Report of the ABA Checklist Committee for 1986

The ABA Checklist Committee has completed detailed reviews of the first substantiated records in North America of the following seven species, and has approved their addition to the ABA Checklist:

- ☐ Oriental Pratincole*
- ☐ Greenish Elaenia*
- ☐ Eurasian Jackdaw*
- ☐ Mugimaki Flycatcher
- ☐ Brown Flycatcher*
- ☐ Siberian Blue Robin*
- ☐ Flame-colored Tanager*

The official deliberations resulted in the following summaries, which compress reams of correspondence and discussion among the members of this hard-working and very careful Committee.

Discussions

Oriental Pratincole (*Glareola maldivarum*)

Where: Attu Island, Aleutian Islands, Alaska

When: May 19-20, 1985

Observers: T.G. Tobish, N.S. Proctor, M.E. Isleib, F. Zeillemaker, and many others

Published Details: *American Birds* 39: 339

Documentation: Specimen, Univ. of Alaska 5237

ABA Records File: No photographs to date

Expert Opinions: B. Kessel, D.D. Gibson, R.C. Banks

Origin: Natural vagrant

Motion to Add: Gibson/Gill

Vote: 6/1

Dissenting Opinion: One Committee member believed that he could not "simply rubber-stamp someone else's identification, although probably correct". The photo published in *American Birds* does not provide essential information about the color of the underwings, tail-length, and color of the tips of the secondaries—characters which would eliminate two other possible species, European Pratincole (*G. pratincola*) and Black-winged Pratincole (*G. noordmanni*).

*This species has already been added to the *ABA Checklist*, Third Edition.

Greenish Elaenia (*Myiopagis viridicata*)

Where: High Island, Galveston County, Texas

When: May 20-23, 1984

Observers: J.G. Morgan, L.M. Feltner, T.L. Eubanks, Jr., R. Braun, M. Braun

Published Details: Morgan and Feltner 1985, *American Birds* 39:242-244

Documentation: Published photograph; banding notes

ABA Records File: No photographs to date

Expert Opinions: R.S. Ridgely; T.S. Schulenberg

Identification I: In my view, the evidence supports the identification of this individual as *M. viridicata*. There are few neotropical flycatchers of this approximate size which have the plain wings (*i.e.*, lacking wing-bars) of the bird in question (as the photos clearly show). This character, plus the yellow coronal streak, virtually eliminates all forms other than several of the *Myiopagis* elaenias. The photos taken show nothing that is not compatible with *viridicata*. *Subplacens* of western Ecuador and other nearby areas has

Eurasian Jackdaw. *Photo by Peter Alden* (courtesy VIREO).

a more complex facial pattern, obviously not indicated on this bird. I could not, to be honest, entirely eliminate from consideration *cotta* of Jamaica. To me the throat distinction (white in *cotta,* grayish in *viridicata*) mentioned by O'Neill does not seem to be borne out by our material (*Note:* only one example of *cotta*), for throats of *both* species are whitish. However, the Texas bird is pure-olive, dorsally, and this seems much more compatible with our ample series of *viridicata placens* (the race found in eastern Mexico) than with *cotta* (which is more bronzy-olive above in, note, our *one* specimen).

VIREO has no photographs of *cotta.* This fact is unfortunate, as there may be some facial-pattern differences not evident in our single specimen. (Yet again, we need *good photos* of *everything!*)

On balance, I'd say our bird must have been *viridicata.* I'm a little bit uncomfortable about dismissing *cotta,* but *cotta* is not supposed to migrate (neither, to my knowledge, does *viridicata,* though), and, as O'Neill points out, the bird would not be expected to respond to a pygmy-owl imitation, for no such small owls occur on the island of *cotta*'s origin. [Courtesy Robert Ridgely, comments in letter (edited) of November 13, 1985.]

