

2019 MINUTES OF THE MONTANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

Date: 11 October 2019

Location: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Regional Office, Great Falls

Members present: John Carlson, Josh Covill, Coburn Currier, Tom Forwood, Ed Harper, Craig Hohenberger, Nate Kohler, Rose Leach (Chair), Jeff Marks (Secretary), Ted Nordhagen, John Parker

Members absent: Forrest Rowland, Kate Stone

Others present for various portions of meeting: Dan Casey, Paul Hendricks, Harriet Marble, Bob Martinka, Robin Wolcott

Approval of 2018 Minutes: Motioned by **Jeff**, seconded by **Rose**, all approved.

We began at 0900 by honoring former MBRC member **Mike Schwitters**, who received a Lifetime Achievement Award from Montana Audubon earlier this year. Several Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks people and past MBRC members were present.

Introductions:

We did not do updates owing to the ceremony for **Mike Schwitters**.

Action Items from 2018:

In the week after the 2018 meeting, **Jeff** contacted each observer who submitted a report and informed them of the voting outcome. **Jeff** also invited **Janet Ellis** of Montana Audubon to join our Yahoo site to download the reports and photos for the archives. **Rose** sent an edited version of the 2018 spreadsheet to **Bryce Maxell** at the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) so that accepted records can appear in their MapViewer database. **Jeff** posted the 2018 Minutes and Annual Report on the *Montana Bird Advocacy's* (MBA) Web site.

On 15 August 2019, **Coburn** and **Janet Ellis** delivered all of the archival material from the Montana Audubon office to the **Montana Historical Society** in Helena, which will house our archives from now on. Thank you **Janet** for helping to make this happen!

During the 2018 meeting, questions were raised about how to handle reports of hybrid birds and of species of questionable provenance, which in some cases might be placed on the **Supplemental List**. We decided today that these issues could easily and effectively be addressed by notes in the comments section of the annual spreadsheet that shows our vote tallies and other details related to each submitted report.

Status of Chukars in Beaverhead County: **Tom F.** reported on status and provided a map of eBird reports in Montana and adjacent Idaho. The Montana FWP biologist in Dillon said that **Chukars** are reproducing in multiple places in the county and probably arrived naturally from Idaho. Landowners have reported them to have been at multiple locations in the county for 20 years. **Jeff** motioned, and **Tom** seconded, that the **Chukar** be considered established in the wild in Beaverhead Co. **Motion passed unanimously.**

John C. is continuing to try and track down a report (with photograph) of a **Whooping Crane** by a Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks biologist.

Temporary Break:

For the first time in the history of the committee, we took a break to look for the adult **Pomarine Jaeger** that several committee members saw flying over the Missouri River near Giant Springs before the meeting started. We adjourned at 10:00 and resumed the meeting an hour later. The bird was re-found quickly and was seen by entire committee in residence!

Evaluation of records:

Reports and supporting documentation were posted on our Yahoo site, and the Committee evaluated reports in two rounds of voting during the year. We reviewed **37 new reports** and one **historical report** that involved **28 species; 25 reports** (66%) were accompanied by photographs. We rejected **six reports**, none of which was accompanied by a photo.

Highlights were the five state firsts: **Stejneger's Scoter**, **Rivoli's Hummingbird**, **Ruff**, **Heermann's Gull**, and **Tricolored Heron**, two of which were historical records (**Stejneger's Scoter** and **Ruff**). Also noteworthy were Montana's 5th **Little Gull**, 2nd documented **Winter Wren**, 4th **Mississippi Kite**, and 3rd **Virginia's Warbler**. The three accepted records of **Summer Tanager** elevated that species from a **Vagrant**, with 9 records, to **Rare**, with 12 records. The five species added to the **State List** ties the record dating back 15 years ago to 2004.

MBRC membership:

The Committee remains at maximum size with 13 members. By unanimous vote, **Rose Leach** and **Jeff Marks** were re-elected **Chair** and **Secretary**, respectively.

We continue to evaluate Committee makeup. All agreed that we do not want the committee to become larger, however. We also agreed to explore a new committee make-up with term limits, with some members rotating off the committee for multiple years before being eligible to rejoin the committee. **Jeff** will develop a proposal for rotating membership, which likely will involve having a permanent pool of committee members, a subset of which would be voting members for a stated term.

