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British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC): 49th Report (October 2018)

This report covers the period January 2018 to September 2018. The 48th Report appeared in *Ibis* 160: 241-248.

Changes to the British List

The following changes have been made to the British List.

Elegant Tern *Thalasseus elegans* (Gambel)

Add to Category A

Third-calendar-year or older, Dawlish Warren NNR, Devon, 18 May 2002 (photographed).

Identification and assessment of records of the various species that comprise the orange-billed group of terns has proved problematical despite receiving much attention. This record has been under review since 2010 (*Ibis* 153: 227-232). Unpicking all the problems has taken time, but it was established recently that birds showing the correct suite of features of Elegant Tern can be safely identified as this species (*Journal of Ornithology* 158, 351-361). This has allowed the Dawlish Warren record to be accepted as the first British record.

Breeds in coastal south-west USA and north-west Mexico, dispersing along the west coast of Latin America.

Elegant Tern should be placed after Cabot's Tern *Thalasseus aculavidus* on the British List.

Elegant Tern[†] A

Thalasseus elegans (Gambel)

One record: third-calendar-year or older, Dawlish Warren NNR, Devon, May 2002.

V monotypic.

White (Masked) Wagtail *Motacilla alba personata* Gould

Add subspecies M.a. personata[†] Gould to the British List

Male, second-calendar-year or older, 29 November to 26 December 2016, Camrose (Camros), Pembrokeshire (Sir Benfro) (photographed).

The Camrose individual showed all the features of this highly distinctive subspecies of White Wagtail, sometimes known as Masked Wagtail, with no signs of intergradation. There are no significant issues with provenance as this taxon is not currently known in captivity in Europe (though other White Wagtail taxa are known to be kept). Instead the Welsh record accords with a number of other recent north-west European vagrant records of this taxon from its central Asian breeding grounds, including one which wintered at Lista, Norway, from 15 November 2003 to 9 April 2004. Long-distance vagrancy has also been recorded as far east as Taiwan.

Breeds from northern Iran to south-west Siberia to west Mongolia, north-west China and the western Himalayas.

Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus* (Linnaeus)

Add to Category A

Female, second-calendar-year or older, Garso, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 29 April to 14 May 2017 (photographed).

The appearance of a female of this species on Orkney in spring after a period of strong north-westerly winds is consistent with it having crossed the Atlantic and having a wild origin. There are no significant issues with provenance as the species is currently kept rarely in captivity in Europe.

Though the sub-specific identity of the North Ronaldsay individual could not be determined it seemed likely to have been one of the eastern forms, which are more likely to be prone to trans-Atlantic vagrancy as they move large distances along the east side of North America.

At least 17 historical records of this species between 1824 and 1885, at a time when American passerines were regularly imported into Britain, were considered likely to involve either escapes or frauds. The pattern of historical records of *Icteridae* is very different from that of modern records (*Brit. Birds* 56: 204-217).

Breeds throughout North America south to Mexico with many subspecies recognised. Some populations, particularly in the north-east, move considerable distances between breeding and wintering areas.

Red-winged Blackbird should be placed after Baltimore Oriole *Icterus galbula* on the British List.

Red-winged Blackbird[†]

A

Agelaius phoeniceus (Linnaeus)

One record: female, second-calendar-year, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, April–May 2017.
V subspecies undetermined.

In addition:

Category A

Thayer's Gull *Larus glaucoides thayeri*

New first record: first-calendar-year/second-calendar-year at Stanton Harcourt, Oxford from 4 December 2007 to 8 January 2008, and same at Erin Tip, Pools Brook Country Park and Markham Pit Yard, Derby on 16-18 February 2008 (photographed) pre-dates the previously accepted first record of this subspecies, and is therefore accepted as the first British record.

Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus*

First-calendar-year, Kenfig (Cynffig), Mid Glamorgan (Morgannwg Ganol), 24 November 1979 (sight record, ringing recovery).

A review of British records of Royal Tern was instigated to establish the first acceptable record. This resulted in the rejection of the St Ives, Cornwall, record from 2 September 1971, and the continued acceptance of the Kenfig record. The review also confirmed that the Kenfig individual belonged to the nominate Nearctic subspecies *maximus*. This was due to a leg-ring which established that it originated from a North American breeding colony.

