

Proceedings of the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union Records Committee

Peder H. Svingen, Chairman

The most recent meeting of the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (MOURC) was conducted at the James Ford Bell Museum of Natural History in Minneapolis on 5 December 2004. In attendance and voting at this meeting were MOURC members Renner Anderson (alternate), Paul Budde, Philip Chu, Anthony Hertzell, Ann Kessen (alternate), Jim Mattsson, Drew Smith, Steve Stucker (alternate), Peder Svingen (Chairman), and Tom Tustison.

In accordance with its policy on term limits, the Committee reviewed nominations for membership and elected Ann Kessen as a Regular member, replacing Anthony Hertzell. Renner Anderson also rotated off the Committee at the end of 2004, leaving two alternate positions unfilled. Jim Lind and Bill Marengo were elected to fill these positions.

Among the items on the agenda was additional discussion on the status of the Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*) in Minnesota (45th Supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds, *Auk* 121:985–995). Prior to the meeting, members received a compact disk containing photographs, written documentation, and a spreadsheet showing reports of this “new” species in Minnesota compiled by Peder Svingen.

At the meeting, Steve Stucker reviewed North American distribution of the Cackling Goose and Canada Goose complex (*The Loon* 76:225–228) and summarized band recovery data in Minnesota, and Ann Kessen discussed three specimens. The Committee thanks Dr. Scott Lanyon and Dr. Robert Zink for permission to view specimens and to include these data in its deliberations.

Records of *Branta hutchinsii* were not voted upon individually. Instead, a vote

was taken on the addition of the Cackling Goose to the Minnesota list, and by a 9–1 margin, it was added as a Regular (R) species. The Committee requests further information on the status and occurrence of Cackling Goose and identifiable forms of the Canada Goose in Minnesota. Please send dates, specific locations, number of birds and how identified, along with photographs, sound recordings, written details, and any additional information, to Peder Svingen (address below).

Also discussed were three recirculated records, i.e., those with inconclusive first-round votes; a potential first state record of the Cave Swallow; and a record of the Dovekie documented primarily by video recording. A photograph of a Mississippi Kite from Duluth was discussed and a vote on the identifiability of this physical evidence was taken. The results of these discussions and votes on these records are included below. All of the other records were reviewed and voted on by mail.

The following records were voted on August – December 2004 and were Accepted (also see Not Accepted records #2004-084 and #2004-110, which involved qualified Accepted votes).

- Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, 1 August 2004, Otrej Township, Big Stone County (record #2004-108, vote 5–2).

This juvenile was well-described at rest and in flight. Members not accepting this record were concerned about the early date, i.e., the probability that a bird hatched in 2004 within this species' current breeding range could reach western Minnesota by 1 August, and that similar-looking species including exotic waterfowl or hybrids thereof were not considered.

- Cinnamon Teal, 1 June 2004, Hantho Township, Lac Qui Parle County (record



Record #2004-111, Mississippi Kite, 8 September 2004, Duluth, St. Louis County. Digital photo by Frank Nicoletti.



Record #2004-094, Red Phalarope, 13 September 2004, Salt Lake, Lac Qui Parle County. Digital photo by Dave Cahlander.

#2004-082, vote 7-0).

- Barrow's Goldeneye, 21 November 2004, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, Houston County (record #2004-119, vote 7-0).

Single adult males were documented at this same location 17 November 2001 and 11-15 November 2003, suggesting the possibility of a returning individual.

- Neotropic Cormorant, 15 August 2004, Otrety Township, Big Stone County (record #2004-088, vote 7-0).

Third state record. This adult in alternate plumage was photographed almost exactly one year after a pair was found at Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge (*The Loon* 76:46).

- *Plegadis* ibis, sp. (13 individuals), 2 July 2004, Borchardt Rosin W.M.A., Lac Qui Parle County (recirculated record #2004-084, vote 6-1 for all 13 individuals, please see comments under Not Accepted record).

- *Plegadis* ibis, sp. (2 individuals), 18 September 2004, West Toqua Lake, Graceville Township, Big Stone County (record #2004-118, vote 7-0).

