

Seventh Annual Report of the Massachusetts Avian Records Committee

Marjorie Rines, Secretary

Changes in technology over the past few years have changed the way that the MARC deals with submitted reports. More and more birders are carrying digital or video cameras, and photographs of rarities are published on the World Wide Web within hours of the initial sighting. Less than a decade ago photographs would have had to be circulated to the nine members, while today an inexpensive CD (compact disc), including all photographs and even field sketches, can be sent to each member. In addition, the internet has provided instant access to expert ornithologists from all over the world through the ID-Frontiers listserv. In the past, a troublesome identification would often involve months, or even years, of correspondence with these experts.

This technology has been a tremendous asset to the MARC in supplementing written reports, but in a few instances at a cost to the written record. Several of the records listed below were accepted based solely on photographic evidence, including the first state record of Lazuli Bunting. Written documentation is part of our ornithological history, but digital photographs are part of a technology that is changing daily. All photos are archived on CD, but the concern remains that the graphic format or the CD itself may become obsolete. The committee is grateful to the many reporters who spent hours preparing written reports and hopes that other observers will follow their example.

This year marked the addition of 6 new species to the MARC's official state list, bringing the total to 476 species. This total includes three composite taxa: Large swift species (*Apus/Cypsiloides* species), Sulphur-bellied/Streaked Flycatcher, and Boat-tailed/Great-tailed Grackle. **Barnacle Goose** had been on the MARC's supplemental list which states that "captive origin cannot be discounted." A historical pattern of occurrence in the northeast plus a rash of sightings along the Atlantic coast in the winter of 2001-2002 convinced the Committee that this was a wild individual. A **Pacific Golden-Plover** was discovered on Plum Island, lingering two weeks to allow many birders to enjoy it, but a **Broad-billed Sandpiper**, also on Plum Island, was not as cooperative and could not be relocated after the initial sighting. A large tern at South Beach in Chatham initially defied identification but was ultimately identified as **Elegant Tern**. The islands south of Cape Cod can often produce good birds, but a **Lazuli Bunting** on Nantucket and a **Shiny Cowbird** on Martha's Vineyard were extraordinary.

Accepted Reports

Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*), #02-03, January 26, 2002, Rockport (Essex), M. Lynch. This species now appears along the Massachusetts coast with greater

frequency, with an average of four individuals reported annually between October and June (since 1997).

White-faced Storm-Petrel (*Pelagodroma marina*), #02-28, September 7-8, 2002, Atlantis Canyon, R. Donovan, B. Zuzevich. This species is rarely reported, but it probably occurs regularly over the warm water canyons beyond the range of whale watch boats typically used by birders seeking pelagic species. The observers were on an offshore fishing boat to the Atlantis Canyon, and they were lucky enough to spot this species for the second year in a row.

Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*), #02-27, adult female September 1-4, 2002, outer Cape Cod (Barnstable), M. + T. Gooley, B. Nikula et al. This southern pelagic wanderer makes occasional peregrinations up the Atlantic coast but rarely lingers in one location for four days. Photographs and description eliminated Lesser Frigatebird (*F. ariel*), which has been documented in Maine.

Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*) #02-01, Wakefield (Middlesex) and Lynnfield (Essex), February 17-19, 2002, F. + P. Vale, M. Rines et al. A single adult associating with a flock of Canada Geese was unbanded and exhibited the skittish behavior of a wild bird. A photograph left no question of its identity, only its origin. Barnacle Goose has occurred in Massachusetts on several occasions, but it is often kept in captivity, and until now the Committee has included it on its Supplemental List, which states "captive origin cannot be discounted." In the winter of 2001-2002 there was a small invasion of Barnacle Geese along the North American east coast from Virginia to New Brunswick, with a total of eight to twelve individuals being reported (see *North American Birds*, Vol. 56, No. 2: p. 142). Historical sightings in North America are clustered in the northeast from October through April, the time when these geese could be expected to appear here as true vagrants from Greenland. The Committee agreed that the evidence was compelling that this was a wild individual and accepted it for the official state list.

