

1998-99 ABA Checklist Report

from the American Birding Association Checklist Committee



DAVID BREWER

Mist-netted on 8 April 1996 at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, this individual represents the first, and thus far the only, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush to be found in the ABA Area.

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This is the second supplement since the publication of the fifth edition of the *ABA Checklist* (1996). The decisions reached reflect deliberations held over the last two years.

When potential new additions to the ABA Checklist area are found, the ABA Checklist Committee first awaits decisions by the appropriate state or provincial committee, if one exists. The next step is to obtain the material from that state or provincial committee and circulate the material among our ABA Committee members. Although we pay careful attention to their recorded deliberations, we are not bound to follow their decisions. Additionally, we would add that although it is the exception, we have experienced some delay in our review of records because of difficulty in obtaining the documentation from local committees. Once the record circulates through our committee, a unanimous vote is required before the record is accepted. One or more dissents means that the record is to be recirculated, unless a majority rejects, in which case

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the record is not accepted. On the second and third round a record will be accepted if the vote is unanimous or has only a single dissent. At the final round, all records will fail unless they meet that standard. For records that have previously been accepted, a simple majority is required of the ABA Checklist Committee to overturn the former decision.

Our committee works closely with the Committee on Classification and Nomenclature of the American Ornithologists' Union (some of the membership is shared). Although we vote independently, both committees usually arrive at the same decision on new additions to the ABA Area's list. Although the AOU area is much larger, extending south through Middle America and also including Hawaii, Bermuda, and the West Indies, the AOU's committee still separately adds new additions to our more confined area. We reiterate that on issues of taxonomy and English names we follow the AOU committee's decisions without exception, a policy adopted at our meeting in Austin in February 1997 (Dunn 1997).

This report adds seven species to the ABA list. These are Fea's/Zino's Petrel (*Pterodroma feae/madeira*), Bermuda Petrel (*Pterodroma cahow*), Chinese Pond-Heron (*Ardeola bacchus*), Green Parakeet (*Aratinga holochlora*) as a viable introduced population, Stygian Owl (*Asio*

stygius), Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush (*Catharus aurantiirostris*), and Yellow-throated Bunting (*Emberiza elegans*). Based on new evidence, the Committee has decided to remove Azure Gallinule (*Porphyryula flavirostris*) from the list. Records of Light-mantled Albatross (*Phoebetria palpebrata*), Kelp Gull (*Larus dominicanus*), Dark-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus melacoryphus*), and Blue Rock Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*) have received split decisions and remain unresolved in their first or second round and will continue circulating to an additional round of voting. The committee will soon begin to evaluate records of Dark-rumped Petrel (*Pterodroma phaeopygia*), Great-winged Petrel (*Pterodroma macroptera*), Bulwer's Petrel (*Bulweria bulwerii*), Swinhoe's Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma monorhis*), Band-tailed Gull (*Larus belcheri*) Cuban Pewee (*Contopus caribaeus*), and Piratic Flycatcher (*Legatus leucophaius*). We also will consider adding Yellow-chevroned Parakeet (*Brotogeris versicolurus*) as an established introduced population (from southern Florida) and will reconsider the Swallow-tailed Gull (*Creagrus furcatus*) that has been accepted by the California Bird Records Committee.



BRIAN PATTESON

Birds identified as Fea's Petrels have been reported off the Atlantic Coast at least since 1991. This one was photographed on 31 May 1998 south of Hatteras Inlet, North Carolina. The ABA Checklist Committee, however, has accepted the bird as a species group: Fea's/Zino's Petrel.

New Species Accepted

Fea's/Zino's Petrel

(*Pterodroma feae/madeira*)

When. There have been numerous records since at least 1991, with sightings extending back a decade earlier to 1981, principally off North Carolina but also north to off Virginia and even inland on Kerr Lake on the North Carolina-Virginia line after Hurricane Fran on 6 September 1996. These records are discussed and detailed by Tove (1997a and 1997b) and include numerous photos of birds seen off North Carolina. These references were our primary source in our revisiting of this issue, along with additional correspondence from the chair of the North Carolina State

Records Committee. Exceptionally, one was photographed off Nova Scotia on 7 July 1997 (Hooker and Baird 1997).

Vote. 6/1.

Placement on the ABA Checklist.

Provisionally after Black-capped Petrel (*Pterodroma hasitata*) and before Cook's Petrel (*Pterodroma cookii*), but since the species remains hypothetical with the AOU (1998, see Appendix), its exact placement is subject to revision.

Birding Code. 3.