- *Plegadis* ibis, sp. (3 individuals), 3 October 2004, seven miles east of Ortonville, Odessa Township, Big Stone County (record #2004-098, vote 7-0).

- *Plegadis* ibis, sp., 13 October 2004, Black Rush Lake, Lyon County (record #2004-117, vote 7-0).

- *Plegadis* ibis, sp., 7 November 2004,

Prairie View Township, Wilkin County (record #2004-114, vote 7-0).

- Mississippi Kite, 30 August 2004, Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve in Duluth, St. Louis County (record #2004-112, vote 7-0).

- Mississippi Kite, 7 September 2004, Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve in Duluth, St. Louis County (record #2004-113, vote 7-0).

- Mississippi Kite, 8 September 2004, Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve in Duluth, St. Louis County (record #2004-111, vote 7-0; vote on physical evidence 8-2).

All three kites were aged as juveniles and were considered to be different individuals on the basis of plumage details. All ten MOURC members vote on whether or not the identification can be made based on physical evidence alone (in this case, an in-flight photograph taken by Frank Nicoletti). Dissenting opinion held that at least one similar species could not conclusively be eliminated — the remote possibility of Plumbeous Kite (*Ictinea plumbea*), which has never been documented north of Mexico.

- Buff-breasted Sandpiper, 26 June 2004, near Ortonville, Big Stone County (record #2004-089, vote 6-1).

This injured bird established only the second late June record for the state, following one at Agassiz N.W.R., 25 June 1980 (*The Loon* 53:137).

- Red Phalarope, 11-13 September



Record #2004-106, Common Ground-Dove, 18 October 2004, near Beaver Bay, Lake County. Digital photo by Earl Orf.

2004, Salt Lake, Lac Qui Parle County (record #2004-094, vote 7-0).

Written documentation and images of this juvenile were submitted by multiple observers.

- Pomarine Jaeger, 7 September 2004, Duluth, St. Louis County (record #2004-090, vote 7-0).

Sight record of one juvenile. Its size was compared to all nearby Ring-billed Gulls. Its bicolored bill, dark brown head and neck, “chesty” profile, wing width at the base compared to the distance from the trailing edge of the wing to the tail tip, contrastingly pale rump and upper-tail coverts, and heavily barred belly and under-tail coverts, were all noted. Also see Not Accepted record #2004-097.

- Black-headed Gull, 27 September – 17 October 2004, Spirit Lake, Jackson County (record #2004-103, vote 7-0).

One adult, discovered on the Iowa side of the border 26 September 2004, was documented on the Minnesota side the

following day and also was photographed 11 October.

- California Gull, 31 October – 15 November 2004, Lake Calhoun, Minneapolis, Hennepin County (record #2004-109, vote 7-0).

This juvenile was carefully documented by several experienced observers. Distant photographs supported the identification.

- Sabine’s Gull, 15 September 2004, Park Point, Duluth, St. Louis County (record #2004-095, vote 7-0).

- Sabine’s Gull, 16–21 September 2004, Ironton wastewater treatment ponds, Crow Wing County (record #2004-096, vote 7-0).

- Sabine’s Gull, 22 September 2004, Park Point, Duluth, St. Louis County (record #2004-099a, vote 7-0).

- Sabine’s Gull, 24–26 September 2004, Superior Entry, St. Louis County (record #2004-099b, vote 7-0).

Though possibly involving the same individual, several members considered



Record #2004-102, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, 9 October 2004, Duluth, St. Louis County. Digital photo by Tom Auer.



Record #2004-105. Clark's Nutcracker, 14 October 2004, Silver Bay, Lake County. Digital photo by Anthony X. Hertzell.

the 22 September and 24–26 September descriptions separately, since the dates and locations were different. Additional reports of this species at Wisconsin Point 21, 23, 24, and 26 September referred to birds seen only on the Wisconsin side of the Superior Entry.

- Arctic Tern, 25–27 September 2004, Superior Entry, St. Louis County (record #2004-101, vote 7–0).

