



**Maryland/District of Columbia Records Committee
2004 Annual Meeting
Saturday, March 6, 2004**

Meeting Minutes and Annual Business Report

The 2004 Annual Meeting of the Maryland/District of Columbia Records Committee (MD/DCRC) was called to order at 10:15 am at the home of Phil Davis in Davidsonville, MD. Members present included Paul O'Brien (Chair), Phil Davis (Secretary), Jonathan Alderfer, J.B. Churchill, Barry Cooper, Patty Craig, Matt Hafner, and Bob Ringler. Absent were Don Broderick and Bonnie Ott. An MOS Board meeting conflict prevented any of the MOS officers from attending.

1. Secretary's Report. The Secretary presented the following report:

a. Database Status Report.

- i. **Database Contents. Figure 1** presents a glossary of the status/decision categories currently used in the MD/DCRC database. **Figure 2** summarizes the current contents of the MD/DCRC database by status/decision category and the changes ("deltas") since the last Annual Meeting. Note that since the last Annual Meeting more than 400 "historical" reports were added to the database. Most of these historical sighting reports (approximately 350) were published in the *North American Birds* (NAB) and *Maryland Birdlife* (MB) seasonal reports but were not previously submitted to the committee. The leads on these reports were furnished by Marshall Iliff. Another batch of potential historical reports (approximately 75) came from the Secretary's analysis of the defunct DC Records Committee files. Each of these historical reports must now be researched to determine for which documentation may exist rendering them "reviewable." Reports without supporting documentation will become "unreviewable," meaning that they were published but no or insufficient documentation exists for a committee review. The completion of this canvass of old records should bring the committee's database up to date. The ongoing plan is that when new NAB or MB seasonal reports are published, they will be scoured and sightings/records will be captured in the database at that time. However, given the working relationships with the editors of these reports and the interactive process of pursuing documentation from leads posted to the MD Osprey local listserver, we expect to coordinate and capture most sighting reports before the seasonal reports are published.
- ii. **Reports Received Per Year. Figure 3** shows the number of reports the MD/DCRC receives each year. The table separates "current" reports (defined as initial documentation received within six months after the first sighting date) and "historical" reports (documentation received more than six months after the first sighting date). The committee's emphasis in locating and obtaining old published historical reports during the period from 1995 through 2003 can be easily seen from the numbers of historical reports received during this period. In recent years, the number of current reports received has averaged in the 40s.

b. Review Package Status Report.

- i. **Completed Packages. Figure 4** presents a statistical summary by calendar year of completed review packages. The table shows the yearly total and average number of reports circulated, the total and average number of new reports, and the total and average number of decisions reached. Decisions include the "Accepted," "Accepted-Group," "Accepted-Form," "Not Accepted," "ID OK/Questionable Origin," and "ID OK/Exotic Origin" categories. Due to the health and subsequent death of one of our members, Rick Blom, no packages were completed in 2002. All 2002 packages were completed during late 2003 and early 2004. Paul

Pisano completed the review process in Rick's place and the committee thanks Paul for his efforts.

Decision	Decision / Status Description
S&R	Records from the committee's baseline document: Stewart & Robbins, The Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia, 1958.
Accepted	Reports accepted by the committee.
Accepted-Group	Reports accepted only as to a species complex or genus--where all other species of this group are reviewable at the observed location.
Accepted-Form	Reports accepted as an unusual subspecies or form.
ID OK/?? Origin	Reports accepted for the species/group reported, however, a majority of the committee questioned whether the bird was a "natural" vagrant or a "wild" bird.
ID OK/Exotic Origin	Reports accepted for the species/group reported, however, a majority of the committee felt the bird was of exotic (i.e., captive) origin.
Not Accepted	Reports not accepted by the committee.
Circulating	Reports currently in circulation and under review by the committee.
Recirculate	Reports where no committee decision was reached during the latest circulation. The report will be circulated again.
Ready	Reports ready for circulation. All relevant reports, or a sufficient number of reports, have been submitted.
Reviewable	Reports of a species/location that meets the committee's Review List criteria. Additional observer data is believed to be outstanding.
USNM	Reports of specimens in the US Museum of Natural History that have not otherwise been published. Specimens are to be verified and reviewed by the committee.
Hold	Reports where review of this species or genus/group has been suspended pending resolution of taxonomy or field identification issues.
Unreviewable	Reports with insufficient descriptive identification details to permit a review by the committee. Typical for many older published sight records.
Report	Reports submitted indirectly to the committee (e.g., via NA Birds, Voice of the Naturalist, etc.). Observer concurrence is required prior to committee review.
Non-Review Species	Reports submitted for a species/location that does not fall within the committee's Review List criteria.
Reopened	Reports reopened for consideration by the committee. Reopened reports are "removed" from the committee's database statistics and replaced by the reopened report.
Research	Reports previously published - investigation in process to determine if documentation exists.
DCRC	Reports from the defunct DC Records Committee files - being investigated.
Withdrawn	Reports withdrawn by the original observer(s).

Figure 1. MD/DCRC Database Status/Decision Definitions

- ii. **Packages in Circulation.** **Figure 5** summarizes the contents of the packages that are currently in circulation at the time of this Annual Meeting.
 - iii. **Acceptance Rate.** The committee's cumulative acceptance rate rose from 76 to 77 percent. The rate, shown in **Figure 6**, is determined by dividing the total number of accepted decisions (which includes "Accepted", "Accepted-Group", "Accepted-Form", "ID OK/?? Origin", and "ID OK/Exotic Origin") by the total number of decisions--which also includes the "Not Accepted" decisions).
- c. **Communications Status Report.**
- i. **External Communications.** **Figure 7** presents a summary of significant communications with people or organizations outside of the committee's routine MD and DC sighting report communications.
 - ii. **Email Traffic.** **Figure 8** shows the increase in the secretary's MD/DCRC-related email message communications over the past years, reflecting an increase in relevant email, listserv messages, digital image communications, and efforts to track down historical documentation.
 - iii. **Acknowledgements.** One hundred and nine report acknowledgements were sent to observers during the past year.

State	Category / Status	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Delta
MD	Accepted	258	332	362	377	381	380	424	44
	Stewart & Robbins	9	9	100	85	83	81	82	1
	Accepted-Group	2	2	9	9	10	10	10	0
	Accepted-Form	-	1	3	3	3	6	7	1
	ID OK?? Origin	5	5	5	5	6	7	8	1
	ID OK/Exotic Origin	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
	Not Accepted	119	124	127	132	133	132	140	8
	Circulating	45	28	9	15	49	78	29	-49
	Recirculate	22	21	27	25	23	18	49	31
	Ready	102	49	64	61	69	78	77	-1
	Reviewable	35	45	36	35	42	44	66	22
	USNM	-	-	6	26	21	14	14	0
	Hold	11	11	16	15	15	15	15	0
	Report	0	3	5	0	0	0	1	1
	Unreviewable	221	224	238	246	248	255	257	2
	Non-Review Species	109	112	119	136	139	140	139	-1
	Reopened	-	-	5	5	6	7	4	-3
	Withdrawn	4	5	7	7	8	9	9	0
	Research	-	-	-	-	-	-	361	361
	MD Totals	942	970	1135	1179	1233	1275	1693	417
DC	Accepted	14	16	19	20	20	20	25	5
	Stewart & Robbins	-	-	25	8	8	8	7	-1
	Accepted-Group	0	0	0	2	2	2	2	0
	Not Accepted	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	Circulating	1	4	1	2	7	13	4	-9
	Recirculate	1	2	4	4	5	2	9	7
	Ready	6	2	3	7	14	21	15	-6
	Reviewable	1	7	9	5	6	4	10	6
	USNM	-	-	4	26	27	15	14	-1
	Report	0	10	10	2	2	2	4	2
	DCRC	-	-	-	-	-	-	75	75
	Unreviewable	8	13	17	16	28	30	27	-3
	Non-Review Species	3	3	3	6	7	7	11	4
	Withdrawn	-	-	-	-	0	1	2	1
	DC Totals	34	57	95	98	126	125	206	81
DE	Withdrawn							1	1
VA	USNM						1	1	0
	Report							1	1
	DCRC							1	1
	Withdrawn							1	1
NY	Withdrawn							1	1
??	USNM				2	3	5	7	2
	Unreviewable							1	1
	Research							2	2
	DCRC							7	7
	Withdrawn						2		-2
	Grand Totals	976	1029	1234	1283	1369	1409	1922	513

