

New Hampshire Rare Birds Committee Decisions

Continuing the practice started last year, the results of the New Hampshire Rare Birds Committee (NHRBC) decisions on rare birds from the four previous seasons are published here. In this issue you will find the NHRBC decisions for Spring, Summer, and Fall 1996, and Winter 1996-97.

In addition, the NHRBC has begun going back in time and evaluating records that predate the formation of the committee. These decisions will also be published in *New Hampshire Bird Records (NHBR)* once all records for a given year have been considered. Thus, in this issue you will find decisions for Spring, Summer, and Fall 1994, and Winter 1994-95.

Finally, there are occasional records that the committee is unable to evaluate in time for publication in the appropriate *NHBR* season. As a result, the decisions for these records also appear in the following summary, as is the case with the sedge wrens from Spring 1995.

The NHRBC is an independent Technical Advisory Committee to *NHBR*. It reviews unusual sightings in an effort to maintain accuracy and scientific integrity for both *NHBR* and the historical database of birds sightings maintained by the Audubon Society of New Hampshire. For information on the committee and its decision making process please see the article in the Summer 96 issue of *NHBR*. The Fall 96 issue has an article on how to document rare bird sightings.

The current committee members are Dennis Abbott, Alan Delorey, Peter Hunt, Steve Mirick, Bob Quinn, Andrea Robbins, and George Robbins. Feel free to contact any one of them if you have questions.

1996 Decisions Spring 1996

Species accepted by the committee:

American White Pelican, Great Bay on May 1. This bird was videotaped, providing a first state record.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Hampton from April 27 through May 19. Another photographed bird.

Sandhill Crane, Portsmouth on March 29. Adequate description of a fairly distinctive species.

Lesser Black-backed Gull, Dover on March 20. Good description.

Lesser Black-backed Gull, Manchester on March 29. An excellent description of the difficult first-winter plumage.

Arctic Tern, Franconia on May 10. Well-described.

White-eyed Vireo, Hollis on May 11. Well-described, in a season with several southern songbirds in May.

Lawrence's Warbler - hybrid, Bradford on May 15. Excellent photograph of this rare hybrid.

Kentucky Warbler, Bedford on May 11. A good description of another southern visitor.
Summer Tanager, Squam Lake on May 20. Well-described.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Keene on April 23. A somewhat early date, but good description.

Blue Grosbeak, Hudson on April 20. Well-described, Indigo Bunting eliminated.

Yellow-headed Blackbird, East Kingston on March 27. Well-described.

Bullock's Oriole, Pembroke on May 5. An excellent description of this newly split species.

Hoary Redpoll, Rochester on April 11. Well-described.

Hoary Redpoll, Littleton on April 23. Well-described, with identifiable photograph.

Both this and the previous bird were part of a large redpoll flight in the winter of 1995-96.

Species not accepted by the committee:

Golden Eagle, Hinsdale on April 27. Observer did not conclusively eliminate immature Bald Eagle.

Short-billed Dowitcher, Penacook on April 21. Observer did not eliminate Common Snipe, especially considering the very early date.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, New Boston on May 18. Insufficient details for a sighting of this rarity. Sighting also very brief and without optics.

Varied Thrush, Rye on April 30. Poor viewing conditions did not preclude a poorly seen American Robin.

Summer 1996

Species accepted by the committee:

Pacific Loon, Rye on June 14 and 16. Excellent field descriptions by independent observers familiar with the species.

Manx Shearwater, Rye on July 13. Good description of birds seen from shore during tropical storm Bertha.

Manx Shearwater, Jeffrey's Ledge (Rye) on July 14. Good description of a bird seen well out to sea (where they are expected).

American Oystercatcher, Seabrook on July 9. An excellent description with a passable photograph of this easy to identify species.

Red-necked Phalarope, offshore Rye on July 22. Good description of a species likely at this time and place.

Little Gull, Rye on June 20 and July 20, Hampton on July 14, and North Hampton on July 20. All of these sightings were well documented with field notes and in some cases photographs. They are considered to represent three or four different individuals.

Royal Tern, Seabrook on July 10. Photographs and a good description by an observer familiar with the species.

Royal Tern, Seabrook on July 17. An excellent description that is good enough to suggest that this was the same bird as above (different observer).

Arctic Tern, Hampton on June 12. A good description separating this species from the Common Tern.

Three-toed Woodpecker, Pittsburg on June 9. A good description of this species after the observer had seen a Black-backed Woodpecker.

