

Delaware Bird Records Committee Annual Report for 2018

Frank Rohrbacher
on behalf of the Delaware Bird Records Committee

This is the 23rd report of the Delaware Bird Records Committee. The Committee members for 2018 were Jim White (President), Frank Rohrbacher (Secretary), Anthony Gonzon, Chris Bennett, John Janowski and Jean Woods. At the 8 August 2018 DBRC Annual Meeting, Frank Rohrbacher stepped down as a review member and was replaced by Jim White. 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 September 2018. It has distributed these documents to the birding community via the DOS website and the 2018 *Delmarva Ornithologist*.

The Committee has decided to digitize and rehabilitate old records stored at the Delaware Museum of Natural History. These records have been distributed to the members with the goal of completing the project before the beginning of next year. The Committee also has approved a motion to update the DBRC by-laws to better reflect our mission and to improve the clarity of our relationship with the DOS, a project that will be led by Frank. Significant changes have been made in the Delaware State Bird and Review Species Lists because of the major changes in the AOS/ABA taxonomy that have occurred. Common Murre and Atlantic Puffin are still on the State Review List but only if they are seen from shore and the Eurasian Collared-Dove continues to be reportable outside of Selbyville. This year's summary consists of 22 records involving 16 species including the first state record for Western Tanager and Elegant Tern. These additions increase the official Delaware Bird State List to 420 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. Accepted records use the standard taxonomic order as of 11 November 2018 of the AOS and the ABA. 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.

Accepted Records

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

3 June 2016 Prime Hook Road Impoundment
DBRC #16/08 Notes, Photographs (Mike Hudson)

1 September 2016 Silver Lake, Rehoboth Beach
DBRC #19/15 Notes, Photographs (JG, LDG, JR)

Gone are days of August 2000 when birders spent hours at Oceanview to catch a view of this possible state record and then worried that the DBRC might not accept it because it might be somebody's pet. It was accepted and many more followed this first bird to the great state of Delaware and they have been seen now in every month of the year. The records above are the 9th and 10th accepted state records. They show that the species is doing well and expanding its range northward. The original records show that what were sightings of single birds are now small family groups as shown by the June report which was of four birds and the September which was of six birds.

Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

24 – 27 February Cods Road
DBRC #17/01 Photographs, Notes (RB, FR, MH, SL, CC)

Having missed the first and last Pink-footed Goose seen in Delaware 65 years ago at Bombay Hook NWR, I was thrilled to be able to see this bird. As I thought about this great find by Richard Breckenridge, a local hunter and waterfowl photographer, I realized how fortunate we were to have him still pursuing his hobby. How many of us in mid-February were still spending large amounts time stopping at every large flock of Snow Geese on Cods Road even though one was being reported in Cape May. When the word got out about this bird, I joined a group of 20 birders looking for the bird at the corner of Cods Road and Fowlers Beach Road where it had been reported within a few minutes of our group's arrival. It took 20 minutes for someone to find the bird right next to the road. Thank you, Richard.

Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*)

11 January 2017 Georgetown
DBRC #17/05 Banding Records (JS)

Joe Sebastiani found a Trumpeter Swan in Avondale, Pennsylvania,

with a wing tag of P02. He reported P02 to the banding office in Laurel, Maryland and was referred to the Ontario Trumpeter Swan Restoration Group, who reported that the bird was a male, born and banded as a baby near Port Severn, Ontario during the fall of 2016. He disappeared from his family (siblings P01, P03 – P06) in late October when they wintered in Burlington, Ontario. P02 was seen and photographed in Georgetown on 11 January 2017. The bird was described to the banding lab as a Canada Goose but the photograph showed P02 in all his glory. Thank you, Joe for your great write-up.

Elegant Tern (*Thalasseus elegans*)

5 August 2017

DBRC #18/09

Cape Henlopen Point

Notes (BGP)

As you are aware, Delaware does not require a specimen or diagnostic photograph to accept a new species on the Delaware Bird State List. That means an exceptionally well written report like this was can be accepted. This species is rare but not unknown on the Atlantic coast and certainly would not be considered an unexpected state record.

Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*)

4 January 2017

DBRC #17/10

Tugboat off Delaware City

Notes, photograph (JG, ES)

This was the second record of a Brown Booby and like the first one, you could see it only if you were on the boat on which the bird was sitting. In both records, the bird was photographed by a crew member which clearly show a Brown Booby. Interestingly, though numerous Delaware pelagic birds make it to the canyons near the Gulf Stream, where one might expect to see a Brown Booby, these two records are not being seen there but only on boats within a mile of shore.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

15 May 2017 – 25 June 2017

DBRC #17/02

Ashton Tract, Bombay Hook NWR

Photographs, Notes, (BF, MR, FR, CC, MG)

A Little Egret may be a very rare bird anywhere in the ABA Area, but we in Delaware have been spoiled because we have now had five accepted records. Probably most important is that in four of the five records the bird spent weeks at Bombay Hook NWR, so every birder in Delaware have seen at least one multiple times and thousands of birders got a life bird in Delaware. However, because Pea Patch Island is also

home to hundreds of Snowy Egrets and Great Egrets, it takes patience and skill to pick a Little Egret out of all the white egrets at the Ashton Tract on a windy day in April but Gina Sheridan was up to the task. The bird was obviously roosting or breeding at Pea Patch Island as reports continued both at Thousand Acre Marsh and in New Jersey across the river. After nesting, the birds at the rookery dispersed which usually means they end up Bombay Hook NWR. That is exactly where it was found in June by Bert Filemyr and Michael Rosengarten, meaning dozens of people arrived at Bombay Hook NWR and cycle continued. Great photographs made acceptance by the DBRC an easy task.

Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)

10 October 2017

DBRC #17/11

Ashland Hawk Watch

Notes, Photographs (DB)

Besides being a great Official Counter of the Ashland Hawk Watch, David is a prolific photographer. On 10 October 2017, a group of observers were working up on the hill when the cry of 'get on this bird' and we did. The buteo was a light bird cruising toward the west end of the notch. As we started to discuss what we had seen, David showed the eight diagnostic photographs of a Swainson's Hawk that he had taken in the 20 seconds that the bird was being seen.

Crested Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*)

27 December 2016 – 6 January 2017

DBRC #16/11

Holland Glade Road

Notes, Photographs (SG, AD, LMS, FR, NC)

On 10 September 2017, a Crested Caracara was observed flying in over the river from Cape May by the Official Counter of the Cape Henlopen Hawk Watch Jennifer Ottinger. The bird then circled up and drifted south. This big, and, some might say ugly bird, seems to have then hidden in plain sight around Rehoboth Beach for about 3 months. On 18 December a Crested Caracara was reported at Gordons Pond SP by Gale Janiszewski and the chase was on. Meanwhile an unnamed Facebook user showed a picture taken at the Outlet Mall in Rehoboth Mall dated 21 September. The bird was finally found at its roost on Holland Glade Road by Sue Gruver, Lynn Smith and Anne Dingle on 26 December 2016 and remained in the area until 6 January 2017, when a blizzard came through southern Delaware. A couple of days later a Crested Caracara was photographed at Forsythe NWR on a telephone pole then disappeared. This was the second accepted Delaware record for this species.

Ash-throated Kingbird (*Myiarchus cinerascens*)

28 December 2016 – 6 January 2017

Gordon Pond SP

DBRC #16/12

Notes, Photographs (JP, DP, FR, NC, SL, NP)

On 28 December 2016, an Ash-throated Flycatcher was found and photographed by Joy and David Peters at the trail to the beach at Gordons Pond SP. The bird was present and well photographed at the trail or the parking lot until the blizzard on 6 January 2017, when it likely succumbed. This was the fourth Delaware record.

