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ABA Checklist Report, 1990



SANFORD KOMITO

Yellow Bittern (Ixobrychus sinensis) photographed on Attu Island, Alaska, 17–22 May 1989.

by Paul A. DeBenedictis *

New Species Accepted—

Yellow Bittern

(*Ixobrychus sinensis*)

Where. Attu Island, Alaska.

When. 17–22 May 1989.

Observers. M. E. Isleib and numerous others.

Published Details. *American Birds* 1989, 43:524.

Documentation. Specimen in

*Educational Communications, SUNY Health Science Center at Syracuse, 766 Irving Avenue, Syracuse, New York 13120

University of Alaska Museum (UAM 5611); photographs by S. Komito.

Identification. Small streaked heron, buffy brown above, with light brown streaking on the neck and chest; less richly colored throughout than the other small bitterns; female in definitive plumage.

Origin. Breeds in China, southeastern Siberia including Sakhalin Island, and Japan; highly migratory, wintering in

southeastern Asia, New Guinea, Australia, and occasionally the western Tropical Pacific.

Motion to add. Gibson/DeBenedictis.

Vote. 7/0.

Placement on the ABA Checklist. Insert between Least Bittern and American Bittern. *Status:* A. *Birding code:* 5.

English name. This species has often been called "Chinese Little Bittern," but the shorter and more descriptive English name adopted here and by the AOU Checklist Committee has been used in *The Herons Handbook* (Hancock and Elliot 1984, Harper & Row, New York) as well as most recent works on Asian birds (with the notable exception of *A Field Guide to the Birds of Japan* [Wild Bird Society 1982, Tokyo]).

New Species Accepted—

Crane Hawk

(*Geranospiza caerulescens*)

Where. Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Hidalgo County, Texas.



KEVIN T. KARLSON/VIREO

Crane Hawk (Geranospiza caerulescens) at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Texas, 20 December 1987–9 April 1988.

When. 20 December 1987–9 April 1988.

Observers. George T. Wallace, Beverly Collier, Tim Schantz, Greg Lasley, R. Guy McCaskie, Don Roberson, Steve Perry, Tony Gallucci, Curtis Marantz, Jon Dunn, Sally Weeks, Kevin Karlson, and numerous others.

Published Details. *American Birds* 1988, 42:194, 288.

Documentation. Photograph published in *American Birds* (op. cit.), others in VIREO (K07/2/001).

Identification. A rather uniformly slaty-colored hawk with long reddish legs; yellow cere; faint, narrow, light barring on the breast, thighs, belly, and crissum; and narrow, white, basal and median tail bands plus a narrower terminal band; unlike any other North American raptor. The dark plumage of this bird is characteristic of the northern *nigra* group of subspecies ("Blackish Crane Hawk"), sometimes treated as a separate species.

Origin. Resident from north-eastern Mexico (central

Tamaulipas and southern Nuevo Leon) south through Central and South America to Peru, Bolivia, and northern Argentina. The record was circulated three times due to the apparently frayed condition of the plumage evident in some of the photographs (including the one published in *American Birds*) and an apparently bent rectrix evident on some other photographs, suggestive of a bird that had been held in captivity. The first set of photographs was taken just after a heavy rainfall, before this hawk had dried completely; other photographs taken at the same time as those that show the bent feather do not depict the same condition, which evidently can be produced temporarily by heavy preening or by some of the foraging methods that this species uses. None of the detailed descriptions from earlier in its stay suggests more than minor feather wear on the rectrices, nor is there any evidence that this bird underwent substantial molt during its stay. Without the

extensive documentation from the Texas Bird Records Committee that accompanied it, this record almost surely would have been rejected on the grounds of dubious origin.

Motion to add. Gill/Kaufman.

Votes. 4/3, 4/2 (1 abstention), 7/0.

Placement on the ABA Checklist. Insert between Northern Goshawk and Common Black-Hawk. **Status:** A. **Birding code:** 5.

This supplement

to the third edition of the *ABA Checklist* documents all changes adopted since our last report (*Birding* 1990, 22:130–135). Our next report will be a supplement to the fourth edition of the *ABA Checklist* (1990).