Identification II: Few tyrant flycatchers in the size-range of this bird have concealed or semi-concealed yellow crown-patches. The only genera to consider are *Myiophobus* and *Myiopagis.* The gray throat contrasting with a yellow belly and short whitish superciliary are typical *Myiopagis* characters, while no *Myiophobus* has this combination of features; most *Myiophobus* also have strong wing-bars. There is no doubt that the bird in the photographs is a *Myiopagis.*

Within *Myiopagis,* one species, *leucospodia,* can be eliminated immediately because it has a white crest. This species is also smaller, much grayer above (just a hint of green), and almost white below. Three additional species that usually have yellow crowns in one or more of their populations can also be eliminated because they have reasonably well-developed wing-bars; these three are *gaimardii, caniceps,* and *flavivertex.* The bird in the photographs clearly has no wing-bars, only greenish edgings to the remiges.

I had expected that the problem would be separating *viridicata* from *cotta.* I was surprised, therefore, when I examined specimens of *cotta* for the first time and was struck by how brown they were on the crown, back, and wings. This color is very different from the generally green tones of *viridicata,* and I was so unprepared for such a striking difference between the two species that I first thought that the brown color might be a result of "foxing" of the *cotta* specimens. However, we have many specimens of *viridicata* in our collection that are the same age as or are older than (by about 15 years) the specimens of *cotta* that I have available, so post-mortem color changes are not likely. I later learned that Ridgway (1907, *Birds of North and Middle America,* Part IV, p. 400) relies on a difference in back-color in his key. Although the colors which one sees in the slides seem to vary somewhat from slide to slide, depending upon the exposure, there is no doubt that all slides show a bird with a light green back. I am confident that the Texas bird was not a *cotta.*

Only two species, *viridicata* and *subplacens,* remain to be considered. *Myiopagis viridicata* occurs north to northeastern Mexico, whereas *M. subplacens* is restricted to the Pacific coasts of Ecuador and Peru and is therefore quite unlikely on geographic grounds alone. These two species are unfor-

tunately quite similar. The differences are easy to appreciate in the hand but difficult to evaluate in the photographs. The crown of *subplacens* is uniformly smoky brown, whereas in *viridicata* the area over the eye tends to be olive-gray, shading greener toward the center of the crown; the nape of *subplacens* is more gray than green, whereas in *viridicata* it is light green, only slightly browner than the back; the back of *subplacens* is a duller, browner green; the superciliary of *subplacens* is more prominent and extends farther behind the eye; the chest of *subplacens* is grayer, less olive. The photographs seem to show a bird with a basically green crown, light-green back, and short superciliary, as in *viridicata*. Almost every one of these features seems to be contradicted in at least one slide each, but I believe that the bird can still safely be called *viridicata*, based primarily on the way the bird appears in the slides that seem to have the best exposure, the bird held by the hand in the mist-net, and the bird sitting on the open palm. [Courtesy T.S. Schulenberg, written comments (edited) of January 1986.]

Origin: Natural vagrant

Motion to Add: Gill/Kaufman

Vote: 6/1

Dissenting Opinion: One Committee member believes that he cannot rule out *M. subplacens* without seeing the original photographs himself. He also queried whether or not this record of a non-migratory species involved possible boat-assistance.

Eurasian Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)

Where: Block Island, New Shoreham, Rhode Island

When: Early April 1984

Observer: C. Blane

Published Details: Smith 1985, *American Birds* 39:255-258; also see *American Birds* 38:886 and *Nova Scotia Bird Notes,* Fall 1984:56-57.

Documentation: Specimen; MCZ 331, 728

ABA Records File: No photographs to date

Expert Opinions: R.A. Paynter, Jr.; P.W. Smith

Identification: "When compared with an extensive study-skin series at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, the Block Island jackdaw's dark tone, lacking any hint of white on the feathers of the lower neck, indicates that this individual was of the western European race, *C. m. spermolegus.* The specimen's mainly dull-brown greater wing-coverts and secondaries, only a few feathers of which show metallic green or purple, indicate that this bird was in its first alternate plumage while retaining some juvenal feathers (based on Svensson 1984)." (Adapted from P.W. Smith, *op. cit.*)

Origin: Natural vagrant: The various subsequent sightings in eastern Canada and in New England indicate a broad pattern of vagrancy rather than an escaped or ship-assisted waif.