Figure 2. MD/DCRC Database summary as of 03/01/2004 and changes from previous annual meetings

Year	Reports Received	"Current" Reports	Historical Reports
1966	1	0	1
1979	2	2	0
1980	1	1	0
1982	1	1	0
1983	2	1	1
1984	3	3	0
1985	5	5	0
1986	3	3	0
1988	2	0	2
1989	2	2	0
1990	3	3	0
1991	25	25	0
1992	13	12	1
1993	25	23	2
1994	58	48	10
1995	183	43	140
1996	104	48	56
1997	268	44	224
1998	43	30	13
1999	192	42	150
2000	52	48	4
2001	76	41	35
2002	34	21	13
2003	467	42	425
2004	8	8	0
Totals	1574	496	1078
Average		20	

Figure 3. MD/DCRC Reports Received per Year

Year	Pkgs	Weeks	#Items	#New	#Decisions	Dec%	Avg#Items	Avg#New	Avg#Decs
1985	3	72.0	40	40	13	33%	13	13	4
1986	7	21.0	61	35	35	57%	9	5	5
1987	6	17.6	59	27	43	73%	10	5	7
1988	4	15.0	33	25	20	61%	8	6	5
1989	4	26.6	35	20	17	49%	9	5	4
1990	3	35.1	30	15	12	40%	10	5	4
1991	7	18.9	65	35	36	55%	9	5	5
1992	9	18.3	75	43	39	52%	8	5	4
1993	4	13.3	41	22	27	66%	10	6	7
1994	4	25.6	39	20	28	72%	10	5	7
1995	4	25.8	63	50	33	52%	16	13	8
1996	4	25.2	51	37	33	65%	13	9	8
1997	5	21.1	68	47	49	72%	14	9	10
1998	7	19.3	107	84	81	76%	15	12	12
1999	6	17.8	84	61	50	60%	14	10	8
2000	3	15.2	27	15	20	74%	9	5	7
2001	3	25.8	44	30	27	61%	15	10	9
2002	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2003	8	37.6	79	69	45	57%	10	9	6
2004	2	87.1	31	22	15	48%	16	11	8
Total	93	28.3	1032	697	623	60%	11	7	7

Figure 4. Package Statistics Summary

Year	Pkg	Start Date	# Items	# New
2003	87	05/21/2003	15	7
	88	08/07/2003	17	16
	Totals 2		32	23
	Averages		16	12
Grand Totals			32	23
Grand Averages			16	12

Figure 5. Status of Packages Currently in Circulation

Decision/Status	#Records
Accepted	453
Accepted-Group	12
Accepted-Form	3
ID OK/?? Origin	8
ID OK/Exotic Origin	1
Not Accepted	141
Grand Total	618
Acceptance Rate:	77%

Figure 6. MD/DCRC Acceptance Rate Report

Mon	Year	Contact	St	Topic
Feb	2003	Hubbard, John P.	NM	Western Wood-Pewee Identification Paper
Mar	2003	Clapp, Roger	DC	USNM MD and DC collection database
Mar	2003	Gorney, Don	IN	Indiana Kelp Gull decision
Mar	2003	Guris, Paul	PA	MD pelagic boundaries
Mar	2003	Rice, Nate	DE	DMNH MD and DC collection database
Apr	2003	Graves, Gary	DC	USNM MD and DC collection database
Apr	2003	Hess, Paul	PA	MD Sharp-tailed Sandpiper records
Apr	2003	Heath, Sue	VA	VARCOM processes and procedures
Apr	2003	Wilkinson, Peter	UK	MD/DCRC By-Laws
Jun	2003	White, Tony	MD	MD and DC checklist questions
Jun	2003	Mlodinow, Steve	WA	Brant subspecies/form question
Jun	2003	Wilkinson, Peter	UK	Chukar / Rock Partridge identification
Jul	2003	Shepard, Ryan	DC	DC birding bibliography and boundaries
Jul	2003	Wilcove, David	NJ	Article "Gull Explosion in the East"
Jul	2003	Craves, Julie	MI	European Goldfinch records
Aug	2003	Gorney, Don	IN	Indiana Kelp Gull decision
Aug	2003	Mirick, Pete	MA	Article "Gull Explosion in the East"
Aug	2003	Brinkley, Ned	VA	MD Reddish Egret report information for VARCOM
Sep	2003	Ackers, Danny	IA	MD and DC hummingbird records
Oct	2003	Pranty, Bill	FL	FL Kelp Gull records
Oct	2003	McGuinness, Hugh	NY	MD and DC Pacific Golden Plover records
Oct	2003	Lehman, Paul	NJ	Slaty-backed Gull outside expert review
Nov	2003	Banks, Richard	DC	Kelp Gull Decision
Jan	2004	Heath, Sue	VA	Records committee procedures
Jan	2004	Lockwood, Mark	TX	Records committee procedures
Feb	2004	Balestri, Marcia	MD	Lilypons checklist
Feb	2004	Hess, Paul	PA	MD Kelp Gull abstract for Birding magazine

Figure 7. Summary of the Past Year's External Communications

Calendar Year	# MD/DCRC Email Messages Sent
2003	731
2002	570
2001	287
2000	128
1999	307
1998	66
1997	64

Figure 8. Number of MD/DCRC Secretary email message sent by calendar year

- iv. **Decision Reports.** Decision reports will be sent to observers, after the meeting, for the current batch of packages (Packages 78 – 88) that were recently summarized. A special decision report mailing will also be made to the observers/contributors of Kelp Gull documentation (Package 89).
- v. **MOS MD/DCRC Web Site Updates.** The Secretary has continued to update and publish MD/DCRC data products to the committee’s web pages on the MOS web site. Thanks to Fran Saunders, the MOS Webmaster for maintaining these pages. The Secretary occasionally reminds the local birding community via e-mail messages on the local birding listserver (MD Osprey) that this web site data is available for their reference. The link to the committee’s web pages is:

<http://www.mdbirds.org/mddcrc/rcindex.html>

- d. **Storage Status Report.** A summary of the amount of MD/DCRC storage (both hardcopy/paper and electronic) is shown in **Figure 9**. The committee’s files currently fill the equivalent of approximately 28 document boxes. Additional committee reference material is not boxed, but is on bookshelves. These items include a library of Maryland Birdlife and American Birds/Field Notes/North American Birds. Other non-boxed reference material includes baseline publications such as Stewart and Robbins (1958), the Maryland Breeding Bird Atlas, and historical publications such as Kirkwood (1895), and Coues and Prentiss (1863 and 1883). The committee’s electronic data files currently consume over 2GBs of data storage. Currently, all electronic data is periodically duplicated and stored both on-site (in the Secretary’s home in a fire-retardant safe) and off-site, typically with the Chair.

