



Maryland/District of Columbia Records Committee

Goals and Procedures

Revised 06 June 2017

Part 1. Introduction and General Information

1.1 Document Scope

This document defines the goals and procedures of the Maryland/District of Columbia Records Committee (MD/DCRC).

1.2 Document Objectives

This document was developed to satisfy the following objectives:

1. To communicate why the Maryland Ornithological Society established the MD/DCRC.
2. To define the committee's organizational foundation.
3. To document the committee's operational procedures.
4. To provide guidance to committee members for evaluating submitted reports.
5. To articulate the major criteria for accepting or not accepting reports.
6. To enable interested persons to fully understand the aims, operations, and procedures of the committee.

1.3 Document Organization

This document is organized in eight parts:

- Part 1 Introduction and General Information
- Part 2 Charter and Goals
- Part 3 Committee Organization
- Part 4 Operational Policies and Procedures
- Part 5 Publications and Information
- Part 6 Document Change Process
- Part 7 Literature Cited
- Part 8 Contacting the Secretary

1.4 MD/DCRC Web Site

Additional MD/DCRC information can be found on the committee's web page:

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

Part 2. Charter and Goals

2.1 Charter

The MD/DCRC, a standing committee of the Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS), was chartered as the MOS Records Committee in late 1982. Coverage, originally limited to the state of Maryland, was broadened in 1990 to include the District of Columbia. At that time, the committee's name was changed to the Maryland/District of Columbia Records Committee.

2.2 Purpose

The purpose of the MD/DCRC is to convert sighting reports of rare and unusual birds in Maryland and the District of Columbia into authenticated records and capture information that can be reliably used for scientific studies, such as determining species distributions and patterns of avian vagrancy.

2.3 Principal Goals

The MOS has charged the MD/DCRC to:

- a. Review reports of unusual ornithological sightings within Maryland and the District of Columbia and determine the adequacy of the documentation of submitted reports.
- b. Maintain an Official List of the Birds of Maryland.
- c. Maintain an Official List of the Birds of the District of Columbia.

2.4 Additional Goals

Complementary goals of the MD/DCRC are to contribute to the science of ornithology by:

- a. Publishing periodic findings reports.
- b. Maintaining an information repository, consisting of:
 1. Submitted reports
 2. The deliberations of the committee
 3. Opinions received from outside experts
 4. Copies of some of the relevant literature

Part 3. Committee Organization

3.1 Committee Composition

The MD/DCRC consists of a Chair, a Secretary, and voting members.

3.2 Chair

3.2.1 Duties

The duties of the Chair are to oversee the workings of the Committee, to function as its spokesperson, and to consult, as need arises, with the Secretary and the members of the Committee.

3.2.2 Term

The term is for one year, but the Chair may succeed him or herself and serve successive terms.

3.2.3 Election

The voting members elect the Chair at the Annual Meeting.

3.2.4 Constraints

The Chair should be either a present or past voting member of the committee. The Chair need not be a current voting member of the committee.

3.3 Secretary

3.3.1 Duties

The duties of the Secretary are to maintain the committee's reports and records, facilitate the circulation of reports, manage and archive the accumulated data, handle committee correspondence, and other tasks as agreed between the Secretary and the Chair or the individual members.

3.3.2 Term

The Secretary serves a one-year term; however, Secretaries are encouraged and expected to serve multiple terms.

3.3.3. Election

The Secretary is elected each year at the Annual Meeting.

3.3.4 Replacement

If a vacancy arises in the position of Secretary, the Chair, in consultation with the members, will identify and appoint a replacement until a candidate can be formally elected at the next Annual Meeting.

3.3.5 Constraints

The Secretary cannot be a voting committee member.

3.4 Voting Members

3.4.1 Composition

The MD/DCRC consists of nine voting members.

3.4.2 Duties

The primary duties of a voting committee member are to review, evaluate, and vote on submitted sighting reports. Members are encouraged to further contribute to the MD/DCRC by volunteering to assist with research or special projects.

3.4.3 Terms

Members serve three-year terms arranged so that each year, three members complete their terms and are succeeded by three newly elected members.

3.4.4 Election

New members are elected by the current members at the Annual Meeting. If a member vacates prior to the completion of his/her term, the Chair will appoint a replacement member to complete the remainder of the vacated term.

