

New Hampshire Rare Birds Committee Report

Winter 2012-13 through Fall 2013

Hector Galbraith, Chair

Michael Resch, Secretary

This report from the New Hampshire Rare Birds Committee (NHRBC) contains the decisions for records voted on by the Committee for four seasons: Winter 2012-13, Spring 2013, Summer 2013, and Fall 2013.

The NHRBC reviews unusual sightings in an effort to maintain accuracy and scientific integrity of rare bird records in New Hampshire. It is independent of *New Hampshire Bird Records (NHBR)* and New Hampshire Audubon. All sightings are evaluated based on details submitted by the observer(s). The Committee requires a vote with not more than one dissension for acceptance of a record. Any first state record requires a unanimous vote.

A rejection is not necessarily an indication that the identification was incorrect but that the information received was not sufficient to allow its acceptance as a state record. Adequate documentation is key to whether a report is accepted or not. For information on the Committee and its decision-making process, see the articles in the Summer 1996 and Winter 2005-06 issues of *NHBR*.

The Committee has recently reviewed a number of records where submitted documentation was unfortunately of limited quality. For instance while reviewing a recent written summary of a Worm-eating Warbler sighting, the Committee noted that the documentation did not eliminate the possibility that the observer had actually seen a Whimbrel! One of the best ways to ensure your sighting is accepted by the NHRBC is to prepare and submit adequate documentation of the sighting. By far the best way to submit documentation is to use the "New Hampshire Bird Sighting Documentation" form, which prompts you to address all the salient topics to support the observation. This form can be obtained on-line on the *NHBR* web site at:

<http://nhbirdrecords.org/your-sightings/reporting-rare-and-unusual-bird-sightings/documentation-forms-for-rarities/>

Furthermore, we recommend that you complete a documentation form even if you are submitting photographs of the bird(s). Recently the NHRBC has received photographs of many of the sightings that have been submitted for review. However, the quality of these photos isn't always the best, and supplemental information contained on a complete documentation form can be crucial in gaining acceptance of the record.

Speaking of photographs, just because you don't have a photograph of your bird doesn't mean it won't be accepted by the Committee. In fact many of the recently accepted sightings were not photographed. The photograph should be just one part of the overall record of the sighting to be submitted to the NHRBC.

If you are in doubt about how many details to provide, the more the better. After all, we don't want your Worm-eating Warbler to be confused with a Whimbrel or vice versa.

The members of the Committee voting on the records in these four seasons were: David Donsker, Kurk Dorsey, Iain MacLeod, Eric Masterson, Mike Resch, Rob Woodward, and Hector Galbraith (Chair). Mike Resch served as the Committee Secretary.

Winter 2012-13

Records accepted by the Committee

Cackling Goose	12/6/2012	Concord
Cackling Goose	12/11/2012	Pittsfield
Great Gray Owl	2/3/2013	Hanover
Red-headed Woodpecker	12/13/2012	Alexandria
Red-headed Woodpecker	2/16/2013	Dover
Townsend's Solitaire	1/11/2013	Gilford
Townsend's Solitaire	1/12/2013	Gilford
Varied Thrush	1/11/2013	Bow
Varied Thrush	1/16/2013	Dunbarton
Varied Thrush	1/19/2013	Bow
Varied Thrush	1/23/2013	Bartlett
Varied Thrush	2/2/2013	Nashua
Varied Thrush	2/9/2013	Hopkinton
Varied Thrush	2/25/2013	Barnstead
Dark-eyed Junco - Oregon subsp.	12/15/2012	Greenland
Common Redpoll (<i>rostrata</i>)	1/7/2013	Strafford
Hoary Redpoll (<i>esculipes</i>)	1/1/2013	Strafford
Hoary Redpoll	1/10/2013	Penacook
Hoary Redpoll	1/15/2013	Concord
Hoary Redpoll (<i>bornemannii</i>)	1/23/2013	Strafford

Records not accepted by the Committee

Cackling Goose	12/20/2012	Durham
This bird was a flyover with a short viewing time. The Committee felt that a small race of Canada could not be eliminated given the limited description of the sighting		

Spring 2013

Records accepted by the Committee

Cackling Goose	3/25/2013	Litchfield
Cackling Goose	3/13/2013	Charlestown
Cackling Goose	3/16/2013	Hinsdale
Cackling Goose	3/21/2013	Charlestown
Northern Lapwing	3/10/2013	Loudon
Curlew Sandpiper	5/22/2013	Hampton
Yellow-throated Warbler	5/29/2013	Hampton

Worm-eating Warbler	5/25/2013	New Castle
Summer Tanager	5/6/2013	Exeter

Record not accepted by the Committee

Yellow-headed Blackbird	5/28/2013	Stratham
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This bird was seen briefly in flight from the road with no optics. Given this out-of-season sighting, a more detailed sighting would have been preferred to accept the record.

