

# California Bird Records Committee (CBRC) Annual Meeting Minutes

Virtual Meeting, CA

13–14 Jan 2023

*Meeting called to order at 1:01 pm on 13 January 2023 (Chair presiding). Members: Justyn Stahl (Chair), Ryan Terrill (Vice Chair), Tom Benson (non-voting Secretary), Jon Feenstra, Rob Fowler, Debbie House, Chris Howard, Guy McCaskie, Gary Nunn, Steve Tucker. Welcome and introductory comments by Stahl.*

1. **Review of Minutes of 2022 Meeting.** The minutes from the annual meeting held 14–15 January 2022 (virtually) had been previously approved via email (30 December 2022). No one requested any changes at the 2023 meeting.
2. **Minute Keeping for the 2023 Meeting.** Chair requested taking minutes be a shared responsibility. A recording of the meeting by Secretary increased the ease of minute-keeping. Minutes were kept in ~four-hour shifts, with Stahl, Feenstra, and Tucker agreeing to take minutes.

**--CLOSED SESSION--**

### 3. Election of New Members

- a. Election of members (three-year terms). The terms of Debbie House, Guy McCaskie, and Ryan Terrill expire after the 2023 meeting.

Nominations:

Andy Birch

Jon Dunn

Kimball Garrett

Marky Mutchler

Peter Pyle

Dessi Sieburth

Susan Steele

Kimball Garrett, Marky Mutchler, and Peter Pyle were elected

Nominators agreed to notify nominees whether or not they were elected by Monday, 16 January. A formal email will be sent to each nominee by the Secretary informing them of the election results. Precise wording will be at the Secretary's discretion, but at a minimum should include an introductory comment, a list of all nominees, and those elected. Voting details shall

not be included.

b. Election of Chair. Justyn Stahl was re-elected Chair.

c. Election of Vice Chair. Chris Howard was elected Vice Chair.

d. Election of Secretary. Tom Benson re-elected Secretary, but would like to step-down at some point.

e. Discussion of member nomination and selection process – Stahl led a discussion of general considerations of potential Committee members. Each member should consider candidates based on their own priorities, but general considerations are:

- i. Regional balance
- ii. Age balance
- iii. Experience balance (new members vs returning members with institutional knowledge)
- iv. Diversity balance
- v. Support of the CBRC, both by submission of records and by general support of the CBRC's mission. They need not agree with all CBRC decisions, but are supportive of the process.

For the sake of discussion, the Committee reviewed the following criteria for Committee membership considered by the British Bird Records Committee (as published in British Birds in April 2017):

1. A widely acknowledged expertise in ID
2. Proven reliability in the field
3. A track record of high-quality submissions to local records committee
4. Experience with record assessment
5. Regional credibility
6. Capacity to handle large volume of record review
7. Capacity to work quickly and efficiently
8. Easy access to the internet

**—OPEN SESSION—**

#### **4. Bylaw Proposals**

No changes to the bylaws were proposed.

#### **5. Procedural Issues**

a. The Committee discussed the Dropbox account, data back-ups, digitization of physical CBRC files housed at the WFVZ (Adam Searcy was working on this, based on some mid-80's CDs from David Vander Pluym), and the need to find out what is backed-up digitally.

b. Secretary proposed the following as a plan for meetings going forward. COVID-19 disrupted our ability/desire to meet in person. Beginning in 2024 we will plan to return to the North/South rotation with hybrid options. The Chair will get a consensus that a majority will meet in person before moving forward with meeting planning.

c. A long list of species in eBird are treated as escapees, but some may warrant review by the CBRC (e.g., the House Crow from Los Angeles Co.). A list was sent to the Committee to review overnight.

d. Ship assistance was discussed. Members noted that a bird may land for one second, one week, and anywhere in between, and that one can never know (unless the bird is actually seen on the ship), whether it rode the ship into port. The Committee should consider patterns of occurrence and perhaps pay close attention to birds outside of these patterns (i.e., single records). The CBRC does not have a policy on ship assistance. The goal is to establish patterns and individuals can always be revisited. The Arizona Bird Committee policy is one based on natural history: for boobies, ships may be part of their ecology now; for seed-eating species, probably not so much. Ryan Terrill summarized our discussion by stating the following:

**Is it part of their natural history and are they captive by being on a ship? This is part of what the CBRC should consider. While we do evaluate individual records, our larger goal is to establish and understand the patterns of occurrence, status and distribution of species of birds in California. Individual decisions are not necessarily final, and rejected records can be and are re-evaluated if they end up fitting a pattern of occurrence over time that suggests there is a natural origin. As a committee, we are built to be flexible and consider new information. Part of the point of publishing records is to establish the history of occurrence, and a good reason not to have an established policy is so the committee members can continue to update their knowledge and apply what we know to past records.**

e. The Secretary reminded the Committee that there is an identification folder in the CBRC dropbox for various files (Slaty-backed Gull, Mexican Duck, etc.)