3.4.5 Constraints

A member may not be reelected for successive terms, but may be reelected after not serving as a voting member for at least one year.

3.5 Administrative Voting

The Chair and Secretary do not vote on record acceptance (unless the Chair is also an elected voting member); however, the Chair and Secretary can vote on all other committee administrative and business matters.

3.6 Meetings

3.6.1 Annual Meeting

The committee holds at least one Annual Meeting, typically in February or March.

3.6.2 Skins Workshop

Generally, the committee also holds an annual Skins Workshop at the Bird Division, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, to provide members with an opportunity to examine and discuss bird study skins and other material relevant to committee reports or records of interest.

3.6.3 Attendance

The meetings and workshop are an important part of the committee's function and all members are encouraged and expected to attend.

Part 4. Operational Policies and Procedures

4.1 Taxonomy

The MD/DCRC follows the current taxonomy accepted by the American Ornithological Society (AOS) (formerly, the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU)). The AOS Check-List of North American Birds, including applicable supplements, provides the common names, scientific names, and species ordering to be used by the committee.

4.2 Jurisdictions

4.2.1 Geopolitical Boundaries

The committee's purview includes Maryland (23 counties) and the District of Columbia. For the committee's purposes, Baltimore City is considered to be a portion of Baltimore County.

4.2.2 Pelagic Boundaries

The Committee has adopted the following as the pelagic (open waters) boundaries of Maryland:

Due east of the Maryland/Delaware/Atlantic Ocean border and due east of the Maryland/Virginia/Atlantic Ocean border, each for a distance of 3 nautical miles; and then using the principle of equidistance (nearest point of land) from 3 to 200 nautical miles from the Maryland coastline.

These boundaries are consistent with the Federal Offshore Administrative Boundaries defined by the Department of the Interior's (DOI) Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) in 2006.

The MD/DCRC considers all sightings within this pelagic zone to be associated with Worcester County, Maryland.

4.3 Reviewable Species

The MD/DCRC reviews and publishes decisions of sighting reports for the following indicated species:

4.3.1 MD and DC "First" Species

These are species that do not appear on the MD/DCRC's Official List of the Birds of Maryland and the Official List of the Birds of the District of Columbia – species that have not previously been documented or accepted within those jurisdictions. Such species may also include AOS area or North American "firsts" that do not appear in the AOS Check-List.

4.3.2 Unusual Species

The MD/DCRC maintains and periodically publishes Review Lists of unusual species rarely documented or accepted in the areas of coverage. Reports of species on this list are encouraged from field observers. In Maryland, species may be reviewable either on a state-wide basis or within specific ranges as defined by the Review List.

4.3.3 Unusual Subspecies and Forms

The committee is also interested in reviewing well-marked, field-identifiable subspecies or forms that are of particular interest for the areas of coverage. The committee maintains a separate Maryland Unusual Subspecies and Forms Review List.

4.3.4 Species of Questionable Origin

Species of questionable origin (i.e., species that may not be wild or naturally occurring) should be documented by observers and submitted to the committee for review. Doing so will enable the committee to maintain historical records on such species to help identify or determine patterns of vagrancy or the establishment of introduced species within the areas of coverage. Examples of such species include Eurasian waterfowl and Monk Parakeets. With these species, a birds' origin may be natural or wild, or it may be an escape or release from captivity. Since patterns of vagrancy and the establishment of local populations change over time, collecting documentation of such species is of value to the committee. It is possible; however, that reports of some these species may be held for review at a later time until more information is available on vagrancy patterns or the establishment of any local populations.

4.3.5 Species of Exotic Origin

Exotic species are those whose natural history all but precludes wild or natural occurrence in the areas of coverage. An example is a Black Swan, whose species flight capabilities and short distance patterns of vagrancy all but preclude anything except release or escape from captivity. For such species, the committee will review at least one report of each from the areas of coverage (Maryland or DC). Subsequent sighting reports will be maintained in the MD/DCRC's data repository but may not be reviewed or may be reviewed at some later time. Species of exotic origin are typically not listed in the AOS Check-list or its Appendix Part 1.