Media	Contents	Amount of Storage
Paper/Hardcopy	Reports/records/packages files	17 document boxes
	Video/audio tapes	1 document box
	Identification/reference files	3 document boxes
	Correspondence/miscellaneous files	7 document boxes
	Maryland Birdlife journals	1.5 feet of shelf space
	American Birds journals	2 feet of shelf space
	Historical references (S&R, etc.)	1 foot of shelf space
Electronic	Documents and databases, etc.	1.08 GB
	Electronic sighting documentation	1.07 GB

Figure 9. MD/DCRC Storage Status

- e. **Database Projects Status Report.**
 - i. **Projects Completed.** The following database projects were completed since the last Annual Meeting:
 - 1. **Official Lists of the Birds of Maryland and DC. Multipart Lists.** At last year’s meeting, the Secretary presented a draft “multi-part” list, which organizes the species into the following sections:

- i. Accepted Species
- ii. Accepted Genus/Complex
- iii. Accepted Subspecies/Forms
- iv. Questionable Origin
- v. Exotic Origin

In addition to accepted species, this report format also captures and presents committee accepted decisions related to subspecies and questionable/exotic origins that were not previously obvious to the birding public. The committee accepted the new format and the newly formatted MD and DC official lists were finalized after last year's meeting and are now published on the MD/DCRC web pages.

2. **Historical Growth of the MD/DC Lists.** This project produced a report that presented in order the new species added each year to the official Maryland and DC lists. A draft was provided for the committee's review at last year's meeting. The final version is now published on the committee's web pages. Marshall Iloff suggested that instead of the year of acceptance of each record, the report should show the year the species was first sighted. The secretary thinks that both dates can go on the report and will look into making that change.
 3. **Official List "Beginning Dates".** At last year's meeting it was suggested that the committee associate a beginning date with each of the official lists, similar to how the British annotate their "A" list. These official lists would then be entitled "Official List of the Birds of Maryland since 1804" (where 1804 represents the earliest start date in the database). The Secretary has incorporated this suggestion into the newly published "multipart" format lists.
- ii. **Projects In-Progress.** The following database projects are still in work:
1. **Decision Text from Old Records.** This project involves electronically "cutting" decision summaries from older (pre-1995) "letter-to-observer" word processing files and "pasting" them into the "decision summary" database record field (with minor edits). More progress was made on this project this year but it is not yet complete. This is a low priority project.
 2. **Dissection of Early Package Ballots.** In the very early days of the committee, members wrote their ballots sequentially on single sheets of paper. This project involves decollating and reassembling these early ballots so that all ballots for any given record/report are contained in the physical file jacket for that record/report. Some additional progress was made on this project during the past year, but additional paper manipulation remains to be done to complete this project. This is a low priority project.
 3. **DC Reports.** The Secretary dissected and reviewed the defunct DC Records Committee files, captured the reviewed and accepted records, and added them to the MD/DCRC database. A number of reports; however, were of uncertain status. These reports were added to the committee database in a "DCRC" (DC Records Committee) status category. These reports require additional validation research before they can be placed into any of the regular MD/DCRC status categories.
 4. **Quantitative Status System.** Over the past few years, the committee approved a "quick look" species status system that presents an "at a glance" view of a species status using total numbers of reports/records and numbers in certain decision/status categories, similar to a California system. The report format is ready but this project is on hold until the historical database research is completed, since the quantitative summary data will be incorrect for many species until all historical reports/records are captured and the database is fully updated.

5. **Members PC Capability Survey.** During the past year, the secretary surveyed the member's PC capabilities in preparation for on-line reviews via an intranet. He noted that many of the members connect to the Internet via dial-up modems which could impact the downloading and reviewing of large image and document files.
6. **Quality Assurance/Loss Prevention Plan/Permanent Storage Plan.** For several years, the committee has contemplated a general plan to move important original committee documentation into MOS secured and controlled storage. Also, for a number of years, the Secretary has wanted to perform a detailed quality check of the past record files to ensure that all information was correct and that all documentation items (such as photographs) were present and accounted for. The Secretary reported that he has developed a master process to accomplish both of these objectives. The process, outlined below, has been started for the records that will be summarized in the upcoming Decision Report #3. Working backwards, this process has also been applied to approximately one-half of the records that were summarized in Decision Report #2. The process has also been employed for the records that have been recently summarized in packages 78-85 and that will be addressed in an upcoming Decision Report. This process is applied to each committee decision, whether accepted ("a record") or not accepted ("a report"). The process is:

Step 1: Observer and Documentation Verification. In this step, the Secretary reviews the record file and ensures that each observer who submitted sighting documentation is captured and entered into the Observer data table. The Observer data table includes a field to summarize and characterize observer-provided documentation, other than written sight reports, such as the number and type of photographs, number of digital images, length of digital or analog video clips, audio recordings, number of video frame grabs, band numbers, and any specimens collected (including the specimen collection and catalog number). The secretary checks and ensures that documentation description information is correctly recorded and included in the database record. All specimens are also documented by specimen photos that show the institution tag information and the specimen catalog number. This specimen information is also entered into the database.

Step 2: Date Verification. All observer documentation is reviewed to ensure that the start and end dates are correctly captured in the database.

Step 3: Location Standardization. The record is next reviewed to ensure that the location of the sighting is properly captured. Locations are now standardized using a three-level system (jurisdiction, place, and details). Standardizing these data fields allows for accurate queries and reports generated directly from the database. During this review, attention is paid to multiple county boundary record situations, to ensure that both counties are captured and that a standard method is used to record multiple counties (e.g., alphabetic order). Fields have also been added to the database for future geocoding of geospatial information. These fields include latitude, longitude, elevation, and zip code. Consideration will be given to adding biotic region descriptors in the future.

Step 4: Sighting Details Specification. Previously, the committee never formally recorded standard sighting details, including numbers of birds, ages, plumages, sexes, morphs, etc. A single field is now dedicated to this information. This quality review process includes populating this field.

Step 5: Citation Verification. In this step, the Secretary double checks each record against the primary journals for publishing regular seasonal reports (the Middle Atlantic Regional report in *North American Birds*—and its predecessor publications; and The Season report in *Maryland Birdlife*). Other citation sources include the no-longer published Field Notes column in the *Audubon Naturalist*, and any articles that appear in ornithological journals, including *The Auk*, *Birding*, and others. Citations are located

(often using the facilities of the PWRC Library); copied, and filed in the jacket for the given report/record. A new Citation data table captures each reference citation. Any discrepancies between published information and what is contained in the committee files is noted in a dedicated database record field.

Step 6: Data Archival. As indicated above, this quality assurance final review process is being applied to older reports/records (those including in Decision Reports #3 and #2) and current reports (those decisions summarized in Packages 78-85). When the secretary performs this review, two copies are made of all paper (hardcopy) documentation. The plan is that original copies will be placed into the MOS controlled storage and the duplicates will be maintained by the Secretary in a working and reference file. All photo/video/audio documentation will be digitized with the originals then placed into controlled storage. Images and slides not submitted in electronic format will be scanned and video and audio tapes will be digitized. This step will take some time and/or additional resources to complete.

