ABA Checklist Report, 1988–1989

THE AMERICAN BIRDING ASSOCIATION CHECKLIST COMMITTEE

by Frank Gill *

ABA Checklist Committee: *Frank Gill (Chair), Laurence Binford, Daniel Gibson, Kenn Kaufman, Greg Lasley, J. V. Remsen, and Alan Wormington*

Since our last report (*Birding* 1988, 20:70–76), the committee has debated and voted on the status of the following species:

New Species Accepted
Wedge-tailed Shearwater
Azure Gallinule
Mottled Owl
Xantus's Hummingbird
Yellow-breasted Bunting

New Species Rejected
Green Parakeet

Species Removed from List
Black Francolin

English Name Changes
Common Barn-Owl to Barn Owl
Northern Hawk-Owl to Northern Hawk Owl
Common Pauraque to Pauraque
Brown Flycatcher to Asian Brown Flycatcher
Eye-browed Thrush to Eyebrowed Thrush

Taxonomic Changes
Western Flycatcher
Black-tailed Gnatcatcher
Water Pipit
Red-eyed Vireo
Brown Towhee

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New Species Accepted—
Wedge-tailed Shearwater
(Puffinus pacificus)

Where. California, Monterey County, on Pacific Ocean, 4.5 to 5 miles due west of Point Pinos.

When. 31 August 1986.

Observers. Richard Stallcup first sighted this light-morph individual; Susan Peaslee, Nancy Menken, Ruben Balzer, William Ure, Katherine Wilson, Tim Manolis, and Alan Thomas were also present and submitted descriptions.

Published details. Richard Stallcup, Joseph Morlan, and Don Roberson, "First Record of the Wedge-tailed Shearwater in California," *Western Birds* 1988, 19: 61–68.

Documentation. Photographs by Richard Stallcup and Alan Thomas (VIREO record numbers CA050–01, CA050–02, CA050–03, CA050–04); and field notes compiled by Richard Stallcup.

Expert Opinions. Robert Pyle, Ron Naveen. Accepted by California Bird Records Committee.

Identification. Combination of long, pointed tail that appeared wedge shaped when fanned, uniformly dark upperparts, and gray bill eliminated all other shearwaters.

Origin. The nearest known breeding colonies are in Hawaii, far to the west-southwest, and the Revilla Gigedo Islands off southern Mexico. Light-morph birds predominate in these colonies and at sea in the North Pacific. Dark-morph birds are, conversely, the more common ones in the South Pacific; the light morph is a rarity around Australia.

Motion to add. Gill/Kaufman.

Vote. 7/0.

Placement on ABA Checklist, 3rd Edition. Insert between Greater Shearwater (*Puffinus gravis*) and Buller's Shearwater (*Puffinus bulleri*).

RICH STALLCUP

Light-morph Wedge-tailed Shearwater, Monterey Bay, California, 31 August 1986.

New Species Accepted— **Azure Gallinule** *(Porphyrula flavirostris)*

Where. New York, Suffolk County, at Fort Salonga, Long Island.

When. 14 December 1986.

Observer. Angela Wright.

Published details. Barbara Spencer and William Kolodnicki, "First Azure Gallinule for North America," *American Birds* 1988, 42:25–27.

Documentation: Skin and partial skeleton (bird found dead, apparently killed by a cat). Adult specimen on deposit at American Museum of Natural History (skin AMNH 817820; skeleton AMNH 16444). Photographs (VIREO record numbers NY101–01, NY101–02).

Expert Opinions. Robert S. Ridgely and Robert Dickerman.

Identification. Smaller weight, wing and bill size, and lack of buffy coloration on the neck and breast eliminated possibility of an immature Purple Gallinule (*P. martinica*).

Origin. The principal issue discussed was whether the individual was a wild vagrant or an escaped aviary bird. Most committee members were convinced of the former because there is a well-established pattern of vagrancy for various Rallidae, particularly for gallinules, in both the New and Old Worlds. Supporting this view, one committee member writes:

> Their (rallids') capacity for long-distance vagrancy is remarkable. Look at the Spotted Rail records for Pennsylvania and for the Juan Fernandez Islands. Look at the Corn Crake records for North America and Australia. Consider the number of records of American Purple Gallinules in Africa and on islands in the South Atlantic. For what it's worth, the same winter season in which the Azure Gallinule appeared also produced a number of northerly records of Purple Gallinule: one in New Jersey, one in New York, one in Maine, one in New Brunswick, one in Nova Scotia, and two in Newfoundland. The nearest normal wintering area is in Florida, and the . . . view that all these birds came from the closest possible source may not be the correct one. It may not be unreasonable to suppose that many or even all of these gallinules came from South America.