Blue Grosbeak, Jackson on June 21. An excellent description of a bird seen at close range for an extended period of time.

Clay-colored Sparrow, Lee on June 8. Good description of a bird seen and heard by many.

Clay-colored Sparrow, Haverhill on June 27. A heard-only bird accepted based on the experience of the observer with this species' song. It is increasing in NH.

Grasshopper Sparrow, Enfield on June 3 (heard only). See comment on the previous Clay-colored Sparrow. The observer has training and experience conducting grassland bird surveys.

Fox Sparrow, Pittsburg on June 6. Excellent description and a tape recording of the song.

Species not accepted by the committee:

Brown Pelican, North Hampton on June 13. Not accepted due to a fairly brief view of a very distant bird. This species would need impeccable details to be accepted due to its rarity in the state.

Summer Tanager, Bow on July 5. None of the details (voice, plumage, date, behavior) fit this species. Birds in house plants (as this one was) are usually House Finches.

LeConte's Sparrow, Danville on July 1. An inadequate description of a bird in the wrong habitat for this species. The description was intriguing enough to leave the committee wondering what it really was. A rare and obscure species that would need impeccable details.

Fall 1996

Species accepted by the committee:

Red-necked Grebe, Pittsburg on August 21. A well-described bird in breeding plumage.

Least Bittern, Hampton Falls on September 2. Good details from an experienced observer.

Tundra Swan, Derry on November 27. Photographed.

Common Eider, Hanover on September 26. Well-documented inland sighting of this coastal species.

Common Eider, Jefferson on October 23. Well-documented inland sighting of this coastal species.

Red Phalarope, Durham on October 23. May have been blown inland by strong storm.

Lesser Black-backed Gull, Berlin on November 18. Carefully described immature bird with a field sketch.

Three-toed Woodpecker, Low & Burbanks Grant on October 26. A rare sighting from appropriate habitat in the White Mountains.

Olive-sided Flycatcher, Hebron on October 18. An excellent description for a sighting on a record late date.

Nashville Warbler, Enfield on November 24. Adequate details from experienced observer.

Cape May Warbler, Rye on November 28. Appears to be a record late date for this species.

Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Hampton on October 2. Excellent details.

Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow (inland subspecies), Hampton on October 2. Excellent details. Either *nelsoni* or *alterus*.

Boreal Owl, Rye on November 24. Remains of a bird found along the coast. Positively identified by comparison of feathers to museum specimens.

Species not accepted by the committee:

Brown Pelican, Alton on September 8. Insufficient details for this rare southern coastal species.

Harlequin Duck, Seabrook on October 9. An extremely early report of a female that was seen in flight. Details did not allow the committee to eliminate Surf Scoter.

Boreal Owl, Waterville on November 16. Insufficient details to eliminate the more common Northern Saw-whet Owl.

Dickcissel, Rindge on October 10. A report of five birds. Details were not sufficient to accept all birds as Dickcissels, although some may very well have been.

Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Hampton on August 16. Careful details are needed in order to understand the status of this species along the coast, especially at this fairly early date.

Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Hampton on October 9. Insufficient details (see above, although date is appropriate).

Winter 1996-97

Species accepted by the committee:

Eurasian Wigeon, Great Bay and Exeter from December 14 to January 30. Two males seen regularly by various observers. Third winter in a row for this increasing species.

King Eider, female in Rye on February 8. Well-described.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Dublin on December 23. A well-described early winter inland sighting.

Ovenbird, West Swanzey on December 17. Photographed.

White-crowned Sparrow, Manchester on February 11. Details sufficient to eliminate the more likely White-throated Sparrow.

Species not accepted by the committee:

Gyr Falcon, Grantham on December 27. Because of the circumstances of this sighting (moving car and no binoculars), the committee felt that Peregrine Falcon could not be conclusively eliminated.

Boreal Owl, Sandwich on December 21. This bird was only heard once, and then only briefly. Northern Saw-whet Owl could not be completely eliminated.

Veery, Seacoast CBC on December 21. Insufficient details to eliminate Hermit Thrush, the more likely thrush at this season.

1995 Decision

Species not accepted by the committee:

Sedge Wren, Dummer on May 20 and 21. In the 1995 NHBRC report, this record was listed as still under review due to new information. After considering this additional documentation, the committee felt that the details were still not sufficient to eliminate Marsh Wren, which is far more common at this location and habitat.

