

# Delaware Bird Records Committee 2022-2023 Annual Report

Anthony Gonzon, Secretary  
*Delaware Bird Records Committee*

This is the 26th report of the Delaware Bird Records Committee since it was re-established in 1995 by the DOS Council. The 2022 committee members were president Jim White, secretary Anthony Gonzon and review members Chris Bennett, Frank Rohrbacher and John Janowski. At the February 4, 2023 Annual Meeting, Bruce Peterjohn was elected to replace John Janowski as review member, Anthony Gonzon continued as Secretary and Jim White continued as President. The Committee bid farewell to long-time member Jean Woods as she charted a course for the future outside of Delaware.

Moving forward, the Committee is updating the means and methods for contributors to submit records to the DBRC. The DBRC now has an online, interactive submission form that allows birders to upload reports, photos, videos and sound recordings. Further, the Committee has updated its review procedures to include a two-tiered process for record review, beginning with a smaller sub-committee of three members to expedite reviews of well-documented reports with strong evidence to support identifications. Any expedited reviews that do not result in a unanimous decision will be submitted to the full five-member committee for review. Additionally, any challenging records, potential first state records, or other sensitive reports will be reviewed by the full committee. Lastly, the Committee is currently developing a positive relationship with local eBird reviewers to incorporate eBird reports in the official state records. In many recent cases, as highlighted by the records covered in this report, the best available information for rare and unusual species is only available through eBird.

The Committee updated the Delaware State List of Bird Species, the Delaware Review List, and the

index of all records adjudicated as of 01 October 2023. These documents are available to the birding community via the DOS website.

This year's summary contains 30 records involving 22 different species, including first state species records for Townsend's Solitaire and Masked Booby. With these additions the Official Delaware Bird State List now consists of 428 species. During this cycle, the DBRC also accepted one new state record for a subspecies, Eurasian Whimbrel. Under current review by the Committee are two records of Golden-Plovers from 2022. The Committee is carefully examining these records, anticipating a resolution for both in 2024, and will be reporting on them in the next issue of the Delaware Ornithologist.

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 following the American Ornithological Society Checklist of North and Middle American Birds (Chesser et.al., 2023). The DBRC emphasizes that a report deemed "not accepted" does not necessarily mean that the Committee believed the species was misidentified, but rather that the documentation submitted was insufficient to establish the claimed identity. Additionally, the Committee encourages contributors to submit additional documentation for a record if they feel the DBRC erred in its decision.

## ACCEPTED RECORDS

### **Brant (Black), *Branta bernicla nigricans***

21 February 2022

Rehoboth Bay, Savage's Ditch, Sussex County

DBRC 22-06

Written Report (BP)

Scanning through flocks of Brant on Delaware's Inland Bays was a right of passage in the mid-2000's as many birders searched for the elusive "Black" Brant that had occurred during the winters of 2004 through 2008. After over a decade-long absence, a "Black" Brant reappeared in 2022 and was well-documented in a written report that established the identification and eliminated "Atlantic" and "Dark-bellied" forms of this goose. The observer noted in the report that this species is known to live upwards of 25 years and, although we may never know for certain, it is within the realm of possibility that this Brant is the same individual from the 2000's.

### **Eared Grebe, *Podiceps nigricollis***

02 January 2021

Angola Neck Preserve, Indian River Bay, Sussex County

DBRC 21-01

Written Report, Photos (MS, AK)

The Rehoboth Christmas Bird County always presents a great opportunity for birders to find a rarity or two and this one was no exception. Eared Grebes do show up occasionally but are often distant and likely even dismissed as more common species. These observers did not miss this one and even managed a couple of photos. However, given the distance of the photos, the record benefitted from the submission of a well-written report that solidly established the identification.