Third fall record in five years at this location.

- Common Ground-Dove, 17–19 October 2004, near Beaver Bay, Lake County (record #2004-106, vote 7–0).

Second state record, well-documented and photographed by many observers.

- *Selasphorus* hummingbird, sp., 16 November — 3 December 2004, Duluth, St. Louis County (record #2004-110, vote 7–0, please see comments under Not Accepted record).

- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, 6 September 2004, Anna Gronseth Prairie, Wilkin County (record #2004-092, vote 7–0).

- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, 7–9 October 2004, 40th Avenue West, Duluth, St. Louis County (record #2004-102, vote 7–0).

- Clark's Nutcracker, 14–24 October 2004, Silver Bay, Lake County (record #2004-105, vote 7–0).

Continuing the recent trend of discoveries by “young birders” in Minnesota, 4½ year-old Al Robertsen spotted this bird at

a feeder in his family's yard. First Minnesota record since 1986.

- Cliff Swallow, 7 November 2004, Good Harbor Bay, Cook County (record #2004-121, vote 7–0).

The recent trend in late fall vagrancy of the Cave Swallow to the Great Lakes and northeastern North America was understood by the observer, who carefully documented this record late Cliff Swallow.

- Sprague's Pipit, 10–11 October 2004, Red Rock Prairie, Cottonwood County (record #2004-104, vote 7–0).

One of the very few migrant Sprague's Pipits ever photographed in the state.

- Townsend's Warbler, 9–11 September 2004, Linwood Lake, Anoka County (record #2004-093, vote 7–0).

Fifth state record, seen by dozens of observers and photographed.

- Lark Bunting, 6 September 2004, 40th Avenue West, Duluth, St. Louis County (record #2004-091, vote 7–0).

Refound and photographed following its initial discovery.

- Lark Bunting, 4 October 2004, Gooseberry Falls State Park, Lake County (record #2004-120, vote 6–1).

Field notes and sketches submitted by an experienced observer convinced all but one Committee member.

- Lazuli Bunting, 27 May 2004, Moulton Township, Murray County (record #2004-043, vote 5–2).



Record #2004-091, Lark Bunting, 6 September 2004, Duluth, St. Louis County. Digital photo by Mike Hendrickson.

This adult male in alternate plumage was observed at close range. Members not accepting the record were concerned that the written description did not fully address the possibility of hybridization with Indigo Bunting. Indices for evaluating hybrid characteristics were presented in *Auk* 76:443–463, 92:66–80, and *Wilson Bulletin* 87:145–179.

The following records were voted on August – December 2004 and were Not Accepted.

(Please note that a record which is Not Accepted only means that the documentation was not complete or convincing enough to include the sighting in *The Loon*, the journal of the MOU, or in the MOU's archives of confirmed bird records. Such a vote does not necessarily mean the observer misidentified the bird or did not see it. Summaries of the reasons why a record was Not Accepted are included here. These are in no way intended to be critical of the observer. The only purpose is to highlight the difficulties an observer may encounter while identifying or documenting these and similar species.)

- White-faced Ibis (ten individuals) and *Plegadis* ibis, sp. (three individuals, designated birds #8, #11, #12), 2 July 2004, Borchardt Rosin W.M.A., Perry Township, Lac Qui Parle County (recirculated record #2004-084, first vote 4–3, second vote 3–4

for birds #1, #4, #13; vote 0–7 for bird #6; vote 1–6 for bird #10; vote 2–5 for birds #2, #5, #7, #9; vote 3–4 for bird #3); all 13 Accepted as *Plegadis*, sp., vote 6–1.

Though ultimately accepted as *Plegadis* ibises, these 13 birds were observed from a distance that most Committee members considered too far away for critical evaluation of potential hybrid characteristics. Field notes and sketches were submitted for each bird, but for none of them were both the facial skin and iris color described (see *North American Birds* 57:136–139).

- Golden Eagle, 30 June 2003, Murray County (Record #2004-073, vote 2–5).