1994 Decisions: Spring 1994

Species accepted by the committee:

- Black Vulture, Lyme on April 17. Excellent details and field sketch from an experienced observer.
- Lesser Black-backed Gull, Rye on May 7 and 8. Excellent details from two separate observers.
- Black-backed Woodpecker, Manchester on May 15. Good details for a species far south of its normal range, especially at this time of year.
- White-eyed Vireo, Conway on May 23. Good description by an observer familiar with the species.
- Worm-eating Warbler, Nottingham on May 21. Adequate description.
- Prothonotary Warbler, Lebanon on May 4. Good details.

Summer 1994

Species accepted by the committee:

- Red-necked Grebe, Windsor on July 3. Well described.
- Rufous Hummingbird, Warner on July 27 and 28. A cooperative bird seen by numerous observers; also photographed.
- Red-headed Woodpecker, Concord on June 1. Well described.
- Pine Grosbeak, Jefferson on July 9. Good description, including call note, by an observer familiar with the species. One of only a handful of summer records for the state.

Species not accepted by the committee:

- Iceland Gull, Rye on July 30. For this species on this date the details were not sufficient (this record was not mentioned in the Summer 1994 issue of *NHBR*).
- Western Tanager, Manchester on July 23. Insufficient details.
- White-crowned Sparrow, Keene in July. Insufficient details to distinguish it from the expected White-throated Sparrow.

Species still under review:

- Blue Grosbeak, Hollis on June 9.

Fall 1994

Species accepted by the committee:

- Leach's Storm-Petrel, Great Bay on October 15. Good details from two observers for this unusual inland sighting.
- Eurasian Wigeon, Great Bay from November 5 to 15. Excellent details from multiple observers. The first record for the state since 1954.
- Marbled Godwit, Seabrook on September 9. Good details.
- Curlew Sandpiper, Seabrook on September 7. Excellent details, including field sketch and description of call.
- Long-eared Owl, Hillsborough on October 8. Good description of calls by an observer familiar with this species varied vocalizations.

Rufous Hummingbird, Keene on August 6. Good details.
Rufous Hummingbird, Stratham on September 24. Good details.
Blue Grosbeak, Exeter on September 25. Good description of two birds.
Clay-colored Sparrow, Stratham on November 5. Adequate description.
Yellow-headed Blackbird, Conway on August 8. Good description of a bird visiting a feeder.

Species not accepted by the committee:

Broad-winged Hawk, Exeter on November 3 and Rye on November 12. This species is very rare this late in the fall, and observers did not eliminate the much more likely Red-shouldered Hawk.
Worm-eating Warbler, Newington on September 28. A heard-only bird. The difficulty of distinguishing this species' song from that of more common species precluded the committee's accepting this record.
Clay-colored Sparrow, Newington on October 30. Insufficient details.

Winter 1994-95

Species accepted by the committee:

Black-crowned Night-Heron, Seabrook on January 22. Well-described.
Black Vulture, Nashua on December 31. Good details.
Lesser Black-backed Gull, Manchester on January 10. Good details on this immature bird allowed for elimination of Herring Gull as a possibility.
Black-legged Kittiwake, Lebanon on December 14. Good description; a rare inland sighting.
Townsend's Solitaire, Newmarket throughout winter. Excellent description; this bird seen by numerous observers throughout its stay.
Brown Thrasher, Plainfield on January 25. Good description, including sketches.
Pine Warbler, Laconia on January 4 and February 21. Good description. The two sightings probably represent the same bird, as they were from two different feeders in the same general neighborhood.
Seaside Sparrow, Greenland on December 3. Good description for this late sighting.
Bobolink, Greenland on December 3. Excellent details from two different observers. A late record for the state.

Species not accepted by the committee:

Eared Grebe, North Hampton on February 22. Insufficient details to eliminate the more likely Horned or Red-necked grebes.
Merlin, North Hampton on February 9. Description did not eliminate the more likely Sharp-shinned Hawk.
Little Gull, Seabrook on December 20. Insufficient details.
Thayer's Gull, Seabrook on January 21. Details were insufficient to eliminate Iceland Gull. This bird had the dark eye characteristic of Thayer's Gull, but Iceland Gulls also occasionally have this feature. The other details were inconclusive.
Ivory Gull, Manchester on January 8. Insufficient details for this extremely rare species, observer did not conclusively eliminate the possibility of an immature Iceland Gull.