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*), #02-05, March 17, 2002, Acoaxet (Bristol), M. Lynch, S. Carroll; #01-20, 12/28, 2001, Lakeville (Plymouth), M. Faherty. Only female Tufted Ducks are on the MARC review list. The Acoaxet duck has reappeared each winter since 1998, site fidelity behavior typical of this species. The Lakeville bird appears to be a new arrival.

Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*), #98-29, October 3, 1998, Provincetown (Barnstable), J. Young. Two immature Swainson's Hawks were reported with a full description of the first but a sketchier description of the second, which prompted the Committee to accept only the first bird described.

Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), #02-09A, April 14, 2002, Wellfleet (Barnstable), L. Bostrom; #02-09B, April 18-May 5, 2002, Chatham, R. Clem, B. Nikula. The Wellfleet observer was able to study this male only 20 yards away, noting the gray head, long gray tail with broad black band, and (when it flew off) the wings rusty red to the wrist and black to the tips. Although she reported it to the Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, word did not get out to the birding community until four days

later and 15 miles away in Chatham, when another observer rediscovered it, presumably the same individual. In the following two and a half weeks it was seen and photographed by scores of birders. The only other Massachusetts sighting (and the first North American record) of this extraordinary European vagrant was over a century ago, in 1887 in Hull. (*See additional article in this issue - ed.*)

Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*), #01-18, December 17, 2001-April 30, 2002, Boston (Suffolk), R. Donovan et al.; #02-02, January 13, 2002, Salisbury (Essex), T. Raymond. A dark Gyr Falcon discovered on the Boston Christmas Bird Count (#01-18) had a band on its leg which proved it to be the same bird that had overwintered at Logan Airport in early 1998 (*Bird Observer*, Vol. 30, No. 6: p. 399). During its stay it often left to hunt at Logan but returned regularly to its perch where it was seen, enjoyed, and photographed by hundreds. A chocolate brown Gyr Falcon in Salisbury (#02-02) treated the observer to three long looks over the course of fifty minutes as it passed as close as only six feet away.

Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*), #01-25, October 26, 2001, Marshfield (Plymouth), D. Furbish; #02-31, September 18, 2002, Dorchester (Suffolk), R. Donovan. Furbish was mowing the fields at Daniel Webster Wildlife Sanctuary, when the bird flushed only 5 feet away. He was optimistically wearing his binoculars, having flushed a Yellow Rail two years before while doing the same task. Donovan was standing in Neponset Marsh, when the bird flushed from only 20 feet away, flew about 20 yards, and disappeared. In both cases, the view was brief, but the distinctive plumage pattern was observed.

Pacific Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*), #02-10, April 21-May 5, 2002, Plum Island (Essex), R. Heil, J. Smith et al. The first state record of this Eurasian vagrant was an impressive discovery, bringing a parade of admirers. A significant rarity on the west coast of the lower 48 states, it is only the third Atlantic coast record: the first, a female shot in Maine in September of 1911, and the second an adult in prebasic molt in September 2001 in New Jersey. This bird, a probable male, was nearly in alternate plumage upon arrival and effectively in full alternate plumage by the end of its stay. The observer was careful to eliminate other golden-plovers, including European (*P. apricaria*), which occurs with some regularity in the Canadian Maritimes at this time of year. The extensive written documentation was supplemented by a number of photographs. (*See additional article in this issue - ed.*)

Bar-tailed Godwit, Siberian race (*Limosa lapponica baueri*), #02-18, May 4, 2002, Edgartown (Dukes), V. Laux, S. Anderson. This breeding plumaged bird stayed only one day, but it was seen by many local birders. Nearly twenty reports of Bar-tailed Godwit have been recorded in Massachusetts, all but four since 1976. The nominate race of this species (*L. l. lapponica*) breeds in northern Europe and comprises the bulk of Massachusetts records, while *L. l. baueri* breeds in eastern Siberia and western Alaska. The only other record of *baueri* in Massachusetts was recorded on Monomoy Island in August 1988.