New Species Accepted

Yellow Bittern
Crane Hawk
Oriental Turtle-Dove
Narcissus Flycatcher
Gray Silky-flycatcher

New Species Not Accepted

Green-breasted Mango
Eurasian Blackbird

Species Removed from List

Stejneger's Petrel
Cuban Emerald

Change in Scientific Name

Olivaceous Cormorant

Change in Status

Masked Booby
Red-crowned Parrot
Plain-capped Starthroat



SANFORD KOMITO

Oriental Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis*), *Attu Island, Alaska, 20 May–12 June 1989.*

New Species Accepted—
Oriental Turtle-Dove
(*Streptopelia orientalis*)

Where and when. Three substantiated records: (1) one was photographed on St. Paul Island, Pribilof Islands, Alaska, 23 June–18 July 1984; (2) one came aboard a fishing-vessel and was photographed within fifty miles of the Pribilof Islands, Alaska, about 20–26 July 1986; and (3) one was photographed in the Massacre Bay region of Attu Island, Alaska, 20 May–12 June 1989. In addition, an unidentified dove probably of this species came aboard a fishing-vessel 140 miles south-southwest of Agattu Island, Alaska, on 21 July 1983.

Observers. (1) Stuart I. Tingley, Kenn Kaufman, William E. Rodstrom, and numerous others; (2) Suzanne G. Speckman; and (3) Stanley Wulkowicz, Theodore G. Tobish, Jr., S. Komito, and others.

Published Details. *American Birds* 1984, 38:1053; and *American Birds* 1989, 43:525.

Documentation. Photographs by (1) William E. Rodstrom, (2) Suzanne G. Speckman, and (3) Daniel L. Guthrie and S. Komito.

Identification. A rich-brown, relatively short-tailed dove with conspicuously pale-margined

back feathers, upperwing coverts, tertials, and secondaries, and patches of blue-tipped black feathers on the sides of the neck. The saturated colors and neck pattern are sufficient to establish the identity of these birds as Oriental rather than European Turtle-Doves, *Streptopelia turtur*, a species that is unknown in eastern Asia, and are suggestive of the east Asian nominate race, *orientalis*, which is the subspecies most likely to occur in Alaska on geographic grounds.

Origin. Nests from the Central Siberian Republic, southeastern Siberia, Sakhalin Island, the Kuriles, and Japan south through India and central Indochina; northern populations are migratory and occur regularly as vagrants to Europe. *Streptopelia* doves do well in captivity and are popular cage birds in Japan; it has been rumored that they are sometimes kept aboard Japanese fishing-vessels. For this reason, the initial reports were withheld until a pattern of occurrences had become apparent. Oriental Turtle-Doves migrate between late March and June and in September and October, when they are most frequent in Europe.

Motion to add. Gibson/DeBenedictis.

Vote. 7/0.

Placement on the ABA Checklist. Insert between Band-tailed Pigeon and Ringed Turtle-Dove. **Status:** A. **Birding code:** 5.

English name. This species appears in much of the European literature (and in *A Field Guide to the Birds of Japan*) as "Rufous Turtle Dove," but only the southern, sedentary races are deeply rufous in color. We follow the AOU Check-list Committee in using Oriental Turtle-Dove as the English name for this species.

New Species Accepted—
Narcissus Flycatcher
(*Ficedula narcissina*)

Where. Attu Island, Alaska.

When. 20–21 May 1989.

Observers. David W. Sonneborn and numerous others.

Published Details. *American Birds* 1989, 43:525.

Documentation. Specimen in University of Alaska Museum (UAM 5610); photographs by S. Komito.

Identification. A small, dark-brown and yellow flycatcher with a yellow supercilium and a conspicuous crescent-shaped white wing-bar on each wing; male in first alternate plumage. The specimen is of the nominate eastern race *narcissina*. The similarly colored Yellow-rumped Flycatcher, *Ficedula xanthopygia*, is distinguished by its white supercilium and a differently shaped white wing-bar.