Motion to Add: Vickery/Gill

Vote: 6/0, 1 abstain

Abstention: One Committee member objected to the lack of documentation of the wild origin of this individual.

Remarks: We reviewed only the Block Island record of this species. See P.W. Smith's article noted above for a summary of other recent records from eastern Canada, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania.

Mugimaki Flycatcher (*Ficedula mugimaki*)

Where: Shemya Island, Aleutian Islands, Alaska

When: May 24, 1985

Observer: D.W. Sonneborn

Published Details: None

Documentation: Photographs, fieldnotes

ABA Records File: ABA-AK008; 6 photographs by D.W. Sonneborn

Expert Opinions: B. King, S. Hilty, J. Marshall, K. Kaufman

Identification I: Although there are a number of species that are superficially similar to *F. mugimaki,* the only serious ID contender that I have come up with is Rufous-chested Flycatcher, *F. dumetoria.* It is my impression that your bird has too much orange extending down the flanks for that species, and evidently the throat is also too orange. (Also, I don't know if *dumetoria* has any plumage combining bright-orange breast and *brown* upperparts.) ANSP has only one specimen of *dumetoria,* so I can't do any thorough analysis until I get to another museum. But aside from a little uncertainty about that species, I'm ready to support the identification of your bird as Mugimaki Flycatcher. [Courtesy K. Kaufman, comments (edited) in letter of January 14, 1986, to D.W. Sonneborn.]

Identification II: Is it a Mugimaki Flycatcher? Yes. Could it be anything else? Yes. It could be *F. dumetoria,* which has the reddish color cut off halfway down the ventral surface as shown in these photographs, whereas, typically, an adult *mugimaki* has the reddish going farther aft. Both have a white patch in the base of the tail, a feature which doesn't show here [in the photo]. But *dumetoria* is a Malay Archipelago resident which is unlikely to get anywhere north, has a pale throat, and has very broad white on the tertials instead of the narrow white seen in the *mugimaki* photo. Your bird may not be quite adult. Our immature male skins show this same restriction of the color in the style of *dumetoria.*

Do the photos clearly document diagnostic characters of the species? Yes: dark back, white behind the eye, narrow tertial white streaks, and white belly. (I am, of course, bothered by the posterior restriction of the color.) [Courtesy J. Marshall, comments (edited) in a letter of March 31, 1986, to F.B. Gill.]

Motion to Add: Gibson/Gill

Vote: 6/1

Dissenting Opinion: One Committee member (Gill) concluded that the photographs are below the standards that he would like to see for verifiable documentation of such an exotic species.

Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa latirostris*)

Where: Attu Island, Aleutian Islands, Alaska

When: May 25, 1985

Observers: M.E. Isleib, N.S. Proctor, T.G. Tobish, and many others

Published Details: *American Birds* 39:339

Documentation: Specimen; Univ. of Alaska 5245

ABA Records File: No photographs to date

Expert Opinions: D.D. Gibson; R.C. Banks

Origin: Natural vagrant

Motion to Add: Gibson/Gill

Vote: 6/1

Dissenting Opinion: One Committee member believed that he could not "simply rubber-stamp an identification" and, as a

matter of conscience, voted against this record.

Siberian Blue Robin (*Luscinia cyane*)

Where: Attu Island, Aleutian Islands, Alaska

When: May 21, 1985

Observers: T.G. Tobish, N.S. Proctor, and others

Published Details: *American Birds* 39:340

Documentation: Specimen; Univ. of Alaska 5238

ABA Records File: No photographs to date

Expert Opinions: D.D. Gibson; R.C. Banks

Origin: Natural vagrant

Motion to Add: Gibson/Gill

Vote: 6/1

Dissenting Opinion: Same as for Brown Flycatcher

Flame-colored Tanager (*Piranga bidentata*)

Where: Cave Creek Canyon, Chiracahua Mountains, Cochise County, Arizona

When: April 11, 1985, to late July 1985

Observers: R.J. Morse and many subsequent observers

Published Details: Morse and Monson 1985, *American Birds* 39:843-844.