Red-necked Stint (*Calidris ruficollis*) #02-25A and B, August 1-2, 2002, Chatham (Barnstable), R. Heil, J. Trimble. An alternate plumaged stint was discovered in a

flock of shorebirds, but the first observer was only able to study it for a total of several minutes; the second, for even less time, as the flock was continually flushed by a Northern Harrier. After searching for half an hour, a stint was located by the second observer, but astonishingly the plumage was paler, distinctly a second bird. The second bird was photographed the following day, but the first bird was never relocated.

Red-necked/Little Stint (*Calidris ruficollis/minuta*), #01-12, August 13, 2001, Chatham (Barnstable), B. Nikula, P. Trull. The brightly-colored calidrid at the edge of a large flock of roosting Semipalmated Sandpipers stood out from the crowd, but after only a few minutes a jaeger flushed the entire flock, and the observers were unable to relocate the bird. The buffy orange on the face to lower breast indicated either *C. ruficollis* or *minuta*, and a band of streaks below the color suggested *C. ruficollis*, but the observers were conservative, given observation at 100 feet under poor light conditions. The first Massachusetts records of both of these species overlapped in June of 1980 on nearby Monomoy Island.

Broad-billed Sandpiper (*Limicola falcinellus*) #02-30, September 10, 2002, Plum Island (Essex), R. Heil. While counting shorebirds the observer was shocked to come upon a Broad-billed Sandpiper among a group of calidrids. He was able to study it with a 60x zoom for a total of 15 minutes from as close as 80 yards and in excellent light. At that distance even the specific feather detail was clear, and he was able to age it as a worn juvenile. This Asian vagrant is generally uncommon even within its range, but in August of 2002 there was an influx of Broad-bills in Europe, with greater than normal numbers from England to Hungary. The appearance of this individual is most likely associated with this incursion, although an Asian origin cannot be ruled out. The only photographically documented record in North America (outside Alaska) was in New York in August 1998 (*North American Birds*, Vol. 53, No. 1: p. 36), but there is a convincing sight record from Nova Scotia in September 1990 (*American Birds*, Vol. 45, No. 1: p. 69). Broad-billed Sandpiper is a very distinctive species, with a unique bill and head pattern. Despite the fact that there was only a single observer, the description and accompanying sketch eliminated the possibility of any other species for this first state record. (*See additional article in this issue - ed.*)

Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*), #01-16, December 31, 2001, Nantucket (Nantucket), F. Gallo, G. d'Entremont. Low Beach on Nantucket is without doubt one of the best locations in the state for winter gulls, with thousands of individuals, often including dozens of "Kumlien's" Iceland Gulls (*L. glaucoides kumlieni*). The reporter included convincing details of this adult bird, including photographs showing it side by side with a Kumlien's.

Elegant Tern (*Sterna elegans*), #02-26, August 4; August 15-28, 2002, Chatham (Barnstable), B. Nikula, G. Wood et al. Wood et al. originally discovered this bird on August 4 and realized it was something different. He described it on the Massbird listserve, tentatively suggesting West African Royal Tern (*S. maxima albidorsalis*) and inviting other birders to check it out. The bird was rediscovered by Nikula on August

15, who photographed it, published photos on the web, and suggested the possibility of first-summer Elegant Tern. In the days that followed, numerous birders saw and photographed this individual, with additional photographs posted on the web, including one comparing plumages of tern skins from Harvard's collection. There was extensive e-mail discussion on the ID-Frontiers listserv, which includes many experts on bird identification. Because the rump of the bird was pale gray, Lesser Crested Tern (*S. bengalensis*) was posited, but it was pointed out that this may not be uncommon in first-year and winter Elegant Terns. The discussion from ID-Frontiers was included as part of the report to the MARC, giving the Committee instant expert input, a luxury not available before the advent of the internet. The acceptance of this southwestern tern represents a first state record and only a third record for the Atlantic coast.

