

the birds seemed to become active again. In 1986, the weather was warmer but the bright sunny day seemed to keep the birds inactive and our count was significantly less (50 species). The foggy weather did have one drawback in that we were unable to find the Bald Eagles that were seen in the area on the 18th and 20th. The count of Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks was also less than other years (15 in 1987 compared to 40 in 1986).

One important ingredient needed for a high count is luck, also beyond the control of the compiler. For example: Bob Ekblad needed to make a quick trip home and, while hurrying back to Rochester to meet the rest of the group at noon, a Snowy Owl flew across the road right in front of him. Later in the afternoon, Bob and I were in the Mayowood area and saw the Cooper's Hawk fly in front of us and across an open field, giving us a good chance to identify it. Being in the right place at the right time added two species to the list.

All of these ingredients came together for the 25th annual Christmas Bird Count for Rochester. The final report shows a total of

64 species seen on December 19, 1987. A lot of work went into accomplishing this record. The weather provided some excellent conditions. And yes, we had some luck in finding a few unusual species.

Can this record be broken? Yes, I think it can. We missed Bald Eagle, White-throated Sparrow, Brown Thrasher, and several other species that have been seen on at least five other Christmas counts. A Rufous-sided Towhee was present at the Quarry Hill feeders until December 17th, but didn't show up on the 19th. Within the month following the count, there were sightings of Pied-billed Grebe, Common Merganser, and Tundra Swan at Silver Lake. The list of birds seen for the 1987 Rochester Christmas Bird Count is devoid of most northern winter birds, an indication of the mild fall that we had. I think if everything came together, lots of hard work, the right weather conditions, and good luck, it would be possible to see 70 species on a Christmas Bird Count in the Rochester CBC circle. **Route 1, Box 24, Byron, MN 55920**

## Proceedings of the Minnesota Ornithological Records Committee

Kim R. Eckert

Before listing the records voted on through the end of 1987, it is important to report on several decisions made at the annual M.O.R.C. meeting on December 6 which affected the new official Checklist of Minnesota Birds included with this issue of *The Loon*:

— Formerly, the status of species was based on the number of years the species was recorded during the past ten years, and a year was defined as July 1 through June 30 of the following year. For the sake of simplicity in researching records, it was decided to change to a calendar year basis; therefore the new checklist is based on the ten-year base period from January 1, 1978 through December 31, 1987.

— The status of several species was changed from the previous checklist:

1) Mute Swan, formerly Casual, is now considered Regular.

2) Red-throated Loon and Sprague's Pipit, both formerly Regular, are now considered Casual; also now on the Casual list are these formerly Accidental species: Ross' Goose, Mississippi Kite, Snowy Plover, Great Black-backed Gull, Yellow-throated Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting and House Finch.

3) Long-billed Curlew, Red Phalarope, Least Tern and Rosy Finch, all formerly Casual, are now considered Accidental; also now on the Accidental list are these species recorded for the first time since the previous checklist: Clark's Grebe, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Garganey, Mountain Plover, Common Black-headed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Ross' Gull, Sandwich Tern, White-

winged Dove, Magnificent Hummingbird, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Brambling and Cassin's Finch.

4) Trumpeter Swan, formerly on the Accidental (c) list, is now considered Extirpated; in effect, this means the 1976 record from Lake Traverse (*The Loon* 49:234-235) is now considered Unacceptable (i.e., probably released from captivity), and that, until a viable breeding population is established, all Trumpeter Swans seen in Minnesota are "non-countable" releases.

5) Glossy Ibis and Black-shouldered Kite are both deleted from the checklist as a result of Unacceptable votes previously reported on; Chukar is also now considered deleted from the list (it was decided that this introduced species was never firmly established in Ely, and that this species should not have been placed on previous Minnesota checklists).

— Captive vs. wild origin for several species was discussed: Garganey (*The Loon* 59:111-112) is considered an Accidental (b) species (i.e., probably wild); Black-bellied Whistling-Duck is considered an Accidental (c) species (i.e., captive vs. wild probabilities about equal), and three such records are recognized (*The Loon* 58:97-99, 59:217-218, and an unpublished record from Wall Lake, Otter Tail Co. on May 19, 1980); Fulvous Whistling-Duck remains on the Accidental (c) list; and Common Black-Hawk is now deleted from the state list (recent research by Dr. Harrison Tordoff on the 1976 specimen from Bemidji — see *The Loon* 50:31-34 — suggests this individual most likely came from captive origin).

