

Delaware Bird Records Committee Report for 2015

Frank Rohrbacher
on behalf of the Delaware Bird Records Committee

This is the 19th report of the Delaware Bird Records Committee. The Committee members for 2014 – 2015 were Jim White (President), Frank Rohrbacher (Secretary), Anthony Gonzon, Chris Bennett and John Janowski. At the 30 July 2015 annual meeting John Janowski stepped down as a review member and was replaced by Jean Woods. Frank Rohrbacher continued as Secretary and Jim White continued 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 2015. It has distributed these documents to the birding community via the DOS Website, DE-birds and the 2015 *Delmarva Ornithologist*.

This year's summary consists of 34 reports forming 20 records involving 16 different species including first state records for Kelp Gull, Zone-tailed Hawk and Burrowing Owl. These additions increase the official Delaware Bird State List to 416 species. Major changes were made in the Review Species List. Most of the pelagic species that are predictable if a pelagic makes it to the canyons at the appropriate time of year have been dropped. However, the Committee decided that Arctic Tern and American Puffin should be written up if seen from land. Black Rail has become a bird of concern and has been added to the list. Because this bird is almost impossible to see, we suggest using sound recordings from your cell phone. Finally, Evening Grosbeak has become increasingly rare in the state, so this species has now been added.

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. Accepted records use the standard taxonomic order as of 1 June 2015. The DBRC emphasizes that a reports deemed "not accepted" does not necessarily mean that the Committee believes the species was misidentified, but rather that the documentation submitted was insufficient to establish the claimed identity.

Accepted Records

Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)
12 May 2012

Coverdale Preserve

DBRC #13/08

Notes (IS)

It has been three years since the DBRC removed Mississippi Kite from the Delaware Review Species List and with the acceptance of this record the file is closed. Even though this species is no longer considered rare, it still makes a birder's day if one flies by or is found perched in a tree.

Zone-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albonotatus*)

27 September 2014

Cape Henlopen Hawk Watch

DBRC #14/09

Notes (BPG, JO)

On the Cape Henlopen Hawk Watch platform on 27 September 2014, Jen Ottinger, Bruce Peterjohn and Sue Gruver were doing what they liked to do: counting hawks. They received a text from Cape May reporting a Zone-tailed Hawk in the mix of vultures and hawks spiraling up in preparation for crossing to Delaware. Less than an hour later, they watched an adult Zone-tailed Hawk rise up off the water with several Turkey Vultures, which slowly circled up over their heads. In sight for several minutes, they got great views and became the only three in the state able to claim them on their Delaware bird list. Several birders had this species as being long overdue in Delaware.

Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*)

12 November – 7 December 2014

Bombay Hook NWR

DBRC #14/08

Notes, Photographs (KB, FR, MB, TK)

This particular HY Sandhill Crane was an extremely cooperative bird. It arrived in early November and stayed around until it had fully molted in the first week of December. It was not shy and hundreds of birders and photographers were able to see and photograph it. The number of Sandhill Cranes reported in Delaware has surged in recent years. This well documented bird was the 9th accepted Delaware record and the 8th reported bird since the first wintering bird was widely available on Garner Road in 2008. If this rate continues for another couple of years, the Committee will likely consider its removal from the Delaware Review Species List.

Thick-billed Murre (*Uria lomvia*)

31 January 2015

Indian River Inlet

DBRC #15/03

Notes, Notes (MG)

11 February 2015
DBRC #15/06

Rehoboth Beach
photograph (unknown)

Thick-billed Murre is an extremely rare vagrant to Delaware. The entire Delaware record consists of two specimens, one obtained in 1896 from Middletown and one in 1987 from Bethany Beach, as well a set of photographs and a written record from Cape Henlopen SP by Colin Campbell on 2 February 2002. This year was therefore a big year, with two definitive photographic records reported to the community through the birding Facebook pages. The first was a fantastic photograph by Mike Gallaway taken at Indian River Inlet on 31 January 2015 and the other was a photograph of one in a cardboard box after being picked up at Rehoboth Beach. The photographer did not want to be identified, so the fate of the bird is unknown.

