

2002 (eighth) report of the Sacramento Bird Records Committee

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Since 1998, annual reports of the Sacramento Bird Records Committee (SBRC) have been published in the CVBC Bulletin. This is the eighth SBRC report and the sixth to appear in the CVBC Bulletin. Reports of the SBRC prior to 1998 are still available from the author on request (send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the address given above). Current members of the SBRC are Bruce Deuel, Andrew Engilis, Jr., Ed Greaves, Ed Harper, Jeri Langham, Tim Manolis, Brian Williams, and David Yee.

Because of the wider readership to which these reports have been exposed by their publication in the CVBC Bulletin, increased interest has been expressed by Central Valley observers as to the exact nature and function of the SBRC. In addition, the SBRC has been slowly evolving over time in response to changing circumstances and more changes are being discussed for the future as a result of pressure from both inside and outside the SBRC to adapt its role to a broader purpose. For these reasons, I would like to begin this report with a history of the SBRC.

The SBRC is a committee of the Sacramento Audubon Society (SAS). The SBRC came into existence primarily in response to two major concerns: The first involved the list of species to be included on the SAS *Checklist of the Birds of the Sacramento Area* (Sacramento Audubon Society 1998; hereafter referred to as the *Checklist*). The second involved rarities reported on local Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs).

The Sacramento Audubon Society was established in 1950. The first "Checklist of the Birds of Sacramento and Vicinity" was prepared by William Kirsher in 1951, and was No. 2 in the Sacramento State College Publications Natural History Series. Its sponsors were SAS and the Science Division of Sacramento State College (now California State University, Sacramento). It was a bar graph checklist that included "the birds that might be found during the course of a year within 35 miles of Sacramento, California." The 1959 *Checklist* covered an area extending "from State Sign Route 12 on the south to the Sutter Buttes on the north, and east and west into the chaparral covered foothills of the Sierra and Coast Range to about the 1000 foot contour." This region more or less encompassed the southern Sacramento Valley, the area most actively birded by SAS members during the course of a year. Through much of the 1950s and 1960s, SAS was the largest and most active Audubon chapter in this area. Davis Audubon Society, for example, did not become established until 1971. As a result, during these decades the SAS *Checklist* was the primary source of distributional information available for the southern Sacramento Valley. The 1959 *Checklist* was the first version to include a list of species of "rare or accidental occurrence"

(14 species). The checklist underwent a series of revisions over the next two decades, and by 1977 the northern boundary of the area covered had been more precisely fixed at State Highway 20 and the list of accidental species had grown to 93.

The current format of the *Checklist* came into existence with a major revision in 1983. Concerns had long been expressed that many of the older reports of rare species on file from as far back as the late 1940s and early 1950s were entirely undocumented. Creation of a records committee to review and evaluate all past as well as current reports, along the lines of similar committees established elsewhere (e.g., the California Bird Records Committee) was seen as a desirable means of determining which species should actually be listed on the *Checklist*. The recently formed SBRC (see below) was thus given the task of evaluating all past reports for the area of coverage. On the 1983 *Checklist* (and subsequent revisions) the list of species of accidental occurrence consisted of species with "5 or fewer records approved by the Records Committee." In addition, for the first time on a *Checklist*, certain species on the main, bar-graph list were marked with an asterisk, indicating that reports of such species required review by the SBRC. A standard process for the addition of species to the *Checklist* as well as for determining changes in status for species already listed (e.g., "upgrading" from the list of species of accidental occurrence to the bar-graph list) was thus established.

The second concern that gave rise to the need for a records committee involved rarities reported on local Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs). For many years, the compiler of each local CBC had been responsible for accepting or not accepting reports of rarities. However, frequent turnover of compilers resulted in uneven evaluation of such reports, with some compilers being more lenient, and others more critical, of reports of rare birds. In addition, first-time compilers often felt uncomfortable as well as unprepared to make such evaluations. SBRC review was seen as a good means of helping compilers in this regard. In addition, many CBC rarities were species that would otherwise be evaluated by the SBRC in any event.

The first SBRC, established in 1978, consisted of a non-voting secretary (the committee Chair) and three voting members. During the next few years the committee changed in form and manner of operation a number of times. The current structure and procedures of the SBRC were established by Bylaws drafted in 1985, and subsequently amended in 1996.