### **Eared Grebe, *Podiceps nigricollis***

01 March 2022

Indian River Inlet, Sussex County

DBRC 22-09

eBird Reports (written descriptions, photos) (AR, DP)

Although having been documented multiple times in Delaware, the DBRC continues to request reports of Eared Grebe, considering how this species may be present in the winter for a year or two only to disappear for several years before wandering back again. Recent records include one bird in 2019, one in 2021 and this 2022 record which was accompanied by a short but descriptive eBird report and a second eBird report with diagnostic photos. Continued occurrences in upcoming years may lead to committee to consider removing this from the list of reportable species.

### **White-winged Dove, *Zenaida asiatica***

02 June 2022

Undisclosed private residence, Sussex County

DBRC 22-21

eBird Report (sound recording) (BE)

In a birding world often dominated by photos and sight records, it can be refreshing to review a report that includes only sound. This White-winged Dove is the first record since 2015 and, notably, all but two of those were from coastal locations. This eBird checklist came complete with a sound recording where this species' distinctive call can clearly be heard, making this the 10th record for Delaware.

### **Purple Gallinule, *Porphyrio martinicus***

22 September 2022

Beach Plum Island Preserve, Sussex County

DBRC 22-31

Written Report, Photo (JM)

Unfortunately, not all rare birds can be shared with the birding community and this Purple Gallinule is only one example. A local birder discovered the recently dead gallinule while walking along the dune crossover for vehicles accessing Beach Plum Island. After contact state officials about the discovery, the observer submitted a report to document this unique occurrence. Prone to wandering, bird represents only the fifth record for Delaware and only the second for Sussex County. The last record, in 2012, also came from Sussex County in Bethany Beach and it was also found deceased.

### **Whimbrel (European), *Numenius phaeopus phaeopus***

2 May 2022

Cape Henlopen State Park, Sussex County

DBRC 22-18

Written Report (BP)

Although this subspecies is not split from the typical Whimbrel that we regularly encounter in Delaware during shorebird migration, this record of the European subspecies is notable and an important record for the committee to consider if this species is split at some point in the future. Field marks between the North American subspecies (*hudsonicus*) and European subspecies (*phaeopus*) were described well in the report, including the distinct white wedge on the rump and lower back, the contrasting white lower breast and belly, and the white underwing pattern of the latter, eliminating *hudsonicus* as a candidate. This record is the first for this subspecies reported to and adjudicated by the DBRC.

### **Long-tailed Jaeger, *Stercorarius longicaudus***

20 May 2020

Herring Point, Cape Henlopen State Park, Sussex County

DBRC 20-21

eBird Report (written description, photos) (LB)

Despite the rarity of this species in Delaware coastal waters, it is one that birders should be considering during migration along the Atlantic Coast and even into the Delaware Bay. The written details contained in eBird report offer a possible ID but lack some information that would adequately support an ID. However, the photos included make this report easy to confirm with one reviewer specifically noting that, in addition to the long central rectrices, the gray upperparts on the bird are unique to Long-tailed Jaegers (adults and sub-adults) and are clearly paler than the black cap.



Adult Long-tailed Jaeger at Herring Point, Cape Henlopen on 20 May 2020. Photo by Lucas Bobay.

### **Franklin's Gull, *Leucophaeus pipixcan***

29 August 2020

Gordons Pond, Cape Henlopen SP, Sussex County

DBRC 21-05

Written Report (BP)

The written report is very thorough and adequately describes a first-summer Franklin's Gull while also eliminating Laughing Gull. For this uncommon species, separation from Laughing Gull presents the greatest identification challenge and the observer nails all the relevant field marks in the report. Although there was no mention of other "hooded" gull species they would either have a much paler mantle or, in the case of a Sabine's gull, the leg color, hood and bill would be significantly different in addition to the most obvious features of wing and tail shape/pattern.