4.3.6 Doubtful Forms or of Hybrid Origin

The AOS Check-list Appendix, Part 2, is a listing of "doubtful forms" and hybrids that have been given formal scientific names. Species of the "doubtful form" types would be extraordinary and the committee will review such reports. Hybrid species; however, would be of interest to the committee only if the range of one or both of the hybrid's parents were unusual for the area of coverage. For example, Lawrence's Warbler and Brewster's Warbler hybrids are expected in Maryland or DC and would not be reviewed; however, Cox's Sandpiper (Curlew x Pectoral Sandpiper) would be notable and reviewable. If observers are unsure of the review status of species or possible hybrids while in the field, it is always best to capture field notes or images and check later with the committee.

4.4 Sighting Reports

4.4.1 Report Submission

Reports of unusual sightings should be submitted to the Secretary. The name, phone number, postal, and email addresses of the Secretary are provided at the end of this report.

4.4.2 Acknowledgements

The Secretary formerly sent observers acknowledgments of submitted reports; however, in this newer age of digital photography documentation proliferation, individual acknowledgements are no longer practical. (Web-based acknowledgements are planned for implementation.)

4.4.3 Documentation Guidelines

The MD/DCRC maintains a documentation checklist/set of guidelines on its web page that illustrates the type of information that is requested in a submitted written report.

4.4.4 Second Hand Reports

In this newer age of digital photography documentation proliferation, the committee now presumes that if an observer has posted observation details to a public forum (such as the MDBirding group), posted digital images or recordings to a public web page, or posted written details (written, imagery, or A/V recordings) in an eBird checklist, then the observer has implicitly granted the MD/DCRC permission to use that documentation for the purposes of a record review and has granted permission to add that documentation (credited to the observer) to our archives for posterity. This implied permission to review documentation does not include any permission to re-publish an observer's photos without specific approval.

4.4.5 Multiple Versus Single Records Policy

The Secretary will organize sighting reports into contiguous blocks of time that are indicative of the period when a bird or flocks of birds were within a jurisdiction (Maryland or DC). Specifically, reports of wintering birds returning for multiple seasons (such as when indicated by banding data) will be considered as one report for each season that bird is present.

4.4.6 Additional Information

In addition to observer-submitted reports and references, other information may be obtained and considered during the review of a report. Examples include:

4.4.6.1 Outside Expert Opinions

MD/DCRC outside reviews fall into two categories. The first case involves species that are generally little-known or unknown to the committee membership (such as the original DC Yellow-legged Gull). In these cases, the Chair and/or Secretary will solicit outside expert opinions before the report is placed into review. In the second case, for species regularly occurring in North America, members may raise identification questions/issues in their first round ballot comments and state, if they wish, that outside expert opinions be sought and may suggest one or more suitable outside experts. The Chair or Secretary will then request and arrange for this type of review.

4.4.6.2 Reference Material

Members are generally encouraged to provide copies of articles on identification of difficult-to-separate species and other relevant subjects, such as distribution or vagrancy, for inclusion in the review packages. During first round reviews, members are encouraged to submit articles and other relevant references to the Secretary for inclusion in subsequent rounds.

4.4.6.3 Solicitation of Additional Information

A member may decide that some observer information details are lacking in the original submission that might be helpful in arriving at a decision. However, it has been the experience of the Committee that soliciting additional observer details of plumage, structure, etc., well after an original observation, generally does not produce useful information. It is suggested that any additional observer information solicited should generally be limited to objective matters, such as the type of optical equipment used; lighting conditions; names and addresses of "other observers"; existence of copies of original field notes; etc. However, individual members are always free to contact observers and solicit additional information. Any information gained from observers should be incorporated into that member's ballot comments or sent to the Secretary for inclusion in the next circulation.

4.4.6.4 Internet and World Wide Web Information

Identification, taxonomy and distribution reference material from Internet sources by recognized experts may be used for Committee deliberations with discretion, recognizing that most of the material on the Internet is not peer-reviewed.