— Because the issue of captive vs. wild origin is complex and difficult, it was decided that votes on "wildness" no longer be taken by mail, and only at a meeting where face-to-face discussion would make a decision easier to reach.

— A first-round vote of 3-4 on a Regular/Casual species is now considered Unacceptable, and a first-round vote of 4-3 on an Accidental (b) species is now Recirculated; see the voting tables in the introduction to the new checklist.

— All records of "Arctic" Loon are now considered to be Pacific Loon; Arctic and Pacific Loons have recently been split into separate species, and it is assumed that all Minnesota records refer to the latter species.

— Although there are no definite and specific

records of Eskimo Curlew in Minnesota, it was decided that the species undoubtedly occurred here in the 19th century and that it should remain on the Minnesota list as an Extirpated species.

— Two formerly Acceptable records were discussed, and it was decided by consensus that both are now Unacceptable: the Ivory Gull in Cook Co. on Oct. 28, 1970 (*The Loon* 42:146), and an unpublished Black Rail in Hennepin Co. on May 13, 1979; the details on the Ivory Gull described the eye as yellow (it should be dark), and the Black Rail description was not written up until eight years later and mentioned chestnut coloration on the wings (it should be on the back).

The following records were voted on June - December, 1987, and found **Acceptable**:

— Garganey, 4/29 - 5/2/87, Goose L., Waseca Co. (vote 10-0; *The Loon* 59:111-112).

— Cape May Warbler, 4/26/87, Theodore Wirth Park, Hennepin Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 59:219).

— White-eyed Vireo, 5/8/87, Bixby W.M.A., Steele Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 59:221).

— Rock Wren, 4/19-20/87, Eagan, Dakota Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 59:156).

— Brant, 3/27/87, Manfred Twp., Lac Qui Parle Co. (vote 6-1; *The Loon* 59:149).

— Yellow-throated Warbler, 5/24 - June/87, Frontenac S.P., Goodhue Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 59:156).

— Laughing Gull, 5/19/87, Duluth, St. Louis Co. (vote 7-0).

— Clark's Grebe, 5/7/87, Duluth, St. Louis Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 59:210-211).

— Snowy Plover, 5/15/87, Agassiz N.W.R., Marshall Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 59:155).

— Laughing Gull, 5/7/87, Agassiz N.W.R., Marshall Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 59:156).

— Common Black-headed Gull, 4/24/87, Heron L., Jackson Co. (vote 6-1; *The Loon* 59:211-212).

— Ruff, 8/1/87, Carlos Avery W.M.A., Chisago Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 59:217).

— Kentucky Warbler, 10/6/87, Minneapolis, Hennepin Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 59:218).

— Sabine's Gull, 9/12/87, Lake Lillian, Kandiyohi Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 60:41).

— California Gull, 10/29-30/87, Minneapolis, Hennepin Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 60:49-50).

— Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, 10/16/87, Prairie Island, Goodhue Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 59:217).

- Pacific Loon, 10/25/87, Lake Lillian, Kandiyohi Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 59:213).
- Yellow-billed Loon, 10/17/87, Stoney Point, St. Louis Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 60:37-38).
- Pacific Loon, 10/17-11/3/87, Duluth, St. Louis Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 59:221).
- House Finch, 10/19-29/87, Forest Lake, Washington Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 60:54-55).
- Great Black-backed Gull, 11/21/87, near Read's Landing, Wabasha Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 60:46-47).
- Carolina Wren, 12/19/87, Owatonna, Steele Co. (vote 7-0)
- Tennessee Warbler, 12/19/87, Grand Marais, Cook Co. (vote 6-1; *The Loon* 60:38-40).
- Iceland Gull, 12/10/87, Grand Marais, Cook Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 60:43-44)
- White-eyed Vireo, 5/17/87, Flandrau S.P., Brown Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 60:46).
- Water Pipit, 8/8/87, West Twin Lake, St. Louis Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 60:50).