Another committee member comments:

> The controversy over the origin of this bird prompted Remsen and T.A. Parker to write a twenty-page paper, now accepted for publication by *The Wilson Bulletin*, on the seasonal movements of Azure Gallinule in South America. Their analysis of specimen records and their own sight records indicates that Azure Gallinule is absent from the northeastern portion of its range (the Guianas and northeastern Brazil) from September to February and is absent from the southern portion (Bolivia, Mato Grosso, Paraguay) from March to September. Only along the main channel of the Amazon in western Amazonia does it seem to be present year-round. They also located five extralimital records within South America, all from late October to January, thereby bracketing the date of the New York specimen. Remsen and Parker concluded that Azure Gallinule makes long-distance seasonal movements within the tropics, much like its congener Allen's Gallinule in Africa. They also conclude that the New York record is best treated as pertaining to a wild bird, particularly in view of the track record of long-distance vagrancy in rails and gallinules.

Motion to add. Gill/Kaufman.

Votes. 5/2; 6/1.

Dissenting Opinion.

I dislike many things about this record: (1) the date (December) is not a very good time for vagrancy, although admittedly the bird could have arrived earlier; (2) there seems to be no record of vagrancy for this species; (3) the species is thought to be sedentary/nonmigratory, which limits its vagrancy, in my opinion, to man-assisted vagrancy (e.g., ships); (4) it appears to be an uncommon bird with a limited range; (5) I know of no data that suggest the population is expanding (and hence perhaps subject to vagrancy); (6) aviary holdings unknown; and (7) its locality—on the coast near New York City—might suggest ship transport, a subject never addressed by this committee.

Placement on ABA Checklist, 3rd Edition. Insert between Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrula martinica*) and Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*).

New Species Accepted— **Mottled Owl** *(Ciccaba virgata)*

Where. Road kill found in Texas,

VIRGIL KETNER

Xantus's Hummingbird, Ventura, California, 13 February 1988.

Hidalgo County, at Bentsen State Park.

When. 23 February 1983.

Observer. Dan Hillsman.

Published Details. Greg Lasley, Chuck Sexton, and Dan Hillsman, "First Record of Mottled Owl (*Ciccaba virgata*) in the United States," *American Birds* 1988, 42:23–24.

Documentation. Photographs by Dan Hillsman (VIREO numbers H24/1/001).

Expert Opinions. J. V. Remsen, Ted Parker, Ken Rosenberg, and Mark Swan. Accepted by Texas Bird Records Committee.

Identification. Photos depicted the following diagnostic characters: small size, as compared to Barred Owl (*Strix varia*); narrowly streaked underparts; and broad, marbled tips to flight feathers.

Origin. The only substantial debate concerned the origin of the road-killed specimen. Was it perhaps carried across the border by a car or truck? The committee agreed in the end with one expert who wrote:

> The bird was found within 150 meters of the park and within a few meters of thorn woodland, which is apparently suitable habitat, and the road DEAD-ENDS at the park entrance. So, the vehicle-transported hypothesis proposes that a Mottled Owl was struck in Mexico, carried on a vehicle with a large grill, survived unnoticed at a customs checkpoint (!), and was then suddenly and miraculously deposited where? . . . of all the endless possibilities in South Texas, within a few meters of suitable habitat on a lightly traveled road without through-traffic that terminates in a park with expanses of suitable habitat!! That's about as far-fetched a story as one could possibly concoct, unless someone can convince me that dead Mottled Owls litter the roads of northern Mexico and [the lower] Rio Grande [Valley], Texas, and that, therefore, it was only a matter of time before one would be found close enough to good habitat.

Motion to add. Kaufman/Gill.

Vote. 7/0.

Placement on ABA Checklist, 3rd Edition. Insert between Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*) and Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis*).