Bridled Tern (*Sterna anaethetus*), #02-29, September 7-8, 2002, Atlantis Canyon, R. Donovan, B. Zuzevich. An adult Bridled Tern passed only 20 yards in front of the first observer who called to the second, and both got excellent sunlit views. When it crossed the bow of the boat, it was joined by a second individual. The observer described the extensive white outer tail feathers and brownish plumage that differentiates it from the similar Sooty Tern.

Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*). This species was added to the official State List in March of 2000 but was erroneously omitted from previous reports. Monk Parakeet is native to South America, but escaped cage birds thrived even in the harsh winter conditions of northeast North America. They have been breeding for many years in nearby Rhode Island, and the appearance of birds in Massachusetts, especially those in Bristol County, are undoubtedly from this population. While Monk Parakeet has yet to be proven to breed in Massachusetts, its occurrence is clearly from a well-established population, and it joins other introduced species such as House Sparrow and European Starling on the official State List.

Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*), #96-15, September 1996 to October 2002, Agawam (Hampden), L. Fieldstad, T. Gagnon, T. Lloyd-Evans; #02-19, September 17-October 1, 2002, Stow (Middlesex), B. + W. Howell; #2-21, September 24-October 20, 2002, Amherst (Hampshire), T. Priest et al. Fall *Selasphorus* hummingbirds are nearly always immature or female types. The Stow bird was a stunning adult male Rufous, both photographed and described. The Amherst bird was a hatch-year female, but was netted and measured to confirm species. The Agawam bird was still visiting freezing feeders in November 1996, and a permit was obtained from MassWildlife to house the bird in a greenhouse for the winter. Before it was released the following spring, it was measured and banded and identified as a female *rufus*. An intriguing saga evolved when, the following fall, and many more after, the same individual showed up at the same feeder, and spent its winters in the greenhouse. In the fall of 2002, it appeared once again but disappeared the day before it was scheduled to be netted and taken inside. *It is important to note that MassWildlife will no longer issue such permits.*

***Selasphorus* species**, #02-06, November 30, 2001-January 21, 2002, Chatham (Barnstable), B. Nikula et al; #02-22, October 6-20, 2002, Princeton (Worcester), B. Van Dusen et al.; #02-23, October 13-21, 2002, Athol (Worcester), B. Fregeau et al.; #02-24A, September 15-October 19, 2002 and #02-24B, November 8-19, 2002, Newbury (Essex), S. Stichter et al. #02-20, September 22-24, 2002, Essex (Essex), P. Brown et al. An unprecedented “invasion” of *Selasphorus* hummingbirds took place in the fall of 2002, with two birds (#02-24A and B) actually showing up together at the same feeder. All of these birds were photographed, making the MARC decisions easier.

Say’s Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*), #02-14, 9/18, 2002, Northampton (Hampshire), C. Gentes et al. The original observer was not familiar with this species when he discovered it perched on a telephone wire in the Mass Audubon Arcadia Sanctuary, but he did all the right things: watched it, took notes, and watched it some more, before he consulted a field guide. He was then able to notify other local birders, so many were able to enjoy seeing this bird. This western vagrant is extremely rare in Massachusetts, with approximately 20 records, the majority seen from early September through mid-October, and, like this bird, they are typically seen only for a single day.

Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*), #01-17A, November 15, 2001, Gloucester (Essex), J. Paluzzi et al.; #01-17B, 12/16-22, 2001, Gloucester, R. Lockwood et al. The first Massachusetts record of this western species was as recent as 1972, yet since 1997 there have been a total of at least eight individuals reported. The two records above might have represented the same bird, but the two descriptions varied: the first described the belly as “faint yellow,” and the second as “strikingly bright.” A month and a mile separated the sightings, and it is likely that they represent two individuals.