Documentation: Photographs; fieldnotes of R.G. McCaskie

ABA Records File: ABA-AZ005; 12 photographs by D.A. Zimmerman and A.J. Clay

Expert Opinions: K. Kaufman; R. Ridgely

Identification: The male Flame-colored Tanager (*Piranga bidentata*) present in Cave Creek Canyon in 1985 was extensively photographed, and several of the best photos will be archived in the ABA Records File at VIREO/ANSP. These comments on its identification are based upon examination of a number of photographs and on my own observation of the individual in question.

The male *P. bidentata* is sufficiently distinctive that no other species provides a serious source of confusion. The male White-winged Tanager (*P. leucoptera*) is superficially similar in that it also has an overall reddish color and white wing-bars on dark wings (and, at least in some populations, mixed reddish and black on the scapulars and upper back). However, *leucoptera* differs in several respects, having a proportionally smaller bill with a more decurved culmen, and blackish lores. The species lacks the pronounced dark crescent at the posterior edge of the auriculars and the large white spots on the tertials and rectrices, features which were all shown by the Arizona bird. All of these points may be verified in the photographs. Additionally, having seen it in direct comparison with a female Western Tanager, I can say that the bird was much too large to be the small *P. leucoptera.* The bird also gave calls typical of *bidentata* and unlike any that I have heard from *leucoptera.*

In a general review of all other tanagers and other thick-billed passerines from around the world, I found no other species that would be a serious ID contender. But a more problematical question raised by someone on the scene was whether or not the Arizona bird might have been a hybrid tanager, with Western (*P. ludoviciana*) and Hepatic (*P. flava*) Tanagers as the most plausible parent species. Both species breed in the area, and the individual in question displayed some characters suggestive of *flava* (dull orange-red color, large size, proportionally large bill) and some of *ludoviciana* (pale wing-bars on dark wings and very similar voice), as well as scapulars and upper back that mixed the colors (reddish and black) of the two species. However, the individual in question had large white spots in the rectrices (not shown by either *flava* or *ludoviciana*), conspicuous trapezoidal white spots in the tertials (*flava* has no white there), both wing-bars white (*ludoviciana*

has the anterior wing-bar yellow and broader), and a heavy blackish crescent at the rear edge of the auriculars (*flava* has only a hint of this, *ludoviciana* has none), as well as the typical striped pattern on the back, all militating against the possibility of hybrid origin and pointing to the bird's true identity as *Piranga bidentata*. [Courtesy K. Kaufman, written comments.]

Origin: Natural vagrant

Other Remarks: Paired with female Western Tanager and nested twice

Motion to Add: McCaskie/Gill

Vote: 7/0

These seven species are now officially added to the *ABA Checklist*.

Other Business

The Committee rejected a motion to add **Ascension Frigatebird** to the *Checklist* at this time:

Ascension Frigatebird (*Fregata aquila*)

