

# Proceedings of the Minnesota Ornithological Records Committee

Kim R. Eckert, M.O.R.C. Chairman

There was a meeting of the Committee on 30 June 1996, and the agenda included discussions and decisions on several items, including: the status of two recently split species on the Minnesota list; a revised voting procedure when a record involves Committee members who observe the bird in question; votes on three records documented primarily by photographs (which are difficult to circulate by mail); votes on three records with inconclusive first-round vote totals (which require a recirculated, second-round vote at a meeting); and votes on two potential first state records (which require a vote at a meeting).

In the 40th supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds (*The Auk* 112:819–830), the Rufous-sided Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) was split into two species, Spotted Towhee (*P. maculatus*) and

Eastern Towhee (*P. erythrophthalmus*), and the Northern Oriole (*Icterus galbula*) was also split into two species, Bullock's Oriole (*I. bullockii*) and Baltimore Oriole (*I. galbula*). The Eastern Towhee is the more widespread towhee and regularly breeds in Minnesota, and, for the time being, it was decided to treat the Spotted Towhee as a Casual species until its true status can be determined. Therefore, unless this latter species proves to be of Regular status (which is probably the case), all Spotted Towhee records need to be documented. The Baltimore Oriole is the more widespread oriole and regularly breeds in the state, and it was decided to treat the Bullock's Oriole as an Accidental species since there is only one documented Minnesota record (Duluth, mid-October – 13 December 1968; *The Loon* 41:41–42).

MORC policy had been that a Committee member would not vote on a record if

he were among the observers of the bird, and an alternate would then vote in his place. It was decided to amend this procedure so that now a Committee member will only be ineligible to vote on a record if he is one of those who originally discovers the bird; i.e., if a Committee member subsequently sees a bird found earlier by someone else, he is eligible to vote on the record. There were three reasons for this change: first, there have been many records in which several Committee members were among the observers, and there were not enough alternates available to vote in their places; second, we are aware of no other records committee with a policy similar to the one we had been following, thus suggesting it was unnecessary; and, third (and most importantly), since the best way to judge the validity of a record is to actually observe the bird in question, the vote of a Committee member who is a subsequent observer should be included.

At the 30 June meeting, the following records were voted on and found to be Acceptable:

- Magnificent Hummingbird, 16 June 1994, near Ogilvie, Kanabec Co. (photo record; *The Loon* 67:57).
- Prairie Warbler, June 1996, Cedar Creek Natural History Area, Anoka Co. (photo record).
- Osprey, 26 December 1994, near Stillwater, Washington Co. (recirculated record)
- Rock Ptarmigan, 20 May 1996, Grand Marais, Cook Co. (potential first state record; *The Loon* 68:79–81); research, discussion and vote on captive vs. wild origin still pending.

At the 30 June meeting, the following records were voted on and found to be Unacceptable:

- Barrow's Goldeneye (female), 29 February – 1 March 1996, Blue Lake sewage treatment plant, Scott Co. This individual was in the company of a male Barrow's Goldeneye, and the documentation consists primarily of photographs of the

bird's head profile and bill size. However, the head shape seems to vary from photo to photo, with some of the photos showing the shape to be consistent with a female Common Goldeneye. The bill size as seen in the photos also appears to be entirely consistent with a female Common.

- Laughing Gull, 16 June 1986, York Township, Fillmore Co. This recirculated record had originally been accepted and published (*The Loon* 58:137), but it was reevaluated this year along with seven other previously accepted Laughing Gull records (see below). The observer's description of these two gulls identified as adults is not specific enough to preclude first- or second-summer Franklin's Gulls, which closely resemble adult Laughing Gulls in their dorsal wing pattern. The observer was apparently unaware of this resemblance and, accordingly, does not explain why the birds were not sub-adult Franklin's.