The current SBRC consists of 8 voting members, including the Chair. The Chair is responsible for compiling records and voting results and for the distribution of records for review. At intervals, records are mailed out for review, usually in packets of from 10 to 15 records. The first member to receive a packet votes to accept or not accept each record, then sends his votes on to the Chair and the packet of records on to the next member in the voting sequence. Members are not allowed to know how other members voted or plan to vote on a record during the first round of review. After all

members have voted, the Chair tabulates the results. A record receiving 8 or 7 votes of acceptance is considered accepted. A record receiving between 6 and 4 votes of acceptance is held over for a second round of review. Records with fewer than 4 votes of acceptance are not accepted. In addition, a record receiving 7 votes of acceptance may, at the request of the lone member not accepting the record, be recirculated for a second round of review. During the second round of review, each member is allowed to see how other members voted on the first round, and to read their comments. If a record still receives between 6 and 4 votes of acceptance in the second round, it is submitted for a third round of review. After that, if there is still no clear decision either way, it is deliberated upon at a meeting of the SBRC until a decision is reached. After a decision has been reached to either accept or not accept a record, the original record and attached documentation are archived at the Museum of Wildlife and Fish Biology at the University of California, Davis, under the care of Andrew Engilis, Jr., and a copy of the record is archived at California State University, Sacramento, under the care of Dr. Jeri M. Langham. The SBRC archives are open to public review.

A frequent question asked of the SBRC is, "What species are reviewed by the committee?" The only easy way to explain this is in reference to the SAS *Checklist of the Birds of the Sacramento Area*. The last revision of the *Checklist* was made in 1998. However, revisions made at that time were for the most part minor and did not affect the status of reviewed species. Thus, either the 1993 or 1998 versions serve equally well as the basic starting point for determining which species are reviewed. The current version of the *Checklist* is available from Sacramento Audubon Society by sending one dollar to Sacramento Audubon Society Store, 215 Ardmore Ave., Roseville, CA 95678-5101. It is also sold at SAS monthly meetings and at some local nature centers and bookstores.

In the 1998 report (Manolis 1999), the SBRC announced it would no longer review reports of the following species (indicated as reviewed species on the 1993 and 1998 versions of the *Checklist*) unless they were of birds observed prior to 1996: Blue-winged Teal, Greater Scaup, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Short-billed Dowitcher, Glaucous Gull, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Townsend's Solitaire, Dusky Flycatcher, Hammond's Flycatcher, Gray Flycatcher, and Grasshopper Sparrow. Thus, the current list of reviewed species includes the following (either on the list of species of accidental occurrence on the 1993 or 1998 *Checklist*, minus the above deletions, or with an asterisk on the main list) plus any species not mentioned anywhere on the 1993 or 1998 *Checklist*:

Red-throated Loon; Pacific Loon; Red-necked Grebe; Brown Pelican; Little Blue Heron; Wood Stork; Fulvous Whistling-Duck; Emperor Goose; Brant; Whooper Swan; Surf Scoter; Long-tailed Duck; Red-breasted Merganser; Gyrfalcon; American Golden-Plover; Pacific Golden-Plover; Snowy Plover; Spotted Redshank; Ruddy Turnstone; Red Knot; Sanderling; Semipalmated Sandpiper; Sharp-tailed Sandpiper; Stilt Sand-

piper; Ruff; Red Phalarope; Franklin's Gull; Little Gull; Western Gull; Sabine's Gull; Black-legged Kittiwake; Gull-billed Tern; Yellow-billed Cuckoo; Greater Roadrunner; Flammulated Owl; Snowy Owl; Spotted Owl; Long-eared Owl; Common Nighthawk; Black Swift; Chimney Swift; Costa's Hummingbird; Allen's Hummingbird; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker; Red-naped Sapsucker; Pileated Woodpecker; Least Flycatcher; Eastern Phoebe; Vermilion Flycatcher; Tropical Kingbird; Eastern Kingbird; Northern Shrike; Bell's Vireo; Mountain Chickadee; Chestnut-backed Chickadee; Sage Thrasher; Brown Thrasher; Bendire's Thrasher; Bohemian Waxwing; Northern Parula; Chestnut-sided Warbler; Magnolia Warbler; Black-throated Blue Warbler; Black-throated Green Warbler; Palm Warbler; Bay-breasted Warbler; Blackpoll Warbler; Black-and-white Warbler; American Redstart; Northern Waterthrush; Canada Warbler; Hepatic Tanager; Green-tailed Towhee; Brewer's Sparrow; Black-chinned Sparrow; Black-throated Sparrow; Lark Bunting; Harris's Sparrow; Chestnut-collared Longspur; Snow Bunting; Rose-breasted Grosbeak; Indigo Bunting; Bobolink; Great-tailed Grackle; Orchard Oriole; Cassin's Finch; Red Crossbill.