Gray Kingbird (*Tyrannus dominicensis*)

23 August 2016

Little Creek

DBRC #16/14

Photograph, Notes (CB)

A Gray Kingbird was a great find on wires in Little Creek and was seen by a few birders but quickly disappeared. A diagnostic photograph by Chris Bennett easily established the bird as a second Delaware Record.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, (*Tyrannus forficatus*)

6 July 2017

Hollis Road at Doddtown Road

DBRC #17/08

Photograph, Notes (GS, DM)

Bob Edelen and his wife were taking a walk and saw a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher on the wires at the intersection of Hollis Road and Doddtown Road in Harbeson. He put out the report and the bird was found again by a few birders the same day on 5 July 2017. Gina Sheridan and Dennis Murphy tried that day and the next morning to find the bird but came up short. One final run in the afternoon of 6 July 2017 was successful when they spotted the bird on the wires near the intersection. They drove as close as possible and Dennis got a great photograph of the bird and the bird was not seen again for the 10th Delaware state bird record. However, after looking at the ninth record for this species, I have to suspect that we may have seen this bird before. On 27 June 2015, Bob Edelen reported a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at the same intersection and using his cell phone took a half dozen photographs.

Northern Shrike (*Lanius borealis*)

19 December 2016 – 6 January 2017

Prime Hook NWR

DBRC #16/16

Notes, Photographs (MR, FR, NC, SL)

Northern Shrike has historically been a very rare winter visitor to Delaware and with global warming I think that the number of such birds will decrease in coming years. This bird is the eighth Delaware state record and like all of the predecessors except for a specimen dated 29 March 1909 from Yorklyn, they appear to form the dispersion pattern that they all arrived from Cape May. One can make the case that only three individual birds have made up all of the records that have been accepted by the DBRC of live birds. The Clarksville bird seen 30 December 1995 is possibly the same bird that showed up at Cape Henlopen SP for a few days 18 – 19 February 1996. The second bird may have spent its first winter at Island Farms after being recorded there 30 December 2001. Then, after not being seen in 2002 – 2003 or 2003 – 2004 one was recorded for the winter of 2004 – 2005 at Island Farm which is off limits to birders, 2005 – 2006 and 2006 – 2007 at Broadkill Beach Road and Prime Hook Headquarters. We learn from the last record how vast the Prime Hook NWR Headquarters/Broadkill Beach Impoundments/Island Farm area are and hard it was to find one Northern Shrike in it. The bird was found at the Headquarter on 28 December and seen a total of 6 – 7 times through the winter with many searchers.

Common Raven (*Corvus corax*)9 September 2017 – 2 October 2017 Yorklyn, Ashland Hawk Watch,
Middle Run NA

DBRC #17/09

Notes, Photographs (DB, FR, DW, TF, JS)

Common Raven is still considered a rare bird because their numbers are still very low in the state. However, they are big, noisy birds that seem to do whatever they can to be observed. Early in September 2017, it became obvious that the official counter at the Ashland Hawk Watch, David Brown, was going to be reporting sightings of one or two birds every other day. Some days there were multiple passing around the hawk watch but the consensus was that there was only one pair and that pair was mostly coming from Yorklyn, which is where the first birds were found a couple of years prior, so I chose several of David's photographs for record of a pair. I added a report of the birds being seen in Yorklyn by Joe Sebastiani. On 25 September David took a great photograph of four ravens flying south. Thus, it was obvious, that we were dealing with at least two pairs. So when Tim Freiday, reported a pair of ravens at Middle Run NA on 2 October that continued to be seen periodically through the month while a pair of ravens still were being seen at the Ashland Hawk Watch made sense. It appears that this was a

small 'murder' or more accurately an 'unkindness' of four ravens that were being seen almost daily in over a quarter of New Castle County.

Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

31 December 2017 – 20 January 2018
DBRC #18/03

Prime Hook NWR
Notes (FR)

Brewer's Blackbirds are very rare in the mid-Atlantic States each winter so it's really a treat to see a couple in a mixed flock going to roost in Prime Hook NWR.