7. **Species Review Status Change History.** The Secretary is working on compiling a chronology of the historical changes to the review lists— to capture, for example, when Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*) was dropped from the review list; or when the review range of Franklin's Gull (*Larus pipixcan*) was redefined, etc. This information is becoming lost and should be captured for posterity. All old review lists have been located and copied, but the data has not yet been compiled into a data table.
8. **Imprecise Date Capability.** This is a project to change the format of the database year, month, and day fields for record start dates. This requirement emanates from records (mostly historical) with incomplete start dates (e.g., year only, or year and month only). Currently, the Secretary estimates a day of month and annotates the data record, but this can be misleading, confusing, and is inaccurate—especially in summary reports. New database fields were added to the database when the other recent changes were implemented and some imprecise date information has already been captured, however, this capability is not yet complete or operational in an automated fashion for all report formats. The information contained in the Decision Report #3 draft, however, was modified to accurately report imprecise dates, where appropriate.
9. **Data Dictionary and Standardization.** The Secretary plans to define a formal data dictionary and schema for all committee data fields and data tables. This project will include a data normalization exercise to clean up the data structures (eliminate duplicate or obsolete fields, etc.). Steps were recently taken to begin this process and to work in coordination with the development of a new Maryland Birdlife database; however, more work remains to be completed on this project.
10. **Business Processes Definition and Documentation.** For posterity, and to share with other state/provincial records committees, the Secretary intends to document the MD/DCRC Level 2 and Level 3 business processes using process flow diagrams. Efforts were briefly begun on this project, but more remains to be done.
11. **Extinct Species Research.** This project involves researching historical species that are extinct or extirpated from Maryland. Examples include Eskimo Curlew (*Numenius borealis*), Ivory-billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*), and "Heath Hen" [Greater Prairie Chicken] (*Tympanuchus cupido cupido*). The objective is to capture all historical documentation for the committee's files. Some information has been gathered but a detailed canvass of the literature and analysis of the results is still pending. This is a low priority project.

iii. Future Projects. The following database projects have not yet been started.

1. **AOU Check-List 44th Supplement Update.** The committee’s taxonomy database needs to be updated to comply with the new AOU 44th supplement.
2. **Web-based Records Committee Vision.** The Secretary plans to implement the following functions:
 - i. **On-line Photo Gallery.** This project will publish, on-line, accepted record photographs, images, and other documentation. The plan is to begin with first state records.
 - ii. **On-line Database.** This project will provide MD/DCRC interactive, query-based database access to interested parties on-line, via the web.
 - iii. **Review Process via the Web.** This project will allow committee members to access an “intranet” (not accessible to the general public) to review records on-line.

The Secretary will coordinate these web-based plans with the MOS Web Site Director.

2. Subcommittee/Project Reports

- a. **Outreach Subcommittee.** Paul O’Brien reported that during the past year, he gave the MD/DCRC Outreach program to two more MOS chapters; Howard County and Washington County. A summary of the Outreach Subcommittee presentations to date is shown in **Figure 10**. Several MOS chapters have not yet been presented with this program.

Date	Chapter/Group	Presenter	Attendance
12/01/1999	Carroll County Bird Club/MOS	Paul O’Brien	6
01/24/2000	Tri-County Chapter/MOS	Paul O’Brien	18
02/01/2000	Baltimore Bird Club/MOS	Paul O’Brien	16
03/03/2000	Anne Arundel Bird Club/MOS	Sue Ricciardi	~35
10/26/2000	Caroline County Chapter/MOS	Paul O’Brien	15
11/09/2000	Montgomery County Chapter/MOS	Paul O’Brien	45
01/04/2001	Frederick County Chapter/MOS	Paul O’Brien	18
02/07/2002	Southern Maryland Audubon Society	Sue Ricciardi	15
10/15/2002	Allegany County Chapter/MOS	Paul O’Brien	15
09/11/2003	Howard County Bird Club/MOS	Paul O’Brien	53
11/25/2003	Washington County Chapter/MOS	Paul O’Brien	23

- b. **Subspecies/Distinct Forms Subcommittee.** At the 1998 Annual Meeting, the MD/DCRC established a Subcommittee on Subspecies and Distinct Forms. As an outgrowth of this subcommittee, Marshall Iliff, the subcommittee chair, has written a comprehensive manuscript, “An Annotated List of Bird Subspecies Known from the State of Maryland”. He is now investigating alternatives for publishing this work. To support this project, the Secretary developed a report to summarize the USNM MD and DC collection data by subspecies. Currently, the Maryland review list includes only subspecies or forms that have been accepted by the committee (“Common” Green-winged Teal—*Anas crecca crecca*, “Audubon’s” Yellow-rumped Warbler—*Dendroica coronata auduboni*, and “Gambel’s” White-crowned Sparrow—*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*). After Marshall’s list is published, the committee will use this work as the basis for the adoption of a proactive review list of subspecies/forms for which it would want to receive observer reports. In the interim, it was decided that the committee would continue to react to reports of sightings of unusual subspecies and forms by requesting documentation from observers. An example, of this is the recent request for documentation for the small subspecies of Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus barrovianus*) that was seen in DC this winter.
- c. **USNM Specimens.** There are still a number of “reported” USNM specimens on our target list. We will look for more of them at this year’s Skins Workshop at the Smithsonian Institution.

- d. **Other Institution Specimens.** The Secretary has begun to contact other museums to obtain copies of their MD and DC collections databases. These databases will then be searched to determine if they include any reviewable records. A Maryland Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*) specimen has been already been located in a Midwestern museum. More museum contacts have yet to be made and more data processing will be performed to analyze this data.
- e. **Third MD/DCRC Decision Report.** Michael O'Brien is the senior author of the next committee decision report. The preparation of this report has begun. An extensive report framework has been generated directly from the MD/DCRC database and the secretary has summarized much of the "front-end" facts and figures to support this report. Michael reports that he plans to begin work on this project after he finishes work on a new book, over the next several months. The committee discussed the volume of information (i.e., the number of pages) associated with the new report format and the idea that an abridged version may be necessary to have it fit within Maryland Birdlife publication guidelines. Paul O'Brien and Bob Ringler agreed to work with the Secretary and the MOS Board on the editorial approach for this and future decision reports. Jonathan Alderfer volunteered to consult on the layout format for these decision reports.
- f. **Fourth MD/DCRC Decision Report.** The Kelp Gull (*Larus dominicanus*) decision will be expanded and published in Maryland Birdlife as a decision report. Paul O'Brien and Phil Davis have volunteered to author this report. The ending date referenced in this report will need to be coordinated to be synchronized with the appropriate issue of Maryland Birdlife in which it appears.
- g. **Fifth MD/DCRC Decision Report.** The Secretary circulated a copy of the Decision Report #3 framework, illustrating the format and amount of data that is produced directly from the committee's database. Marshall Iliff has volunteered to author this next general decision report.