## White-winged Tern, *Chlidonias leucopterus*

10-21 July 2022

Big Stone Beach Road, Kent County

DBRC 22-23

Written Reports, Photos (MM, CB)

First discovered by Randy Fisher on 10 April, this bird was observed by many birders eager to add it to their state list, life list or both. Written reports submitted by two observers on 11 July provide excellent descriptions of this unique



White-winged Tern at Big Stone Beach on 15 July 2022.  
Photo by Jeffrey R. Haperman.

bird along with confirming photos that exhibited all the necessary field marks to separate this tern from the more-expected Black Tern or the once-in-a-lifetime Whiskered Tern. Notably, the descriptions also described the molt this tern was undergoing, providing valuable information on plumage characteristics that will be useful on future occurrences of this species. This bird hung around the marshes on Big Stone Beach Road for nearly two weeks offering an opportunity to witness this 8th state record and the farthest south along Delaware's coast that it has occurred.

## Pacific Loon, *Gavia pacifica*

31 March 2022

Atlantic Ocean, Cape Henlopen SP, Sussex County

DBRC 22-12

Written Report (BP)

Separating a Pacific Loon from the more-common Red-throated and Common Loons is no simple task. This bird, observed from the Cape Henlopen Hawk Watch, was obliging to the reporter as it offered extended views and plenty of time to study the finer details of its appearance. In a well-written description, the observer meticulously describes all the important details to establish the identity of the bird, which had molted into alternate (breeding) plumage. In addition, careful notes allowed for a detailed summary separating this loon from other possible species, including Arctic Loon, making this the only the second confirmed record following the 2016 Pacific Loon, also observed at Cape Henlopen. With the appearance of Pacific Loons along the Atlantic seaboard occurring more frequently, birders may want to spend more time picking through loons to find the needle in the haystack.

## Masked Booby, *Sula dactylatra*

13 July 2022

Fenwick Island, Sussex County

DBRC 22-25

Photo (anon, HM)

Every birder imagines what it would be like to discover a "state-first" record, but it does not always take someone with a pair of binoculars and a field guide to be lucky. In this case, a non-birder visiting Fenwick Island found an odd bird on the beach and photographed it. Ultimately, the observer sent it to seasoned birder Holly Merker, who then reported it the Delaware's Rare Bird Alert via the GroupMe app for smart devices. Little additional information is known about this bird; nonetheless, this represents a first state record for a long-overdue species. A single photo of the bird exists, but that image showed all of the necessary field marks to accept this record. The image shows the clean white underparts, eliminating immature boobies other than a Masked Booby while a first-cycle Northern Gannet would

have been entirely dark. The anonymous observer may not have been aware of how unique this bird is to Delaware but will now forever be a part of our ornithological history. The bird was taken to rehab but subsequently died and was prepared as a specimen in the Delaware Museum of Nature and Science (Halley, 2022).



Masked Booby at Fenwick Island on 13 July 2023. Photo by Kelly McGovern.

### **Brown Booby, *Sula leucogaster***

05 July 2022

Atlantic Ocean, Cape Henlopen SP, Sussex County

DBRC 22-22

Written Report (BP)

Perhaps 2022 should be characterized as the Year of the Booby for Delaware? This year brought reports of both Brown and Masked Booby, amazing for this small coastal state. This record in early July marks only the third confirmed occurrence after review by the DBRC. This report described many of the critical field marks necessary to distinguish a Brown Booby from other similar species like the Northern Gannet. In addition to key field marks discussed in the report, the author also noted an important behavior exhibited by this species – the dive angle as it plunged into the ocean a near horizontal line, completely uncharacteristic for a gannet. An excellent record in a year of excellent records, this species may begin to appear more frequently as

birders learn more about vagrancy and identification.

### **Ash-throated Flycatcher, *Myiarchus cinerascens***

04-26 January 2022

Whitehall Neck Road, Bombay Hook, Kent County

DBRC 22-02\*

eBird Reports (written descriptions, photos) (anon, AE)

This report represents the 7th confirmed report of this species for Delaware, but, surprisingly, the first from the Bombay Hook area and Kent County. First reported on 04 January 2022 by an anonymous eBirder, the flycatcher lingered long enough for quite a few birders to add this species to their state list until it disappeared after 26 January. Despite the many sightings, no observers submitted direct reports to the DBRC; however, a brief written description in the first eBird report, followed by photos taken by Andy Ednie two days later provided enough evidence to confirm this wanderer.



