

# Proceedings of the Minnesota Ornithological Records Committee

Kim R. Eckert, MORC Chairman

There was a meeting of the Committee on 7 December 1997, and among the items on the agenda was the establishment of term limits for the Committee members. (Previously, the members have been able to serve an unlimited number of one-year terms.) The following procedure was decided on:

- The Chairperson will continue to be one of the seven regular members and will have no term limit; he/she serves subject to the selection and approval of the MOU Board of Directors in the same way as other MOU committee chairpersons. The Chairperson will continue to appoint all regular and alternate Committee members.

- The other six regular members can serve a maximum of two consecutive three-year terms (since the meeting there has been a proposal to change this to six consecutive one-year terms). After this six-year period, the member must be off the Committee for at least one year before being eligible again for membership as either a regular or alternate member.

- The terms of the three alternate members will continue to be for one year, with no limit to the number of years an alternate member may serve.

- When a regular member's position is vacated, either by expiration of his/her term or by resignation, the vacancy will be filled either by one of the alternate members or by a former regular member who has been off the Committee for at least one year. When there is a vacancy in an alternate member's position, the vacancy can be filled by someone who has either never been on the Committee or not been a member for at least one year.

- To initiate the rotation of these term limits, the terms of those regular mem-

bers with the most seniority expire first. Accordingly, Bob Janssen's term expired at the end of 1997, and he was replaced by alternate member Karl Bardon, and Karl's position as an alternate was filled by Anthony Hertzell. After each calendar year, another regular member's term will then expire in the following order of seniority: Bud Tordoff, Dick Ruhme, Bruce Fall, Ray Glassel, Peder Svingen and Karl Bardon.

The meeting agenda also included votes on the following: seven records documented primarily by photographs, one record with an inconclusive first-round vote, and one previously accepted record which was reconsidered at the request of a Committee member. Accordingly, the following records were voted on and found to be Acceptable:

- Western Tanager, mid-May 1997, near Battle Lake, Otter Tail Co. (photo record #97-71, vote 7-0, *The Loon* 70:67).

- Prairie Warbler, July 1997, near Lanesboro, Fillmore Co. (photo record #97-72).

- Band-tailed Pigeon, 24 August 1997, Duluth, St. Louis Co. (photo record #97-73, vote 7-0).

- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, 2 October 1997, Duluth, St. Louis Co. (photo record #97-74, vote 7-0).

- Black-legged Kittiwake, 2-17 November 1997, Grand Marais, Cook Co. (photo record #97-75, vote 7-0, *The Loon* 69:222-223).

- Great Black-backed Gull (2 individuals), 10-28 November 1997, Grand Marais, Cook Co. (photo record #97-79, vote 7-0).

- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, 4 June - 17 July 1997, near Elk River, Sherburne Co. (photo record #97-80, vote 7-0, *The Loon* 69:183-185).

The following records were voted on at the meeting and found Unacceptable:

- Sprague's Pipit (3 individuals), 10 May 1997, near Sabin, Clay Co. (recirculated record #97-42, vote 3-4). The majority felt the description was not complete or specific enough to preclude the possibility of the birds being juvenile Horned Larks, American Pipits, Vesper Sparrows or longspurs. The legs were described as pink, but the light conditions at the time were not described, and some references state that Horned Larks and American Pipits sometimes have legs which are flesh-colored or tinged with pink. The description of the underparts implies they were unstreaked, which alone would preclude Sprague's Pipit. The only reason stated for eliminating Vesper Sparrow from consideration was the lack of a visible chestnut shoulder patch, a mark which is often not visible. Neither observer had any useful experience with this species, and they consulted field guides while making their identification, but in life Sprague's Pipits do not resemble the illustrations in any of the standard field guides. Finally, the location of the birds in a roadside ditch adjacent to a stubble field would be atypical for this species, and it would be highly unusual to find three individual Sprague's Pipits migrating together in Minnesota.

- Baird's Sparrow, 7 June 1997, near Strandquist, Marshall Co. (reconsidered record #97-56, vote 0-7). This record was previously accepted by the majority of the Committee since the plumage description seems to be consistent with this species and since the song heard reportedly matched a Baird's Sparrow tape recording. However, the record was reconsidered after further discussion for several reasons: 1) the song was never actually described; 2) the plumage description of the facial pattern is incomplete; 3) the observer had no previous experience with this species, which is a relatively difficult sparrow for even experienced birders to identify; 4) the field guide used during the observation to identify the bird has an inaccurate illustration of this species; 5) the description appears to be only written from memory three months

after the sighting; and 6) a subsequent visit to the site by other observers revealed the habitat was a mix of stubble cornfield, hayfield and trees, which would be atypical for a Baird's Sparrow.