3. Action Item Review:

- a. **Reopened Common Gull.** At the 1999 Annual Meeting, members petitioned to reopen the previously accepted Conowingo "Common" Mew Gull (*Larus canus canus*) record [MD/1995-033] due to recently more fully understood variations in Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*) plumages. In keeping with the new procedure, a narrative providing rationale for the reopening was provided by Marshall Iliff; however, additional analysis that was anticipated has not yet been submitted to the committee by other members. Jonathan Alderfer indicated that the status of identification issues between Common Gulls and Ring-billed Gulls is still not settled. He had previously indicated that he might submit the second Conowingo bird as a Common Gull to the committee (this bird was initially called a Common Gull, but was later thought by most to be an immature Ring-billed Gull and was never submitted to the committee). If the second bird is submitted, the committee will then review both the first (the reopened record) and second bird at the same time. The committee decided to dedicate some of the time from this year's Skins Workshop to study immature Common v. Ringed-billed Gull specimens at the Smithsonian to try and determine the variability of the upper wing coverts and tail pattern in Common and Ringed-billed Gull. The latest literature will also be searched. Barry Cooper will be going back to the UK in May and, while there, will plan to study first summer birds (which will be more worn than the Maryland bird) and will consult with local experts. Barry will be provided with copies of the latest papers and a copy of the files on these two Maryland birds.
- b. **Kelp Gull.** The Maryland Kelp Gull [MD/1999-035] has been accepted and the decision summary is posted on the MD/DCRC web pages. Actions associated with this record are now closed, except for publishing the final formal decision report in *Maryland Birdlife*.
- c. **Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*).** For the Conowingo possible Slaty-backed Gull [MD/1999-052] review packages were provided to five outside experts: Mark Brazil (Japan), Jon King (CA), Steve Mlodinow (WA), Martin Reid (TX), and Paul Lehman (NJ). As of this date, three

reviewers have responded and there is no clear consensus in their views. We are still trying to get opinions from the others. The committee decided to pursue some other opinions on this bird.

- d. **Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*)**. At last year's meeting, the committee decided to review the reports of this species that are in the "ready" category. However, upon reflection, it was decided that the current literature and recent thinking be encapsulated into a position paper for the members and that this paper should be circulated with the reports. Paul O'Brien has summarized his opinions and findings on the problem. Phil Davis has some notes on this subject, too, and will write them up. Marshall Iliiff is also working on a paper. A check with other records committees will be made to see if any of them has any recent news on this subject. This action still open from last year.
- e. **Western Wood-Pewee (*Contopus sordidulus*)**. After last year's meeting, the Secretary located a recent paper on Wood-Pewee identification and the MD and DC specimens were then inspected at last year's Skins Workshop. Jonathan Alderfer measured the specimens and applied the identification keys, however, neither bird keys fully at the 100 percent level. Jonathan has a question on the paper that he will ask of the author. When we receive the measurements and final write-up from Jonathan we can begin the review process. The idea of trying to have a future DNA analysis performed on these specimens was also discussed.
- f. **Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*)**. Last year, the committee decided to proceed with review of the submitted Oregon/Pink-sided Juncos (*J. h. oregonus*/*J. h. mearnsi*). However, there are some open Junco taxonomy issues. The committee decided to prepare a position paper on the current status of Juncos and include this paper with the review package. Marshall Iliiff volunteered to author this paper. The committee decided that there was no reason to hold the review of the more morphologically straight-forward Pink-sided and Oregon forms, but for now, hold any of the more problematic forms (e.g., *shufeldti* and *cismontanus*).
- g. **Goals Document Structure**. At last year's Annual Meeting, the Secretary suggested and took an action to try and revise the committee's goals document into two or more separate documents: one oriented to the voting members and another oriented primarily to the Chair and Secretary. The idea was to take a long document and make it into two shorter more focused documents. The secretary extensively reworked the document, but could not conveniently sever it into pieces. In the process, more content was added and the document was reorganized which further expanded the number of pages (!). Overall, the committee probably took a good document and made it better, even though we did not achieve the original objectives. A copy of the revised document was provided to the members prior to this year's Annual Meeting for their review. The committee would like to thank past Chair, Harvey Mudd, the architect of original document, for reviewing this latest version and making some excellent comments and edits. One last editorial change was incorporated and the final document was adopted. It will be posted to the MD/DCRC web pages.
- h. **Internet Policies**. [This item remains open.] The Secretary has researched policies and standards related to digital documentation. This may turn into a published paper in the future. Some additional reference material was obtained since the last meeting, but otherwise, little progress was made during the past year on this project. The tentative outline of the paper is:
 1. Introduction
 2. Written Documentation Guidelines
 3. Sketches and Artwork Guidelines
 4. Photographic Images Guidelines
 5. Video Recordings Guidelines
 6. Audio Recordings Guidelines
 7. Taxonomy and Nomenclature Guidelines
 8. Geospatial Information Guidelines
 9. Software and Hardware Platform Guidelines
 10. Data Transmission Guidelines

- 11. Data Processing and Data Management
- 12. Data Archiving
- 13. Intellectual Property Rights
- 14. Privacy
- 15. Security
- 16. Literature Cited

4. Committee Procedures and Processes:

a. Review List Changes:

1. **MD List Changes.** The following change and discussion related to the MD Review List.
 - i. **Added – Loggerhead Shrike.** The committee decided to add Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) to the Maryland Review List. This species is an extirpated breeder in Maryland and in the region and is now a rare species within the state. Furthermore, it is possible to confuse this species with the now more common Northern Shrike (*L. excubitor*).
 - ii. **Other Discussions.** Other species were discussed as possible additions to the Maryland review list but none were adopted. Declining land species discussed included Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*), probably due to predation by Barn Owls (*Tyto alba*). The committee also discussed that since Maryland water pelagic trips are now running again on a regular schedule, that some pelagic species should possibly be added to the review list since identification is problematic. Species discussed included Leach's Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) and Great Skua (*Stercorarius skua*). None of these changes were adopted at this time, however.
2. **DC List Changes.** Change recommendations were solicited and submitted to the committee by some of the avid DC birders.
 - i. **Added – Hudsonian Godwit.** The committee decided to add Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*) to the DC review list.
 - ii. **Other Discussions.** Two other species were also discussed as possible deletions to the DC review list but they were not deleted. One species was California Gull (*Larus californicus*), which was not deleted since it is still reviewable anywhere in Maryland. The other species discussed was Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*). Black Skimmer is reviewable in Maryland west of the coastal plain, so it was decided to leave this species on the DC review list (i.e., reviewable anywhere within DC) even though only a portion of DC is west of the coastal plain. It was also noted that there are two Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*) reports that are ready for review by the committee and that this species has still not been accepted on the DC official list.

b. Circulation/Voting Issues:

1. **Fourth Round Discussions.** The floor was opened for discussion on the three fourth round reports, below. No substantive issues were raised concerning these records. They will be circulated in a special package to the members of the current term.
 - i. **MD/1997-365. Mississippi Kite.** Scotland, Saint Mary's County; 5/20/1995; Pkg 85.
 - ii. **MD/1997-157. Parasitic Jaeger.** DC, Constitution Gardens; 5/28/1994; Pkg 82.
 - iii. **MD/1997-171. Parasitic Jaeger.** DC, 11th Street Bridge; 6/21/1994; Pkg 82.

