

2013 MINUTES OF THE MONTANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

Date: 18 October 2013

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

Members present: Dan Casey (Chair), Chuck Carlson, Coburn Currier, Nate Kohler, Rose Leach, Harriet Marble, Fritz Prellwitz, Mike Schwitters, Dan Sullivan, John Carlson, Bob Martinka

Members absent: Jeff Marks (Secretary), Ted Nordhagen

Non-members present: Janet Ellis of Montana Audubon during the afternoon

Approval of 2012 Minutes and 2013 Agenda: 10:00

Action Items from 2012: All action items involving specific reports were resolved (2012-24, 25, 27, & 41), and Jeff also determined that the **Yellow-throated Warbler** sighting in Tracker that was attributed to Denver Holt was a data-entry error. Coburn's job change led to a discussion of our interface with the Heritage Program. **Dan C** will continue to work on the 2012 action item related to allowing **Coburn** to continue to enter data into Tracker for us (see below).

Evaluation of records: Reports and photos were posted on our Yahoo site, and Committee members submitted votes via e-mail in advance of the annual meeting. We reviewed 31 new reports in 2013 and accepted all but five of them. Four reports were rejected, and the report of an adult **Harris's Hawk** (photographed over multiple weeks; see below) resulted in placement of that species on the **Supplemental List**. One accepted report (**Golden-crowned Sparrow**) required information from a 2nd observer, which was supplied two days after the Committee meeting. Highlights included the addition of **Baikal Teal** to the State List, the 2nd record for **Little Gull**, and discovery of what may turn out to be a "new" breeding population of **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** roughly 250 km west-northwest of the Pryor Mountains population. We also discussed the need to be clear about the source of comments inserted into reports (notes at bottom of Bronzed Cowbird report in this case).

We discussed how to better share background information on records such as the Harris's Hawk and the Baikal Teal. Members did varying amounts of background work regarding escapees, collections, the history of other vagrant observations, and how records committees dealt with them. To prevent redundancy, and to provide all committee members access to such information before casting their votes, we need better communication during the review process. Doing this retroactively for the teal and hawk is a first step toward accomplishing this goal. Accordingly, we will form an **ad hoc group** to compile a portfolio of resources such as background information on falconry practices, contacts in the area, etc., to help better inform us when we receive records of potential falconry birds in the future. **John Carlson** will compile this information. **Fritz** will contact George Allen in WA for information on falconers with permits for Harris's Hawk in the vicinity.

Similarly, we will form an ad hoc group to compile information on **captive waterfowl**. **Coburn** will compile what we learned about Baikal Teal populations and resources for us (Isis database, for example).

State List: With the addition of **Baikal Teal** and **California Quail** (see below), the

State List now stands at **429 species**.

Supplemental List: We placed the **Harris's Hawk** on this list because of the likelihood it was not a wild bird (i.e., it escaped from captivity or was released by a falconer). Jeff's background research on records from surrounding states showed that in all cases where the age of the bird was known, it was an adult, like the Montana bird. Yet, adults would be highly unlikely to wander as vagrants.

Review List: We expanded the exception area for **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** to include LL 9 so that it now covers LLs 9, 10, 11, & 12. We also removed **Scarlet Tanager** (now with 21 records) and **Glaucous-winged Gull** (now 22 records) from the Review List. We note, however, that records for rare species (i.e., no longer on the review list) still could be reviewed in the eBird data base, and reviewers would have the opportunity to gather relevant information related to how the identification was made at that time. Although it has nearly 20 records from outside the exclusion area (and more than 20 records if we count pending records in Tracker), we decided to keep **Sagebrush Sparrow** on the review list so that we continue to capture the highest level of data on records for this species. **Coburn** will post a spreadsheet of records he compiled for this species to our Yahoo site. We kept **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** on the review list because of conservation concerns. Finally, we erred in voting to remove **Northern Parula** from the Review List. Although 22 records are listed in Tracker, two of them are duplicates, so we currently stand at only 20 accepted records for this species, and it must remain on the Review List.

Old reports reconsidered: None.

Bylaws discussion: None.

eBird Discussion: We reviewed filter editing and subspecies issues. We agreed that if you make edits to another reviewer's queued records or filters, you should inform that reviewer of the changes you made. Dan Sullivan wondered if he should retain review of "only one county" because John Parker now covers Park County, but we asked Dan to keep his two other counties (Stillwater and Sweet Grass) for now.

Other Discussion Items:

Montana Natural Heritage Program Tracker Database: We are concerned that the people we used to work with at the Montana Natural Heritage Program have taken other jobs or will be doing so shortly. Thus, we no longer have an efficient means of making sure that accepted records of Review Species are added to the data base.

Suggestion: Allow Coburn to enter accepted MBRC records into the data base directly. Or, send an excel spreadsheet to Bryce Maxell at Heritage and request that his staff enter the records—with the correct observation dates (not the entry date) and other relevant details—into Tracker (Jeff did this already for the first batch of reports from 2013). We need a mechanism to review the entries for quality control, owing to problems we have experienced in the past.