Origin. Nests in northern China and from Sakhalin Island south through Japan, migrating to southeastern Asia to spend the winter.

Motion to add. Gibson/DeBenedictis.

Vote. 7/0.

Placement on the ABA Checklist. Between Black-capped Gnatcatcher and Mugimaki Flycatcher. *Status:* A. *Birding Code:* 5.

New Species Accepted—
Gray Silky-flycatcher
(*Ptilogonys cinereus*)

Where. Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, Cameron County, Texas.

When. 31 October–11 November 1985.

Documentation. This is the same record previously not accepted by our committee (*Birding* 1988, 20:74–75). See also *Birding* 1986, 18:34–36.

Origin. The identity of this bird has never been in question. This record was resubmitted following a recent discovery that reduces the distance between a presumed nesting population and the U.S. border to about a hundred miles, and the proceedings of the Texas Bird Records Committee, which accepted this record. The question of origin was discussed in our previous report. We find none of the arguments, pro or con, compelling. Despite several observations of captives in Mexican bird markets, we recognize that this species is not frequently so encountered. The obvious molt of outer tail feathers evident in photographs is at a time only slightly later than might be expected for the related Phainopepla; molt cycles of the Gray Silky-flycatcher are poorly documented. The

most damaging argument against natural vagrancy remains the lack of published reports of this species outside known nesting areas even in Mexico, although wanderers are alluded to in the documentation we have examined. We encourage birders who have observed vagrant individuals of this species or who have data from nesting areas that suggest seasonal movements to publish their observations in the ornithological literature. This species is largely frugivorous and hence may be prone to wander, as does the Phainopepla (which provides spectacular examples of long-distance vagrancy). Given the new information, the majority of the committee felt that the arguments for captive origin are no longer sufficiently compelling to preclude acceptance of this record. We have not seen details of the other reports of this species from the southwestern U.S.; none currently are accepted by their respective state bird records committees.

Motion to add. Lasley/DeBenedictis.

Vote. 6/1.

Placement on the ABA Checklist. Between Cedar Waxwing and Phainopepla, in the family Ptilogonatidae. *Status:* A. *Birding Code:* 5.



SANFORD KOMITO

Narcissus Flycatcher (Ficedula narcissina) on Attu Island, Alaska, 20–21 May 1989.

New Species Not Accepted—
Green-breasted Mango
(*Anthracothorax prevostii*)

Where. Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas.

When. 14–23 September 1988.

Documentation. Three transparencies deposited in VIREO (X08/1/001), one published in *American Birds* 1989, 43:26, 129.

Expert opinions. Thomas S. Schulenberg, Robert S. Ridgely, and F. Gary Stiles.

Identification. The transparencies clearly depict a female or immature male Mango hummingbird; Green-breasted Mango is most likely on geographic grounds. This bird appeared the day before Hurricane Gilbert made landfall in Texas. The hurricane's track also passed near the range of the very similar Black-breasted Mango, *Anthracothorax nigriventris*. In plumages comparable to that of this bird, these species differ only in the pres-

ence or absence of iridescent blue-green coloring in the black stripe on the throat, breast, and upper belly. Careful study of the slides, including computer enhancement by DeBenedictis, reveals that the image is out of focus. There are scattered turquoise to deep-violet pixels in the black ventral area, but nothing about them suggests a feather-shaped object. They could be an artifact of the film or the result of the slide-duplication process. Our experts disagreed about other plumage characteristics that might separate these forms. Everyone who has reviewed this record has reached the same conclusion: it very likely, but not certainly, pertains to a Green-breasted Mango. The Texas Bird Records Committee accepted this record as *Anthracothorax* species, but our committee has elected not to admit to the *ABA Checklist* any record identifiable to genus only. Capture of this bird and, if it could not be preserved as a scientific specimen, retention of some of the critical breast feathers would have been necessary to identify it unequivocally. In view of its uncertain identity, origin was not questioned.

Motion to add. Lasley/DeBenedictis.

Vote. 0/7.

New Species Not Accepted—
Eurasian Blackbird
(*Turdus merula*)

Where. Outremont, near Montreal, Province of Quebec.