2. **Record Reopenings.** No records were petitioned to be reopened.
3. **Circulation Issues.** The committee discussed the following circulation issues:
 - i. **Pine Grosbeak.** MD/1999-214 (USNM specimen #600551). On their ballots, members held different opinions as to whether this was an adult or HY/SY male (reference Jonathan Alderfer ballot in Package 84). However, this issue is now moot since it was discovered that this specimen was actually salvaged in New York and not in Maryland. This case highlights the criticality of not relying totally on museum collection databases, or in this case, even museum tags, since errors do occur.
 - ii. **Web-based Submissions.** A number of members voiced concerns over reports that were reviewed based on email or listserver messages, rather than as direct and more formal reports to the committee. The Secretary assured the members that in all cases, observers were approach and suggested or asked to make a direct report, but they did not. Any policy to restrict such reports would reduce data submitted to the committee which would not be desirable. (Reference Jonathan Alderfer comments: MD/2001-041, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, in Package 82.)
 - iii. **End Dates Based on Third Party Reports.** A number of members questioned end dates for which documentation was not included in the committee files. Cases in point include: MD/2000-049 Harlequin Duck and MD/1999-050 California Gull. This has been discussed with the North American Birds regional editors and the committee agreed that coordinating and documenting end dates must be handled subjectively and administratively on a case-by-case basis, depending on the species and observers.
 - iv. **Specimen Photos.** Fran Pope submitted the following comments for consideration:

“Photos of museum specimens were circulated in recent packages #79, 82, 84 and 85 (and possibly others). Generally, the photos were dark and difficult to interpret. Written descriptions and measurements of the specimens were lacking. We were supposed to make our decisions based upon the photos. I commented that I felt the actual museum specimens were the "evidence" we were charged with examining in order to decide whether or not to accept the record. For me, obscure photos of the evidence hardly constituted a satisfactory substitute for the "real thing". My suggestion would be, since the Committee has an annual study trip to the museum where the specimens are located, to utilize that time to examine any specimens coming up for review. Members would have the opportunity to see the specimens in hand and discern much more than most of the photos revealed as well as make measurements if needed. Reference books could be consulted and a more informed decision could be made”.

The committee agreed with Fran’s comments about the specimen photos. However, since not all members can and do attend the Skins Workshops, the review packages still need to stand by themselves. For any new specimens to be reviewed in the future, the committee will ensure that measurements are taken and circulated along with published keys and that optimum photograph angles and exposures are considered.
- c. **Species Issues and General Discussion:**
 1. **“Western” Greater White-fronted Goose.** [MD/2001-039, Columbia, MD]. Members suggested that this report be considered as a member of a “non-*flavirostris*” group or complex, rather than a member of a “Western Greater White-fronted Goose” complex.
 2. **Chukar.** Last year, Jonathan Alderfer noted that people are known to breed Rock Partridges (*Alectoris graeca*) and they are very similar to Chukars (*A. chukar*) and hybrids are also

known to exist in Europe. Even though these are most certainly exotic species in MD and DC, the committee should pay close attention to the identification since people tend to generically call all of these birds "Chukars." Both species were inspected at last year's Skins Workshop and the results were documented in the Skins Workshop minutes. The report that is currently under review by the committee [MD/2000-017, Cecil County] was not documented to separate Chukar from Rock Partridge, so the Chair and the Secretary will decide a course of action to deal with this open report since it might otherwise result in as a combination vote of Accept-Group and Exotic Origin!

3. **Black-tailed Gull (*Larus crassirostris*).** The committee recently accepted the reopened 1984 Sandy Point Black-tailed Gull record [MD/1998-014] and is still considering the 2000 report from Assateague Island [MD/2000-055]. The review issue of this species has always been about origin. Barry Cooper presented an analysis he conducted about vagrancy and potential ship-assist of this species. His analysis is presented in Attachment 1 of these minutes. Paul O'Brien also discussed his theory on the vagrancy of this species. His analysis is presented in Attachment 2 of these minutes.
 4. **Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) and other Ducks.** In recent packages, the committee accepted the two January-February 2000 DC and Maryland Tufted Ducks [DC/2000-011 and MD/2000-012], Prior circulations, however, raised questions about Tufted Duck vagrancy and escape possibilities. Barry Cooper attempted to evaluate which of the Eurasian fresh-water diving ducks are most likely to occur as wild vagrants on the U.S. eastern seaboard. His analysis is presented in Attachment 3 of these minutes.
- e. **Skins Meeting.** The 2004 Skins Workshop has been scheduled at the US National Museum of History (Smithsonian Institution). Preliminary information follows:
1. **Date and Time.** Saturday, March 27, 2004; 10 am.
 2. **Species List.** The following is a list of candidate species/skins to review:
 - i. **Common Gull v. Ringed-billed Gull (first winter).** In support of the reopened and second Conowingo birds (MD/1995-033).
 - ii. **Dusky/Hammonds/Least Flycatchers.** In support of a possible upcoming submission.
 - iii. **Audubon's/Manx Shearwaters.** In support of a currently circulated report (MD/2003-109, Chesapeake Bay)
 - iv. **Bridled/Sooty Terns.** In support of several circulating "hurricane" bird reports.
 - v. **Swainson's Hawk (dark morph).** As a follow-up to a recently "not accepted" report (MD/1993-004. Montgomery County) and several other Swainson's Hawk reports.

5. Old Business:

- a. **"Elevating the status of photos.** At the 2001 annual meeting, Marshall Iliff raised the idea of "promoting" the status of the evidence used to substantiate the presence of a species in MD or DC. For example, if a "state first" species was accepted based on a written report, but subsequently a photograph became available with a later sighting of the same species, then the committee should indicate that the species on the state list now is also documented by a photo, in addition to the original written report upon which the original acceptance was based. The Secretary extended the example by supposing that for this same species if a specimen later becomes available, then the same process should be applied to reflect an additional change to

the documentation baseline. The Secretary implemented changes to the Official Lists to indicate the types of documentation that exists for each species (specimen, photographic, audio, or written report). This new format was coordinated with the members after last year's Annual Meeting and the final versions of the official lists were published to the MD/DCRC web pages. This item is now closed, however, a few documentation investigations are still underway—a few for Maryland a quite a few for DC.

- b. **Multiple/Single Records.** The committee's policy of dealing with returning species was discussed. Language was added at last year's meeting to clarify how the committee decided to deal with this issue. Last year, it was suggested that perhaps the records numbers could use suffixes (e.g., 1996-030A, 1996-030B, etc.) in cases where a bird has been shown (such as through banding) to be a returnee. Last year, the Secretary agreed to look at the feasibility of this but did not pursue it since changing the field size would be a non-trivial exercise and thought it best to continue with the existing process of using unique records numbers. In addition to the Ellicott City Harris's Sparrow, the only other records where this was thought to be a factor were potentially the E.A. Vaughn WMA Le Conte's Sparrow(s) and the Sandgates Kelp Gull (which is basically been present for multiple years with only brief interruptions). Marshall Iliff submitted a position paper and proposal on this subject suggesting other records where this situation could apply and further proposed to combine such sightings into single records. However, his paper was inadvertently not circulated to the members before the meeting for review and time was not available at the meeting to fully review and consider it for this meeting. The subject will be considered at next year's meeting. Other records committees and authorities will also be consulted for opinions.