Where: Galveston, Texas

When: April 29, 1980

Observer: S. Madge

Published Details: None

Documentation: Slide; *British Birds* Rarities Form by S. Madge

ABA Records File: No photographs to date

Expert Opinions: P. Harrison, R. Naveen, S. Olson

Identification: The entire case for this bird's being Ascension Frigatebird rests on the apparent presence of white "axillary spurs" and on the absence of black on the head, breast, and central abdomen. I am wary of birds identified by one field-mark (spurs), especially when at least one other species, Magnificent Frigatebird, is known to vary in the amount of white in the same area. Specifically, Naveen says that he found "one juvenile Magnificent in the Smithsonian Institution collection that had an extensive amount of white in the axillaries, but it also had a bit of a breast-collar, thus resembling third-stage juvenile Magnificent...." When I read this remark, I immediately pick out the terms "extensive white" and "a bit", asking myself two questions: Is "extensive amount" enough to encompass the Texas bird? Yes. And if there was only "a bit" of breast-band, could the observer and photos miss noting the characteristic? Perhaps. I wonder if the Texas bird was one with an "extensive amount" of white and at the same time was slightly delayed in the molt of the dark breast-band. Even more likely is that Magnificent Frigatebird in second-stage juvenal plumage (without breast-band) can have "extensive white" in the axillaries; we know that the amount varies, so why not variation to the extreme?

Perhaps most damaging to the record is the fact that the observer and camera lens failed to note any white in the underwing-coverts. Harrison, on whom we have relied for telling us about the spur, says that on juveniles in first stage (as well as second and third stages) the underwing is "mostly blackish exept for random white patches on coverts, [a character which] consistently appears in juvenile stages of this species...." He pictures such patches, which are quite obvious. So how could these patches go unseen if the Texas bird was an Ascension Frigatebird?

I believe that the odds are far more likely that this bird was a slightly unusual Magnificent Frigatebird, rather than a very-out-of-range Ascension. [Courtesy L. Binford, written comments.]

Motion to Add: Tucker/Gill

Vote: 1/6, 1 abstain

Abstention: One Committee member felt that he could not evaluate this record without seeing actual photographs. Although he was willing to accept identification opinions of experts who examined specimens, he could not accept the opinions of others who have examined a photo.

Dissenting Opinion: One committee member (Tucker) voted for this motion, admitting that it was only a 99% call. "The fact that something could possibly be something *else* is *not* a good argument, in my opinion, when all the evidence clearly points to the suggested species. A mutant

Hairy Woodpecker in Georgia could be a runt and have black marks on the outer tail-feathers! But since there is no known instance of such an occurrence, why make a decision on the fact that it is in the realm of possibility? Now I also accept that in this case the evidence is based on the clarity of a telephotograph of a bird at quite a distance. But the logic holds, I think. Until convinced otherwise, I will vote to go with it."

In its voluminous correspondence and deliberations, the Checklist Committee also considered motions to delete two species from the *Checklist,* namely **Cape Petrel** and **Slender-billed Curlew.**

Cape Petrel (*Daption capense*)

Basis for Motion: The *AOU Check-list,* Sixth Edition, includes Cape Petrel for North America primarily on the basis of a supposed 1873 specimen from Maine, while the *ABA Checklist,* Second Edition, includes the species on the basis of a 1962 sighting in California.

A relevant comment on the Maine specimen is that of W.R.P. Bourne (1967, "Long-distance Vagrancy in the Petrels", *Ibis* 109:141-167), who states (p. 150) the following: "A bird said to have been shot at Harpswell, Maine, in the USA, in June 1873 (Norton 1932) appears to have been reported first as a Manx Shearwater. The subsequent history many years later seems so complicated that it leaves much room for error." Discussing this and some other anomalous seabird records, Bourne had earlier stated (1964, "On the Occurrence and Nomenclature of Certain Petrels in North America", *Bull. B.O.C.* 84:114-116): "It seems possible that, as with various other southern petrels reported in the northern hemisphere in the [past] century . . . all these birds were brought home from the South Seas and supplied to local naturalists who failed to enquire adequately concerning their origin." I do not believe that anyone has come up with a refutation of Bourne's comments, nor a defense of this supposed Maine record, which should be considered hypothetical at best. Other old specimen records for North America (*e.g.,* one supposedly from Monterey Bay) have already been discounted by most authorities.

The 1962 sighting in Monterey Bay may well have been correct, but the bird was seen very briefly, under less-than-perfect conditions, and was not photographed. More to the point, I am told that this record has been rejected by the California Bird Records Committee; it would be hard to justify our taking a less conservative course than the local Committee in such a case.

