

2020 MINUTES OF THE MONTANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

Date: 25 September 2020

Location: Meeting was via Zoom owing to the Covid-19 pandemic

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

Members absent: Ted Nordhagen

Non-members present: None

Approval of 2019 Minutes: Motioned by **Rose**, seconded by **Jeff**, all approved.

Introductions: None this year.

Action Items from 2019:

In the week after the 2019 meeting, **Jeff** contacted each observer who submitted a report and informed them of the voting outcome. **Rose** sent an edited version of the 2019 spreadsheet to **Bryce Maxell** at the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) so that accepted records can appear in their MapViewer database. **Jeff** posted the 2019 Minutes and Annual Report on the *Montana Bird Advocacy's* (MBA) Web site.

John C. followed up on an older purported **Whooping Crane** report from Montana FWP, but no one could locate the information or the alleged photo; this case is now closed.

Kate provided information from other records committees related to nocturnal flight calls. It turns out that we are one of the few committees who have evaluated such reports. We will continue to do so, and to solicit input of experts in the field.

Jeff also drafted a proposal to restructure the membership of the MBRC that was circulated 4 days before the Zoom meeting (see below).

Evaluation of records:

Reports and supporting documentation were posted on our new **Groups.io** site, and the Committee evaluated reports in one round of voting during the year. We reviewed **47 new reports** that involved **31 species; 37 reports** (79%) were accompanied by photographs. We rejected **three reports**, none of which was accompanied by a photo.

We accepted two state firsts: the recently split **Mexican Duck** and the **Ivory Gull**. Other highlights included the state's **2nd Tricolored Heron**, **5th Mississippi Kite** (and **2nd specimen**), **2nd White-eyed Vireo**, **3rd Eastern Towhee**, and **5th Prairie Warbler**. We also had two **Yellow Rails** and Montana's **1st Northern Cardinal** from west of the Continental Divide. Highly unusual for one year were the 6 accepted records of **Summer Tanager**.

MBRC membership:

After discussing options for restructuring the MBRC, we voted unanimously to increase the size of the Committee to 15 members. **John Carlson** announced that he was stepping down at the close of the meeting. **John** joined the Committee in 2003 and has been an exemplary member. We thank him for 18 years of valuable service. We then voted unanimously to add **Dan Casey, Andrew Guttenberg,** and **Hilary Turner** to the MBRC, effective immediately. **Jeff** will prepare a draft amendment to our **Bylaws** to reflect the increased size of the MBRC and how that affects voting decisions on reports.

Official State List:

The **State List** now stands at **441 species** with the addition of the two new species noted above. 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 8 June 2020, **Jeff** proposed expanding the exception area for the **Gray-cheeked Thrush** such that no report is needed for encounters east of the Continental Divide. ***Motion passed unanimously via email vote 48 hours later, with all 13 committee members voting.***

In an email message dated 24 June 2020, **Jeff** noted that through spring 2016 (as documented in *Birds of Montana*), we had at least 35 records of **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** for the state, including 8 extant specimens. Since 2016, we've had 5 good records (2 in 2017, 3 this year), 2 of which are not in eBird. So, we now have no fewer than 40 records of a species that is fairly easy to distinguish by sight and sound from the only other species with which it could be confused; viz., **Black-billed Cuckoo**. **Jeff** proposed we remove **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** from the Review List. ***Motion passed unanimously via email vote during the following week, with all 13 members voting.***

After lengthy discussion of the difficulty involved in distinguishing **Blue-headed** from **Cassin's vireo**, we proposed reducing the exception area for **Blue-headed Vireo** such that no report is needed for LLs 5–8 and anywhere east of 108°W longitude. ***Motion passed unanimously.***

As of the date of this meeting, we have 20 accepted records of **Bewick's Wren**, all but three from west of the Continental Divide. Accordingly, **Jeff** proposed an exception area such that no report is needed for encounters west of the Continental Divide. ***Motion passed unanimously.*** We recognize the likelihood that this species will be removed completely from the review list in the next year or two.

Also as of today's date, we have 14 accepted records of **Great-tailed Grackle**, all but two from east of the Continental Divide. The species clearly is expanding in distribution and probably breeds in multiple Montana locations east of the divide. Accordingly, **Jeff**

proposed an exception area such that no report is needed for encounters east of the Continental Divide. ***Motion passed unanimously.***

NOTE ADDED AFTER OUR ANNUAL MEETING: With the acceptance of two reports this year, we now have 21 records for **Red Phalarope**. Jeff did not notice this until 12 October, at which time he called for a vote via email to remove **Red Phalarope** from the Review List. ***Motion passed unanimously by email vote less than 48 hours later, with all 15 committee members voting.***

Old reports reconsidered:

Kate and **Forrest** discussed the difficulty of separating **Blue-headed** from **Cassin's vireos** in the field, even in high-quality photos. We would be more inclined to accept reports that included a description or recording of vocalizations (we realize that many fall birds will be silent). We re-voted on **MBRC 2019-003** and **2019-036** and rejected them and will revisit other accepted records. As noted above, we revised the exception area to LLs 5-8 and everything east of 108°W; previously no reports were needed from anywhere east of the Continental Divide.

Bylaws discussion:

John C. noted in 2019 that the **Bylaws** no longer reflect the location of the archives. **Jeff** will revise the **Bylaws** for this item and for the new reorganization of the committee makeup and submit the revised document to the committee for email vote later this fall.

eBird discussion:

None. We will hold a separate meeting of eBird reviewers later this fall, via Zoom.

New action items:

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. He will also post the **Annual Report**, **Minutes**, and revised **Review List** on our Web site. **Rose** will send an edited version of the 2020 spreadsheet to **Bryce Maxell** so that accepted records can appear in the MNHP's database. [**Jeff contacted all observers by 26 September and posted the new Review List on our Web site on 1 October.**]

Jeff will draft a proposal to update the **Bylaws** to accurately state where the archives are housed and to incorporate the new changes in committee makeup.

Coburn will deliver reports, photos, and the spreadsheet of votes from 2019 and 2020 to the Montana Historical Society in Helena in October, following this meeting.

Forrest proposed and will head up developing a list of species for which we prefer vocal information in addition to a photo.

Jeff contacted **Justin Bosler** to request information on ruling out two rare species of *Myiarchus* on his report for **Ash-throated Flycatcher** (2020-001) and received the information from **Justin** on 9 October. **Jeff** also modified the rare bird report form to note that hybrids should be considered in the section about ruling out similar species.

Adjournment: 13:25.

Our next meeting is proposed for Great Falls on Friday, 24 September 2021
Submitted by: Jeff Marks, Secretary, 13 October 2020