Cassin’s Kingbird (*Tyrannus vociferans*), #02-34, November 1-2, 2002, Whately (Franklin), R. Packard et al. The observer was driving when the movement of this flycatcher caught his eye. He stopped to watch as the bird flew and spread its tail, showing no white outer tail feathers as would have been apparent in a Western Kingbird (*T. verticalis*). He noted a thin tan tip of the tail, conspicuous white sub-moustachial, and thin blackish mask, and, consulting his field guide, he realized he was seeing a Cassin’s Kingbird. The bird was seen by many other birders, and photographs were published on the internet. This is only the third state record of this southwestern flycatcher, the first on October 21, 1962, and the second, October 9, 1965, on Monomoy Island.

Blue-headed Vireo (*Vireo solitarius*), #01-21, December 23, 2001, N. Truro (Barnstable), M. Lynch. An individual seen on the Truro Christmas Bird Count was well beyond the normal departure date for this species.

Gray Jay (*Perisoreus canadensis*), #01-15, December 2-31, 2001 Windsor (Berkshire), C. Quinlan, C. Marantz. The winter of 2001-2002 was good for northern species, and this individual visiting a feeder in Windsor was seen and photographed by many.

Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*), #02-04, February 4-10, 2002, Essex (Essex), J. Behnke, P. Brown (photo). This western thrush has been recorded in Massachusetts less than a dozen times, typically in early winter. Details were sparse, but photographs posted on the internet were definitive.

Townsend's Warbler (*Dendroica townsendi*), #01-19, December 28, 2001-February 3, 2002, Centerville (Barnstable), S. Johnson et al. Less than a dozen occurrences of this western species have been reported in Massachusetts, the first in 1978. This immature male at a feeder was feeding on suet pieces and on insects when available.

Connecticut Warbler (*Oporornis agilis*), #01-23, November 25, 2001 (Suffolk), Boston, R. Donovan. Few Connecticut Warblers linger after the first week of October, and *Oporornis* warblers seen this late are more often the very rare MacGillivray's (*O. tolmiei*). The observer got a clear view and documented it carefully.

Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*), #01-22, March 29-April 28, 2001, Naushon Island (Dukes), S. Storer; #02-11, March 24-April 7, 2002, Westport (Bristol), S. Bolton, P. Brown (photo). Neither of these reports was accompanied by written documentation, but photographs were definitive. Spring sightings of this western vagrant are very unusual, and it is likely both birds had overwintered.

Lazuli Bunting (*Passerina amoena*), #02-12, May 5-10, 2002, Nantucket (Nantucket), M. Aguiar, E. Ray (photo) et al. Lazuli Bunting is a common western songbird closely related to our Indigo Bunting. Although it often wanders east of its territory to the Midwestern states, it has only been recorded once or twice in the northeast. This first state record appeared in the middle of spring migration on Nantucket. It is shocking that a report of this importance was completely undocumented in writing, but the MARC could not ignore definitive photographs of this male that were vouched for by reliable sources and posted on the internet. The Massbird listserve included a report of a purported female, but the message included no description other than "the bird does have more noticeable wingbars than the Indigos near it," so only the male was accepted.

Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*), #02-35, November 9, 2002, Ipswich (Essex), R. Hamburger et al. A bird club group searching a muddy farm field saw a flock of blackbirds fly in, and noticed a grayish-brown bird with a dark eye. It initially suggested Brown-headed Cowbird until closer scrutiny revealed a thin bill, slender structure, and longer tail, and it was identified as a female Brewer's Blackbird. Common in central and western North America, this species has become almost annual in recent years.

Boat-tailed/Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus major/mexicanus*), #02-33B, October 27, 2002, Newburyport (Essex), R. Heil, J. Smith. A large male grackle flew out of the salt marsh and continued past the observers, perched on a railing briefly, then flew off and disappeared. Its large size and extremely long, keel-shaped tail made it clear that it was either *Q. major* or *Q. mexicanus*, but the brief view did not allow for detailed observation. Great-tailed Grackle is a western species that is typically found in pastures and second-growth woods and scrub. Boat-tailed is an eastern species

partial to salt marshes, and it has already been recorded as breeding in Connecticut. The observers submitted this report as *Q. major* based on location and habitat, but as they were not able to definitively identify it as such, the Committee accepted it as one of this *Quiscalus* pair.

