

## Report of the Nevada Bird Records Committee for 2005

JACK COCHRAN, SECRETARY  
Nevada Bird Records Committee

*80 South Gibson Road, #1314, Henderson, NV 89012*

This report of the Nevada Bird Records Committee (NBRC) details the evaluation of 24 records covering the years of 2000-2003.

As mentioned in last year's report, documentation will now only be accepted for birds on the Nevada Review List, or for other compelling reasons (e.g. birds noticeably out of season). Observers should note that the Nevada Review List contains documentation exemptions based on state subdivision into three regions, northwest, northeast, and south, and they should consider this prior to making a submission. The list is located on the Great Basin Bird Observatory web site at ([www.gbbo.org](http://www.gbbo.org)). Follow the link from "Nevada Birding" to "Documenting Rarities". A "Documentation of Significant Sighting Form" can also be retrieved from this area. This form is only meant to be a helpful guide, contrary to the current published language on the web site that seems to indicate that only this form should be used for documentation, as many accepted records were not authored in that format.

Observers who submit reports should not be disappointed if the NBRC votes not to accept a bird record. Even if a record is not accepted, it is archived and could provide valuable context for future sightings. Reports that are accompanied by photographs and sketches have a higher likelihood of acceptance.

The Committee is currently composed of the following members (the first time in several years that a full Committee of six has been established): John Klicka, Martin Meyers, Scott Page, Mike San Miguel, Greg Scyphers, and Dennis Serdehely. Former members Pete Bradley, Chris Elphick, Dorothy Crowe, Ted Floyd, and Gary Voelker contributed to some of the decisions listed below and are gratefully acknowledged for their service to NBRC.

Records are accepted if they have received votes of 6-0, 5-0, or 5-1. 4-2 votes are re-circulated. Any record receiving three or more negative votes is not accepted. The exact vote for a record is not included in the details listed below.

Initials are listed only for observers who submitted documentation for accepted records. The year and the record number assigned are listed after observers' initials, or alone, in absence of initials. If photographs were included in documentation, it is noted as "Ph" after the record number. Records are listed in taxonomic order. The county name is shown in **bold-face type** after the specific location of the sighting. For brevity, this year there is no listing of records still under review.

Analysis of records as to previous sightings, especially when potential first state records are involved, has become controversial based on the perceived weakness of Alcorn, the lack of referral to American Birds, and numerous "old" documented sightings that have yet to be either: submitted to, or reviewed by the Committee. Analysis that includes

these comments continues to be deferred until a historical review of sightings can be conducted by the Committee.

It is with great sorrow that I acknowledge the recent death of two fine Nevada birders, Jack Walters and Dennis Trousdale. Not only did these birders contribute greatly to the overall NBRC record, but they were also friends of mine. In particular, Jack's passion for the birds, including educational efforts and conservation promotion, will be missed. His playful nature and sense of humor were represented well in his reports to the Nevada birding listserv and during field trips that we took together.

Jack contributed to four of the accepted submissions in this report, and also provided the documentation for such important Nevada records as Curlew Sandpiper, Bay-breasted Warbler, Red-eyed Vireo, Common Blackhawk, Mississippi Kite, Zone-tailed Hawk, Blackpoll Warbler, and Clapper Rail. Dennis was similarly prolific, and had accepted records for Kentucky Warbler, Connecticut Warbler, Black Turnstone, Chestnut-sided Warbler, and Common Grackle. Jack and Dennis even teamed up for one excellent record, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. Their efforts to document their sightings to NBRC should be a model for all Nevada birders who see rare birds.

In keeping with the above sentiment, the Secretary notes that many rare birds are reported on the Nevada birding listserv, but never documented to NBRC. The Committee again invites (implores) those observers who see a rare bird to consider documenting their sighting.

### **2003 RECORDS ACCEPTED**

LEAST TERN *Sterna antillarum* (DS; 2003-04, Ph) A dead bird found and photographed in Las Vegas Wash, **Clark** on 29 April 2003 was deemed "fresh" by one reviewer. Another reviewer found it interesting that the bird apparently arrived just prior to an "invasion" of several Least Terns that were at the Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve in southern Nevada starting in late spring and lasting through the summer in the same year.

WOOD THRUSH *Hylocichla mustelina* (KW, RF; 2003-17, Ph) A perfect example of where photographs, even those considered to be of poor quality, cemented the record of a bird from 12 October 2003, Pahrnagat National Wildlife Refuge, **Lincoln**.

MAGNOLIA WARBLER *Dendroica magnolia* (DS; 2003-10) All reviewers felt that the solid documentation left no doubt as to the identity of this brightly colored, male bird found at Dyer Pond, **Esmeralda** on 24 May 2003. In addition, one reviewer commented that it was the right time of the year for this bird as a vagrant in Nevada.

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER *Dendroica caerulescens* (MSMJ; 2003-18) At Corn Creek, Desert National Wildlife Range, **Clark** on 15 October 2003, an immature bird was well documented. Vocalization descriptions were deemed important (and accurate) by two reviewers.