Summer 2013

Records accepted by the Committee

Long-tailed Jaeger	7/4/2013	Between Jeffreys Ledge and Isles of Shoals
Chuck-will's-widow	6/3/2013	Newton
Red-headed Woodpecker	6/2/2013	Belmont
Acadian Flycatcher	6/9/2013	Concord
Yellow-headed Blackbird	6/2/2013	Hinsdale
Yellow-headed Blackbird	7/16/2013	Benton

Records not accepted by the Committee – None

Fall 2013

Records accepted by the Committee

Leach's Storm-Petrel	10/12/2013	Rye
Clapper Rail	9/24/2013	Rye
American Oystercatcher	9/20/2013	Rye
Long-billed Dowitcher	10/3/2013	Hampton
Wilson's Phalarope	8/31/2013	North Hampton
Black Skimmer	10/1/2013	Seabrook
Calliope Hummingbird	10/6/2013	Manchester
Rufous Hummingbird	9/14/2013	Durham
Rufous Hummingbird	10/9/2013	Langdon
Western Kingbird	11/2/2013	Sutton
Sedge Wren	9/29/2013	Concord
White-eyed Vireo	11/10/2013	Exeter
White-eyed Vireo	11/10/2013	Portsmouth
Yellow-throated Warbler	8/10/2013	Rye
Blue Grosbeak	9/23/2013	Concord
Lark Sparrow	10/5/2013	Penacook

Records not accepted by the Committee

Gray-cheeked Thrush	9/5/2013	Pittsfield
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This was a nocturnal heard-only bird. The Committee felt that it is very difficult to separate Gray-cheeked and Bicknell's Thrushes by call only, and thus Bicknell's could not be eliminated.

Gray-cheeked Thrush	9/28/2013	Beans Grant
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This was a heard-only bird in song. Given the extreme rarity of a singing Gray-cheeked in fall in NH, a visible sighting and/or a more detailed description of the song would have been required to accept the record.

Answer to the Photo Quiz

by David B. Donsker

The herons (family *Ardeidae*) are one of the more characteristic bird families to recognize, so identifying these long-necked, long-billed, white wading birds as members of this rather uniform appearing family is the easiest part of this exercise. The purpose of this Photo Quiz, however, is to show just how difficult it can be at times to distinguish between similar species in this group.

Although there is no scientific distinction between the birds that we refer to as "herons" and those that we call "egrets," in general, the more delicately proportioned and/or white plumaged birds are considered egrets and the larger and/or darker species, herons. But it's not that simple. Great Egret, though a pure white bird, is more closely related to Great Blue Heron than it is to our other egrets. Great Blue Heron has a pure white morph that breeds in southern Florida called "Great White Heron," which has recently been recorded once as a rare vagrant to New Hampshire. Reddish Egret, which is extralimital to New Hampshire, famously has both white and dark morphs. Little Blue Heron and Tricolored Heron, both dark birds in adult plumage, are in the genus *Egretta* and are actually "true" egrets as is Snowy Egret. This relationship is more easily appreciated in the former, at least, by its white juvenile plumage.

So, approaching the identification of a white-plumaged egret-like member of the heron family requires more than a cursory glance. It requires an understanding and knowledge of the seasonal and age variation of the plumages and the soft part coloration of the bill, face and legs of the members of this group, and the structure, posture and foraging behavior that is typical of the various species.

With that in mind, let's more carefully examine the images of these two birds. At first impression, they are extremely similar. Both are pure white. Although size is hard to judge without other birds in the photos by which to compare, both of these birds appear to be small to medium sized species of superficially similar structure, which are assuming an upright stance. Neither has any evidence of head plumes, back plumes or aigrettes (head plumes) so they are most likely juveniles or adults in non-breeding plumage. Both have long, tapered, bicolored bills, which are pale gray in their basal portions, but are black at the tips. We can see the entire lower extremities of the bird on the left, which are fairly uniformly pale from thighs to toes, but the front part of the lower legs of this bird is subtly darker than the back sides. If you are examining the colored image on line, you can see that the legs are olive green, but the toes are subtly yellowish. Although the legs of the bird on the right are partially