Discussion. Since the committee last reviewed this species (DeBenedictis 1996), there have been a number of additional records, some of which have been well photographed. The committee agrees that these records pertain to the "Soft-plumaged Petrel" group and further that the southern-hemisphere species, known as the Soft-plumaged Petrel (*Pterodroma mollis*), is excluded. Identification, though, between the two others of this group from the subtropical Atlantic Ocean, Fea's Petrel (*Pterodroma feae*) and Zino's Petrel (*Pterodroma madeira*, also known as Madeira Petrel) remains at this stage conjectural. Fea's breeds on the Cape Verde Islands off western Africa and also on Bugio Island in the Desertas Islands, Madeira. It may also breed on the Azores and Great Salvage Island (Tove 1997a). Zino's breeds only in the highlands of Madeira Island, Madeira. Both species are threatened, Zino's critically so. The estimate of the population of Zino's is only 8 to 30 pairs (Tove 1997a). The latter species is distinctly

smaller in size and has a smaller bill, and possible differences have been suggested in wing shape (Gantlett 1995) and upperwing pattern (Howell 1996). These differences are summarized by Tove (1997a). The wing shape and upperwing differences, though, were derived from birds thought to be Zino's that were photographed off Bugio Island, where Fea's is known to breed! We are not aware of photographs yet of birds from the nesting burrows of Madeira in which the spread upperwing is photographed in daylight. Given present knowledge, the committee feels that short of a specimen or a bird measured in hand (both unlikely events), it will not be possible to adequately certify that the birds off North America are actually Fea's. We wish to add that, given the "threatened" and "endangered" status of both species, getting such documentation is inadvisable. The committee acknowledges that based on likelihood, Fea's is overwhelmingly likely and based on that fact three members were willing to accept the records outright as Fea's. The apparent thickness of the bill on some of the birds photographed off the East Coast does lend support to the identification as Fea's. These three members plus four additional members were willing to accept the species as a species group, Fea's/Zino's. This decision was done with reluctance, but it should be noted that these two are probably each others' closest extant relative; indeed,



BRIAN PATTESON

With a handful of records off the Carolinas, Bermuda Petrel has now been adequately documented for the ABA Area. This bird was photographed off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina on 29 May 1998.

Bretagnolle (1995) suggested they are conspecific, based on their similar vocalizations.

Bermuda Petrel
(*Pterodroma cahow*)

When. Wingate et al. (1998) detail the history of this critically endangered species as well as the four records off the Carolinas, one of which on 26 May 1996, 31 nautical miles east-southeast of Hatteras Inlet, North Carolina, was documented with photos. This record formed the basis of photos and discussion published in Wingate et al. (1998), we reviewed written notes and illustrations from recent observers. Committee members also had available the published color photo in *Field Notes* (52: 408) of a more recent Bermuda Petrel, one off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, on 29 May 1998. Just as our committee

was finishing deliberations, we heard of another individual documented with photos from off North Carolina (16 August 1999).

Vote. 7/0.

Placement on the ABA Checklist.

Insert after Mottled Petrel (*Pterodroma inexpectata*).

Birding Code. 4.

Discussion. The records to date are all from the late spring and summer. As the species continues to recover on Bermuda and criteria for identification are now known (Wingate et al. 1998), we can be hopeful that sightings off the mid-Atlantic coast, especially the Carolinas, will continue to increase.



YVA MOMATIUK AND JOHN EASTCOTT

In August 1996, a Chinese Pond-Heron spent much of six days on St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs, Alaska.

Chinese Pond-Heron **(*Ardeola bacchus*)**

When. 4–9 August 1996.

Number, Location, and

Documentation. One full-breeding-plumaged bird was present at Antone Lake, St. Paul Island, Pribilof Islands, Alaska. An account, including published

color photos, is detailed by Hoyer and Smith (1997).

Vote. 7/0.

Placement on the ABA Checklist.

Insert after Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*).

Birding Code. 5.

Discussion. Although the species has been recorded no closer than Hokkaido in northern Japan, records from Japan have been increasing in recent decades (Brazil 1991). The species is highly migratory and winters south to throughout southeast Asia and to Sumatra and Borneo (del Hoyo et al. 1992).

Green Parakeet **(*Aratinga holochlora*)**

Number, Location, and Documentation. First recorded in 1960, the species is well established in the major towns of southernmost Texas from Brownsville to McAllen. The total population is many hundreds, if not thousands. This cavity-nesting species nests commonly in colonies numbering from 5 to 30 pairs or more at one site. The species has been confirmed nesting in Brownsville, Edinburg, Weslaco, Harlingen,



STEVE BENTSEN

Substantial populations in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas and the continued deliberations of the ABA Checklist Committee have resulted in the inclusion of Green Parakeet on the list. These birds were photographed in McAllen, Texas, May 1999.

McAllen, Mission, San Benito, and many smaller towns in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Vote. 7/1 and 7/1. Accept as an introduced species.

Placement on the ABA Checklist. Insert after Carolina Parakeet (*Conuropsis carolinensis*).

Birding Code. 1

Discussion. Since the committee last considered adding this species (Gill 1990), numbers have increased considerably. This and the elapsed period of time (well over a decade) led to the committee's decision to add the species. The committee considered separately whether to add this species also as naturally occurring. Some members felt that the population now present occurred as a result of introductions *and* wild birds moving north from northeastern Mexico. But the majority believed that the evidence suggested otherwise, and this motion was defeated 3/4 and 2/6. In particular, there are no certain historical records of this species when there was more connecting habitat from South Texas to where they occur natively in Mexico. Further, numbers of this species remain constant, indeed are on the increase, unlike those of naturally occurring vagrants like Clay-colored Robin (*Turdus grayi*) and Blue Bunting (*Cyanocompsa parcellina*) which occur primarily in the winter and are irregular. The long debate over the subspecies involved (Gill 1990) is no longer germane, as this is being accepted as an introduced population. The Texas Bird Records Committee has accepted this as a "species of uncertain origin" (Haynie 1996).