## **6. Expedited Batches**

No concerns. Crested Caracara was discussed as a possible addition but no motion ultimately made (only 21 records).

## 7. Changes to the Review List

Additions: none

Deletions:

- a. Slaty-backed Gull (meets criteria for removal, despite issues with 1st cycle birds). Voted to remove 9-0 (Fowler/Feenstra). The Committee discussed the possibility of re-evaluating all records of 1st cycle birds that had been rejected. A list would be compiled (Secretary) for the 2024 meeting and those can be decided upon then.
- b. Great Crested Flycatcher. Seems to be increasing, recent records well documented with photos. Meets criteria. Voted to remove 8-1 (Howard/House).

## 8. 4<sup>th</sup> and Final Records

2021-070 Sandwich Tern

Identification was questioned for this record, most notably the entirely black cap at this time of year. Scanning Macaulay library, no examples were found except a few of the European subspecies. Terrill noted the possibility that this could be a *longipennis* Common Tern, but poor photos prevent identification. The possibility that the pale bill tip was also an artifact was also proposed.

2021-067 Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrel

Nunn, in particular, showed concern given the difficulty of this identification. Other members touted Charlie Wright's experience identifying seabirds and the experience he had earlier that day with Townsend's Storm-Petrel, and his particular note of the stout bill, and that his views of the bird were better than the quality of the photos.

2020-207 and 2020-208, Glossy Ibises

Immature birds. Most were concerned if can they be identified at all.

2021-025 Glossy Ibis

Some noted that the face pattern is different in some eBird photos than those submitted with the record. There is low contrast in the face and the eye shows a tint of red. The legs are also fairly pink in some eBird photos.

Terrill brings up that it is beyond our scope to try to identify back-cross hybrids, and that we can only go with that it is closest to. He also showed the paper with a genomic study with genetically pure Glossy Ibis being identified as White-faced Ibis. Hybrids look like hybrids.

1953-101 Bay-breasted Warbler

Most concern with this record was with sparse details and it being the earliest record for the state. There are many subsequent records and this record is not controversial in its identification, time, or location. Stahl noted that it isn't the *first* record for the state, only the *earliest*.

*Dinner break at 5:25pm, reconvened at 6:03pm*

#### **Fourth and final records continued:**

2014-189, Mexican Duck

Rejected by House and Howard due to breadth of wing bar and the overall paleness. Outside opinion: Webster didn't like this one (too pale), but Engilis did. Members didn't think it looked too pale, and that the broad wing bar may have been from the angle of the photo and blur. House was concerned about some black feathering around the bill. The pale belly visible in one photo was also suggested to be an artifact.

2016-152 Mexican Duck

The Committee was generally not concerned about origin issues. House was concerned about the uppertail and flanks, but supposed they could be an artifact or angle related.

2018-258 Mexican Duck

Members were concerned that the tail curl was "a breaking wave," that, and the chestnut breast, was too Mallard-like. There is also some green head sheen and a ghost white collar. House also noted the long eye stripe, and Howard noted that bill was too bright. House, in particular, was concerned that these features, as noted by Brown, are all rare, but not impossible, in Mexican Ducks, but that their coincidence in one individual.

2018-259 Mexican Duck

House noted the tail curl, greenish head, and again, how to reconcile these rare marks in Mexican Duck with an individual that isn't a hybrid.

Records brought to the meeting by request

2022-039 Red-necked Stint

Issues were brought up relating to this observer and many unsubstantiated records.

2017-068C Masked/Nazca Booby

Tucker confused by why this wasn't a solid Nazca Booby based on bill color. He also super-saturated one photo to demonstrate.

House, Howard, Feenstra concerned by differences in color of bill as described by observers and that in the photos.

Stahl and Fowler proposed recirculating as a Nazca Booby. 9-0 vote to recirculate.

