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# B.C. Field Ornithologists Bird Records Committee Report for 2019

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**Abstract** – In 2019, the British Columbia Bird Records Committee reached decisions on 11 records. Of these records, nine were accepted to the Main List, and two were not accepted (one due to identification not being established and one due to uncertain origin). Two new species were added to the Main List. Records reviewed all involved birds seen in 2018. The provincial checklist now stands at 525 species on the Main List, with an additional 11 species on the Provisional List.

**Keywords** – rare bird reports, British Columbia, checklist

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This is the seventh annual report of the B.C. Bird Records Committee (hereafter the committee) since its reinstatement in 2013. Details on the committee's mandate, history, operating guidelines, and past decisions can be found in previous annual reports and on the BCFO website. Two committee members (Chris Charlesworth and Mike Toochin) reached their term limits and rotated off the committee in early 2019, and a request for applications for committee membership was posted to the BCFO website and regional listservs. After ratification by the BCFO Board of Directors, Cathy Antoniazzi and David Bradley were added to the committee. Committee membership otherwise remained consistent from the previous year, and included Peter Candido, Catherine Craig, Michael Force, Nathan Hentze (Chair), and Guy Monty. Members serve no more than two consecutive three-year terms before automatically rotating off the committee.

In total, the committee reached decisions on 11 records in 2019. These include nine accepted to the Main List, one not accepted due to identification not being established, and one not accepted due to uncertain origin. Accepted records included one new species added to the Main List, and one species elevated from the Provisional List to the Main List. Details on all these records are provided below. Submitted records all involved observations from 2018. An additional 18 reports were submitted to the committee in 2019, and these will be evaluated in early 2020. The committee periodically updates its database of all reviewed records, which is posted online at the BCFO website. The committee would greatly appreciate receiving submissions for any records, past or present,

not in this database. Up-to-date details on committee membership, the Review List, checklist, rare bird report form, committee decisions, photos of many of these records, and other information can be accessed from the BRC section of the BCFO website ().

The following is an account of all records reviewed and adjudicated since the previous report. Bird species are listed taxonomically and with naming following the seventh edition of the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) Check-list of North American Birds (1998) and subsequent supplements up to the 60th (Chesser *et al.* 2019). Provincial firsts and new additions to the Main List are written out in uppercase. The number in brackets following the species name refers to the unique Bird Records Committee Number assigned to the record. Primary finders/observers are listed for accepted records only and are designated by (†). If more than one observer is listed, an asterisk (\*) indicates those who submitted details. In some cases an observer other than the original finder submitted a report or supplemental evidence (*e.g.* photographs). Although the committee appreciates receiving reports from the original finder(s), details from subsequent observers are also encouraged and welcomed. If photos (ph), video (v), or sound recordings (so) were provided, that is also noted after the observer's initials. Descriptions of records are based on comments and discussion provided from individual committee members during official committee business. For many records, an attempt is made to provide brief context or background information on provincial occurrence and vagrancy patterns.

## Bird Records Committee Decisions

### Accepted Records

#### Main List

Accepted records are ones for which the committee has received documentation that conclusively supports the identification. In addition, accepted records are believed to pertain to wild birds that arrived in British Columbia without the active intervention of humans. Records that are provincial firsts are accepted to the Main List if they are accompanied by physical evidence (*i.e.* photograph, video recording, sound recording, and/or specimen). Records of non-firsts may be accepted without physical evidence if the provided notes are detailed enough to eliminate other species.

#### Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – (2019-006)

Victoria – 2018 November 20 – Geoffrey Newell<sup>†</sup> (ph)

This record is of an adult bird seen flying offshore of McMicking Point, Oak Bay (Victoria). Black-headed Gull is a common species in Eurasia. On the Atlantic it has been increasing in population and range for many decades, being first found breeding in Iceland in 1911, and Greenland in 1969 (Cramp and Simmons 1983). It was first confirmed nesting in Canada in Newfoundland in 1977 (Finch 1978) and Quebec in 1982 (Aubry 1984). Sightings in Alaska likely pertain to birds from Asia, rather than Europe. It is uncertain where birds found in British Columbia originate, and may be from either or both populations. However, the scarcity of this species in the interior of the continent (*e.g.* only one Alberta record; Hudon *et al.* 2014), and the predominance of reports from coastal areas provide support for an Asian origin (Hamilton *et al.* 2007).

#### Little Gull (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*) – (2019-005)

Victoria – 2018 October 31 to November 09 – Geoffrey Newell<sup>†</sup> (ph), Gordon Hart

An adult Little Gull was identified by Geoffrey Newell on 2018 November 07 at Cattle Point, Victoria. It was relocated nearby on November 08 and last seen November 09. An adult Little Gull was subsequently discovered to have been photographed at Cattle Point on October 31 by Gordon Hart. The date range is therefore considered by the BCBRC to be continuous between October 31 and November 09. Many records in the province are of birds seen in association with Bonaparte's Gulls, as was the case for this record. Though the committee has received few reports, there are numerous sightings in the province and the species is nearly annual (*e.g.* Toochn and Cecile n.d.). Over

the past decade sightings appear to have declined in coastal British Columbia, but increased in the interior.

#### Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) – (2019-010)

Kelowna – 2018 October 31 – Chris Charlesworth<sup>†</sup> (ph)

Lesser Black-backed Gulls have increased dramatically in North America over the past several decades. Most records pertain to *L. f. graellsii*, the subspecies which breeds closest to North America (and now occasionally within it; *e.g.* Ellis *et al.* 2008), with an increasing number of records occurring in the west (*e.g.* Hamilton *et al.* 2007). The source for many of the North American records is likely Greenland, where this species has undergone a rapid population increase. The first confirmed nesting in Greenland occurred in 1990, but by the early 2000s the population was estimated at more than 700 breeding pairs in the southwest (Boertman 2008). An expansion of breeding to the eastern Canadian Arctic seems probable, and with it the number of records in the province is expected to rise. Within British Columbia most reports come from the southern interior during the late fall/winter period, as with this record of a second-cycle bird.

#### ARCTIC LOON (*Gavia arctica*) – (2019-011)

Sooke – 2018 November 25–28 – David Bell<sup>†</sup> (ph)

This sighting of a photographed Arctic Loon elevates the species onto the Main List. There was previous record accepted to the Provisional List (BCBRC #2018-001; see Hentze 2019). This bird was a presumed adult in basic plumage, seen distantly off East Sooke Regional Park. This species is casual along the Pacific Coast south of Alaska, with six accepted records in Washington (including one found less than three weeks after the Sooke bird; WBRC 2019), two in Oregon (OBRC 2020), and 16 in California (Tietz and McCaskie 2019).

#### VERMILION FLYCATCHER (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – (2019-007)

White Rock – 2018 October 20 – Kaichi Huang<sup>†</sup> (ph)

Diagnostic photos accompanied this report of an immature female Vermilion Flycatcher briefly present in White Rock. This sighting marks the first confirmed record in the province. Two additional sight records, unreviewed by the BCBRC, have been reported in Toochin and Cecile (2018), though at least one of these sightings has since been retracted by the original observer (M-A Beaucher *pers. comm.*). While this species breeds only as far west and north as southern California and southern Nevada, it

occasionally wanders farther north along the Pacific Coast to Oregon (five accepted records; OBRC 2020) and Washington (eight accepted records; WBRC 2019). The late fall occurrence of this sighting fits the trend of most other records in the Pacific Northwest, which are predominantly from October to December.

**Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** (*Polioptila caerulea*) – (2019-009)

Kelowna – 2018 November 05–27 – Chris Charlesworth† (ph, so)

This record involved a bird seen and photographed by multiple observers over three weeks of sightings. Records of Blue-gray Gnatcatcher appear to be increasing in the Pacific Northwest, with most sightings in late fall. In Washington, there are 37 accepted records, with 24 of those since 2015 (WBRC 2019). Breeding has been confirmed in southern Washington (WBRC 2019), and the species may be expanding northwards. There are two subspecies breeding in the United States and Canada corresponding to eastern and western populations, which differ subtly in plumage (Pyle 1997) and vocalizations (Pieplow 2012). Both have been documented in Washington State suggesting that a northward expansion of the western subspecies alone does not account for the increasing detections (of those identified to subspecies in Washington, ten were Eastern and seven were Western; WBRC 2019). Both subspecies could occur in B.C.

**Red-throated Pipit** (*Anthus cervinus*) – (2019-003)

Saanich – 2018 September 28 – Geoffrey Newell† (ph)

Most records of Red-throated Pipit in the province are during autumn, as with this one seen and photographed along the oceanfront in association with American Pipits. Red-throated Pipits typically winter from Africa through southeast Asia, and are rare but regular along the Pacific Coast of North America where some overwinter (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). Many of the recent records in British Columbia are from the Victoria area, where sightings have occurred in fall, winter, and spring.

**Lesser Goldfinch (3)** (*Spinus psaltria*) – (2019-008)

Osoyoos – 2018 July 15 to at least 2019 November 28 – David Bell† (ph)

This species has rapidly increased in British Columbia, with records from the southern coast and southern interior. The submission of this sighting when first detected on 2018 July 15 detailed 3 birds (2 males and 1 female). Bird presence at that site (Kruger Mountain Road) appears to be nearly continuous since that first sighting, with up to 15 in-

dividuals being reported at one time (eBird 2019). In 2019, David Bell photographed a recently fledged Lesser Goldfinch being fed by a female at this site, representing the first breeding record for the province (ebird.org/checklist/S57952402). While this species may be establishing itself as a regularly occurring member of the province's avifauna, for now the BCBRC is still requesting submissions of sightings of this species.