Kelp Gull (*Larus dominicanus*)

25 May 1996
DBRC #14/06

Port Mahon Road
Notes, Photographs (EK)

Where were you on 25 May 1996? Well, Ed Kwater and his wife, Cheryl, were birding on Port Mahon Road. He remembered photographing a strange Lesser Black-backed Gull. In March 2014, he was going through his old slides on a light table and came across the ones he had taken years before. He instantly realized that the strange Lesser Black-backed gull was in fact a Kelp Gull. He converted the slides to digital, wrote up the bird and sent it all to the Delaware Bird Records Committee. Most birders in Delaware remember “Shrimpy,” first reported on 25 January 1998 at the Sandgates, Saint Mary’s County, Maryland but misidentified. The bird was correctly identified on 14 February 1999 at which time most Delaware birders went there for their ABA life bird. A year and half earlier Ed Kwater photographed a Kelp Gull in Delaware — coincidence?

Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*)

20 June 2015
DBRC #15/10

Broadkill Beach Road
Notes, Photographs (AK)

Roseate Terns have been very rarely reported for the last eight to nine years. This record with its excellent diagnostic photographs was a treat for the Committee. This was the 9th accepted record.

Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

11 February 2008
DBRC #.08/04

Milford
Notes, Photographs (*vide* AG)

When Eurasian Collared-Doves first formed a colony in Selbyville in 1997, it was widely believed that by 2015 we would be knee-deep in them throughout the state. The colony at Selbyville flourished for several years but for the last two to three years only 2 or 3 birds have been reported. In 2003, the Committee decided to make this a Review Species only for birds seen outside of Selbyville. Since that time we have only received six reports, all of which were turned into records and accepted, including this one.

White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*)

17 February 2015
DBRC #15/01

Wyoming
Notes, Photographs (TS, BEM)

23 May 2015
DBRC #15/07

Slaughter Beach
Notes, Photographs (KRS)

Both of these White-winged Dove records were extremely well written and supported by great photographs which made their acceptance extremely easy. Including these two records, there have now been nine accepted records in the state. Most of the previous records were found along the beach between Lewes and Rehoboth Beach which are in the Cape May shadow.

Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*)

17 April 2015
DBRC #15/05

Bombay Hook NWR
Notes, Photographs (TF, CW, JD, DS, STG)

Everyone loves owls, particularly the birders and photographers that make Bombay Hook NWR their home away from home. When Dan Stotts, the refuge biologist, found a Burrowing Owl outside the culvert under the road to Allee House, he called back to the headquarters for support in photographing the bird. As the news spread through the refuge and the birding community, many people were able to see and photograph the bird sitting on a bluebird house 10’ from the road. Many of the photographers had to cut short their efforts to photograph a Great Horned Owl and owlets. The bird set atop the bluebird house as

night fell but was gone the next day. Obviously, the Committee had received some very nice photographs and had no problem with accepting this new species.

Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*)

21 October 2014

DBRC #14/10

Indian River Inlet

Notes, photographs (AK)

This record had good photographs and was written up very well. Western Kingbird is a bird that is rarely reported to the DBRC considering how many show up in Cape May. However, this species has shown an equal tendency to appear in the middle of the state. Four records were in the shadow of Cape May: this one at IRI, two records from Cape Henlopen SP and the two specimens taken at Rehoboth Beach in 1912 on the same day counted as one record. Four records were in Kent County: one at BHNWR, two at Whitehall Neck Road and one at Cedar Swamp WMA. All the records occurred from July through January with most from October through December.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficator*)

27 June 2015

DBRC #15/11

Harbeson

Notes, Photographs (RE)

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher is also a very rare bird in the state. Though this will be the ninth record, it is only the third accepted since 1996. One should always be prepared for the unexpected and in this case Bob Edelen was not. He has photographed this species many times in Texas, Kansas and Costa Rica but when he saw this one on Benum Switch Road, he didn't have his good camera. However, the Committee had no problem accepting this record with his written description and his self-described "lousy photos" from his cell phone.

Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

5 October – 2 November 2013

DBRC #13/12

Thirteen Curves Road

Notes, Photographs (TS, FR, CMF, CDC)

15 December 2013

DBRC #13/16

Bergold Lane

Notes, Photograph (JS)

31 August 2014

DBRC #15/02

Charles E. Price Memorial Park

Notes, Photographs (JS, TS, BS)

In 1993, when I began birding in Delaware and joined DOS, the first thing that I learned was that if you needed a Loggerhead Shrike for your Delaware list, you just had to go down to Island Farm off Broadkill Road in the winter. Looking at every Northern Mockingbird was a poor strategy. Through the 1970s, 1980s and the early 1990s that was where a Loggerhead Shrike would usually winter. That didn't mean every year, but rather a single bird would set up there for a few years, disappear and be followed by a new bird within a couple of years. When Loggerhead Shrike stopped breeding in New England, the only breeding birds north of us were a small group in southern Ontario. After 2000, it seemed that the birds were gone for good but the drought ended with a short spring visit at Grass Dale in 2008. Then there were three visits at Bennett's Pier Road by a bird that nested in Ontario based on its band: spring 2010, spring 2011 and fall in 2011. One bird on Cods Road in spring 2012 brings us to the three records above. All three were extremely well documented with great photographs. The fall records of the Thirteen Curves bird in 2013 and the Price Memorial bird 2014 are showing that birds are still moving though the state. The 2013 – 2014 (and we already know 2014 – 2015) bird that wintered at Dover Air Force Base means that it must have spent its summers north of us. It's unlikely that the bird bred in Virginia or south because that would mean the bird had gone north to winter.

Records Not Accepted

Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*)

5 November 2006

DBRC #06/17

Bombay Hook NWR

Notes, Photographs

Trumpeter Swan is now an accepted species in New York and New Jersey. Ontario has been releasing them for years and they are now nesting in northern New York. This bird was reported in early November, had no yellow on the bill and the bill seemed good for a Trumpeter Swan, but the size seemed small when compared with the Tundra Swans. The curve at the gape was not right and the border at the forehead was not shown well enough in the photographs to decide whether it was pointed or not. After three well fought rounds, the record was ultimately rejected for failure to get the four votes needed for acceptance on the third round. Trumpeter Swans have been wintering in New York, New Jersey and Maryland for some time, so please inspect those flocks of Tundra Swans.

Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*)

9 May 2009

Cape Henlopen Hawk Watch

DBRC #09/06

Notes

This record is the final record of the Swallow-tailed Kite for the Committee to adjudicate because it was removed from the Delaware Review List. Again, after three rounds, it failed to garner the four votes needed to pass it. The DBRC emphasizes that a report deemed “not accepted” does not necessarily mean that the Committee believes the species was misidentified, but rather that the documentation submitted was insufficient to establish the claimed identity.

Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*)

3 August 2009

Bombay Hook NWR

DBRC #09/19

Notes

Spotted Redshank is a very rare vagrant to the East Coast and would have been a first state record had it passed. The bar for acceptance, therefore, is higher than a typical review species. Having said that, this record made it through three rounds before it was rejected.

Pine Grosbeak (*Pinicola enucleator*)

27 September 2012

Middle Run NA

DBRC #12/16

Notes

Pine Grosbeak rarely make it this far south and when they do they never are here in September. However, the write ups for this bird gave the Committee some pause and this, like the others above went three round before it was rejected.

Reporters

Kathy Barrowclough, Michelle Butler, Colin D. Campbell, John Dunn, Robert Edelen, Timothy Freiday, Chuck M. Fullmer, Michael Gallaway, Anthony Gonzon, Al Guarente, Susan Talbott Guiteras, Brian Henderson, Becky Kern, Alan Kneidel, Thomas Kunnecke, Ed Kwater, Scott Lewis, Brian E. McCaffrey, Jennifer Ottinger, Bruce G. Peterjohn, Frank Rohrbacher, Joe Sebastiani, Tim Schreckengost, Kurt R. Schwarz, Mason Sieges, Lynn M. Smith, Ian Stewart, Dan Stotts, Chandler Wiegand.