4.4.7 Reopening of Reports

Previously accepted records or not-accepted reports may be reopened for review. Reopened reports are circulated in the usual manner and follow the standard voting processes, as though each were a first circulation. The original circulation file and any new additional information will be included in the reopened file. Records/reports can be reopened via either of two processes:

4.4.7.1 Consensus Reopenings

Any committee member can request that a record/report be reopened, but must provide a justification for the re-examination request. The Secretary will then submit the request and the record/report file to the entire committee for members to vote "yes" or "no" as to whether the record/report should be reopened. Typically, this procedure is conducted at the Annual Meeting. Agreement of a majority of the voting committee members is required to reopen a record/report. When records/reports are reopened via this consensus method (i.e., a petition by at least five voting members of the committee), it is expected that one or more of these members will serve as the "advocate" for reopening and prepare a summary of the arguments that support the reopening.

4.4.7.2 New Evidence Reopenings

If new evidence surfaces in the form of additional original observation documentation, new photographs, new patterns of vagrancy, or other relevant material from any source, the report/record can be reopened by the Chair.

4.5 Review Packages

4.5.1 Package Circulation

Individual reports are bundled in groups, assigned a unique number, and are circulated in parallel to the committee members as a review "package."

The committee now uses an electronic "eReview" process: The Secretary uploads a review package to a server as a series of folders and subfolders. (Packages were previously mailed to members on CD, so review packages are still referred to as CD images.)

The Secretary then notifies members that a new package has been posted and that the clock "has started." The goal is to complete the review of each package by all of the voting members within 28 days (4 weeks).

When the package is posted, the members then, in parallel:

- a) access the review package,
- b) conduct their reviews,
- c) download the ballot template form and append their name to the ballot template filename,
- d) evaluate each review item,
- e) complete the associated ballot/comment form, and
- f) email their completed ballot/comment form file to the Secretary.

4.5.2 Frequency and Size

Packages typically consist of 16 to 18 reports, mixed between first circulations and recirculations.

4.6 Voting Procedures and Policies

4.6.1 Voting Process

Packages should be processed by each voting member within 28 days of posting to the server. Completed Vote/Comment forms are to be emailed to the Secretary.

The average time it takes each member to process packages will be noted. If a members' average time exceeds 5 weeks between annual meetings (barring extenuating circumstances), the member may be replaced. The Secretary will contact members who delay processing for five weeks. Members who expect to be away for more than a month at a time should advise the Secretary.

4.6.2 Comments

Members are encouraged to provide written comments for each vote, detailing the reasons for their vote. These comments provide information to other members during subsequent circulations, are used by the Secretary when notifying observers of Committee decisions and, can be useful to interested researchers who wish to understand the reasoning underlying committee decisions.

4.6.3 Discussions

Members should not discuss first circulation reports with other members before they vote. However, to help minimize repeated recirculations, members are encouraged to discuss reports after the first round of voting has been completed.

4.6.4 Acceptance Criteria

The following factors are relevant to the decision process:

a. Confidence

In voting on the correctness of identification, each member should seek a high level of confidence in his or her own mind in order to vote affirmatively.

b. Consistency

Members should strive to judge each report with the same stringency and with uniform rigor. Use of a "sliding scale" as the number of records of a given species increases is discouraged. One aim of this practice is to minimize circularity of reasoning. Members should consider the informal "100 Year Rule," which dictates that an accepted record should be able to stand on its own merit after 100 years when all of the involved personalities have passed. This consideration encourages a focus on the documentation itself rather than observer experience and other supplementary details.

c. Documentation

At least minimal documentation is required for a report to be acceptable. Documentation may include specimens, photographs, video clips, audio recordings, drawings, banding or measurement data, and/or written descriptions.

d. Specimens/Photographs Only

A specimen, photograph, etc., unaccompanied by a written description, may be considered as the sole documentation provided that date, locality, and collector/photographer/submitter are specified.

e. Written Descriptions

A detailed written description unaccompanied by further evidence may be satisfactory as the sole documentation. A recognizable photograph will almost always strengthen written evidence. Drawings or sketches are also generally helpful.

f. Single Observer Reports

Documentation submitted by a single observer, even unaccompanied by photographic or other objective evidence, may be sufficient to gain acceptance for a report.

g. Multiple Observer Reports

The documentation for a given report will usually carry greater weight if submissions by more than one observer are available and are in essential agreement. A statement to the effect that a bird was seen by one or more additional observers (named or unnamed) confers no added weight to the evidence, unless the additional observer attaches at least a minimal statement about his/her own observations or his/her agreement with the statements in the original submission. Generally, added weight is also related to the independence with which each submission is prepared.