There are potential future changes in the taxonomy of Royal Tern, with the two subspecies

on either side of the Atlantic likely to be split to create two new species (*Biological Journal of the Linnean Society* 121, 439-445). DNA evidence suggests that West African *albididorsalis* birds are more closely related to Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis*. If this taxonomic revision occurs the Kenfig record will become the first British record of this new monotypic species.

Nominate *maximus* breeds from coastal southern California to Peru, and from Florida and the West Indies to Argentina; *albididorsalis* breeds from Mauritania to Guinea, dispersing south to Namibia.

Category B

Two historical records were reviewed following BOURC guidelines for assessment of Category B records (*Brit. Birds* 104: 162–163).

In an attempt to ensure consistency in its assessment of historical records, BOURC has developed working guidelines for the assessment of Category B records (strictly speaking records which fall between 1800 and 1950, though the same guidelines can be used with some earlier historical records). The main underlying premise of these guidelines is that for historical records to be acceptable they should be verifiable. The main points are:

1. *There should ideally be an extant specimen, and/or photograph, and/or adequate description [or measurements] or drawing*

If a specimen has been lost but was formerly exhibited at a scientific meeting (the equivalent of contemporary peer review): a) identification to species should remain acceptable unless there have been taxonomic changes which make this untenable; b) identification to subspecies is unlikely to remain acceptable unless it is clearly stated how this was made (e.g. by comparing the specimen with a series of skins).

2. *There should be a reasonably precise date, including at the very least the year of the record*

In practice there is a precise date in the vast majority of cases. When records are imprecisely dated or undated it causes two problems: 1) the records lose scientific value since they cannot form part of any meaningful pattern or analysis; 2) any vagueness about the date inevitably raises questions about the validity of the record unless there are credible circumstances which explain it.

3. *There should be a credible account of the circumstances of discovery*

In the first instance this should be a detailed contemporary account of the circumstances. Where this exists, it should be compatible with what we now know about the species' behaviour etc. Incongruous records are likely to invite close scrutiny.

4. *There should preferably be endorsement by contemporary authorities*

5. *There should not be any evidence or strong suspicion of fraud*

Fraud is often difficult to prove, but suspicious patterns involving taxidermists (e.g. Hastings and Tadcaster) or large financial transactions should be investigated as far as possible.

6. *The likelihood of natural occurrence should be assessed as greater than the likelihood of captive origin*

It may be easier in some cases to judge the likelihood of natural occurrence with the benefit of hindsight than it was for previous authorities; conversely, the likelihood of captive origin may be very difficult to establish on the basis of incomplete extant records of trade.

7. *If the record does not conform with subsequent patterns of occurrence (if any) this should be explained*

Patterns of occurrence do change, and often this can be explained by changes in status etc. (e.g. Spotted Eagle *Clanga clanga*, Macqueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii*, Great Snipe *Gallinago media*). Cases which cannot be explained in this way should be looked at very closely.

During research on other records, including a rejected first record of Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* from Brighton which was considered a likely fraud (*Ibis* 157: 186-192), it became clear that a series of records from the Brighton area during the period 1854-1884 - in particular those which passed through the hands of the taxidermy business run by Swaysland & Son - had attracted contemporary doubts and included several British 'first records' which merit reappraisal. To begin this process BOURC focused its review on two records: an 1869 White-winged Lark *Alauda leucoptera* and an 1882 Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*.

White-winged Lark *Alauda leucoptera*

The record reviewed by BOURC involved a female said to have been caught on 22 November 1869 near Brighton, Sussex, now at the Booth Museum, Brighton (BoMNH 208047). Although a BOURC review in 1992 accepted the identification and considered that the bird was of natural origin, during that circulation some reservations were expressed concerning lack of detail about the place or circumstances in which it was obtained. This time, in light of additional information about the Swaysland firm of taxidermists, through whose hands it passed, considered against BOURC guidelines there was sufficient doubt about its provenance to result in unanimous rejection. The only remaining accepted British record is therefore the bird at King's Lynn, Norfolk, during 22-24 October 1981.