I should add a comment here concerning the Golden-Plovers, as some confusion may arise if the 1993 or 1998 versions of the *Checklist* are consulted. Between the publication dates of these versions, what had been the Lesser Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*) was split into two species, American (*P. dominica*) and Pacific (*P. fulva*) golden-plovers. Lesser Golden-Plover was listed with an asterisk on the main list of the 1993 *Checklist*, but only American Golden-Plover was listed on the 1998 *Checklist*, and the asterisk had been inadvertently deleted. For now, both American and Pacific golden-plovers should be considered as if listed on the main list with an asterisk (i. e., the SBRC will accept reports of either species for review).

It is important to bear in mind that quite a few species have been documented within the *Checklist* area since publication of the last *Checklist* (e. g., Kentucky Warbler and Buff-breasted Sandpiper, records of which were published in the last issue of the CVBC Bulletin). It is beyond the scope of this paper for me to list other such recent additions, and, in any case, many proposed additions have yet to be reviewed by the SBRC. This is an ongoing process and any list published here, no matter how up-to-date at press time, would soon be out of date. If you are deciding whether or not a particular species should be reported to the SBRC and a current copy of the *Checklist* is unavailable to you, common sense and a little bit of knowledge of bird distribution as can be obtained from, say, the range maps in almost any of the popular field guides will have to serve as the basis for your decision.

For some time, the other aspect of SBRC review, unseasonable records (e. g., Yellow Warbler on a CBC), has been a source of debate and confusion, even within the SBRC. Most such records received and reviewed to date involve CBC rarities, even though the Bylaws of the SBRC do not limit

review of seasonal rarities to such reports. For some time now, however, the SBRC has found it impossible to achieve the original goal of having an SBRC meeting immediately after the CBC period in order to report it's decisions back to compilers in time to meet the deadline for CBC data submission to National Audubon Society. Most local compilers still eventually submit their reports of reviewed species to the SBRC; however the decision to include a report of a rarity within the CBC results has devolved back to local compilers. The bigger problem with the review of unseasonable records remains the establishment of firm limits as to which species merit this sort of review and during which time periods they are to be considered out of season. A draft list of such species and their review status is currently before the SBRC for evaluation and hopefully will be published in due course.

The SBRC has also made changes over time in the geographical area of its coverage. For example, the SBRC long ago decided to review records from the tiny part of Sacramento County south of Highway 12 in the Delta region. The SBRC made some more dramatic decisions in this regard at its last regular meeting, and the current area from which reports are reviewed by the SBRC is as follows: All portions of Colusa, Sutter, Nevada, Yuba, El Dorado, Amador, Calaveras, San Joaquin, Sacramento, and Yolo counties within the Central Valley and below the 1000-foot contour line on either side of the valley, plus that part of Solano County within the Central Valley, below the 1000-foot contour, and north of Highway 12 (i. e., excluding the Suisun marshes and the Vallejo area).

Where to from here? As the above brief history shows, the scope and function of SBRC activities has evolved over time. For example, SBRC reports originally were intended to appear in the Sacramento Audubon Society newsletter, but from the start this was impractical because of cost and space limitations. For a time, SBRC reports were published by the author and made available on request, until the welcomed arrival of the CVBC Bulletin as an outlet for their publication. Only half of the current SBRC members are members of Sacramento Audubon Society, and Sacramento Audubon Society is no longer involved with financial support of SBRC activities. The geographic area of SBRC review has expanded beyond the borders of the SAS *Checklist*, and there has been ongoing discussion of extending it even further to include the northern half of the Central Valley from San Joaquin County north, although the current workload of the SBRC precludes this as an option for now. Eventually, the Central Valley checklist and checklist area envisioned by the CVBC (Edson 2003) might serve as benchmarks for the SBRC review process. Finally, the SBRC has developed increasingly close ties not only with the CVBC but, most recently, the Museum of Wildlife and Fish Biology at the University of California, Davis (see Engilis, 2002). In summary, the SBRC is due for a re-evaluation of its role and, particularly, its relationship with SAS. Stay tuned.

Since the last report (Manolis 2002), 23 records have been reviewed by the SBRC. Of these, 18 (78%) were accepted, 2 (9%) were not accepted, and 3 (13%) were held over for recirculation. The information for these records, presented here, includes: the record number (e. g., 4-00 indicates the fourth report received in 2000); for accepted, records, initials of the observer(s) submitting documentation (i. e., not necessarily the first observer[s] of the bird[s]); and comments on additional supporting documentation (photos, tape recordings, etc.).

RECORDS ACCEPTED

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) — An apparent Reeve (female, based on size) was reported (4-2000, TM) seen along Brewer Road north of the intersection with Nicolaus Road, Placer Co., 6 August 1998. The bird, discovered there the previous day, constitutes the first accepted record of Ruff for Placer County. The lone SBRC member who rejected the record did not doubt that the bird was a Ruff, but bemoaned the fact that none of a number of other observers of the bird bothered to submit additional documentation. The SBRC welcomes additional documentation of this record, as it is never too late to submit such information, even for records that have already been accepted or not accepted.