New Species Accepted— Xantus's Hummingbird *(Hylocharis xantusii)*

Where. California, Ventura County, Ventura, backyard at 157 Via Baja; tried to nest twice; unsuccessful.

When. 30 January to 26 March 1988.

Observers. Art Edwards, Kem Hainebach, Virgil Ketner, Jim Royer, Peter Willmann, and others.

Published Details. Chuck Bernstein, "Seeing the Xantus'," *Bird Watcher's Digest* 1988, 11(1):53–57.

Documentation. Photographs by Virgil Ketner from 13 February 1988, taken in Ventura, California, have been published. One appeared in *American Birds* 1988, 42:193.

Expert Opinions. Committee members. Accepted by California Bird Records Committee.

Identification. Photos and published details depicted the following diagnostic characters for an adult female Xantus's Hummingbird: all-green upperparts, pale orange underparts, a dark eye patch, and pale supercilium. Similar to an adult female Lucifer Hummingbird (*Calothorax lucifer*), but outer tail feathers are uniformly pale orange and lack black in the center and white tips characteristic of *C. lucifer.*

Origin. Presumably a vagrant from the cape region of Baja California Sur, Mexico, nesting as far north as San Ignacio in northern Baja California Sur. One committee member's analysis follows:

> . . . the California Bird Records Committee mentioned the possibility of the bird being an escapee from the supposedly abundant aviaries in the area of sighting, but there is no documentation of such aviaries. . . . I think the species is a very unlikely aviary inhabitant and is not likely to be caught or smuggled by a Mexican (especially a female bird). It showed no obvious cage wear. . . . Hummingbirds in general in southern Mexico exhibit short-distance dispersal or migration, and I thus would not be surprised if Xantus's did too.

Motion to add. Gill/Kaufman.

Vote. 7/0.

Placement on ABA Checklist, 3rd Edition. Insert between White-eared Hummingbird (*Hylocharis leucotis*) and Berylline Hummingbird (*Amazilia beryllina*).

New Species Accepted—**Yellow-breasted Bunting** *(Emberiza aureola)*

Where. Alaska, Aleutian Islands, Attu Island.

When. 26 May 1988.

Observers. Adult male observed at length in short grass along abandoned aircraft runway on Attu Island by more than 60 individuals.

Published details. None.

Documentation. Specimen on deposit at University of Alaska, color slides (VIREO numbers G13/1/001, G13/1/002, G13/1/003).

Expert Opinions. Committee.

Identification. The black face and throat, bright yellow underparts interrupted only by a narrow breast band of chestnut, chestnut upperparts, and white shoulder patches represented all the field marks for identification of this bird.

Origin. Common summer bird in neighboring Kamchatka, U.S.S.R.

Motion to add. Gibson/Gill.

Vote. 7/0.

Placement on ABA Checklist, 3rd Edition. Insert between Rustic Bunting (*Emberiza rustica*) and Gray Bunting (*Emberiza variabilis*).

New Species Rejected—**Green Parakeet** *(Aratinga holochlora)*

Where. Texas, Rio Grande Valley area, including Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge and the cities of Brownsville and McAllen.

When. Dates ranging from 10 and 11 October 1960, 5 September 1984 through 31 May 1985, 28 December 1987, and 28 January 1988.

Observers. John C. Arvin, Harry C. Nissen, Guy McCaskie, et al.

Published details. None.

Documentation. Published photograph by T. Pincelli in *Birding* 1985, 27:225; and sound recording from McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas, 28 January 1988 (VIREO numbers P18/1/001; P18/1/002; A12/1/001; L06/3/015).

SAM FRIED

Green Parakeets, Brownsville, Texas, December 1988.

Expert Opinion. R.S. Ridgely.