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*

This record concerned a bird said to have been caught on 23 October 1882 at Brighton, Sussex, now at the Natural History Museum, Tring (NHMUK 83.10.10.1), which also passed through the hands of the Swaysland firm of taxidermists. It too had been assessed previously: the outcome of the first BOURC review (*Ibis* 116: 578-579) was that identification was accepted but a majority of the Committee was not convinced of the validity of the record; it was subsequently reassessed and accepted "in the light of additional evidence" (*Ibis* 122: 564-568), although some reservations were expressed during the review. This time, given serious concerns about its provenance, acceptance was no longer considered safe and it was unanimously rejected. The first accepted British record becomes one on Fair Isle, Shetland, during 13-22 October 1988.

Further details about both these records and the review will be published in *British Birds* (Harrop In Prep.).

Category D

Falcated Duck *Anas falcata*

Review of categorization (currently Category D). Voting was completed during 2015. The species did not receive the two-thirds majority vote required for placement in either Category A or D. After discussion at the BOURC meeting in December 2016, the complete file has been re-circulated.

Category E

The following have been placed in Category E

Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus*

Second-calendar-year or older, Holme and Titchwell RSPB, Norfolk, 25 January to 10 April 1997 (photographed).

This species was formerly in Category B on the basis of a record from the Menai Straits (Afon Menai), Gwynedd, 1830-31, but was moved to Category E following a review in 1999 (*Ibis* 143: 171-175). In 2001, following assessment of the 2000 Outer Hebrides record, the

species was placed in Category D (*Ibis* 145: 178–183). In 2008 the Outer Hebrides record was admitted to Category A (*Ibis* 151: 224-230), partly on the basis of an emerging pattern of vagrancy to the Western Palearctic, though it was noted that the Committee remained of the opinion that “most records in Britain and Europe involve birds of captive origin.”

This record was considered as a potential first for Britain, as it predates the Outer Hebrides October–November 2000 record. The species is widely kept in captivity, and is one of a small group of wildfowl (including Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris* and Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola*) for which the possibility of escape is considered very high. During the months immediately preceding the 1997 Norfolk record, there were other reports of Hooded Mergansers in Sussex from 13 November 1996 (clipped), Nottinghamshire from 16 November 1996 (also recorded in Leicestershire in May 1997), Kerry, Ireland, from 21 November (colour-ringed), and Avon on 21 December 1996. Given this context, although a wild origin for the Norfolk bird is possible and the occurrence of an accepted Canvasback *Aythya valisineria* in Norfolk in January 1997 was noted, the Committee was not convinced that the bird was of wild origin. Hence the record was placed in Category E.

Breeds across North America, with winter movements of birds from northerly parts of the range.

Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus*

Second-calendar-year, Sudbrook, Gwent, 12 May 2016; same Brent Moor, South Brent, Devon, 16 May 2016; same Cookworthy Moor Plantation, Devon, 20 May 2016; same Breney Common near Helman Tor, Cornwall, 23 May 2016; other dates as wandered southern England (photographed).

The appearance of a number of wandering Bearded Vultures during the past few years in north-west Europe well away from their mountain breeding ranges in the Alps and the Pyrenees has generated wide interest, particularly in light of similar observations of Griffon Vultures *Gyps fulvus* which have been shown to have a wild origin. However, it seems highly likely that all of the Bearded Vultures derived from introduced Alpine populations and not from natural populations in the Pyrenees. These Alpine birds were the progeny of introduced birds; this along with the observation that the long-term persistence of the Alpine populations has not yet been confirmed means that the populations cannot be considered self-sustaining following published criteria that define self-sustaining introduced populations (*Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 14, 503). This has resulted in the species being placed in Category E. The same categorisation has been adopted by other national bird committees in north-west Europe where Bearded Vultures have been reported, including Belgium where the presumed same individual seen in Britain was observed (http://www.belgianrbc.be/reports/BRBC_2016_UK.pdf).

A paper discussing Bearded Vulture records both in Britain and north-west Europe will be published in *British Birds* (McInerney & Stoddart In Prep.)