The following records were voted on by mail July-December 1997 and found to be Acceptable:

- Prairie Warbler, 18 May 1997, Fridley, Anoka Co. (record #97-34, vote 7-0).

- Yellow-throated Warbler, 18 May 1997, Bloomington, Hennepin Co. (record #97-35, vote 7-0, **The Loon** 69:229).

- California Gull, 11 June 1997, Lake Vermilion, St. Louis Co. (record #97-36, vote 7-0).

- Gyrfalcon, 2 March 1997, near Waskish, Beltrami Co. (record #97-39, vote 7-0).

- Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, 6 May 1997, near Ghent, Lyon Co. (record #97-41, vote 6-1).

- Western Tanager, 14-15 May 1997, near Rochester, Olmsted Co. (record #97-43, vote 6-1).

- Yellow-throated Warbler, 19 May 1997, Lebanon Hills Regional Park, Dakota Co. (record #97-44, vote 7-0).

- Western Tanager, 19 May 1997, near Greenbush, Roseau Co. (record #97-45, vote 7-0).

- Little Gull, 19 May 1997, Marsh Lake, Big Stone Co. (record #97-46, vote 7-0, **The Loon** 69:227-228).

- Clark's Grebe, 25 May 1997, Thielke Lake, Big Stone Co. (record #97-47, vote 7-0).

- Arctic Tern, 29 May 1997, Duluth, St. Louis Co. (record #97-50, vote 7-0, **The Loon** 70:59-61).

- Arctic Tern, 2-3 June 1997, Duluth, St. Louis Co. (record #97-51, vote 7-0, **The Loon** 69:171).

- Baird's Sparrow, 6-9 June 1997, near Felton, Clay Co. (record #97-52, vote 7-0, **The Loon** 70:62).

- Clark's Grebe, 1-13 July 1997, Lake Osakis, Todd Co. (record #97-54, vote 7-0, **The Loon** 69:225-226).

- Sage Thrasher, 1-4 May 1997, Blaine, Anoka Co. (record #97-55, vote 7-0).

- Prairie Warbler, 8 June 1997, Cannon

River Bike Trail, Goodhue Co. (record #97-57, vote 7-0).

- Snowy Plover, 16 August 1997, Crookston, Polk Co. (record #97-58, vote 7-0).

- Ferruginous Hawk, 24 August 1997, near Aitkin, Aitkin Co. (record #97-59, vote 6-1, **The Loon** 70:65).

- Say's Phoebe, 9 September 1997, Grand Marais, Cook Co. (record #97-60, vote 7-0).

- Rock Wren, 5 May 1997, Bloomington, Hennepin Co. (record #97-61, vote 6-1).

- Lazuli Bunting, 29 May 1997, Rochester (?), Olmsted Co. (record #97-62, vote 7-0).

- Blue-winged Warbler, 3 June 1997, Camden State Park, Lyon Co. (record #97-63, vote 7-0).

- California Gull, 16 August 1997, Inver Grove Heights, Dakota Co. (record #97-65, vote 7-0).

- Lesser Black-backed Gull, 4 October 1997, Minneapolis, Hennepin Co. (record #97-66, vote 6-1).

- Red-throated Loon, 27 October 1997, Lake Winnibigoshish, Cass Co. (record #97-68, vote 7-0).

- Red Phalarope, 30 October 1997, Lake Bemidji, Beltrami Co. (record #97-69, vote 7-0, **The Loon** 70:66).

- Pacific Loon, 8 November 1997, Vine-land, Mille Lacs Co. (record #97-70, vote 7-0).

- Great Black-backed Gull, 26 November – 18 December 1997, Black Dog Lake, Dakota Co. (record #97-78, vote 7-0, **The Loon** 70:66-67).

- Red-throated Loon, 1 September 1997, Stony Point, St. Louis Co. (record #97-81, vote 7-0).

- Band-tailed Pigeon, 4 October 1997, Duluth, St. Louis Co. (record #97-82, vote 7-0).

- King Eider, 8 November 1997, Kimball Creek, Cook Co. (record #97-83, vote 7-0).

- Black-throated Sparrow, 8 November 1997, Austin, Mower Co. (record #97-84, vote 7-0, **The Loon** 70:64-65).

- Black-legged Kittiwake, 27 Novem-

ber 1997, Two Harbors, Lake Co. (record #97-85, vote 7-0).

- Glaucous-winged Gull, 1-2 December 1997, Grand Marais, Cook Co. (record #97-86, vote 7-0).

The following records were voted on by mail July-December 1997 and found to be Unacceptable:

- Eastern Wood-Pewee, 23 April 1997, Lake Louise State Park, Mower Co. (record # 97-32, vote 1-6). This bird was only heard and never seen, and it would represent a very early migrant during a colder-than-normal spring. Although the song heard was well described by the experienced observer, the majority felt that the possibility of a vocalizing starling or mockingbird being involved is not entirely precluded.