Identification. Discussion focused on whether these birds were of the nominate subspecies *holochlora* or whether the subspecies *rubritorquis* or *strenua* was involved. (The range of *A. h. holochlora* is the Mexican states of Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas, Vera Cruz, Puebla, San Luis Potosí, Guanajuato, Mexico, and Oaxaca; the range for *A. h. rubritorquis* is eastern Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras to northern Nicaragua; and the range for *A. h. strenua* is the Pacific slope of Mexico and Central America from Oaxaca to Nicaragua.) Several committee members stated that the lack of detailed field descriptions prohibited them from positively identifying the birds as *A. h. holochlora*. One committee member lamented:

> The only pictures (out of six) that can be identified with certainty indicate unlikely subspecies (*rubritorquis* or *strenua*). The three pictures that are probably *A. h. holochlora* cannot be identified with certainty (in agreement with comments from Bob Ridgely). Furthermore, the descriptions in the sight records accompanying the file are inadequate for establishing the [subspecific] identification. Although I find it unlikely that at least some of the Rio Grande [Valley] birds aren't of the adjacent and most expectable subspecies, *A. h. holochlora*, as yet we do not have definitive documentation. I don't think that we should add this species to the list until the identification is beyond a doubt.

Concurring, another member stated:

> With the six poor photos in hand and in complete absence of any written description, I cannot be certain of the identification, and I require 100 percent certainty in identification of a species new to the ABA Checklist.

Origin. The committee questioned whether the sightings represented escaped cage birds. The expert opinion summarized the feeling of the committee as a whole:

> Can we be assured that they are wild birds? In my view, this has not yet been adequately established. What has really changed in recent years is the massive increase in the number of Mexican parrots brought over the border for commercial purposes. I think it very likely that this is the source of the south Texas birds. . . . The fact that other parrots which do not range especially close to Texas (but which do figure prominently in trade) are also seen at liberty there, albeit in smaller numbers than *A. holochlora* . . . strengthens this argument. So, too, may the scatter of rather yellow-looking feathers on

the photographed bird, a fading which could easily have been brought on by inadequate diet in captivity. . . . I would regard them as an accidentally released population, and thus would wait for them to establish an apparently stable breeding population.

One committee member thought that the fact that the parakeet flocks occur mainly in the cities in the Rio Grande Valley, not in the native vegetation at Bentsen or Santa Ana, was worth some attention.

This doesn't rule against their being wild birds, however. The great numbers of exotic trees and shrubs planted in those cities may very well provide food resources superior to those of the native vegetation. . . . McAllen and Brownsville are quite likely the best feeding areas for parakeets that the Valley has *ever* had, and the cities could be thought of as providing a new habitat. As evidence that this habitat is different: White-winged Dove is primarily a summer resident in the Valley, and in winter it is virtually absent there—*except* in the cities, where flocks winter regularly. If there are wild parakeets wandering the Valley, it would make sense to assume that escaped cage birds would join them. In Costa Rica I've been impressed with the way the flocks of *Aratinga finschi* [Crimson-fronted Parakeet] invade downtown San Jose at some times of year, while at other seasons (perhaps when the *Erythrina* are not in bloom) the birds are absent. In repeated visits to other parts of the Neotropics, I've noticed what seem to be big seasonal fluctuations in numbers of other parrot species. I'm willing to believe that some New World psittacines may be nomadic in response to food supplies. And, frankly, I believe it's quite possible that flocks of Green Parakeets are invading the Rio Grande Valley in winter. I'd like to see some evidence that would allow me to vote in favor of adding this species to the list. But I haven't so far.

Motion to add. Tucker/Gill.
Vote. 1/6.

Species Removed from List—**Black Francolin** *(Francolinus francolinus)*

Reason for removing from checklist. This Old World species was first introduced to southwestern Louisiana in the early 1960s. There is no indication that the bird has increased its population or expanded its range since that time. One committee member's thoughts reflected the committee's reasoning for removal:

The species was introduced recently (1960s) with no indication that a thriving (renewing) population ever existed, whether originally or now. . . . I am not in favor of removing any introduced species from the checklist if that species disappears. . . . I am in favor of removing Black Francolin outright from the checklist only because I don't believe it was ever properly established in the first place.

Another member elaborated:

Its numbers seem not to have changed since then [mid-60s]. While it does seem to be maintaining its low numbers, it does not seem to be increasing in numbers, as I think a viable population should.

In fact, it is not maintaining its numbers. It has been very difficult to find any Black Francolins in the 1980s and the population has contracted to the vicinity of the Gum Cove Ranch. Also pertinent is the fact that in 1985 the Louisiana Ornithological Society Bird Records Committee deleted this species from the official state list because of its uncertain status. [*Birding* 1989, 21:158–159.]

Motion to delist. Remsen/Gill.
Vote. 7/0.