Official State List:

The **State List** now stands at **439 species** with the addition of the five new species noted above. **Jeff** has continued to post on the MBRC's Web pages the **State List**, including re-arranging the linear sequence of taxa and updating changes in nomenclature as outlined in supplements to the American Ornithological Society's *Check-list of North American Birds*. The current **State List**, **Review List**, **Supplemental List**, and other MBRC material are at <https://www.montanabirdadvocacy.org/mbrc/>.

Review Species:

In an email message dated 28 May 2019, **Jeff** proposed expanding the exception area for the **Gray Flycatcher** and **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** such that no report is needed for sightings in **QLL 41D**. Previously, the exception area in Carbon Co. was confined to **QLL 41C**, but **Jeff** and others found both species to be reasonably common in 41D during a visit from 23-25 May. ***Motion passed unanimously via email vote 36 hours later, with all 13 committee members voting.***

We began a discussion on how to handle reports of **Blue-headed Vireos** well out of their normal migratory range in the state. **Kate** and **Forrest** were to have led this discussion but were unable to attend the meeting. Accordingly, we tabled the discussion for a later date, hopefully to occur online before the 2020 meeting. Too, we decided to delay a final decision on two reports of Blue-headed Vireo submitted in 2019 (2019-003, 2019-036) until we have had the discussion noted above.

Old reports reconsidered:

A **Ruff** reported (and later retracted) at Medicine Lake by an out-of-state birder on 17 August prompted discussion of the one reported at Medicine Lake by **Lance Tanino** and **Ted Nordhagen** in early August 1998 (**MBRC 1999-040**). **Jeff** examined his records from the 1999 meeting and found that we had voted "C" on the report, which had consisted of **Nordhagen's** notes but not **Tanino's**. Committee chair **Terry McEneaney** was to have tracked down Tanino's report, but apparently he never did so. Even worse, no one on the committee noticed the lack of follow-up. **Ted** produced **Tanino's** notes, which included a field sketch of the bird, and the committee re-evaluated the documents as two independent write-ups of this hitherto unreported species for the state. The report was accepted unanimously, and **Ruff** was added to the **State List**, some 21 years after the fact!

Bylaws discussion:

John Carlson noted that the Bylaws no longer reflect the location of the archives. **Jeff** will examine the Bylaws carefully and draft a motion to update the Bylaws accordingly.

eBird discussion:

The review queue was manageable in 2019, often hovering around 200 reports. We had a dedicated eBird discussion for about an hour that included **Bob Martinka**, **Dan Casey**, **Harriet Marble**, and **Robin Wolcott**. Discussion focused on splitting some regions with multiple counties into smaller units, recruiting additional eBird reviewers, and time management so that reports in the review queue are dealt with promptly.

Examples of regions proposed for modification included Lewis & Clark and Powell Cos. split into two regions; Cascade Co. split from Teton/Pondera Cos.; Fergus, Meagher, & Judith Basin Cos. split from others in that complex; Choteau Co. split from others in that complex; Madison and Gallatin Cos. split into two regions; and Mineral Co. split from

others in that complex.

Potential new eBird reviewers include **Sasha Auer, Brian Henderson, Cynthia Hudson, Eric Rasmussen, Hilary Turner, Stephen Turner, and Mike Weber.**

We decided that **next year we will hold a two-day meeting in Great Falls**, with the first day dedicated to MBRC business and the second day dedicated to eBird. All eBird reviewers who are not committee members will be invited to attend.

Action items:

As per our usual practice, **Jeff** will contact each observer who submitted a report to inform them of the voting outcome and will make sure that hard copies of reports and photos will be archived. **Rose** will send an edited version of the 2019 spreadsheet to **Bryce Maxell** at the MNHP so that accepted records can appear in their MapViewer database. [**NOTE: Jeff contacted all observers by 18 October**]

As noted above, **Jeff** will scrutinize the bylaws and draft a proposal to update them to accurately state where the archives are housed. **Jeff** also will draft a proposal concerning a rotating membership, with term limits, for the committee.

Adjournment: 15:00.

Our next meeting is proposed for Great Falls on Friday, 25 September 2020

Submitted by: Jeff Marks, Secretary, 13 November 2019