- Laughing Gull, 7 May 1987, Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge, Marshall Co. This recirculated record had also originally been accepted and published (*The Loon* 59:156), but reevaluated this year. As with the previous record, the observer was apparently unaware of the similarity in the wing patterns of sub-adult Franklin's Gulls and adult Laughing Gulls, and, therefore, the description of this apparent adult gull is not specific enough to rule out a first- or second-summer Franklin's Gull.

- Slaty-backed Gull, 8–13 April 1996, Red Wing, Goodhue Co. This potential first state record was studied by three observers, but only one of them felt certain enough of this adult gull's identity to document it as a Slaty-backed. While the Committee unanimously felt the identification might well have been correct, it was also felt that for a record to be accepted, especially a first state record, all the observers should agree on the identity of the bird. Additionally, the identification of an adult Slaty-backed Gull and separation from other dark-mantled gulls is most difficult and relies heavily on a detailed description — or preferably a series of

photos — of the exact dorsal and ventral wing patterns. But the documentation submitted, while lengthy and well written, unfortunately does not provide a thorough enough description of the wings.

The following records were voted on by mail January-June 1996 and found to be Acceptable:

- Yellow-throated Warbler, 18 May – 5 August 1995, Sibley State Park, Kandiyohi Co.

- Black-legged Kittiwake, 12 November 1995, near Orwell Wildlife Management Area, Otter Tail Co. (*The Loon* 68:71).

- Black-legged Kittiwake, 1–2 December 1995, Black Dog Lake, Dakota Co. (*The Loon* 68:71-73).

- Clark's Grebe, 11 August 1995, Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge, Marshall Co.

- Barrow's Goldeneye, 2 December 1995 – March 1996, Blue Lake sewage treatment plant (*The Loon* 68:130–131).

- Swamp Sparrow, 25 November 1995, near Barnum, Carlton Co.

- Iceland Gull, 1 December 1995, Black Dog Lake, Dakota Co. (*The Loon* 67:252–253).

- Barrow's Goldeneye, 26 February 1995, Lac Qui Parle Lake, Lac Qui Parle Co. (*The Loon* 68:175).

- Henslow's Sparrow, 8 October 1995, Black Dog Lake, Dakota Co.

- Henslow's Sparrow, 11 October 1995, near Plummer, Red Lake Co. (*The Loon* 68:74–75).

- Gyrfalcon, January – February 1996, Duluth, St. Louis Co.

- Laughing Gull, 28-30 June 1992, Ruthton, Pipestone Co. (*The Loon* 64:178–179; this and the following record had previously been accepted and published, they were reevaluated this year along with six other Laughing Gull records, and their acceptance was reaffirmed).

- Laughing Gull, 15 June 1995, Cameron Lake, Polk Co. (*The Loon* 67:173–175; see above).

- Chipping Sparrow, 4 December 1995, Hoyt Lakes, St. Louis Co.

- Common Raven, 23 March 1996,

near La Crescent, Houston Co. (*The Loon* 68:177).

- California Gull, 30 March 1996, Fergus Falls, Otter Tail Co. (*The Loon* 68:177).

- Great Black-backed Gull, 30 March 1996, Bloomington, Hennepin Co. (*The Loon* 68:173).

- Savannah Sparrow, 13 December 1995 – 13 March 1996, Brooklyn Park, Hennepin Co. (*The Loon* 68:128).

- Lesser Black-backed Gull, 25 March 1996, Rainy River, Lake Of the Woods Co.

- Lesser Black-backed Gull, 10 – 13 April 1996, Bloomington, Hennepin Co.

- Lesser Black-backed Gull, 22 April 1996, Diamond Lake, Hennepin Co.

- Clark's Grebe, 4 May 1996, Myre-Big Island State Park, Freeborn Co. (*The Loon* 68:174–175).

- Western Tanager, 17 May 1996, Wealthwood, Aitkin Co.