As no undisputed records exist for North American waters, I believe that Cape Petrel has no place on the *ABA Checklist.* [Courtesy K. Kaufman, written comments.]

Motion to Delete: Kaufman/Gill

Vote: 7/0

This species is now officially deleted from the *ABA Checklist.*

Slender-billed Curlew (*Numenius tenuirostris*)

Basis for Motion: Although this species is included in the *AOU Check-list,* Sixth Edition, on the basis of a specimen supposedly from Ontario, the original reference (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965) leaves some room for doubt as to the origin of the specimen. This species is not common even within its known range, and although long-distance vagrancy is certainly possible for this and any other migratory shorebird, a first record for the western hemisphere should be supported by unimpeachable evidence—which, in my opinion, is not provided by an unlabeled, mounted specimen. It is significant that the *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Ontario* (James *et al.* 1976) considers this record hypothetical. There is also a sight record of Slender-billed Curlew from North Carolina, but we have no documentation on this record. I propose that we delete this species from the *ABA Checklist.* [Courtesy K. Kaufman, written comments.]

Vote: 2/5; 1/6 (recirculated)

Majority Opinion: There are several reasons why I believe the record to be acceptable:

(1) The "critical point" of the label's being removed hardly seems sufficient for not accepting this record.

(2) Neither Harris nor Terry was a "commercial" collector; therefore, there would be no reason to falsify the location.

(3) The specimen was collected in 1925. If it was *not* from Ontario, how would these "non-commercial" local collectors obtain such a species? It is clear that they were strictly local collectors who were not interested in building anything but a local collection.

(4) Both individuals clearly remembered the incident of obtaining the specimen, which they knew to be very unusual at the time.

(5) The species is somewhat of an east-to-west migrant, indicating that vagrancy to North America is reasonable. Also, in 1925 the species could easily have been more common than it is today.

Some further comments:

(1) Although Kaufman states that the *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Ontario* (James *et al.* 1976) lists the bird "hypothetical", the Ontario Bird Records Committee reviewed the record in 1982 and deemed it "acceptable" (*Ontario Birds* 1:10).

(2) For what it is worth, the Ontario shoreline of the Great Lakes has attracted a rather interesting array of shorebirds over the years, including American Oystercatcher, Wandering Tattler (3), Spotted Redshank (2), Mongolian Plover, Wilson's Plover, and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. The recent occurrence of Little Curlew in California should also be taken into account. [Courtesy A. Wormington, written comments (edited), October 30, 1985.]

This species remains on the *Checklist* unless and until stronger evidence is presented for its deletion.

The Committee votes on these records brought out some important philosophical issues which prompt further improvements in the process of reviewing each record. Committee members clearly differ on who gets the benefit of the doubt. Opinions from experts on particular species are an essential part of the review process, but some Committee members wish to examine the available evidence themselves before voting in favor of acceptance. Obtaining the original photographs that document records of rarities continues to be difficult and to cause delays in the review process, but procedures being developed for the ABA Records File should help to solve this problem. In the case of future records documented by specimens, which we cannot circulate around the Committee, we plan to provide Committee members with photographs of the specimen and a diagnosis of the distinguishing characters. Photographs of such specimens will be kept in the ABA Records File.

With this goal in mind—of increased knowledge and communication of the requisite data—the ABA Checklist Committee notes that it welcomes written opinions and documentary evidence from ABA members in regard to the following species, all of which are now under review by the Committee:

Additions:

Solander's Petrel
Great Frigatebird
Muscovy Duck
Swallow-tailed Gull
Eurasian Collared-Dove
Green Parakeet
Mottled Owl
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Gray Silky-Flycatcher
Shiny Cowbird

Deletions:

Stejneger's Petrel
Ringed Turtle-Dove
Cuban Emerald
Thick-billed Vireo

ABA Checklist Committee
October 1986

Frank B. Gill, Chairman
Laurence C. Binford
Daniel D. Gibson
Kenn Kaufman
J. Van Remsen
James A. Tucker
Alan Wormington