Resident in mountainous regions. The nominate subspecies *barbatus* breeds in southern Europe and north-west Africa, from Turkey through the Himalayas to north-east China and Mongolia; *meridionalis* in western Arabian Peninsula, and north-east, East and South Africa.

Demoiselle Crane *Grus virgo*

Third-calendar-year or older, Mockerkin Tarn, near Ullock, roaming to Cockermouth, Cumbria, (22 Feb) 13–22 March 2016 (photographed).

The species is widely kept in collections and, as yet, there is little evidence for it occurring naturally in north-west Europe. Small numbers migrate through the eastern Mediterranean to and from their African wintering grounds. This individual appeared at a time inconsistent with migration times, and without substantiation to support a natural origin the record was placed in Category E. The species was already in Category E due to a number of previous confirmed escaped records.

Breeds from eastern Turkey, the Ukraine and south-west Russia to Mongolia and northern China, with western birds migrating to winter in central eastern Africa, and eastern birds wintering in the Indian subcontinent.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*

Adult, Landguard Bird Observatory, Suffolk, 16 May 2014 (photographed).

This bird was found next to a container port where large numbers of boats arrive from around the world. Though it was highly unlikely that it had arrived naturally as a vagrant, it was possible that the bird had instead been transported aboard a boat. As such it might have derived from natural populations, or perhaps more likely from nearer introduced populations in the Arabian Peninsula or Europe. However, it could also be an escape from captivity, as the species is widely kept. With the most likely explanations therefore being either transported from an introduced population or an escape from captivity, the committee voted unanimously for a captive origin with, consequently, the record being placed in Category E. The species was already in Category E, following a number of earlier records of escaped birds.

Cosmopolitan. Natural resident populations from central Asia, Pakistan, India to south-east Asia. A highly invasive species, with introduced populations throughout the world including Australia, New Zealand, southern Africa, Madagascar, Florida, the Arabian Peninsula and Europe, not all of which are self-sustaining.

Changes to the British List after the adoption of version 8.2 of the *IOC World Bird List*

Following the decision by BOU to adopt the taxonomy of IOC (<http://www.worldbirdnames.org/>), the British List was rearranged to reflect this change in the 9th Edition (*Ibis* 160: 190-240). It followed version 7.3 of the *IOC World Bird List*.

IOC have since released a revised version 8.2 of the *IOC World Bird List*, which results in the following changes to the British List:

- **Bewick's Swan** *Cygnus columbianus*. Correct authority name spelling to Yarrell.
- **Teal** *Anas crecca*. Now monotypic, so delete subspecies *crecca*.
- **Ruddy Duck** *Oxyura jamaicensis*. Now monotypic, so delete subspecies *jamaicensis*.
- **Short-toed Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus*. No longer monotypic; nominate subspecies *gallicus* added.
- Revise classification of Family Phylloscopidae with a consequent re-order of the sequence of the genus *Phylloscopus*.
- **Arctic Warbler** *Phylloscopus borealis*. Now monotypic, so delete subspecies *borealis*.
- **Thick-billed Warbler** *Iduna aedon* now *Arundinax aedon*.
- **Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris*. Correct subspecies name to *britannica*.
- Separate New World Sparrows from Old World Buntings into new Family Passerellidae.
- New Family sequence: Fringillidae, Calcariidae, Emberizidae, Passerellidae,

Icteridae, Parulidae, Cardinalidae.

Corrections to the British List

The following are corrections to mistakes/omissions in the 9th Edition of the British List (*Ibis* 160: 190-240).

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*. Correct specific name to *canadensis*.

Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*. Correct Family from Psittacidae to Psittaculidae.

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*. Add hybrid pairing with Common and Arctic Terns.

British List Totals

With the addition of Elegant Tern and Red-winged Blackbird the British List stands at 616 species.

Category	Total
A	598
B	8
C	10
Total	616

Species in Category D and E form no part of the British List.

FILES UNDER CONSIDERATION

Richardson's Cackling Goose *Branta hutchinsii hutchinsii*

Records from Welney, Norfolk, 15 December 1984 to 24 March 1985 and Holkham Freshmarsh, Norfolk, 6-23 February 1999 are being considered as potential first records of this taxon.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*

Adult, Cowpen Bewley, Cleveland, 8 April 2018 (colour-ringed) is being considered for admission to Category C5.