The following records were voted on June - December, 1987, and found **Unacceptable**:

- Whooping Crane, 9/20/87, Blaine, Anoka Co. (vote 1-6). Although it was agreed that the two birds described may well have been Whooping Cranes, the birds were not seen well enough as they flew by for a complete description to be given, and it was felt such an unusual species should have more complete details. They were first seen as the observer was driving on a busy highway and as he was trying to brake and pull over, implying the observer could not have given undivided attention to the birds and would have a difficult time clearly seeing them. He also was unable to use binoculars on them until they were flying away and at an angle making it impossible to see any clear field marks.
- Long-tailed Jaeger, 8/26/87, Itasca S.P., Clearwater Co. (vote 3-4). There was no doubt from the details that an adult jaeger was seen, and that the relatively long tail and the implied lack of breast band were suggestive of Long-tailed Jaeger. However, the tail length described did not completely rule out Parasitic Jaeger (tail length of these two species can overlap), and some Parasitics do not show a breast band. It was also felt that such an unusual record should have been more completely described — i.e., there was no

mention of how much white was visible in the primaries or if there was any contrast in color between the flight feathers and the wing coverts (there are diagnostic differences in both these features in Long-tailed).

- McCown's Longspur, 10/17/87, Redrock Ridge, Cottonwood Co. (vote 3-4). Although the description of the tail pattern and black breast band seemed to indicate an adult male McCown's in breeding plumage, the majority had four reservations about the record: 1) the bird was only seen briefly as it flew overhead, and there is no indication why the observer was sure it was a longspur and not a Horned Lark or something else; 2) the tail pattern was only seen from below, and the distinction between the undersides of longspur tails is not clear and difficult to see; 3) the black of the breast could also fit an adult male Lapland or Chestnut-collared Longspur molting from breeding to winter plumage; and 4) it was felt that by mid-October an adult male McCown's Longspur would have already molted out of breeding plumage and not appear as the observer described.

— Mew Gull, 9/19/87, Duluth, St. Louis Co. (vote 6-1, with 7-0 required for Acceptance). The dissenting member agreed that the bird may well have been an adult Mew Gull, but that such an unusual record (there is only one state record) should not have any inconsistencies. However, the observers reported the gull was the "same size as Ring-billed Gulls which were also present," and this is not correct for Mew Gull. The observers, who described themselves as relatively inexperienced with gull identification, also reported seeing a Herring Gull "which had unmarked bill, dark eye with white appearing ring around it" at the same time and place — this tends to cast further doubt on their ability to identify or describe gulls. Also, there was no mention of a darker mantle or larger white "mirrors" in the wing tips, both features of Mew Gull.

— Sprague's Pipit, 8/17/87, Lake Louise S.P., Mower Co. (vote 0-7). The sketchy description did not rule out other possibilities, especially juvenile Horned Lark or Vesper Sparrow; also, the documentation implies that the observers did not consider any other alternate possibilities, even though other species are often misidentified as Sprague's Pipit, a species poorly portrayed in most field guides (for an accurate illustration of this species, see the photos in the *Master Guide*

to *Birding*).

— Boreal Owl, 12/12/87, near Appleton, Swift Co. (vote 0-7). As the observer himself admitted in the documentation, he did not observe any diagnostic features to eliminate

the more likely Northern Saw-whet Owl (e.g., black facial frames, paler bill or spotted forehead).

**9735 North Shore Dr., Duluth, MN 55804**



## **The Summer Season (June 1 to July 31, 1987)**

**Steve Wilson and Mary Shedd**

The trend of unusually warm and dry weather that gave us such a pleasant winter and spring of 1987 continued into June. Temperatures were 3-4°F above average in all regions of the state. It also remained quite dry with rainfall about 1½" below normal in the southern regions and 2-3" below normal in the central and northern regions. Water levels across the state remained low, and by the end of the month much of the states topsoil moisture was low. In July temperatures remained warm statewide, 2-3°F above average. July also brought rain, some of it accompanied by high winds and hail and some in great downpours such as the record 10" that fell on the Twin Cities area on July 22 and 23 and caused flash flooding. Overall precipitation was 1-2" above normal in the central, south central and western regions and 2½-4" above normal elsewhere. By the end of the month, topsoil moisture was surplus or adequate in most of the state.

Despite some complaints that it was "too hot" to bird this summer, 63 observers, a greater number than usual, contributed seasonal reports. These birders, along with the statewide U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Breeding Bird Surveys, reported 261 species, fewer than the average for the last ten-year period, and down from last year's 271 species. Most of the state received good coverage, with only notable holes in coverage being in Kittson and Roseau Counties, the northern half of the east central region plus adjacent Carlton County, and in the counties along the Iowa border from Faribault County west.

Compared to the remarkable summer of 1986 and coming on the heels of one of Minnesota's most unusual spring seasons in many years, the summer of 1987 seemed fairly uneventful. Nevertheless, there were some very interesting and unusual sightings. One of the most exciting was the Magnificent Hum-