PALM WARBLER *Dendroica palmarum* (MM; 2003-02, Ph) The clear, diagnostic photograph supplied with this record from 1 January 2003 Carson Lake, **Churchill** made for a quick and affirmative review.

**SMITH'S LONGSPUR** *Calcarius pictus* (JW, TL; 2003-14, Ph) An exciting find for Nevada was this bird at Carson Lake near Fallon, **Churchill**. This longspur was viewed by many birders from approximately 16 December 2003 through 14 January 2004. Again, photographic evidence was instrumental in the positive record, although one reviewer apparently eschewed the pictures and voted to reject on what he considered to be an incomplete written description for the bird. In addition, this reviewer confessed that his own inexperience with this species may have contributed to his negative vote. With this bird, one of the reporters had listed Chestnut-collared Longspur, Lapland Longspur, and Snow Bunting (see below) as seen on the same day and in the same location.

**SNOW BUNTING** *Plectrophenax nivalis* (DS; 2003-15) A single bird was at Carson Lake, **Churchill**, 17 December 2003 in the same area as the Smith's Longspur described above (2003-14). The documentation was strong enough to rule out an "odd partial albino" bird, according to one reviewer.

**HOODED ORIOLE** *Icterus cucullatus* (DS; 2003-09) At Fernley, **Lyon** on 16 May 2003, a spring male was adequately documented to secure the record. One committee member was surprised that this record was considered for review, but the Nevada Review List indicates that documentation should be submitted for this species, except for birds found in southern Nevada.

**PURPLE FINCH** *Carpodacus purpurens* (TWR; 2003-12, Ph) The review process for this bird netted at Logan House Creek in the Carson Mountains, **Douglas** on 22 July 2003 was not trivial, even with the detailed description of the bird that discussed separation from the similar Cassin's Finch, and in-hand photographic evidence! The lone, dissenting reviewer felt that since the bird "has retained juvenal plumage, it may not be fully grown, making morphometric comparisons moot." The undertail coverts, which this reviewer suggested would add extra weight to identification, were not addressed in the documentation text, nor shown in the photos.

## **2003 RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED, IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED**

**EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE** *Cantopus virens* (2003-05, Ph) The difficulties in separating this species from the common Western Wood-Pewee were noted in all reviewer comments as they voted to reject this record from the Meadow Valley Wash, **Lincoln**, 6 May 2003. Interestingly, this is the rare record that is denied even when supplemented with a relatively good photograph, which serves to highlight the challenge in distinguishing pewees observed in the field. The identification seemed to rest largely on "yellowish orange" mandible color, but several reviewers said this was not diagnostic for Eastern Wood-Pewee. In this case, voice would have been a more powerful credential for Eastern than a photograph, but the bird apparently was not calling. In addition to his extensive morphological analysis of the situation, one committee member also provided status and distribution information (in North America, and more specifically based on accepted California records) that served to minimize the possibility for an Eastern Wood-Pewee in

Nevada at such an early date.

HOODED ORIOLE *Icterus cucullatus* (2003-07) Two reviewers voted to disallow this record of a first-year male from Fernley, **Lyon**, 22 April 2003, while simultaneously noting that it likely was a Hooded Oriole. One reviewer deemed color descriptions for the bill (listed as all black, but should have distinctive bluish-gray patch), and wings and back (should be brown for Hooded, not gray) lacking. Two reviewers decided the documentation did not rule out the less likely Orchard Oriole.

## 2002 RECORDS ACCEPTED

BROWN PELICAN *Pelicanus occidentalis* (WB; 2002-13) A bird flying parallel to highway I-15, east of Jean, **Clark** 22 July 2002 was identified from a car by the driver. (This is one case when documentation not compiled during the sighting can be overlooked.) Although one committee member felt the observation conditions were too poor to get his vote, the description, particularly elimination of American White Pelican, was deemed adequate by the remaining committee members. Other supportive reviewer comments: immature pelicans tend to disperse this time of year (including occasionally to the Colorado River and Lake Mead), and the record coincided approximately in time with Brown Pelican reports from Arizona.

ACORN WOODPECKER *Melanerpes formicivorus* (ShG, StG; 2002-17) The most interesting point about this sighting of a bird at Old Mill Town on Kyle Canyon Road, **Clark** 12 December 2002, according to two reviewers, was the late date, perhaps the latest for a Nevada record of this species. The thorough description and generally unmistakable appearance supported the record.

RED-EYED VIREO *Vireo olivaceus* (CT; 2002-23) The excellent description of the bird discovered at Corn Creek, Desert National Wildlife Range, **Clark** 3 June 2002, including the vireo behavioral characteristic of “plopping” onto a branch, led to this accepted record. One member noted that the observation date fit the pattern of this species for vagrancy at desert oases.