Ash-throated Flycatcher along Whitehall Neck Road on 06 January 2022.

## **Western Kingbird, *Tyrannus verticalis***

02 January 2022

University of Delaware, Lewes, Sussex County

DBRC 22-01\*

eBird Report (written description, photos) (JW et. al.)

Western Kingbirds are not the most reliable vagrant in Delaware so this observation near the College of Marine Studies near the coast of the Delaware Bay was certainly a nice find. Photos submitted as part of the report from Susan McInnis are diagnostic for this species with the white outer edge to the tail visible. The other kingbirds with yellow underparts would have a different tail pattern. Those diagnostic white outer tail feathers were also noted in the brief description included with the eBird report.

## **Loggerhead Shrike, *Lanius ludovicianus***

06 September 2022

Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge, Sussex County

DBRC 22-30

Written Report, Photos (MM)

There have been 15 prior accepted records of Loggerhead Shrike in Delaware which is quite a shift from this bird historically nesting in the state. Sightings of this predatory songbird have continued to decline with the most recent accepted record coming in February 2019 at Fowler Beach. Interestingly, nearly half of all Loggerhead Shrike records back to 1991 come from Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge. This observer was able to capture some excellent photos leaving little to the imagination when reviewing this shrike. Although one had not been observed for three years, this 2022 record was quickly confirmed and serves as a prompt for birders to be extra observant in the Prime Hook region for Delaware's next record.



Loggerhead Shrike at Prime Hook on 06 September 2022. Photo by Michael Moore.

## **Common Raven, *Corvus corax***

2 March 2020

Herring Creek, Angola Neck, Sussex County

DBRC 20-16

Written Report (BP)

Common Ravens, now well-established in northern Delaware, should be expected to move south onto the Delmarva Peninsula. A detailed written description of this bird made the record easy for the committee to accept. Given how quickly this species is becoming established throughout the region, ravens are likely to show up at almost any location throughout the year, often adding surprise and excitement for birders as their population continues to grow.

## **Common Raven, *Corvus corax***

20 February – 29 December 2022

Dover Downs/Leipsic Road, Dover, Kent County

DBRC 22-05/08/13

eBird Reports (written descriptions, photos) (m. obs.)

In early 2022, ravens became a fixture in the Dover area. Centering around Dover Downs and Leipsic Road, numerous observers reported these

large corvids to eBird. The committee elected to review a small sample of records to add to the official record, documenting the early part of the story on these birds, reviewing three great eBird records to accomplish that: 20 February (JC); 27 February (AR); 01 April (MM). Since those reports, a late 2022 eBird submission on 29 December (MO) continued to document the presence of these ravens in 2022. The saga of these ravens does not end there and there is more to their story to come in a future report.

### **Common Raven, *Corvus corax***

18 April 2022

Hopkins Road, Lewes, Sussex County

DBRC 22-15

eBird Report (written description) (RB)

In an April eBird report, the observer described the scenario of the observation, noting that he was travelling at over 45 mph and that the raven was soaring overhead. Despite that, his experience with this species elsewhere helped as he was able to observe and then describe features of the bird consistent with a Common Raven. With the recent push of ravens across Delaware, a quick yet sufficient view of one is more than enough to establish an identity.

### **Common Raven, *Corvus corax***

01 June 2022

Milford, Kent/Sussex County

DBRC 22-20

eBird Report (written description) (GS)

Another eBird report documenting the distribution of Common Ravens throughout Delaware, this bird was only observed briefly, but the observer heard it clearly and was able to describe the diagnostic call notes in the report. Seen from a private residence, the county location of this record is not absolutely clear but now that ravens are found across the entire state, this

record is more important considering the date when ravens should be at some mid-stage of their breeding cycle.