Shiny Cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*), #02-32, October 14, 2002, Edgartown (Dukes), V. Laux et al. This South American species is rapidly expanding its range and is already established as a breeder in Florida. There have been sightings all along the lower Atlantic coast, and it was only a matter of time before it was recorded in Massachusetts. The observer glimpsed a purplish blackbird perched on a chimney. Hoping for a Brewer's Blackbird, he raised his binoculars and was astonished to instantly recognize it as a male Shiny Cowbird. Like the Brown-headed Cowbird, Shiny Cowbird is a brood parasite, so this first state record is a dubious distinction.

Records Not Accepted:

Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*), #02-08A, March 14, 2002, Rockport (Essex). Both date and location are reasonable for Pacific Loon, but the description could not rule out a small Common Loon.

Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*), #02-37, November 15, 2002, Wachusett Reservoir, Boylston (Worcester). Details were suggestive of Western Grebe, but not conclusive. Virtually all Western Grebes seen in Massachusetts have been at the coast.

Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*), #02-13, June 1, 2002, Lowell (Middlesex). The description of this bird was very good for Anhinga, but the observation was made without binoculars, and the observer did not make the identification until she bought a field guide a month and a half later. This observation may well have been an Anhinga, but the circumstances weighed against it in the voting.

"Great White Heron" (*Ardea herodias*), #02-16, September 16, 2002, Groton (Middlesex). This color morph of Great Blue Heron is restricted to the coast of southern Florida, where it is a permanent resident. The only record for Massachusetts is a bird at Nauset Marsh (Eastham) in late summer of 1996, seen by many, but never acted on by the MARC (subspecies and color morphs are acted upon at the MARC's discretion). The description of this individual was too scanty to accept a species so rare in Massachusetts.

Eskimo Curlew (*Numenius borealis*), #02-17, September 5, 2002, Edgartown (Dukes). As one Committee member put it, "Eskimo Curlew has been presumed extinct by many ornithologists for decades, probably correctly so. The rarer the bird, the higher the evidence bar that must be hurdled. 'Presumed extinct' is pretty rare." Other members commented that Little Curlew (*N. minutus*) could not be eliminated.


Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*), #01-11, September 29, 2001, Mt. Wachusett (Worcester). An immature reported by two hawk watchers was well described in shape and behavior, but the report lacked details on plumage.

Three-toed Woodpecker (*Picoides tridactylus*), #02-15, August 15, 2002, Sheffield (Berkshire). Details were skimpy on this sighting and could not rule out Hairy Woodpecker or Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*), #02-07, May 26, 2002, Mashpee (Barnstable). A bird loosely associating with a flock of Horned Larks was noticed by a group of birders as being different. Details were scanty and could not rule out juvenile Horned Lark.

Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*), #01-26, October 13, 2001, Plum Island (Essex). The description could not rule out Rusty Blackbird.

The Massachusetts Avian Records Committee (MARC) was formed to evaluate reports of rare and difficult-to-identify species, as designated on its review list <<http://massbird.org/MARC/MARCreviewlist.htm>>. The MARC also evaluates any new state record and records of species that are geographically or temporally rare. Previous MARC reports have appeared in *Bird Observer*, and readers may also find copies of these reports at the MARC web site at <<http://Massbird.org/MARC/>>. MARC members include Steve Arena, Jim Baird, Rick Heil, Chris Leahy, Wayne Petersen, Scott Sumner, Jeremiah Trimble, Richard Veit, and Trevor Lloyd-Evans (Chair). Marjorie Rines is the Secretary.

Erratum: In the Sixth report of the MARC, "Black" Brant (*Branta bernicla nigricans*, file #00-26) was reported as having been seen in Mashpee (Barnstable County). It was seen in Plymouth (Plymouth County). 



TOWNSEND'S WARBLER BY JIM BAIRD