

## **2015 MINUTES OF THE MONTANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE**

**Date:** 25 September 2015

**Location:** Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Regional Office, Great Falls

**Members present:** Rose Leach (Chair), Chuck Carlson, Dan Casey, Coburn Currier, Nate Kohler, Harriet Marble, Ted Nordhagen, John Carlson, Bob Martinka (we had a quorum)

**Members absent:** Jeff Marks (Secretary), Fritz Prellwitz, Forrest Rowland, Dan Sullivan

**Non-members present:** none until 2 pm discussion on eBird: Robin Wolcott, Tony Leukering. John Parker

**Approval of 2014 Minutes:** 10:00, with spelling change from Baikal Teak to Baikal Teal.

**Action Items from 2014:** All 2014 information was entered in Tracker by Heritage Program Staff (Scott Blum) and Committee members were notified via email 17 Dec 2014.

--Committee unanimously voted to remove **Northern Parula** from the review list via email (finalized 27 January 2015), because there are now 21 approved records in Tracker. Nearly all have MBRC numbers. The few that don't were prior to 1979.

-- Rose will request that the 2015 information be entered. (Also, Nate found 1 old record that is not in Tracker (2005-039), so Rose will tell them that, too.)

**Changes to the agenda** – None

**Introductions** and highlights from committee members in attendance.

**Evaluation of records:** Reports and photos were posted on our Yahoo site, and Committee members submitted votes via e-mail in advance of the annual meeting. We reviewed **40 reports** that included **27 species**. Ten species had multiple reports: 3 species had 3 reports each and the remainder had 2 each. We accepted **34 reports**, requested additional information on 1 (2015-009 Iceland Gull), and rejected 5, which is about average. We repeated last year's concern that observers work on eliminating other species with their write-ups, and that they be more careful in their descriptions, so that the written descriptions could stand alone without the accompanying photos. By consensus, we agreed that for reports with lower case letters, observers should not be notified of our decisions until after we have met, on the chance that the outcome may change during our meetings.

For the Secretary:

**2015-003—Little Gull—** Last para, Nate asked for clarification on description of white segments, so that the sentence reads that the segments were on the wing. Clear up typos. Could Mike make any of these changes?

**2015-017**—Sagebrush Sparrow— Please include additional information to the report to justify the “B” in Status.- There was subsequent evidence of a family group reported to MOB, and I think feeding young, so that should be on the report, so a reader knows how we got to a big rather than little B.

**2015-035**— Both Great-tailed Grackle and Common Grackle would need a “B” for this record.

**Supplemental List:** no change.

**Membership:** Dan Casey is stepping down after this meeting, to make room for new membership. Harriet, Chuck, and Bob also noted they would be resigning soon (likely after next year’s meeting), and urged the committee (those that are left) to explore for replacements. Names of replacement people were mentioned. Discussion will continue via email and recommendations and votes will be conducted via email at a later date. Rose expressed interest in continuing as chair (the 2-year term was up at this meeting). No one else expressed interest in the chair position. Jeff was concerned about his role, because the bylaws require attendance if possible. The Committee wanted him to remain on as secretary.

**Review List:** Concerns were raised that the number 20 (for de-listing) may be somewhat arbitrary, so that information such as time frame and distribution of records should be taken into account when deciding when to remove a species from the Review List. Also, we reiterated that any eBird reviewer can ask for a full report on species that are off of the Review List, but for which we may want further details (e.g. recent Purple Martin record in eBird in Missoula County).