Documentation for this unseasonal report of a subadult eagle was reviewed more than a year after the sighting. The description was not entirely consistent with Golden Eagle and the majority felt that an immature Bald Eagle could not be eliminated.

- Pomarine Jaeger, 18 September 2004, Superior Entry, St. Louis County (record #2004-097, vote 1–6).

This juvenile jaeger was seen at close range by three experienced observers, two of whom submitted documentation. Unfortunately, the two descriptions were inconsistent regarding critical facets of the identification. One observer stated “belly lighter than flanks yet heavily barred with dark and light pattern” while the other observer’s drawing showed clean white undersides labeled “white breast/belly.” Other discrepancies concerned color of under-tail coverts and whether or not the bill was seen. The identification relied in part on the presence of a “strong double underwing flash.” This is not an infallible criterion for Pomarine Jaeger according to Olsen and Larsson (Skuas and Jaegers, 1997). Identification also relied upon size — the jaeger was said to be either “not larger than a Ring-billed Gull” or “as big or slightly bigger than Ring-billed Gull.” Depending on the sex and age of the species in question, both Parasitic and Pomarine jaegers may appear similar in size to a Ring-billed, so size comparison with more than one or two gulls is needed;

reverse sexual size dimorphism in jaegers makes big female Parasitics overlap in size with small female Ring-billed Gulls.

- California Gull, 15 July 2004, Breckenridge wastewater treatment ponds, Wilkin County (record #2004-085, vote 0-7).

This juvenile was compared to Herring Gull, but it was unclear whether Herring Gulls were present for size comparisons. The bird had a bicolored bill, but juvenile California Gull has a blackish bill at fledging which gradually becomes pale; by October it is sharply two-toned in most individuals (*Birding* 34:540-544).

- Arctic Tern, 9 October 2004, South Kawishiwi River, Lake County (record #2004-107, vote 0-7).

This black-billed tern with an entirely white underbody and partial black cap must have been in juvenal or basic plumage, or a combination of the two, yet its upperwing was described as uniform gray and its underwing showed only a hint of gray on the trailing edge; an Arctic Tern in this plumage would show a black trailing edge on the underside of the outer wing, a carpal bar on the upperwing, and (if a juvenile) whitish secondaries. Three Accepted fall records of this species in Minnesota have involved adults in alternate plumage at the Superior Entry in mid- to late September.

- Dovekie (unknown number of individuals), late October – early November 2003, Lake Minnetonka, Hennepin County (record #2004-116, vote 0-7).

The identification rested primarily on a poor-quality videotape, which did not rule out Bufflehead among other species.

- White-winged Dove, 31 July 2004, Otrey Township, Big Stone County (record #2004-081, vote 2-5).

This bird was seen only briefly, and binoculars were not used. The description omitted color of bare parts, body color, and tail markings.

- White-throated Swift, 28 September 2004, St. Paul, Ramsey County (record #2004-100, vote 3-4).

This bird was not seen with binoculars, but was serendipitously photographed in

flight using a digital camera. While acknowledging the possibility that it was correctly identified, the majority considered the blurred image insufficient for a potential second state record.

- Calliope Hummingbird, 18 September 2004, Springfield, Brown County (record #2004-122, vote 0-7).

This silent female or immature short-tailed hummingbird may have been correctly identified, but the description was incomplete and the observer reported no experience with this species. The upper surface of the tail was green and apparently lacked rufous in the proximal portions of R1-R4, while R3-R5 lacked white tips; these details do not match any age or sex class of the Calliope Hummingbird.

- Rufous Hummingbird, 16 November – 3 December 2004, Duluth, St. Louis County (record #2004-110, Not Accepted as Rufous Hummingbird, vote 1-6; but Accepted as *Selasphorus*, sp., vote 7-0).

This adult female hummingbird was carefully studied and hundreds of images were obtained by many observers over a period of 2½ weeks. Most observers and expert opinion leaned towards its identification as Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*), but in-hand examination could not be arranged and even the best photographs of the spread tail were insufficient to conclusively eliminate the very similar Allen's Hummingbird (*S. sasin*).