### **Common Raven, *Corvus corax***

26 November 2022

Assawoman Wildlife Area, Sussex County

DBRC 22-44

eBird Report (written description) (EB)

This is our final Common Raven summary for this report, but still an important one. Ravens have been documented in every county from northern Delaware south to Sussex. With this report, we now have a full state-wide distribution as Assawoman Wildlife Area is a short distance from the the state's southern boundary with Maryland. Once again, a brief description in an eBird report hits key field marks making this another easy raven record to accept.

### **Townsend's Solitaire, *Myadestes townsendi***

08 December 2020 – 22 April 2021

Cape Henlopen State Park, Sussex County

DBRC 21-10

Written Reports, Photos (MK, SM, CB)

Some seasoned birders believe this bird was long overdue in Delaware, but it was no longer absent starting in December 2020. First documented at Cape Henlopen State Park and reported to the committee by Megan Kasprzak and Shannon Modla on December 30, we later discovered that the bird had been photographed on December 8 but was not submitted until January by another birder. This first-state record hung around until April 2021 when it was last photographed on April 15 and last reported a week later. The committee was lucky to have such a well-documented record, making it easy for us to unanimously accept Delaware's first Townsend's Solitaire.



Townsend's Solitaire at Cape Henlopen State Park on 06 January 2021. Photo by Mark R. Johnson.

### Evening Grosbeak, *Coccothraustes vespertinus*

October 2020 – November 2020

Statewide, multiple locations

DBRC 20-31

eBird Reports (multiple observers)

The DBRC accepted this record as a report of multiple occurrences of Evening Grosbeak throughout the state. Assembled by committee member Frank Rohrbacher, it distills eBird records based in the report of Evening Grosbeak to be included in the record to add to other documentation received on this species during an amazing irruption year. This report is not exhaustive of all eBird records, but includes occurrences from all three Delaware counties across the state.

In chronological order, the 2020 records included: Frederica, 5 Oct. (AR); Kitts Hummock, 27 Oct. (JJ); Bear, 28 Oct. (KB); Cape Henlopen SP, 27 Oct. (BP); Ashland Nature Center, 31 Oct. (DB et. al.); Massey Church Road, 1 Nov. (AD, JD); Delmar, 31 Oct. (TC); Arundel, 2 Nov. (GG); Ashland Nature Center, 3 Nov. (DB et. al.); State Forest Road, 3 Nov. (NG); Cape Henlopen SP, 4 Nov. (JO et. al.); Ashland Nature Center, 4 Nov. (DB et. al.); First State National Historic Park, 4 Nov. (DB et. al.); Glasgow, 4 Nov. (MM); Lincoln, 4 Nov. (JP); First State National Historic Park, 14 Nov. (DO); Indian River Inlet, 14 Nov. (JD, AD); Cape Henlopen SP,

17 Nov. (JO et. al.); Cape Henlopen SP, 21 Nov (DF); First State National Historic Park, 21 Nov. (DO); Port Penn, 27 Nov. (DS); Middletown, 27 Nov. (CR); Felton, 26 Nov. (SL).

### Evening Grosbeak, *Coccothraustes vespertinus*

03-04 November 2020

Ashland Nature Center, Hockessin, New Castle County

DBRC 20-33

eBird Report (written description, photos) (DB)

This report of Evening Grosbeaks by seasoned hawk counter David Brown is included as an excellent example of an eBird report that both adequately describes the species encountered but also provides photo documentation that supports the ID. Evening Grosbeaks had not been seen in Delaware for a couple of decades and any documentation on this irruption year was welcomed.



Female Evening Grosbeak in flight over the Ashland Hawkwatch on 04 November 2020. Photo by David Brown.

### Evening Grosbeak, *Coccothraustes vespertinus*

01 December 2020

Middletown, New Castle County

DBRC 20-32

Written Report (JJ, RB)



During this irruption year, Evening Grosbeaks appeared across the state. Oddly enough, the DBRC received only a few direct reports of this species with most occurrences being reported to eBird only instead. Despite the many reports to eBird, these observers submitted a well-written report that describes an Evening Grosbeak and takes reports of this species into December of that year.