During the discussion on this topic, however, it was proposed that the Talbot County St. Michaels and Royal Oak Painted Bunting(s) (MD/2002-040 which is ready for review) should not be combined into one report, since there are plumage issues that could suggest the immature bird and the adult seen a few months later may not be same bird. The Secretary will make this split before circulating

- c. **Long-range Planning.** The MD/DCRC prepared a first draft and distributed it to the committee members before the 2003 Annual Meeting. Since the committee is actively pursuing a number of significant projects, a second draft has not yet been drafted. The committee database activities are consuming all available resources for the short- and mid-term. [This action will formally remain open, however]

6. New Business:

The following topics were low priority and were not addressed at this year's meeting and will be considered in the future:

- a. **Exotics Review Policy.** This is a reference to last year's annual meeting discussion and M Iliff's comments on Chukar, MD/2000-017).
- b. **Standard Age Policy.** This will be a discussion of which standard age policy should the MD/DCRC adopt (Humphrey-Parks v. live-year, etc.)
- d. **Reject and Exotic Voting Combination.** This is a procedural voting question. Refer to M Iliff comments on MD/2001-009 "Whooper" Swan.
- e. **Hybrids.** The committee's current position is to not review hybrids unless both of the suspected parents are review species.

7. Elections:

- a. **New members.** Members completing their voting terms are Jonathan Alderfer, Paul O'Brien, and Bob Ringler. The committee thanks them for all their efforts over the past three years. The new members elected were: Ed Boyd, Paul Pisano, and Sherman Suter.
- b. **Secretary.** Phil Davis was reelected as the Secretary.
- c. **Chair.** Paul O'Brien was reelected as the Chair.

8. Next Year's Meetings Dates:

- a. **Annual Meeting:** Saturday, February 26, 2005 (we will reschedule if in conflict with a Lewes, DE pelagic)
- b. **Skins Workshop:** Saturday, March 26, 2005 (tentative)

The meeting was adjourned at 4:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

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Attachment 1
Black-tailed Gull Analysis
By Barry Cooper
Maryland/District of Columbia Records Committee
March 6, 2004

Abstract. This paper briefly describes the breeding, winter distribution and migration of Black-tailed Gull, *Larus crassirostris*, [BTGU]. The major emphasis is on the species' pattern of vagrancy, particularly in North America, and attempts to evaluate whether the reports of Black-tailed Gulls in Maryland can represent the natural arrival of wild birds or birds originating from a non-natural source such as ship-assisted passage. My analysis does not take into account any possible escapes (from captivity) since (as Marshall Iliff writes) we do not have good data on species and numbers of birds held captive, even at zoos.

Distribution. The Black-tailed Gull is found in the Western Pacific Ocean breeding principally in Japan, North Korea, North China and Siberia. The population is estimated to be at least 350,000 pairs. The species migrates principally south-west to winter in the Sea of Japan, NE China Coast and Korean Straits. This suggests a rather short-distance migrant. However other birds move more extensively, with small numbers wintering regularly in Hong Kong, about 1500 miles from core breeding locations. Vagrancy further south has included birds found in Thailand, Philippines and even Australia. There have been at least two Australian records with one bird being photographed in Victoria, which is over 5,000 miles from the most southerly breeding colonies.

North American Records. Up until December, 1998, there had been 11 records from Alaska (Birding Vol. XXX number 6). Records south and east of Alaska totaled about 12 birds. These included three birds along the west coast [British Columbia, San Diego and Sonora, Mexico], a single record from Manitoba and east coast records of about eight birds from Newfoundland to Virginia with an additional record of a single bird in Belize. To arrive at this count I have attempted to eliminate obvious duplication [e.g. counting as a single individual the series of at least 6 sightings in Rhode Island between 10/95 & 10/97].

There is now an increasing pattern of vagrancy in North America. For example in North American Birds Vol. 57 #1 Page 102, Thede Tobish [the Alaska regional editor] states "With apparent continued expansion of northern populations, BTGU has become nearly annual in the Region's periphery mainly in summer and fall".

Utilizing NAB and scanning various web sites I attempted to locate as many North American records as possible since 1998. I should emphasize that this list probably does not include all reports. Also, a number of these sightings may not have yet been reviewed by the relevant state record committees [although many were accompanied by photographs that confirmed the identification].

During this five year period there were about 20 additional reports of BTGU, almost equaling the total number recorded in North America up until 1998. Again, wherever possible I attempted to eliminate apparent duplication [e.g. the 6/03 Racine WI BTGU and the 8/03 Miller Beach and Chicago IL BTGU's were treated as one record]. In adult plumage, at least, the BTGU is a fairly obvious and easily identifiable bird and it could be that a small number of wide-ranging individuals are responsible for the majority of the east coast sightings.

Vagrancy Scenarios. Examining the concentration of records for Alaska, birds have been reported at least every month between May and October, with June representing the peak month of sightings. Many wintering birds in the coastal west Pacific return north-east to their breeding colonies in the spring. A tentative explanation for the concentration of summer and fall sightings in Alaska is that some northeastern-moving birds overshoot their breeding range, making landfall in Alaska. Overshooting by birds returning to their breeding grounds is a well known phenomenon [e.g. Swallow-tailed Kite in N.Am. or Woodchat Shrike in the U.K.]

Also, birds leaving their colonies in post-breeding dispersal might move 180 degrees off-course (that is, to the NE) and arrive in the Aleutians or Alaskan mainland in late summer or fall. This does coincide with many of the Alaskan records (fide Tobish).

Two possible scenarios for natural vagrancy to the east coast are as follows:

1. Some BTGU's initially arriving in Alaska penetrate the interior by moving on in a south-easterly direction. Sightings from Yukon [6/02] Manitoba [6/87] and then farther south on the Great Lakes [6-8/03] adds support to this scenario. Huge areas of the Canadian North-West are uninhabited and birds very easily could pass through the vast network of wetlands and lakes undetected.

2. Paul O'Brien has a theory on a northern route of travel of these Asian Gulls. His analysis is presented in Attachment 2.

Non-natural Transport. An alternative hypothesis that has been suggested is that the BTGU's reported on the North American eastern seaboard (as well as other records) represent birds that have been either detained on a cargo or container ship or were otherwise ship-assisted from the western Pacific. There are of course many well documented cases of passerine and other species being ship-assisted [e.g. see NAB vol 57 no. 1 page 21].

The only means of testing this hypothesis, short of an actual observation of a BTGU being carried by ship (which has never been reported) was to poll birders with extensive at-sea experience as to the plausibility of this scenario. Our conclusion, from both personal experience and in the experience of those who have spent a great deal of time at sea, is that gulls are rarely observed to land on ships (excluding vessels actively fishing).

For example, (along with my wife, Gail Mackiernan) I have personally have traveled over 20,000 miles at sea, spending 10 hours a day counting seabirds. Even when passing through areas holding tens of thousands of Kelp, Franklin's and other gulls we have never observed a single bird come aboard (in contrast with, for example, boobies and storm-petrels). In fact, Gail, a retired oceanographer, has spent even longer at sea than I have.

In order to corroborate this observation, I contacted two very knowledgeable birders who have spent an extraordinary amount of time at sea: Dr. Peter Lonsdale and Robert Mumford. Bob, a former member of this committee, is a retired career navy officer who estimates spending almost 650,000 miles at sea. Dr Lonsdale is a oceanographer with Scripps Institute of Oceanography; Peter estimates that he has spent over 50 weeks at sea during the past five years. Peter mentioned that occasional boobies hitch a ride and often storm-petrels will come aboard at night [particularly when the ship is on station with its flood lights on]. However, both observers were emphatic that gulls do not come aboard. Both described much the same scenario, that large numbers of gulls may initially follow ships out to sea and then slowly fall back and return to port. This very much mirrors our own much more limited experience. In contrast to inshore day pelagic trips, gulls (save pelagic species such as Sabine's) are quite a rarity in the deep water open oceans.

