid from the famed New Jersey flock.

Sooty Tern (*Onychoprion fuscatus*)

6 September 2008
DBRC #08/20

Broadkill Beach Road
Notes, Photographs (ES)

Sooty Terns are rare for Delaware and exceedingly so from land. However, with the assistance of Tropical Storm Hanna, this tern was granted assistance and Ed Sigda was fortunate enough to be along Broadkill Beach Road to observe and photograph the bird. Committee members considered other potential options when examining the pho-

tos, but the field marks shown, including the pale underwing with dark trailing edge eliminate all other possibilities. There were only four previous records for Delaware, two of which were specimen records. In the future, storm-assisted birds should be searched for at the earliest possible time that it is safe to venture out. Other species, including deep water pelagic species like *Pterodroma* petrels have potential to appear over any inland body of water.

White-winged Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*)

26 – 30 April 2008

Ted Harvey WMA

DBRC #08/11

Notes, Photographs (KS, SC, FR, WE)

The first report of this species since 1985, there is no clear pattern of vagrancy for White-winged Terns along the East Coast. Initially reported on 26 April 2008, the tern was present and observed by multiple observers over several days at the north impoundment of the Ted Harvey Wildlife Area, east of Dover. This record was supported by four observers who provided four written descriptions including two that provided comprehensive detail to exclude other similar species, including Whiskered Tern and Black Tern. Unfortunately, photographs made available were not completely diagnostic but when included with the written descriptions confirm this bird as basic plumage White-winged Tern.

Common Murre (*Uria aalge*)

25 February 2007

Pelagic out of Lewes in Delaware Waters

DBRC 07/02

Notes, Photographs (EB, SL, ES, FR)

Both Common Murre and Thick-billed Murre are typically quite rare off of the Delaware Coast. In the past several years, however, pelagic trips during late winter have produced a number of records of these and other alcids in Maryland and Delaware waters. On this particular trip organized by Sea Life Paulagics, at least three Common Murres were described from Delaware waters. Two were retaining their basic plumage while the third was in nearly full alternate plumage, providing a look that is rarely seen away from northern breeding areas. Photos of these alcids taken by Sharon Lynn, Ed Boyd and Frank Rohrbacher, in addition to written reports from Rohrbacher and Sigda provide excellent documentation for this record.

Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*)

13 November 2008

Woodland Beach WMA

DBRC #08/31

Notes, Photographs (FRo, CC)

15 November 2008

DBRC #08/32

Prime Hook Beach

Jeff Gordon

16 November 2008

DBRC #08/33

Prime Hook NWR

Notes, Photographs (FR, SC)

Reports of Cave Swallows have become more frequent in the mid-Atlantic during late fall migration. In many cases, observed birds appear to belong to the *Petrochelidon fulva pallida* subspecies that occurs in Texas and northern Mexico. As this species is encountered more frequently in fall, observers are making note of the field marks (rump color) to separate *P. f. pallida* from the nominate subspecies (*P. f. fulva*) most often encountered in Florida. This particular year provided a number of records and if this pattern continues to increase, the committee may need to consider removing Cave Swallow from the list of reviewable species. Records occurred in coastal areas from New Castle County into Sussex County and included several photographs to support their identification.

Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*)

24 December 2007 – 24 January 2008

Fowler Beach Road

DBRC #07/19

Notes, Photographs (BP, ES, FR)

21 September 2008

DBRC #08/22

Prime Hook NWR

Notes (BP)

2 November 2008

DBRC #08/27

Fowler Beach Road

Notes, Photograph (ES)

28 February 2009

DBRC #09/02

Deep Branch Road

Notes, Photographs (BF, MS, JH, LJa, MR)

Clay-colored Sparrows have appeared with greater frequency in the last several years and these four records support that trend. All records were accompanied by excellent supporting documentation and three included diagnostic photographs. Each record was considered in terms of separation from basic plumage Chipping Sparrow – the most likely species to be confused with Clay-colored Sparrow. All records were well supported. In review of the status of this species, the committee elected to remove it from the list of review species. Given the volume

of recent records, this species should now be expected in fall and winter by observers that understand the finer points of its identification and know where to look. Field edges and scrubby areas around Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge appear to be particularly attractive, but it's also very likely that this species occurs elsewhere but is overlooked.

Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*)

30 September 2008

DBRC #08/23

Prime Hook NWR

Notes, Photographs (BH)

Much like Clay-colored Sparrow, Lark Sparrow records are also becoming more frequent in the region, although not at the same frequency in Delaware. This record represents only the sixth state record and was a one-day wonder. Observer Bill Haber was fortunate enough to locate this bird and capture a few images to support his written description. Prime Hook has a tendency to attract vagrant sparrows, including this Lark Sparrow. More effort in searching for rare sparrows in this diverse area of the state could yield additional records for this species as well as even greater surprises.

Henslow's Sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*)

6 June 1903

DBRC #01/08 A, DBRC #01/08B

Choptank Mills

Photographs, specimens (GA)

A review of these specimen records from the Academy of Natural Sciences, courtesy of photos provided by George Armistead, confirmed the identity of these historic specimens.

Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*)

11 October 2008 – 7 November 2008

DBRC #08/24

Brandywine Creek SP

Notes, Photographs (H&KS, CB, KSt, BF

FR, SC, MAS, CK, CC)

The fall and winter of 2008 were excellent for vagrant sparrows around Delaware. This Harris's Sparrow provided many excellent opportunities to study a bird that had not been reported in over ten years and constituted only the third state record. During its four to five week stay, many observers documented this bird and there is no lack of photographs to support its identification. First documented by Andy Ednie on 11 October 2008, it was last photographed by Chip Krilowicz on 3 November and last reported on 7 November. Although participants re-

mained hopeful, it was not observed during the Wilmington Christmas Bird Count about one month later.

Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*)

2 March 2008

DBRC #08/08

Prime Hook NWR

Notes, Photographs (BH)

Several excellent photos accompanied this record submitted by Bill Hubick. As with other rare sparrows from 2008, this record also comes from Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge. The photos clearly show the white lores and bill color indicative of this subspecies and allowed for comparison to photos of the more expected nominate subspecies, *Z. l. leucophrys*. Although the presence of the nominate subspecies is well documented in Delaware, this record represents the first state record for Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow.

Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*)

12 January 2008 – 17 February 2008

DBRC #08/03

Wilmington

(DK, FR, DS)

First observed by Dean Krammes on 12 January 2008, this bird remained until at least mid-February. Although located on private property not broadly publicized, several observers were able to visit and take photos of the bunting as it used the feeders. Written notes mention that it was either a first year male or adult female based on the bright yellow-green plumage and lack of the additional colors of an adult male. Painted Buntings, despite age or sex, are readily identifiable in the field and are usually unmistakable, making this record easy to accept as the sixth state record.

Lesser Goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*)

3 August 2008

DBRC #08/19

Wilmington

Notes, Photographs (MM)

This first state record was an amazing find for Maria and Keith McCutcheon. Diagnostic photos taken clearly depict the black-backed form of Lesser Goldfinch. Although a western species, one reviewer pointed out that this particular race has a pattern of vagrancy to the East. Furthermore, that reviewer and one other also researched the possibility of the bird coming from captivity. No documentation could be

found that would indicate a concern with regard to provenance. The committee unanimously accepted this record and indicated that there was no evidence to suggest this was not a natural vagrant.

Records Not Accepted

Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*)

4 October 2006

DBRC #06/13

Ashland Nature Center

Notes, Sketches

Delaware still awaits its first accepted record of Anhinga. In the case of this record, the observers provided great detail regarding what they observed in the field. However, several field marks that would have eliminated any doubt of this bird's identity were not supportive enough to neither confirm it as an Anhinga nor separate it from a cormorant. As a potential first state record, the committee agreed that the burden of proof is higher than with other records, requiring highly detailed field notes with information that would allow for separation from other species and/or photographs.

Reporters

George Amistead, Devin Bosler, Ed Boyd, Chuck Brandt, Colin Campbell, Steve Cardano (SCa), Steve Colins , Albert Dager, Jeffery Davis, Wendy Ealding, Jane Henderson, Bill Hubick, Howard E. Eskins, Bert Filemyr, Mike Fritz, Jeff Gordon, Bill Haber, Maria McCutcheon, Sue Gruver, John Van Haas, Lynn Jackson (LJa), Lin Just, Dean Krammes, Chip Krilowicz, Thom Lewis, Sharon Lynn, Dennis Murphy, Marnie Pepper, Bruce Peterjohn, Frank Rohrbacher, Mike Rosengarten, Forrest Rowland (FRo), Joe Sabastiani, Kurt Schwarz, Michael Schwitters, Martin Selzer, Bob Sheldon (BSh), Ed Sigda, Hal & Kristen Snyder, Mike A. Smith (MAS), Kim Steininger (KSt), Derek Stoner, Bob Strahorn