JIM CULBERTSON

Two Texas records, both at Bentsen–Rio Grande Valley State Park, have resulted in the inclusion of Stygian Owl on the ABA Checklist. This individual was photographed on 26 December 1996.

Stygian Owl (*Asio stygius*)

Number, Location, and Documentation. One was well photographed at Bentsen–Rio Grande Valley State Park, Hidalgo County, on 26 December 1996. An account with stunning color photos including one on the cover of *Field Notes*

was published by Wright and Wright (1997). Incredibly, as this record was being reviewed, Cooksey (1998) published a record with color photos of another one recorded two years earlier (9 December 1994) at the very same location!

Vote. 6/1 and 7/1.

Placement on the ABA Checklist. Insert after Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*).

Birding Code. 5.

Discussion. All but one committee member had little hesitation in accepting these records as pertaining to naturally occurring vagrants. The one dissenter preferred to see some evidence that the species actually occurs in northeastern Mexico. Presently, it is known only as close as central Veracruz in the Sierra Madre Oriental (Howell and Webb 1995).

**Orange-billed
Nightingale-Thrush
(*Catharus aurantiirostris*)**

Number, Location, and Documentation. One mist-netted on 8 April 1996 at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, Cameron County, Texas. An account with color photos of the bird in-hand was produced by Papish et al. (1997). The bird was not seen again after it was released.

Vote. 7/0.

Placement on the ABA Checklist. Insert after Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*).

Birding Code. 5.

Discussion. This widespread tropical species occurs as close to Texas as southern Tamaulipas in northeastern Mexico (Howell and Webb 1995). It is believed to be partially migratory, as it occurs in lower elevations in winter, and it appears to withdraw from the northeastern part of its range in Tamaulipas in winter (Papish et al. 1997, Phillips 1991). If this assumption is indeed the case, additional Texas records should occur.



DAVID W. SONNEBORN

A Yellow-throated Bunting was observed and photographed on Attu, Alaska, 25 May 1998.

**Yellow-throated Bunting
(*Emberiza elegans*)**

Number, Location, and Documentation. One male on Attu Island, Alaska, on 25 May 1998. An article with description and identifying color photos was written by Sykes (1998).

Vote. 8/0.

Placement on the ABA Checklist. Provisionally after Rustic Bunting (*Emberiza rustica*).

Birding Code. 5.

Discussion. The species occurs no closer to Alaska than the Amur River region and Ussuriland (breeding range) and in winter from northern Japan (Dement'ev and Gladkov 1954, Brazil 1991, Sykes 1998). As a short-range migrant, the species is not necessarily a predictable vagrant to Alaska, but the spring 1998 season in the Aleutians and the Pribilofs was a remarkable one for the variety and quality of migrant Asian species (Tobish 1998).

Species Removed

**Azure Gallinule
(*Porphyryla flavirostris*)**

When Killed by cat on 14 December 1986.

Vote. 3/4 and 3/5 to remove.

Number, Location, and Documentation. Adult male, Fort Salonga, Suffolk County, Long Island, New York. Specimen (AMNH 817820) deposited at the American Museum of Natural History, New York. See Spencer and Kolodnicki (1988) for details on the identification and circumstances under which it was found.

Discussion. Perhaps no other specimen-based record has generated so much controversy within the ABA Records Committee. Even when this record was initially reviewed and accepted in 1988, there was considerable debate as to the bird's origin. At the time of the 1988 evaluation nothing had been published about the possibility of this species' making even seasonal movements. However, stimulated in part by the New York record, Remsen and Parker (1990) established that Azure Gallinule makes seasonal movements in at least a portion of its range. In their review, they also listed five extralimital records, all from South America and all from late October to January. Their summary, along with the absence of any documentation of this gallinule's ever being imported into the U.S., prompted the ABA Records Committee to accept (6/1) the record during a recirculation (Gill 1990).

The record was considered finalized until a few years later when an ornithologist at a New York university museum contacted

(with encouragement from Richard Prum), J. V. Remsen. The following was stated by the New York ornithologist in a letter, dated 30 September 1996, to Remsen: "An individual who I know extremely well, and who will remain anonymous, read the article [appearing in *Newsday* shortly after the bird was found] and indicated to me that they had this bird in captivity and that it escaped sometime in early December [1986]." Because the gallinule apparently was illegally possessed, the identity of the aviculturist remained anonymous. Subsequent correspondence (26 February 1997) between the New York ornithologist and the current committee revealed that the bird purportedly escaped "close to the site of discovery."

Although the committee had no reason to doubt the veracity of

the New York ornithologist's statements, members were very uneasy with judging such an important record based on second-hand information. Nonetheless, with such ambiguity about the origin of the New York gallinule, the current committee ultimately voted by majority to reject the record.

Acknowledgments

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