**Field Sparrow** (*Spizella pusilla*) – (2019-001)

Kelowna – 2018 September 26 – Nathan Earley†

This sight-record represents the first record of Field Sparrow for the interior of the province. The two previous records were from the south coast (see Hentze 2017; 2018). This is also the earliest for the province, with others being 2015 October 30 and 2016 November 20-21. There are few accepted records in adjacent regions including one accepted Washington record (2016 October 29; WBRC 2019), and one accepted Alberta record (Kananaskis Country; 08 June to early July 2000; Slater 2001). In addition, California has relatively few sightings (18 accepted records; Tietz and McCaskie 2019), potentially due to the species' relatively short-distance north-south migration in central and eastern North America (Hamilton *et al.* 2007).

## Non-accepted Records

### *Identification Not Established*

The following reports are ones for which the documentation was inadequate to conclusively determine the species involved. It must be stated that in not accepting these records, the committee is not indicating that these sightings were necessarily misidentified. Although that may sometimes be the case, it is more frequent that the documentation submitted does not fully eliminate other species, even if they happen to be rarer than the one submitted. This may be due to incomplete submissions, or simply important features of plumage or behaviour not observed in the field. Names of observers are withheld from non-accepted reports.

**Red-throated Pipit** (*Anthus cervinus*) – (2019-004)

Victoria – 2018 September 28\*

This report was of a bird identified primarily by flight call and seen only briefly in flight. While the description was suggestive of Red-throated Pipit, the record was not accepted as the species could not be identified conclusively based on the observer's views, and similar-sounding species (*e.g.* Olive-backed Pipit) could not be ruled out by the committee.

### Origin Uncertain

This category is one for which the documentation conclusively established the identification, but for which there were significant concerns about provenance. In most cases there is a concern that the individual was brought to the province in captivity, from whence it escaped or was released, or that it arrived in the province on its own, but had a captive origin. In most cases this category includes species that are known to be widespread in private collections, and/or which lack known natural vagrancy patterns.

### Eurasian Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*) – (2019-002)

Vancouver – 1997 date unknown\*

In 1997, an unknown bird was photographed in a backyard in Vancouver. In 2019, the original observer re-discovered the photograph, and submitted it to the BRC. Due to the passage of time very few details on the sighting are available, including the exact date of the sighting. The single photograph clearly shows an adult Eurasian Tree Sparrow. Eurasian Tree Sparrow was introduced in 1870 to the St. Louis Missouri/Illinois area of the U.S.A. Unlike the congeneric House Sparrow, Eurasian Tree Sparrow did not expand much beyond the original introduction area in the United States. Recently, the species appears to be undertaking a northwards range extension (Burnett *et al.* 2017), with sightings in Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan (eBird 2019; Barlow *et al.* 2017). However, among B.C. and the Pacific states the species has had a more confusing history. In British Columbia, two male Eurasian Tree Sparrows were reported in Vancouver from at least 1985 October 30 to 1986 January 20 and 1985 December 22 to 1986 January 31 (Duncan 1986; p. 320). The former visiting a North Vancouver feeder and the latter at Lost Lagoon, Stanley Park. In Oregon in 1989, three Eurasian Tree Sparrows were found; the first attending a feeder in Astoria while the other two remained in North Bend for several years where they successfully nested (Marshall *et al.* 2006). In California a bird observed in Los Angeles in 1991 was assumed to be a ship-assisted arrival (Hamilton *et al.* 2007), and another in 2017 was also of questionable origin (Tietz and McCaskie 2019). More recently, an adult Eurasian Tree Sparrow was reported from Neah Bay, Wash., on 2019 October 27, with a hybrid Eurasian Tree Sparrow x House Sparrow found in the same area on 2019 November 10 (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S61338077>). Currently, Eurasian Tree Sparrows can even be ordered online from within North America, further confounding origins for sightings such as the Vancouver one, or any other in western North America. None of the Pacific state bird records committees has yet accepted a record of Eurasian Tree Sparrow, due to the likelihood of birds being escaped/released cage birds, or having been assisted in passage on a vessel, and the committee takes that same position here.

### Acknowledgements

The provincial birding community has provided much encouragement and assistance to the committee, and we are indebted to all birders who have submitted reports, answered queries, and provided comments and constructive criticisms. Assessing bird records necessitates a collaborative approach, and the committee also thanks Matt Bartels and Chris Charlesworth for providing supplementary information for select records, or general assistance. The committee would especially like to thank George Clulow for the many roles he serves in assisting the committee and to Art Martell for his guidance in addition to editorial assistance on this and previous reports. Thanks also to Peter Candido, Catherine Craig, and Michael Force for reviewing this report. Finally, all efforts were made to provide accurate date and observer information in this report. If any errors exist, they are the sole responsibility of the author. Any corrections should be sent to the BCBRC Chairperson.

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