- 1) White-winged Dove: We now have 21 accepted records and 5 more from this year for which the secretary did not ask for a report, including 3 with photos. The species has increased in range in the last 10 years. Motion from Jeff to remove it from the review list and seconded by Dan. [Discussion via email from Forrest: Ok to delist, but do keep filters set to 0 for this species, because they are often mis-identified as Eurasian Collared-Doves. We need to make sure that Heritage does not accept this species without scrutiny. Rose will ask them if this is possible.] *Motion was passed unanimously.*
- 2) Eastern Phoebe: We now have 21 accepted records, fairly well-distributed around the state. Motion from Jeff to remove it from the review list. Motion seconded by Bob. *Motion passed.*
- 3) Gray Flycatcher: We now know this species occurs in the Bear Canyon area in small numbers. Motion from Jeff to add **QLL 41C** to the geographic exception area and suggest that we ask for reports from there only when the observer does not describe vocalizations. *No Action taken.* Concerns were expressed about needing more information in the area to further clarify relative abundance and more exact distribution within the entire latilong. Will revisit

next year. Also, while the species may be more widespread, we re-iterated the need for reports to continue to have vocalizations recorded or appropriately described, to eliminate Dusky Flycatcher. That is, while we recognize that Gray Flycatcher does occur in Bear Canyon, we did not want to relax any standards of accepting it, because Dusky remains the more common species there.

- 4) Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: Motion from Jeff for an exception area for this species (i.e., no reports needed) for **QLL 38A**. Motion seconded by John. *Motion passed with one dissent.*
- 5) Sagebrush Sparrow: This species clearly breeds in small numbers in QLL 41C. Motion from Jeff to add **QLL 41C** to the geographic exception area. Motion seconded by Coburn. *Motion passed.*
- 6) Great-tailed Grackle: Multiple Great-tailed Grackles have been documented in the Dillon area each year since 2013, including two nesting records, and Jeff has heard of others from there that were not reported to the committee. Motion from Jeff to add **QLL 37C** to the geographic exception area for the species. Motion seconded by Nate. *Motion passed.*

**Old reports reconsidered:** None.

**Bylaws discussion:** None.

**eBird discussion.** - Robin Wolcott, John Parker, and Tony Leukering joined the committee for discussion. We started discussion about when to validate records that are review species for the committee. Agreed to not validate until voted on by the committee, but to elevate the review process to get those records reviewed via email as soon as possible.

Dan provided a background on the relationship between eBird and MBRC and noted that he felt that eBird would be a greater part of MBRC in the future as the number of checklists continues to grow. Dan noted that filters have some work that needs to be done. Robin noted that she felt that most of the MT filters are set too loose. Tony has worked on filters from early on in eBird and noted that early filters were rough and often statewide and at best monthly. eBird has evolved into much finer resolution both temporally and spatially, necessitating similar updates in filter resolution. Often errors are just in number input (10 entered but meant one). Tony suggested using filter numbers such as 9 in the above case (that do not end in 0), which helps to catch some of these typos. We need to balance between review need/time and meaningful filters.

Biologically meaningful polygons (vs county boundaries) are being developed in eBird that will facilitate more meaningful review and avoid conundrums of setting filters across multiple habitats within arbitrary county boundaries. Dan also expressed the need to be aware of which errors are most important, i.e. more downy woodpeckers than expected vs. one American Tree Sparrow in July. Discussed filter pros and cons of how tight filters need to be to avoid alienating birders from having too many observations flagged vs. flagging birds that need to be reviewed. Robin mentioned that a zero on a filter means that the species may occur but is not expected vs. not have a number which means the bird will not show up on the review list, but needs to be added with more effort from the full checklist. Robin noted that you can search by time period for species by county to help set up filter dates for thresholds. We discussed how to use subspecies in our checklists to increase the resolution of our information, but also noted that this is often abused by observers who do not differentiate between subspecies and just pick one to enter their data for which is self-fulfilling data entry and confuses the data on subspecies. Tony noted that in his request for further info on subspecies on records, he asks the observer for details on how they separated that subspecies from another. Robin asked about BBS survey data entry into eBird. Consensus to use logical groups of BBS points when entering, if possible. Discussions continued on filters and other eBird issues.

We discussed the issue of the data portal in Lewistown and agreed that it was not worthwhile and would like to see the use of the kiosk changed so that we do not have to invalidate all the records coming from the kiosk. John will follow up with the CMR to assess what can be done with the kiosk.

Several members needed to leave at our agreed upon time of 3 pm, but the eBird discussion continued. We will pick next year's date (possibly either 23 or 30 September 2016, Great Falls). Meeting officially **adjourned 4:15 pm**.