Changes from the 37th Supplement (1989) of the AOU Check-list of North American Birds

The ABA Checklist Committee follows the lead of the AOU Committee on Classification and Nomenclature with respect to English name changes and taxonomic decisions. The following changes and decisions follow that committee's rulings and appeared in the "Thirty-seventh Supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds," published in *The Auk* 1989, 106:532–538. [For Paul DeBenedictis's review of these changes, see "Gleanings from the Technical Literature" in *Birding* 1989, 21:209–211.]

English Name Changes. Common Barn-Owl (*Tyto alba*) to Barn Owl; Northern Hawk-Owl (*Surnia ulula*) to Northern Hawk Owl; Common Pauraque (*Nyctidromus albicollis*) to Pauraque; Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa latirostris*) to Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*); and Eye-browed Thrush (*Turdus obscurus*) to Eyebrowed Thrush.

Cox's Sandpiper *(Calidris paramelanotos).* The committee notes the conclusion of the AOU Committee on Classification and Nomenclature that there is insufficient evidence to decide at the present time whether this sandpiper is a separate species or a hybrid. (See the 37th Supplement to the AOU Check-list of North American Birds.) The recent possible Massachusetts sighting cannot be evaluated in the absence of a taxonomic decision.

Western Flycatcher *(Empidonax difficilis).* Replace Western Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*) with Pacific-slope Flycatcher

SHAWNEEN FINNEGAN

The English name for Eye-browed Thrush was changed to Eyebrowed Thrush. This Eyebrowed Thrush was photographed at Attu Island, Alaska, 26 May 1988.

The Yellow-green Vireo was split from the Red-eyed Vireo. This Yellow-green Vireo was in Pacific Grove, California, 9 October 1988.

SHAWNEEN FINNEGAN

(*Empidonax difficilis*) and Cordilleran Flycatcher (*Empidonax occidentalis*). Pacific-slope Flycatcher breeds from southeastern Alaska and northwestern and central British Columbia south through southwestern California. Cordilleran Flycatcher breeds from southeastern Washington, southwestern Alberta, northern Idaho, western Montana, Wyoming, and western South Dakota south to northeastern California, Nevada, and central and southeastern Arizona, and east to western Nebraska, central Colorado, central New Mexico, and western Texas (and south to southern Mexico).

Black-tailed Gnatcatcher *(Polioptila melanura).* Replace Black-tailed Gnatcatcher with California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*) and Black-tailed Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila melanura*). Distribution of California Gnatcatcher is limited to southwestern California (north to Los Angeles County). Black-tailed Gnatcatcher is distributed from southeastern California to western and southern Texas.

Water Pipit *(Anthus spinoletta).* Replace Water Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*) with American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*), which the AOU currently recognizes as a separate species. The English name "American Pipit" is the traditional name of *A. rubescens*.

Red-eyed Vireo *(Vireo olivaceus).* Replace Red-eyed Vireo with Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*) and Yellow-green Vireo (*Vireo flavoviridis*). (See "36th Supplement to AOU Check-list of North American Birds" in *The Auk* 1987, 104:591–596.)

Brown Towhee *(Pipilo fuscus).* Replace Brown Towhee with California Towhee (*Pipilo crissalis*) and Canyon Towhee (*Pipilo fuscus*). California Towhee is distributed from southwestern Oregon south through California into Mexico (Baja California). Distribution of Canyon Towhee is from western and central Arizona, northern New Mexico, southeastern Colorado, northwestern Oklahoma, and western and central Texas, south into Mexico.

Votes in Progress. Motion to remove Stejneger's Petrel (*Pterodroma longirostris*); motion to add Crane Hawk (*Geranospiza caerulescens*); and motion to remove Mugimaki Flycatcher (*Ficedula mugimaki*).

Future Votes. Await state (California) decision on Solander's Petrel (*Pterodroma solandri*); motion to add Chinese Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*); await state (Colorado) decision on Red-backed Hawk (*Buteo polyosoma*); await state (California) decision on Swallow-tailed Gull (*Creagrus furcatus*); motion to add Rufous Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis*); motion to add Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*); await state (Texas) decision on Green-breasted Mango (*Anthracothorax prevosti*); and motion to add Narcissus Flycatcher (*Ficedula narcissina*).