LECONTE’S THRASHER *Toxostoma lecontei* (JM; 2002-16) The record of this bird from 23 October 2002, Torrance Ranch, **Nye** was especially strong based on the observer’s description of the vocalization. Although two members thought this thrasher was not on the Nevada Review List, and therefore should not have been reviewed, it is on the Review List, albeit south exempt (which means that documentation from Clark, Esmeralda, Lincoln, and Nye counties is not necessary). One reviewer stated that the “observation was probably near the northernmost range limit for this species and may be significant from that standpoint.” No matter what, the record was deemed worthy of review by the previous NBRC Secretary, who entered it into the system, and so it was circulated.

CAPE MAY WARBLER *Dendroica tigrina* (CT; 2002-22) A bird described as a first spring male at Corn Creek, Desert National Wildlife Range, **Clark** 25 May 2002 gener-

ated a positive record, although not without reservation from one reviewer who wrote that the crown should be streaked instead of solely black, and that the “wing bar” should have been a “broad white bar or patch”. Chestnut-colored auriculars though seem to eliminate any other contenders.

HEPATIC TANAGER *Piranga flava* (JW; 2002-18, Ph) Photographic evidence left no doubt as to the identity of this bird found at Miller’s Rest Stop near Tonopah, **Esmeralda** 29 September 2002.

GRASSHOPPER SPARROW *Ammodramus savannarum* (JW; 2002-20, Ph) Only one reviewer was not swayed by the description and close-up photograph of this fall sparrow at Corn Creek, Desert National Wildlife Range, **Clark**, 27 October 2002.

LAWRENCE’S GOLDFINCH *Carduelis lawrencei* (JW; 2002-19, Ph) Again, photographic support pegged the record for this adult male located at Corn Creek, Desert National Wildlife Range, **Clark**, 17 October 2002.

## **2002 RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED, IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED**

EASTERN MEADOWLARK *Sturnella magna* (2002-21, Ph) Interestingly enough, another record of two birds (!) seen on 27 May 2002 Miller’s Rest Stop near Tonopah, **Esmeralda**, was rejected even though accompanied by a photograph. Voice, according to the reviewers, is critical (or even mandatory) in separating Eastern and Western Meadowlark. Additionally, description/discussion of the tail patterns would be helpful, but was not included in the report. The observer’s identification seems to rest largely on the apparent white malar stripe, but one reviewer cited a source that describes considerable overlap between Eastern and Western Meadowlark in this area.

## **2001 RECORDS ACCEPTED**

BLACKPOLL WARBLER *Dendroica striata* (CE, TF; 2001-28) One bird, seen by many birders on a field trip, was at Oxbow Park, **Washoe** on 26 September 2001. The possibility of confusion with other fall *Dendroica* warblers (specifically Bay-breasted and Pine) was thoroughly eliminated with the incredibly detailed write-ups provided by both observers. The experience of both observers with eastern warblers, and the long observation time (up to 10 minutes or more), surely contributed to the excellent documentation of this bird.

## **2001 RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED, IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED**

COMMON TERN *Sterna hirundo* (2001-13) This bird was described from the Dr. Harry M. Gallagher State Fish Hatchery near Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge, **Elko** on 28 June 2001. This rather detailed record was rejected, but unfortunately the reviewers

themselves provided little documentation on the reasons why. The “best” explanation was that Artic Tern, which would be very unlikely, was not completely eliminated by the report. This record may be considered for recirculation.

**WORM-EATING WARBLER** *Helmitheros vermivorus* (2001-25) A bird from Corn Creek, Desert National Wildlife Range, **Clark** 1 September 2001 was, unfortunately, so poorly described that the record was rejected. Two reviewers felt that, given the observer, the bird was properly identified. However, since only the written documentation will be left in the archive years from now (and not the memory or reputation of the observer), this particular record is a perfect example of the need for thorough documentation.

**MOURNING WARBLER** *Oporornis philadelphia* (2001-23) Two birds (!) were reported at Porter Springs, Seven Troughs Ranch, **Pershing** on 26 August 2001. This was a difficult record to evaluate, according to the reviewers. The basic visual description for the birds seemed adequate (although some reviewers wanted more discussion for elimination of other warblers), but other areas of the documentation led to the record’s downfall. These included: (1) No description of body structure, such as tail length and bill shape. (2) The “flying up into the trees” behavior description, which is atypical for this species during migration. (3) The observer’s claim of almost annual fall sightings of this species at Porter Springs, specifically in 1994, 1996, 1999, and 2000. No documentation has been received by NBRC for any of these sightings. And, accepted records are sparse for this species, at this time, in the region (according to one reviewer). (4) The presence of two such rare birds in the same place at the same time. (5) Lack of photographic evidence.

#### Contributors

William Bearman, Becky Blasius, Chris Elphick, Ted Floyd, Rick Fridell, Shirley Graff, Steven Graff, Tim Lenz, Martin Meyers, Jim Moore, T. Will Richardson, Mike San Miguel, Jr., Dennis Serdehely, Carolyn Titus, Jack Walters, Kevin Wheeler

#### References

Alcorn, R. 1988. **The Birds of Nevada**. Fairview West Publishing (Fallon, Nevada).