"Back-door" records continue to appear in Tracker, meaning reports of officially rare species that have not been evaluated by the MBRC. Some of these records result from

data dumps by federal agencies (e.g., BBS data from USGS) and NGOs (e.g., surveys by Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory and the Avian Science Center). Often, no contact information is given for the observer (or the observer's identity is unknown), and no details on how an identification was made, or whether photos or other forms of documentation were obtained, are provided.

Moreover, glitches remain when entering data into Tracker and moving Tracker records into eBird. **Dan C** and Janet Ellis will draft a letter of our concerns regarding coordination, data entry and review, and the continued interchange between Tracker and eBird prior to the Heritage Partner's meeting on 13 November 2013. **Bob, Rose, and John** are attending this meeting and will raise our concerns and try to figure out a way to resolve problems of data entry and quality control. We want to avoid the problems of the past, wherein we had a backlog of records with no accompanying documentation, and no way to contact the actual observers (often seasonal technicians) to obtain the information we need to evaluate a report.

California Quail in the Bitterroot: We reviewed data provided by Dan Casey from Christmas Bird Counts and information from Janet Ellis regarding when it was last legal to import exotic birds into the state (2003). The California Quail now appears to be well established in Ravalli County. Although it is impossible to know if they are still being released (now illegally), or whether the population would persist in the absence of releases, it is well documented that many broods are produced in the wild each year and that quail numbers continue to increase. We then voted 12-1 (including e-mail votes by Marks and Nordhagen) to add California Quail to the State List.

Archives: It is critical that we maintain hard copies of reports and supporting documentation and make sure they are backed up electronically and stored properly. Hard copies of reports and photos (i.e., the archives) will reside at Montana Audubon for the foreseeable future. Janet offered Audubon's printer and scanner for copying reports, because Coburn had been doing this on his own equipment. We will retain the individual reports, how they were resolved, and any associated documentation (photos, videos, etc.).

Membership: A month before the meeting, **Mike Schwitters** announced that he was stepping down from the Committee. Mike will remain the eBird reviewer for his area. We thank Mike for all of his contributions to the Committee during his tenure from 2006 to 2012, for the many valuable records he has provided over the years (especially from the Freezout Lake area), and for his continued role in improving our understanding of bird distribution in the state.

Soon after Mike's announcement, we voted to add **Forrest Rowland** to the MBRC, which again is full with 13 members. We remain concerned with the average age of members and will strive to add younger people to the Committee when openings for new members become available.

Everyone agreed that it is desirable to meet face-to-face once a year for a variety of reasons, most important of which is to facilitate discussion that enables us to make

the best decisions possible on reports. To help facilitate everyone's participation, we discussed moving the location of the meeting and using Skype or conference calls for those who could not attend. But the consensus was to leave things as they are. As stated in the bylaws, the ability to attend the annual meeting is a condition of membership, and everyone must make a good-faith effort to attend each meeting.

Committee members who habitually miss meetings without a good reason for doing so will be asked to resign.

Election of Chair and Secretary: **Dan C** wished to relinquish the Chair position, which he held for eight years (2005-2013). Shortly before the meeting we voted by e-mail to elect **Rose Leach** as the new Chair, effective at the close of this meeting. We thank Dan for all of his great work on behalf of the Committee. **Jeff** volunteered to remain as Secretary and was elected to another two-year term.

Action items:

Each of us will capture any research we did on Harris's Hawk and Baikal Teal and forward to John C (raptors) and Coburn (waterfowl).

Each of us will be sure to contact fellow eBird reviewers if we make changes to the lists or filters of others.

Dan C has revised the spreadsheet to send to Jeff, who will make the final changes and circulate to the Committee.

Dan C and Janet Ellis will draft a letter to the Heritage Program outlining our concerns regarding data transfer, how to input our rare bird records, eBird, pending records, and potential lack of oversight regarding data input from Heritage computer staff that are not as familiar with local bird distribution. Dan will include the request to allow **Coburn** to get into Tracker to enter our rare bird records into the data base.

Jeff will add LL9 to the exception for **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** and remove **Glaucous-winged Gull** and **Scarlet Tanager** from the Review List.

Ted and Jeff need to vote on adding **California Quail** to the State List.

Coburn will make sure archives are up-to-date with Janet.

Each of us will look in our files to make sure we have captured all of the scanned information from Bob Martinka and other past efforts to archive information.

Bob will compile all the scanned files, assess storage capacity needed (Yahoo Group site does not have enough).

Dan C will look into Griffin Groups as an alternative to our Yahoo Group site; more powerful and perhaps with enough storage for all of our scanned materials

Adjourned: 14:45

Our next meeting will be at Great Falls on 10 or 17 October 2014

Submitted by: Rose Leach (with input from Dan C and Jeff), 23 October 2013