When. 23 November 1970.

Documentation. Specimen in University of Montreal (McNeil and Cyr 1971, *Auk* 88:919–920).

Identification. Identification of the specimen, which is the basis for the species' inclusion in the sixth edition of the *AOU Checklist*, has not been questioned.

Origin. Northeastern European populations are migratory, and vagrants have been recorded from Iceland and Greenland. From the onset, however, the origin of this specimen, an adult male reported to show no signs of prior captivity, has been controversial because of the locality (Montreal is a major seaport) and the age of the bird (adults are decidedly in the minority among vagrant birds in the fall). After a divided initial vote, the committee decided to table the motion until either additional records or more definitive evidence about possible captive origin could be obtained.

Richard Ryan's recent note (*Birding* 1990, 22:190–191) on recently discovered traffic in illegally imported birds, centered in Montreal and specifically involving Eurasian Blackbirds, provided the "smoking gun" needed to bring the committee to a consensus. The record was rejected on the grounds of possible transport by humans. Given the number of European *Turdus* thrush (e.g., Redwing and Fieldfare) records recently obtained in the Atlantic Provinces of Canada, the absence of additional records of Eurasian Blackbird also was considered damaging.

Motion to add. Keith/Tucker (1981).

Votes. 5/2, 0/7.

Species Removed from List—
Stejneger's Petrel
(*Pterodroma longirostris*)

Reasons for removal. This species was placed on the *ABA Checklist* on the basis of a bird seen briefly off California in 1979. The record was initially accepted after much debate, but the species was added to the *AOU Checklist* only after an old specimen from Hawaii had been discovered. Subsequent observations of birds thought to be Cook's Petrel, *Pterodroma cookii*,

raised questions about the identity of this bird, which prompted a "motion to delete" both in our committee and in the California Bird Records Committee. Although the California Committee continues to accept this record, after two circulations our committee agreed that, while this bird may have been correctly identified, its identity is not certain. It was also unclear as to how many of the written reports were based on notes taken when the observation was made as opposed to being composed later, after the observers had had time to discuss the observation with one another. Stejneger's Petrel has been collected more than six hundred miles off California. We have no doubt that, if it enters our waters with any regularity, a record for which there is conclusive documentation eventually will be obtained.

Motion to delete. Kaufman/Gill.

Votes. 5/2, 7/0.

Species Removed from List—

Cuban Emerald
(*Chlorostilbon ricordii*)

Reasons for removal. This species has been reported about a dozen times from Florida, the first report more than forty years

ago. To the best of our knowledge, however, there are no well-documented, much less substantiated, records. The recent discovery that a second species of *Chlorostilbon*, Brace's Emerald, *Chlorostilbon bracei*, thought to be recently extinct, inhabited the Bahamas, further complicates field identification in a very difficult genus. Given the uncertainty, the committee unanimously voted to delete this species until an unequivocal record is obtained.

Motion to delete. Kaufman/DeBenedictis.

Vote. 7/0.

Change in Scientific Name—Olivaceous Cormorant.

Replace *Phalacrocorax olivaceus* **with** *Phalacrocorax brasiliensis*.

Reason for change. M. Ralph Browning (*Wilson Bulletin* 1989, 101:101–106) has convincingly demonstrated that Gmelin's name *Pelecanus brasiliensis* refers to the bird we now call Olivaceous Cormorant. Gmelin's is the earliest valid name for this species and supersedes all other scientific names by reason of priority; it has seen extensive use and cannot be suppressed on the grounds of obscurity. The AOU

Check-list Committee has voted to adopt this change, and their decision will appear in the next supplement to the *AOU Check-list* (B. L. Monroe, Jr., pers. comm.). (See *Birding* 1991, 23:163–165.)

Change in Status—

Masked Booby
(*Sula dactylatra*)

Status. Change V to N.