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*

Third-calendar-year or older, near Land's End and roaming, then Drift Reservoir and other sites, Cornwall, 7 May to 16 Nov 2016 is being considered for admission to Category A.

'Azorean Yellow-legged Gull' *Larus michahellis atlantis*

Near-adult, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 10 September 2005 is being reviewed as a potential first British record.

Little Auk *Alle alle polaris*

Adult, female, near Lerwick, Mainland, Shetland, 19 January 1956 (specimen) is being considered as a first record of this taxon.

'Mandt's' Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle mandtii*

Second-calendar-year or older, Cut End, Witham Mouth, Lincolnshire, 7-10 December 2017 is being considered as a first record of this taxon.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca halimodendri*

Records from North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 16 October 2003 and Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, 5-21 December 2004 are being considered as potential first records of this taxon.

Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris*

First-calendar-year, St. Agnes, Isles of Scilly, 12 to 17 October 2017 is being considered for admission to Category A.

White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*

Records from Woolston Eyes, Cheshire, 30 April 2016 and Port of Ness (Port Nis), Isle of Lewis (Eilean Leòdhais), Outer Hebrides, 3-4 and 31 May 2016 are being reviewed to establish first records of *gambellii* and *leucophrys*, respectively.

Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea*

Adult male, Wells Woods, Norfolk, 21-30 October 1988 is being reviewed for admission to Category A.

BOU Website: www.bou.org.uk

The BOU website is continually updated and contains the British List, announcements and the most recent Committee reports. The website is for information purposes only and is not an official document or part of the permanent record. Announcements of changes to the British List do not come into effect until published in a Committee report in *Ibis*.

PUBLICATIONS BY OR, ON BEHALF OF, MEMBERS OF THE BOURC AND MEMBERS OF THE BOURC-CFSC, RELATING TO THE BRITISH LIST, SINCE THE 47th REPORT

- French, P.R. and Harrop, A.H.J. 2017. BBRC and BOURC Chairmen's comments on 'Acadian Flycatcher in Kent: new to Britain'. *Brit. Birds* 110: 758-759.
- French, P.R. and Harrop, A.H.J. 2018. BBRC and BOURC Chairmen's comments on 'Red-footed Booby in Sussex: new to Britain'. *Brit. Birds* 111: 45-46.
- French, P.R. and Harrop, A.H.J. 2018. BBRC and BOURC Chairmen's comments on 'Chestnut Bunting in Orkney: new to Britain'. *Brit. Birds* 111: 163.
- French, P.R. and Harrop, A.H.J. 2018. BBRC and BOURC Chairmen's comments on 'Eastern Kingbird on Barra: new to Britain.' *Brit. Birds* 111: 195.
- French, P.R. and Harrop, A.H.J. 2018. BBRC and BOURC Chairmen's comments on 'Caspian Reed Warbler: new to Britain.' *Brit. Birds* 111: 334-348.
- McGowan R.Y. and McInerny C.J. 2018. Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland, 2016. *Scott Birds* 38: 99-121.
- McInerny C.J. and Stoddart A., on behalf of BOURC and BBRC. 2018. The Western Swamphen in Britain. *Brit. Birds* 111: 515-518.
- Stoddart, A. 2018. Siberian Accentors in Europe in autumn 2016 and the first British records. *British Birds* 111: 69-83.
- Stoddart A. and McInerny C.J., on behalf of BBRC and BOURC. 2017. The 'Azorean Yellow-legged Gull' in Britain. *Brit. Birds* 110: 666-674.

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Committee Membership (January 2018 - September 2018)

Andrew Harrop (Chairman)
Chris McInerny (Secretary)
Steve Dudley (*ex officio* non-voting member; BOU Senior Administrator)
Dawn Balmer
Paul French (*ex officio*; BBRC Representative)
James Gilroy
Alex Lees
Andy Musgrove
Andy Stoddart

Consultants

Bob McGowan (Museums)
Keith Naylor (Historical Records)
Andrew Owen (Captive Birds; Bird Trade)