

Rare Bird Records Reviewed by the Records Committee of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

T. H. Kent, June 16, 2002

The Records Committee of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union was formed in 1980 for the purpose of peer review of rare bird sightings. It also inherited the roles of its predecessor, the Checklist Committee, which was responsible for the Field Checklist of Iowa Birds and the Official Checklist of Iowa birds.

Iowa was relatively early among states to have a Records Committee. Many of the procedures were modified from those in use in Minnesota and California. The quarterly field reports submitted to the Field Reports Editors of *Iowa Bird Life* were the mechanism for obtaining most of the written descriptions (documentations) and photographs of rare birds for review for the current years. In 1981 and 1993 most of the old published records of rare birds were reviewed.

The review process involves circulation of the evidence to the seven committee members, who vote (Accepted or Not Accepted) as to whether that evidence is beyond doubt for identification of the species in question. Not Accepted does not mean that the identification was incorrect, but rather that the reviewers did not find it beyond doubt. The philosophy of records committees is to err on the side of being sure rather than being inclusive. In order to be Accepted, a record must receive 7 votes on first review or 6 on a subsequent review. A second review is mandated if the first vote is not unanimous but a majority voted in favor of the record. In the second and subsequent reviews, members are required to react to each others' comments.

The 1, 489 records reviewed from 1980 to 1999 are being archived as a set, with copies being donated to the State Historical Society of Iowa in Des Moines (2000) and the Iowa State University Library Special Collections in Ames (2002). Some of these records date back to 1820. This is a convenient time to index this set of data, because with the new millenium a new secretary will be using new computer programs that are not easily compatible with those developed in the 1980s.

The records are filed chronologically by species using the taxonomic order of *The A.O.U. Checklist of North American Birds, Seventh Edition*, 1998. A list of all the records in that order is provided in a separate folder. A two-page list of species in alphabetical order is also provided for convenience. Another folder contains a list of records by record number. The reports of the Records Committee for 1980 through 1999, which were published in *Iowa Bird Life*, are in another folder. They list the Accepted and Not Accepted records from 1980 through 1999.

Many of the older records are cited in two books: *Iowa Birds* (1984) by Dinsmore, Kent, Koenig, Petersen, and Roosa and *Birds in Iowa* (1996) in Kent and Dinsmore. Pages in the latter book describing the history of the state list are included in the current folder along with the latest state list (1996) published in *Iowa Bird Life*. Seven species have been added to that list of 397 species in the years 1996 through 1999: Neotropic Cormorant, Eurasian Collared-Dove, White-winged Dove, Sprague's Pipit, Yellow-billed Loon, Arctic Loon, and Lesser Goldfinch. Thus at the end of 1999 there were 404 species on the Official List of Iowa Birds.