'Audubon's' Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*)

13 December 2015
DBRC #15/24

Burton's Island SP
Notes (BGP)

For the past 10 – 15 years, we have been documenting records of well-marked subspecies that have not been previously reported from Delaware, such as Red-shafted Flicker, races of Dark-eyed Junco other than Slate-colored, and European forms of North American species including Tundra Swan, Brant, and White-winged Scoter, which should be submitted for review. We no longer review Green-winged 'Common' Teal, *Anas crecca crecca*. I have been surprised at how few of these birds have been documented. Except for the occasional 'Black' Brant or Great 'White' Heron, this 'Audubon's' Yellow-rumped Warbler is the only accepted and only one of very few records of what I originally thought would be an important category of rare birds in the state. This well-documented record of a male in a small flock of 'Myrtle' Yellow-rumped Warblers on Burtons Island in the winter of 2015 was a welcome diversion for the DBRC. Please search through the Dark-eyed Juncos at your feeders for an 'Oregon', a 'Pink-sided' or a 'White-winged' Junco this winter.

Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*)

22 – 26 March 2017
DBRC #17/07

Dixie Lane Road
Photographs, Notes (HD, CC, FR)

29 December 2017 – 9 January 2018
DBRC #18/01

Dover
Notes, Photographs (GM)

18 January 2018
DBRC #18/02

Bay Pointe
Notes, Photograph (MCM)

26 January 2018 – 10 February 2018
DBRC #18/06

Lincoln
Notes, Photographs (F&KB)

27 February 2018
DBRC #18/08

Dixie Line Road
Notes, Photograph (AK)

These five Painted Buntings in 2017 – 2018 added to the eleven previous Delaware State records bring us up to sixteen Delaware State records. Even when we take in account that the two Dixie Lane Road birds are the likely the same individual, it does suggest the number of Painted Buntings may be increasing over these two years. Of course, the one thing about Painted Bunting is that virtually any photograph of a male or a green bird is diagnostic and the DBRC has no problem with identification, so we decided to keep it as a Review Species for another year.

Western Tanager, (*Piranga ludoviciana*)

12 January 2018

Delaware Seashore SP, Indian River Life-Saving Museum

DBRC 18/04

Notes, Photograph of dead bird (JEH, LS)

On 12 January 2018, as James E. Hall and Laura Scharle were leaving work at the Indian River Life-Saving Museum at the Delaware Seashore SP, they observed a dead bird on the sand. They picked up the bird and photographed it. The bird had no bands and as they were not sure of the species sent the photographs to Chris Bennett who identified it as a Western Tanager. The DBRC had no problem identifying this bird from the photographs as one of the reviewers summarized 'The overall size of the bird along with the size and shape of the bill identify this bird as a tanager. The only North American tanager that has wing bars is Western Tanager. Some winter orioles show similar color patterns as in this bird and have wing bars but they all have dark bills, with more slender shape, with a sharp point and an extremely straight culmen'. This is a first Delaware State Record and brings the Delaware State Bird List up to 420 species.

Records Not Accepted

Arctic Tern, (*Sterna paradisaea*)

22 August 2015
DBRC #15/14

Gordons Pond
Sketch, Notes

Common Raven, (*Corvus corax*)

7 July 2015

DBRC #15/13

Rte 2 at McIntire Drive

Photograph, Notes

Both of these records were rejected after 2 – 3 rounds, The DBRC believed that the documentation just didn't totally establish the species. In both of these cases the Committee believes that these observers did see these species.

Reporters

Fran & Ken Bass, Chis Bennett, Richard Breckenridge, David Brown, Colin Campbell, Nancy Cunningham, Hank Davis, Ann Dinkle, Bert Filemyr, Timothy Freiday, Marie Gardiner, Jeff Gordon, Liz D. Gordon, Sue Gruver, James E. Hall, Mike Hudson, Alissa Kegelman, Sharon Lynn, Gregory Madden, Michael C. Moore, Dennis Murphy, Bruce G. Peterjohn, David Peters, Joy Peters, Nick Pulcinella, Jerald Reb, Frank Rohrbacher, Michael Rosengarten, Laura Scharle, Joe Sebastiani, Gina Sheridan, Lynn M. Smith, Ed Snell, Dan Walker.