2015-126C Masked/Nazca Booby  
Tucker. No motion to recirculate.

1913-101 Snowy Owl

Terrill wanted to discuss the merit. McCaskie and others were concerned about the believability based on a 32-year difference between the account and the supposed collection event. Also, this did not occur during an invasion year.

2022-032 Eastern Wood-Pewee

Stahl notes too many concerns with discrepancies between the accounts of the multiple observers. Howard, who had requested recirculation, withdrew his request.

2020-100 Eastern Yellow Wagtail

Terrill concerned with the possibility of Western Yellow Wagtail and the problems with identification of non-calling birds, or calling birds given that few are familiar with both species' vocalizations. Should we consider these birds Eastern/Western Yellow Wagtails and a new category for review? Tucker and McCaskie rebutted that until North America gets a Western Yellow Wagtail record, the California records should remain Eastern Yellow Wagtails. There was no motion to change the status.

2005-005 Stonechat

eBird/Clements has split Asian Stonechat into Siberian and Amur Stonechats. Field identification of these species is difficult and photos of the SCI bird are not identifiable (even barely Stonechat). The AOS has only Asian Stonechat on the checklist. McCaskie and Feenstra propose that the SCI Stonechat record be changed to Asian Stonechat to follow AOS taxonomy. 8-0 approve, House abstains.

2021-146 Winter Wren

Dave Pereksta has added new information to this record. Stahl and Feenstra propose to recirculate with this new material.

2021-159 Common Redpoll

Howard voiced concerns over the observation and the account, with potential photo errors.

2013-106 Pyrrhuloxia

Benson. This record was rejected for questionable origin, but current knowledge of vagrancy suggests otherwise. Stahl and Tucker propose recirculation. 9-0 approve.

*The meeting adjourned for the day at 8:06 pm.*

*Meeting called to order at 9:03 am on 14 January 2023 (Chair presiding). All members present.*

## **9. Proposal to treat eBird exotics in CBRC Watch List (Escapees to potentially review from eBird data).**

Benson brought up the CBRC “Watch List” of Introduced Birds and the birds included therein that are unlikely to occur naturally. Benson proposes adding to the Watch List a section for obvious escapees with some potential to occur naturally in California, and adding a section for species that are not obvious escapees but are unlikely to occur naturally. Determine at 2024 CBRC meeting whether the committee wants to formally review records from the newly proposed sections. Members concur to move forward with Benson’s proposals. Some species with some likelihood to occur naturally should get species accounts in the Watch List. The Introduced birds subcommittee will take responsibility for moving forward with these proposals. Stahl will assist, and Terrill may assist as well.

## **10. Date issues with unpublished records**

Mexican Duck records from the Parker Strip – are the recent records here the same birds. Stahl initially thought they were different individuals but retracted his concerns. House is not confident that they are the same individuals, but other members concur with treating them as the same individuals. No further action on these records regarding dates/same bird issues are needed.

## **11. Date corrections to published records**

- 2008-091 Red-necked Stint SD: Additional documentation has been made available from Matt Sadowski that would extend the last date this bird was observed to 27 Aug 2008. Stahl motions to extend date of record, Nunn seconds, date extension is approved (9-0).
- 2009-054 Common Redpoll MRN: Potentially use initial observation date of 13 June 2019 based on eBird observation by A. Hinkle on that day. Committee members are in agreement that the bird in the video is not a redpoll. Stahl motions to not include 13 June observation as part of accepted record, Feenstra seconds, and the initial observation date does is not extended (0-9). Record dates remain unchanged, 14–20 Jun 2019.
- 2014-155 Gray Hawk SBA: Change final observation date from 15 February 2015 to 2 February 2015, which is the date used in the CBRC database and published in North American Birds; the 40<sup>th</sup> annual report apparently used 15 February in error. Terrill motions to change date, House seconds, new end date of 2 February 2015 passes (9-0).

## **12. Same bird issues**

- Slaty-backed Gull 2022-018 and 2022-022. Benson passed along Andrew Birch’s analysis intended to show that these records pertain to the same individual. Terrill motions to consider them the same bird, Fowler seconds, motion passes (9-0).
- Short-tailed Albatross in Monterey Bay. Review and discussion of recently photographed Short-tailed Albatross in or near Monterey Bay based on documentation from various

observers on Don Roberson's website – how many individuals were there? Tucker motions for Beta and Cortes being considered the same individual, Houses seconds, motion passes (9-0). Members agree Alpha, Delta and Echo are all separate individuals.