### **Evening Grosbeak, *Coccothraustes vespertinus***

20 December 2020  
Lewes, Sussex County

DBRC 20-43  
eBird Report (written description, photos) (CBr)

This eBird report rounds out the reports reviewed by the DBRC for 2020. The observer did an excellent job of provided some brief descriptive comments on the birds but also provided some clear definitive photos that left the committee with no questions about this report.

### **“Oregon” Dark-eyed Junco, *Oreganus* Group**

26 December 2020  
South Bowers Road, Kent County

DBRC 21-08  
Written Report (BP)

This observer provided an excellent written report of this Junco subspecies group found while participating in the Milford Christmas Bird Count. This report separates the other forms of Dark-eyed Junco, eliminating the expected “Slate-colored” form and the less-likely “Pink-sided”. While reviewing this record, one committee member remarked that it is very satisfying to have details that not only help to review the record but also learn something about the shades of gray discussed while looking at the photographs in the field guides.

### **Henslow’s Sparrow, *Centronyx henslowii***

23 October 2020  
Lewes, Sussex County

DBRC 20-41  
Written Report (BP)

The Henslow’s Sparrow has become somewhat of a unicorn in Delaware. Once a nesting species here, it has all but disappeared from the state, even during migration. While finding one can be a major challenge, identifying it provides another layer of difficulty. Additionally, the observer acknowledged that he submitted this report for the committee to consider how to assess fall reports of Henslow’s Sparrows. This sparrow is very secretive during migration and typically only provides brief views of birds in flight. The written description provides excellent details that not only establish the identity of the bird but also eliminate other similar species making this record easy to accept making this the first accepted record for Delaware not represented by a museum specimen.

### **Western Tanager, *Piranga ludoviciana***

21 January 2022  
Private Residence, Townsend, New Castle County

DBRC 22-03\*  
Written Report, Photos (NR)

Delaware’s first Western Tanager record only occurred in 2018. This record represents the third confirmed occurrence in Delaware and the first for New Castle County. Like the first record in 2018, this bird was found deceased by the observer. At the time of discovery, the observer was unsure of the tanager’s identity and published photos to social media where it was quickly confirmed as a Western Tanager. Photos submitted with the written report made accepting the record an easy decision for the committee. The bird was prepared as a specimen in the Delaware Museum of Nature and Science (Halley, this issue).

**Black-headed Grosbeak, *Pheucticus melanocephalus***

07 April 2022

Private residence, Dover, Kent County

DBRC 22-26

Written Report, Photos (TV)

This record is amazing, considering the rarity of this species in Delaware. Found at a feeder in the Dover area during early spring migration in 2022, this male grosbeak posed nicely for the observer to capture several excellent photographs. The only previous accepted record came in the winter of 1985/1986 and was represented by a single slide. There was no question about the identity of this bird by the committee when reviewing this record because of the exceptional photos showing every angle of the Black-headed Grosbeak to easily distinguish it from the more likely Rose-breasted Grosbeak.



Male Black-headed Grosbeak that visited a feeder at a private residence in Dover on 07 April 2022.

**RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED**

**LeConte's Sparrow, *Ammospiza leconteii***

31 January 2020

Davey Crockett Tract, Little Creek WA

DBRC 20-07

eBird Report (written description)

Given its habit of secrecy, the LeConte's Sparrow is not an easy bird to locate, let alone identify, in Delaware. This observer was fortunate to be in the right place at the right time to encounter an unusual sparrow at the under-birded Davey Crockett Tract in the Little Creek Wildlife Area. Showing itself long enough to make good field marks visible, the description provided in an eBird checklist was well-detailed. Unfortunately, after three rounds of review, the committee decided that the description was not sufficient enough to establish the ID.

**Acknowledgements:**

The DBRC thanks all the many contributors to the records of Delaware Birds, without whom our work would not be possible. The following individuals contributed to the review of the records within this report:

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