Reason for change. Masked Boobies have long been known from the Dry Tortugas, Florida, but they attempted to nest on Sand Key for the first time in 1984 (*American Birds* 1984, 38:900). After several unsuccessful attempts, one pair finally fledged one young in 1988 (*American Birds* 1988, 42:424). Consequently, the status of this species has been changed from Visitor to Nester, and its *Birding Code* reduced from 4 to 3. The species occurs annually in the Gulf of Mexico from Florida to Texas and in Gulf Stream waters off eastern Florida, north casually to at least the Carolinas and accidentally to the Canadian Maritimes, where it perhaps is only storm-driven. It is casual off the California coast.

Motion to change. Kaufman/DeBenedictis.

Vote. 7/0.

Change in Status—
Red-crowned Parrot
(*Amazona viridigenialis*)

Status. Change V to I.

Reason for change. Lasley has informed the committee that the Texas Bird Records Committee has not yet dealt with this species because the question of origin remains controversial. Our files contain evidence dating from the early 1980s of nesting by this species in the greater Los Angeles area (although it is not accepted as an introduced species by the California Bird Records Committee), where it may now outnumber Yellow-headed Parrot, *Amazona ochrocephala*, and in southeastern Florida, where the most vigorous populations exist. Several nestings in the Brownsville area and elsewhere in Texas are now known as well. Recent Christmas Bird Counts and other observations suggest that stable if not expanding populations are present in all three areas, and our committee believes that the species has now met the ABA requirements for established introduced species. The presence of introduced populations in California and Florida greatly weakens the argument for natural origin of Texas birds, on which its former status as a Visitor was based. We doubt that the origin of birds in the Rio Grande Valley can ever be established with confidence, and, therefore, change the status of this species to Introduced and reduce its Birding Code to 2.

Motion to change. Lasley/DeBenedictis.

Vote. 6/1.

Change in Status—
Plain-capped Starthroat
(*Heliomaster constantii*)

Status. Change A to V.

Reason for change. This species has been found in southern Arizona during the summer months more than fifteen times since the first record in 1969. It has been found almost annually since 1979. It is now a Code-4 bird, and correspondingly we have changed its status from Accidental to Visitor.

Motion to change. Kaufman/DeBenedictis.

Vote. 7/0.

Birding Codes

While preparing the fourth edition of the *ABA Checklist*, we slightly modified the definition of Code 2, which now denotes species that barely enter the ABA Checklist Area, are of restricted distribution within it, or are more widespread but difficult to observe. We also established an additional category, Code 6, for species that cannot be or are very unlikely ever again to be observed at all. These changes, more consistent application of all codes, and additional distributional data obtained since the third edition (1986) of the *ABA Checklist* resulted in code changes for about sixty species; these are reported in the fourth edition.

All extinct species were as-

signed Code 6, and in view of the long absence of substantiated records, Ivory-billed Woodpecker and Bachman's Warbler were also so assigned; we are not yet ready, however, to declare the warbler extinct nor the woodpecker extirpated (it survives in Cuba). California Condor is temporarily assigned Code 6, because its entire population currently is in captivity. Any observations of Code-6 birds should be treated as if they were additions to the *ABA Checklist*. Our committee will review observations of Code-6 birds in strict confidentiality.

Work in Progress

Preparation of the fourth edition of the *ABA Checklist* has again drawn our attention to the differences between the *AOU Checklist* and the *ABA Checklist*. We hope that most of these discrepancies can be resolved in the near future. The committee is currently considering or preparing for deliberation the following motions: to delete Mugimaki Flycatcher; to add White-chinned Petrel, Kermadec Petrel, Great Frigatebird, Band-tailed Gull, Social Flycatcher, Masked Tityra, White-throated Robin, Black Catbird, Yellow-faced Grassquit, and Eurasian Siskin; and to determine the status in the ABA Checklist Area of Scarlet Ibis, several parrot species (especially Monk Parakeet and Rose-ringed Parakeet), and Eurasian Collared-Dove. We need information that would help us to estimate the population size (both numerically and in geographic extent), nesting status, and number of years present of any introduced species not included in the *ABA Checklist*. Please send all such information to the chairman. As always, we welcome documentation for any other potential additions to the *ABA Checklist*.