### **13. Other issues**

- Add Yellow Grosbeak to supplemental list based on Yellow Grosbeak 2006-093 INY. McCaskie proposes it should be added, as the identification of that bird was not in doubt but the record was not accepted based on natural occurrence questions. McCaskie points out that there is little difference between that record and records of other species (Demoiselle Crane, Gray Thrasher, Blue Mockingbird, Black-backed Oriole) that ultimately led to them being included in the supplemental list. In 2017 and 2019, the committee decided that Yellow Grosbeak was not suitable for inclusion in the supplemental list. The committee discussed related bylaws and the hypothetical list that no longer exists. McCaskie motions to add Yellow Grosbeak to the supplemental list, Howard seconds, motion passes (9-0).
- Members discussed adding Ainley's Storm-Petrel to the state list based on findings discussed in Foraging Areas of Nesting Ainley's Storm Petrel (Medrano et al. 2022) published in Marine Ornithology, a study of GPS-tracked individuals that documented individuals making foraging trips to California waters on multiple occasions. While members did not express doubts about the study's authors documenting the birds in California waters, specific information not included in the paper was still desired for what would be a first state record. Unsuccessful attempts had previously been made to contact the author regarding the number of individuals, exact dates, and other pertinent information. No motion was made. Stahl and Feenstra will continue to obtain more information from the study's authors.
- Members discussed potential review of Whooping Crane reports from The Distribution of the Birds of California (Grinnell and Miller 1944) at the request of Stahl. The committee reviewed Grinnell and Miller's account and Louis Bevier's comments. General consensus among members was that it did feel these records warranted review based on the scant info on historic reports available. Stahl motions to review these records but no second was made. Most members agree to defer to Grinnell and Miller's determination that Whooping Crane reports in the state should only warrant inclusion on their supplemental list for California.

### **14. Rare Birds Online**

The CBRC would like control of this, as WFO currently does not allow it. This has been discussed in 2021 and 2022 meetings. No significant progress was made since the 2022 meeting. If WFO allows it, Benson will reach out to get Tim Brittain to get files needed for CBRC to host. House agrees to assist Benson in contacting Tim Brittain.

## **15. Annual reports**

Terrill provides update on the 47<sup>th</sup> report. A section from Searcy is still outstanding. For the 48<sup>th</sup> report, Stahl will be the lead author, and Benson, Terrill and Feenstra will assist with writing. House also offered her assistance if needed.

## **16. Budget**

2023 costs were reviewed by Benson. To donate, donate through WFO link and specify that funds are intended for the CBRC.

## **17. Introduced Birds Subcommittee report**

Little recent activity to report. The Watch List was utilized by eBird in developing its recent substantial changes to exotics policies. Members of the IBS had significant input on the status of introduced species in the state's eBird exotics matrix.

## **18. Outreach and public relations**

Stahl lead discussion about public airing of grievances about the CBRC by interested, but generally unfamiliar, birders in the state. Fowler suggested measured conduct in public settings when the committee is being cast in a negative light. Veteran members discussed the recorded presentation McCaskie had made in the past intended to educate birders on the CBRC, which could potentially be given by other members to birding groups (e.g., Audubon meetings and similar settings).

## **19. Secretary**

Benson and Stahl discussed Benson's filling this role for a very extended period up to this date, and his desire to pass the torch to someone new. In both formal and informal searches for a replacement, Char Glacy expressed interest and would shadow Benson. Glacy may potentially fill this role, but other suitable candidates for Secretary are still being sought.

## **20. Next meetings**

- The WFO Conference will be held in Copper Mountain, CO, 19–24 July 2023. Benson has volunteered to give a CBRC update/presentation.
- Members agree that the next CBRC meeting will take place 12–13 January at Occidental College. CSU Stanislaus could be a future option for a meeting location.

## **21. Appreciations**

- House, McCaskie and Terrill are thanked for their service to the CBRC as their terms end.
- Benson is thanked for his apparently irreplaceable work as CBRC Secretary.
- Thanks to Joe Morlan for his work updating the CBRC website.

- Thanks to Jim Tietz for tracking records and updating “Rare Birds” on the CBRC website.
- Thanks to WFVZ and Linnea Hall for continued archival services.
- Thanks to Cliff Hawley for fundraising efforts.

*Chair adjourns the meeting at 11:21 am.*