- White-faced Ibis, 15 May 1996, Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge, Lac Qui Parle Co. (*The Loon* 68:179)

The following records were voted on by mail January-June 1996 and found to be Unacceptable:

- Pacific Loon, 7–22 October 1995, Two Harbors, Lake Co. The majority felt the identification was probably correct, but the documentation was apparently only written from memory two months after the observation, and, other than mention of a "slight chin strap", the brief description includes no useful plumage details.

- White-rumped Sandpiper, 7 November 1995, Milford Township, Brown Co. The experienced observer's identification may well have been correct, but the description omits too many important details since neither the white rump nor the longer primary extension are mentioned.

- Western Sandpiper, 2 October 1995, Cottonwood, Lyon Co. The color of the back is described as "golden-marbled", and the size is described as that of a Semipalmated Plover, but neither feature is consistent with Western Sandpiper. In

addition, the observer was unaware of how rare this species is in Minnesota, suggesting the bird was not studied carefully enough for a positive identification.

- Western Sandpiper, 4 September 1995, near Faribault, Rice Co. No description of this individual is provided; the documentation only states that it looked the same as the bird in the other 4 September record below, but this record was unacceptable.

- Western Sandpiper, 4 September 1995, near Faribault, Rice County The identification was based on spotted underparts, rust on the head and scapulars, and a drooped bill; however, these features are also consistent with White-rumped Sandpiper. It is also unlikely that an observer would be able to find Western Sandpipers three times in one month in the same county. The record is also weakened by the fact that the observers were unaware of how unusual the species is in Minnesota.

- Western Sandpiper, 23 September 1995, Phelps Lake, Rice Co. The reasons given for not accepting the above record also apply here. In addition, this record is even weaker since neither size nor leg color were noted.

- Thayer's Gull, 12 November 1995, Hunt Lake, Rice Co. The identification was based on the gull's darker eye and brighter pink legs than on a Herring Gull; however, the iris color is only useful on adult birds and there is no mention of the age of this gull, and there is no consistent difference in the leg colors of these two species. There is also no clear description of the pattern of the wing tips.

- Thayer's Gull, 5 November 1995, Alexander Lake, Rice Co. This identification was apparently based almost entirely on eye color, but, as with the previous record, this field mark works only on adult birds, and there is no mention of this gull's age.

- Laughing Gull, 9–15 June 1983, Frontenac State Park, Goodhue Co. A previously accepted and published record (*The Loon* 55:125–126) which was reevaluated

this year. As with the other records of birds originally identified as adult Laughing Gulls and recently reconsidered (see above), the observers were unaware of the similar wing pattern shown by first- and second-summer Franklin's Gulls, which are not precluded by the documentation.

- Laughing Gull, 27 May 1989, Florence Township, Goodhue Co. An unpublished record not previously voted on and considered unacceptable for the same reasons indicated above.

- Laughing Gull, 27 May 1989, White-water Wildlife Management Area, Wabasha Co. Another previously accepted, published (*The Loon* 61:152–153), and reevaluated record; considered unacceptable for the same reasons indicated above.

- Laughing Gull, 28 May 1989, Duluth, St. Louis Co. Another previously accepted, published (*The Loon* 61:93), and reevaluated record; considered unacceptable for the same reasons indicated above.

- Loggerhead Shrike, 16 December 1995, Audubon, Becker Co. The "short, dark beak with no visible hook" is perhaps suggestive of a Loggerhead, but the description provides no other useful information and therefore is too brief to fully preclude a Northern Shrike.

- Osprey, 16 December 1995, Bloomington Christmas Bird Count, Hennepin Co. The sketchy description is consistent with Osprey, but it does not fully preclude Rough-legged Hawk. The record is also weakened by the apparent inexperience of the observer, and there is a long history of other raptors being misidentified as Ospreys in winter.

- Black Rail, 4 May 1996, Minneapolis, Hennepin Co. The description is too brief and incomplete for such an unusual species to be accepted. The observers also describe themselves as inexperienced, and at one point in the documentation they state, "we're now both skeptical that it was a Black Rail."

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