- Western Tanager, 17 May 1997, White Bear Lake, Ramsey Co. (record #97-33, vote 3-4). The entire description consists only of the following: "red head, yellow body with black markings, about 8 inches long." While it was agreed the bird may well have been correctly identified, the majority felt the description is too brief and vague to be accepted.

- Rufous Hummingbird, 25 July – 18 August 1995, Lake Bronson State Park, Kittson Co. (record #97-38, vote 0-7). Although the hummingbird was present for several days, seen by several observers, and may well have been correctly identified, the entire description of the plumage consists only of the following: "golden brown in color to tan." It was unanimously felt that such a description is not nearly specific enough for acceptance.

- Eastern Wood-Pewee (4 birds), 10 April 1997, Faribault, Rice Co. (record #97-40, vote 0-7). The observer was apparently unaware this would be the earliest spring record ever for this species, and the documentation was apparently only written from memory three months after the sighting. The description does not preclude Eastern Phoebe, since the only feature mentioned to eliminate that species was the presence of wing bars; however, contrary to the information in most field guides, phoebes often have noticeable wing bars. There is

also nothing in the brief description (which makes no mention of the presence or absence of an eye ring) to eliminate one of the Empidonax flycatchers.

- Black-headed Gull (2 individuals), 27 May 1997, Forest L., Washington Co. (record #97-48, vote 0-7). The entire description of the two individuals only includes the following: "dark auricular spot, red bill with black tip, red legs, and white tail." With no mention of size or wing pattern, it was unanimously agreed that a potential third state record should be much more completely documented.

- Northern Goshawk, 31 May 1997, Camden State Park, Lyon Co. (record #97-49, vote 0-7). This distant soaring raptor was too far away and seen under unfavorable light conditions for the observer to see any diagnostic plumage features, and with nothing available for direct comparison the size of the bird remains uncertain. The general grayish coloration of the plumage suggests that, if a goshawk, this would be an adult far out of range and season, but it was felt the possibility if it being an adult Cooper's Hawk or even a male Northern Harrier is much more likely.

- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, 13 June 1997, near Knife River (?), Lake Co. (record #97-53, vote 0-7). The entire description only mentions that "it was a bird with a tail approximately twice the length of its body." While it is quite possible the bird was correctly identified, there is nothing to indicate whether this bird was a passerine or raptor or water bird, etc. (And, even if it were a flycatcher, the possibility of Fork-tailed Flycatcher remains.)

- Tennessee Warbler, 19 June 1997, Brooklyn Center, Hennepin Co. (record #97-64, vote 3-4). It was unanimously agreed that the bird was probably correctly identified, since it was heard by someone familiar with this species' song and since this was during a later-than-normal warbler migration. However, the bird was never seen, and the majority felt the written description of the song heard (like a "sewing machine starting slower and then speeding up") is not specific enough to

eliminate other possibilities.

- Common Raven, 28 October 1997, near Rochester, Olmsted Co. (record #97-77, vote 2-5). The documentation does not include mention of the distance or light conditions at the time, or whether or not the observer was using optics at the time, and it seems the observer may have had only a cursory look at it since it appears to have only been watched from a moving car. The description of the bird only mentions that the bird was "very dark" with a "wedged tail" and a bill which was not hooked, and the majority felt that such a description and the conditions at the time involve too many uncertainties to accept such an out-of-range bird.

Whether their records are found to be Acceptable or Unacceptable, the efforts of all those who document their reports of unusual species are appreciated. Accordingly, the Committee acknowledges with thanks all those who provided documentation for the records listed in this article: Diane Anderson, Jared Anez, Karl Bardon (two records), Dave Benson, Terry Brashear, Carole Brysky, Paul Budde (two records), Dave Cahlander, Steve Carlson, Tim Dickson, Larry Dolphin, Kim Eckert (five records), Bob Ekblad, Lane Ellwanger (two records), Deanne Endrizzi, Dave Erwin, Roger Everhart, Cole Foster, Dave Grosshuesch, Jay Hamernick, Mike Hendrickson, Tony Hertzell (three records), Ken and Molly Hoffman, Doug Johnson (two records), Gene Knight, Fay Kotilinek, Chuck Krulas (two records), Fred Leshner, William Longley, Gladwin Lynne, Craig Mandel (two records), Warren Nelson, Frank Nicoletti, Connie Norheim, Mark Ochs, Ric Olson, Shaun Putz, Steve Roman (two records), Orwin Rustad, Roger Schroeder (three records), Drew Smith, Peder Svingen (four records), Mike Tarachow, Dan and Sandy Thimgan, Howard Towle, Tom Tustison, Sylvia Winkelman.

Summary: 52 records voted on; 41 Acceptable (79%), 11 Unacceptable (21%).

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