- Say's Phoebe, 4 August 2004, Florida Township, Yellow Medicine County (recirculated record #2004-086, first vote 4-3, second vote 3-4).

This bird was described as showing a "rosy" or "rosy-peach" belly and undertail coverts, and "pale gray" wing linings, which are not typical for this species and suggest the possibility of Vermilion Flycatcher. The observer's experience with this species and the light conditions were not mentioned — the latter an important consideration, since identification relied largely on coloration of the underparts.

- Cave Swallow, 15 July 2004, Breckenridge wastewater treatment ponds, Wilkin County (record #2004-087, vote 0-10).

All ten MOURC members vote on potential first state records. This bird was seen only in flight and was initially identified by voice, but the observer did not mention previous experience with this species, including its calls. The description of its back indicated that it was an adult bird, but the forehead was “tan, with a rusty tinge” (suggesting an immature bird — the forehead should be reddish in adult Cave Swallow). The documentation also lacked basic information about the circumstances of this sighting, including light conditions, observer orientation with respect to the sun, and whether the sketch was prepared before or after consulting field guides or other references. Though recently increasing as a vagrant to north-eastern North America and predicted to occur in Minnesota, almost all extralimital records of the Cave Swallow have been in late October or early November.

- Sprague’s Pipit, 27 July 2004, Keene Township, Clay County (record #2004-080, vote 3–4).

Call notes supported the identification, but this species’ distinctive white outer tail feathers and whitish wing bars were not noted. Field notes were not submitted.

- Worm-eating Warbler, 18 May 2004, Big Stone N.W.R., Lac Qui Parle County (recirculated record #2004-063, first vote 4–3, second vote 4–3).

The observer reported recognizing its call note in flight, but the documentation lacked information about the observer’s experience with this species (including its call notes), whether or not a field guide was used, and how other species were eliminated. Observers are encouraged to either use the “Request for Documentation” form or follow its format exactly; the form can be mailed upon request or downloaded (please note new URL) under “Documents for Downloading” at <http://moumn.org/>.

- Lark Bunting, 29 June – 18 July 2004, Springfield, Brown County (record #2004-083, vote 2–5).

The observer reported no experience with this species. The description was incomplete, and the bird’s behavior and

habitat were atypical for Lark Bunting. Other observers were unable to confirm the identification.

The efforts of all those observers who document reports of unusual species are appreciated, whether or not the records are Accepted. An increasing number of submissions have included digital documentation (audio, video, or photographic) in recent years — a most welcome trend — but observers are encouraged to also take field notes and sketches and submit a written description for unusual species, even if documented by digital media.

The Committee acknowledges with thanks those who provided written documentation for the records listed in this article: Tom Auer, Jo & Steve Blanich, Jerry Bonkoski, Conny Brunell, Paul Budde, Doug Chapman, Philip Chu, Nelvina De Kam, Bob Dunlap, Kim Eckert, Eddy Edwards, Laura Erickson, Ron Erpelding, Bruce Fall, Cole Foster, Mike Hendrickson, Anthony Hertzler, Paul Jantscher, Jeanie Jopru, Doug Kieser, Jim Lind, Jim Mattsson, David Neitzel, Frank Nicoletti, Bob O’Connor, Ryan Perala, Jackie Potts, Bob Russell, Roger Schroeder, Drew Smith, Peder Svingen, Bill Unzen, Josh Watson, and Nathan Wersal.

There were also many observers who documented records of Regular species which were not voted on by the Committee; although these records are not cited here, the efforts of these individuals are greatly appreciated. The Committee wishes to especially thank Tom Auer, Conny Brunell, Steve Falkowski, Ben Fritchman, Mike Hendrickson, and Josh Watson for documenting many such records during the second half of 2004.

The Committee welcomes questions or comments from MOU members regarding any record in particular or our procedures in general. Please contact Peder Svingen by e-mail at psvingen@d.umn.edu or at the address below. Summary: 45 records voted on / 30 Accepted, 15 Not Accepted.

2602 East 4th Street, Duluth, MN 55812.