Finally, I spoke with Peter Clement [former member of the British Birds Rarities Committee] who said that to the best of his knowledge there has been no direct or indirect evidence that any of the numerous North American gull vagrants to the U.K. [Ring-billed, Laughing, Franklin's, Bonaparte's etc] have been ship-assisted. This is in contrast to evidence of ship-assisted passage for such birds as Song and White-crowned Sparrows and Dark-eyed Junco. There also have been no reports of BTGU.

Another problem with the theory of ship-assistance is that large numbers of cargo vessels from Japan, Korea and other parts of BTGU's range arrive at ports on the west coast of North America and in Europe. My guess is that there are just as many if not more experienced gull watchers in these regions than along the North American east coast. Yet there are only two sightings for the West Coast -- 43 years apart -- [I have excluded the British Columbia record which I think is more reflective of the Alaskan vagrancy pattern] and none at all from Europe. If one proposes assisted passage via cargo ships from Japan and elsewhere in the Western Pacific than why only to the east and Gulf coasts of North America?

One final comment regarding BTGU vagrancy is that there is an interesting similarity to that of the Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*. [SBGU] Both species breed in the western Pacific and are generally short distance migrants moving south-west in winter. While the SBGU is a more northerly species, there is quite a broad range of overlap with the more southerly populations of SBGU overlapping with the northern range of BTGU. In fact both species occupy several of the same breeding islands. The same also applies for overlapping ranges in winter [Gulls of North America, Europe & Asia 2003]. The SBGU is a regular summer-fall visitor to Alaska and occurs there more numerously than the BTGU. This is not at all surprising as its most northerly breeding grounds are much closer to Alaska than those of BTGU. While I have not researched the records, the SBGU also has vagrancy patterns to the continental U.S. and Canada including records in Saskatchewan, Quebec, New York, and the upper mid-west. A Maryland report is under review. This vagrancy pattern, while by no means identical, is quite similar to that of BTGU in the continental U.S./Canada. [particularly if one assumes that many of the east coast BTGU records refer to a small number of wide ranging birds]. The conventional wisdom is that the SBGU sightings refer to birds penetrating the continental US/Canada from the west, probably Alaska, which is the path being now proposed for BTGU.

Conclusion. I believe that the preponderance of evidence supports the natural origin of Black-tailed Gulls in America, and does not support the hypothesis that these birds arrived by ship. There is not enough data to deal with the possibility of escapes, but the number of reports would seem to negate this theory as well.

As an aside, I found this a very interesting and informative exercise. In the future, if the committee is presented with other reports of species whose origin may come into question, it might be worthwhile to have one or more committee members (or an outside expert) do a similar analysis before the report is circulated.

Attachment 2
Black-tailed Gull Vagrancy
By Paul O'Brien
Maryland/District of Columbia Records Committee
March 6, 2004

Black-tailed Gull (BTGU) lives in the Kurile Islands and stays close to shore. These birds are free to wander up the coast of the Kamchatka peninsula to the extreme tip of Siberia. There is a record from Gambell, from which Siberia is visible on a clear day. The distance from Siberia to the western tip of the Seward peninsula is no greater than that to Gambell, so BTGU should be able to make it to mainland Alaska. Sticking to the coast they could then pass by Point Barrow where recent reports indicate that the polar ice sheet now retreats more than 20 miles in the summer, presumably the result of global warming, exposing the shoreline of the Beaufort Sea for an extended period. This northwest passage would take them by Victoria and Baffin Islands to Newfoundland, where there is a record of BTGU. Moreover, there is now a record from the Northwest Territories, establishing the route as operative. Given such a route, BTGU then would have access from Newfoundland to the east coast and, either through the St. Lawrence River or Hudson Bay, to the interior. There is, in fact, a record from Manitoba. Although the data are sketchy, the outlines of a new northwest passage are evident, the result of a retreating ice cap that has exposed a summertime coastal route for BTGU and perhaps for Slaty-backed Gull as well.

Attachment 3
Vagrancy Analysis of Tufted and other Duck Species
By Barry Cooper
Maryland/District of Columbia Records Committee
March 6, 2004

In the most recent packages that have been completed, the committee accepted the two January-February 2000 Maryland and DC Tufted Ducks, However, prior members of the committee raised questions about Tufted Duck vagrancy and escape possibilities.

I attempted to evaluate which of the Eurasian fresh-water diving ducks are most likely to occur as wild vagrants on the U.S. eastern seaboard. For the purpose of this analysis shared species such as Greater Scaup and Common Merganser were eliminated. The species reviewed were Tufted Duck, Common Pochard, Smew Red-crested Pochard, and Ferruginous Duck. My analysis follows:

Red-crested Pochard and Ferruginous Duck: Both are present in very low numbers in north-west Europe and are considered very poor candidates for wild vagrancy in the eastern U.S.

Smew: The largest winter population is in eastern Europe with an estimated 65,000 birds. Rarer in north-west Europe with an estimated population of 25-30,000 birds. Medium distance migrant. Given low numbers in western Europe, probably not a very good candidate for wild vagrancy. This is, in fact, a local and highly sought-after species in winter in the UK and not at all common.

Common Pochard: Probably a fairly good candidate for wild vagrancy as a common resident and winter visitor to north west Europe with an estimated winter population of 350,000 birds. Medium distant migrant with northern populations migrating west and south west. This species may be overlooked in Maryland particularly if a single bird is associating with a large flock of Canvasbacks.

Tufted Duck: By far the most widespread and common species and considered the most likely to occur as a wild vagrant. The winter population in north-west Europe is estimated at 750,000 and increasing. Predominately migratory, particularly the more northerly populations which migrate southwest, some as far as Iberian peninsula. Hard weather winter movements of this species and Common Pochard from the Continent west to Ireland could be a potential source of vagrancy to the eastern U.S. However, of particular interest is that this is the only species being reviewed that breeds in Iceland. The bulk of the Icelandic population [perhaps 20,000 birds] migrates SE across the Atlantic to Ireland and some on to Iberia. (This route rather closely parallels that used by the Icelandic population of Greater Golden Plover, which also winter in Ireland and the British Isles. In some years, this latter species has occurred in good numbers in Newfoundland, often related to adverse weather conditions.) It is not unreasonable that migrating Tufted Ducks could also be affected by weather during migration, and similarly end up in North America. Or, birds could be migrating 90o "off course", that is, SW instead of SE., and reaching North America this way. (This distance from Iceland to Newfoundland is about the same as from Iceland to Iberia.)

If one hypothesizes that the Tufted Ducks found in eastern North America are true vagrants from Iceland, then one would predict the bulk of the reports of this species to come from Newfoundland and the Canadian Maritimes, with fewer in New England and even fewer to the south. In winter, as northeast ponds and lakes freeze, some birds, mixed with other Aythya ducks, could move south and be the source of occasional Tufted Duck sightings in the Middle Atlantic region.

Conversely, if most of the reported Tufted Ducks were escapes, then we might reasonably expect the majority of reports to come from areas of denser human population, where waterfowl collections, zoos, and other sources of potential escapes are found, and would not show a geographical trend towards the sparsely-populated NE.

Examining American Birds Vol. 57 for the winter season December to February, 2003, in fact, one finds that Tufted Ducks were recorded as follows:

Canadian Maritimes	16
New England	10
Hudson /Delaware	5 (1 of these in Delaware)
Middle Atlantic	0

While this review is limited in scope, the observed distribution pattern supports a wild origin rather than escape, with the probable source the Icelandic population.