Great-crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*) — An amazing record of one (12-2000, AE) seen and heard at the Cosumnes River Preserve, Sacramento Co., 30 September 1997, is the first accepted record for Sacramento County and the *Checklist* area. This report generated much comment by members, a number of whom accepted it with some reservations (plus there was one vote against the record). The major concern was that observation of the bird was brief and incomplete, the identification being based primarily on the distinctive call note of the species. However, the general consensus was that: 1) the visual description was of a *Myiarchus* flycatcher; 2) the calls, heard well, were distinctive of *M. crinitus*; and 3) the observer had sufficient prior experience with vocalizations of this and other *Myiarchus* species to make the identification.

Northern Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) — Four records, all from the winter of 1999-2000, were accepted by the SBRC: one (24-2000, SH) seen at the Davis Wetlands, Yolo Co., 4 December 1999; one (25-2000, SH) seen in Bray Canyon, Yolo Co., 19 December 1999; one (26-2000, SH) seen at North Pond in Davis, Yolo Co., 20 February 2000; and one (7-2000, TM) seen along Elkhorn Boulevard about .5 mi E of Highway 99, Sacramento Co., 27 December 1999. The Yolo County birds were all reported as “apparently first winter birds,” but the Sacramento County bird was a gray-bodied adult. This species may go unreported in the southern Sacramento Valley for a number of years and then be found in modest numbers in a relatively

circumscribed area and time period, such as is represented by these reports. Records 25-2000 and 7-2000 were of birds discovered on the Putah Creek and Sacramento CBCs, respectively.

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*) — Three reports from Sacramento County, one (39-99, SA) in Carmichael, 15 July 1999; one (19-2000, AE) at the Cosumnes River Preserve, 6 September 1999; and one (6-2000, TM) in the Arden Park area of Sacramento, 7 October 1999, are unprecedented for one summer-fall period. The first two birds were adult males, but the October bird was a young male or bright female.

Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*) — Four reports were accepted, all from the Cosumnes River Preserve, Sacramento County: one adult male (14-97, JT) from 7 July to 16 August 1996; another adult male (16-97, JT) from 27 July to 10 August 1996; a presumed female (17-97, JT) seen on 27 July 1996; and a fresh juvenal-plumaged bird (19-97, JT) seen on 2 August 1996. Male #14-97 was seen singing in the vicinity of female #17-97 on 27 July, and was seen feeding juvenile #19-97 on 2 August. JT reports that a female on a nest containing a bunting egg and a cowbird egg was reported in the territory of male #14-97 on 18 July (*vide* Jennifer White). JT found two young in this nest on 31 July. The years 1996-1998 produced a number of records of this species as well as hybrid buntings (*P. amoena* x *P. cyanea*) at the Cosumnes River Preserve (Manolis et al. 2002).

Brewer's Sparrow (*Spizella breweri*) — One (5-2000, TM) was reported seen at the Jacob Lane Access to the American River Parkway, Carmichael, Sacramento Co., on 28 September 1998.

Lark Bunting (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) — One (8-2000, TM) reported along Radio Road W of El Centro Road, Sacramento Co., 27 December 1999 had been discovered previously on the Sacramento CBC.

Chestnut-collared Longspur (*Calcarius ornatus*) — A single apparent female (14-2000, AE) was found two days before the Rio Cosumnes CBC on the Valesin Unit of the Cosumnes River Preserve, Sacramento Co., 27 December 1999, but could not be found on count day. However, a flock of about 20 was found at this location the day after the count by JT (*vide* AE). This is apparently the first record of the species for Sacramento County.

Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalis mexicanus*) — One female (20-98, CH) was seen at the Lincoln Sewage Treatment Plant, Lincoln, Placer Co., 11 August 1998, and three males and a female (13-2000, AE) were found at Camden County Park, Elk Grove, Sacramento Co., 29 December 1999. This species has become an established part of the local breeding avifauna and its removal from the SBRC review list is imminent.

RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED

Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*) — After two circulations, the SBRC voted not to accept a report (6-97) of one seen along the American River Parkway near the Watt Avenue Bridge, Sacramento, Sacramento Co., 29 January 1997. The first vote was 4-4, the second vote was 3-5. Those voting not to accept were concerned about plumage details and behavior that did not seem appropriate for this species.

Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*) — A remarkable winter sighting of a female or first-year male (1-2000) reported seen at a residence on Norris Avenue, Sacramento, Sacramento Co., 8 January 2000, received a 3-5 vote on its first circulation. Despite a tantalizing description of a bird coming to a backyard birdbath, the majority of SBRC members felt that the report fell just short of adequately documenting such an unprecedented occurrence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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