h. Voting Considerations

When evaluating a report, in addition to evidence about the description of the bird itself, members of the committee generally also consider other matters. A "mix" of considerations is used by each member in arriving at his or her decision and may also vary from report to report. Different members may use different consideration "mixes" for a given report. However, it is hoped that the committee membership represents a balance of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and points-of-view. For these reasons members are encouraged to indicate in their ballot comments as to which factor(s) they considered especially critical. Typical considerations may include the following:

- (1) The ease of identifying the species.
- (2) The conditions of the sighting: distance, lighting, optical equipment used, etc.
- (3) Whether field notes and/or sketches were made prior to consultation with field-guides, reference materials, or with other birders present, etc.
- (4) Unusual weather patterns that may have contributed to the arrival of a vagrant.
- (5) A pattern of vagrancy or distribution of the species in question to our region.
- (6) The experience of the observer, in general, and with the species under consideration, in particular.
- (7) Other considerations deemed relevant by members, such as the possibility of the bird in question being an escape or hybrid.

i. Species Familiarity

Each member is encouraged to include in his or her comments some indication of his/her own familiarity with the species in question. This may help others to later evaluate the vote and comments of that member.

4.7 Voting Process

4.7.1 Abstentions

Members may not abstain and must vote on all reports, including those containing their own documentation.

4.7.2 Voting Options

Voting options, as to correct identification, are:

- 1) Accept
- 2) Accept-Form (or subspecies)
- 3) Accept-Group
- 4) ID OK/?? Origin
- 5) ID OK/?? Exotic
- 6) Not Accepted

4.7.2.1 Accept

This vote indicates that the member agrees with the identification of the taxon (species, subspecies, or group identification), as submitted, and as being wild or naturally occurring.

4.7.2.2 Accept-Form

If an unusual form or subspecies is the subject of the review, this vote will apply to the subspecies or form, as submitted, (for example, an "Audubon's" Yellow-rumped Warbler). This vote indicates that the member agrees with the form or subspecies identification, as submitted, and as being wild or naturally occurring.

4.7.2.3 Accept-Group

A report may be submitted and reviewed even when the submitter deems the evidence sufficient only to identify the bird as a species that is a member of a particular group, such as a genus or some defined complex of species. Such reviews or votes can apply only when all species comprising the indicated group are reviewable in the area of coverage. For example, *Fregata* sp., or *Uria* sp. would be suitable for submission and review as members of genus-defined groups because all frigatebirds and all guillemots are subject to review in the areas of coverage (Maryland or DC). However, *Myiarchus* sp. would not be a valid review group because Great-crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*) is not reviewable in the area of coverage. As another example, if observational details of an inland jaeger sighting can eliminate Pomarine Jaeger from consideration, then "Parasitic/Long-tailed Jaeger" would be an example of a complex that would be eligible for review. When a "group" acceptance vote is used, the voting member must clearly specify the limits of the acceptance "group" defined.

4.7.2.4 Origin Votes

Reports are judged not only to whether the bird observed was correctly identified, but also as to its known relationship to the avifauna of the jurisdictions of Maryland and the District of Columbia; specifically, on the question of whether the bird was of wild/natural origin. In the voting process, the committee decouples the questions of identification and origin. If a

member votes to accept identification (either to species, subspecies/form, or as a member of a group), but has questions about the origin, the member has the option of voting either "ID OK/?? Origin" ("identification OK but of questionable origin") or "ID OK/Exotic Origin" ("identification OK but of exotic origin"). The question of origin falls into these three categories:

4.7.2.4.1 Natural Origin

At one end this spectrum, birds arrive in our region are part of the natural processes of migration, range expansion, and occasional vagrancy are thought to be of a "wild" or "natural" occurrence. An example of a wild/natural occurrence is the sighting of a Fork-tailed Flycatcher for a brief period during the month of September – this case is totally consistent with the pattern of vagrancy for this species.

4.7.2.4.2 Exotic Origin

At the other end of the spectrum are released and escaped pet birds and escapes from other collections (zoos, exotic wildfowl collections, etc.). An example might be the observation of a Black Swan on a local lake. This species is naturally found in Australia and New Zealand; is a short distant migrant; has no history or pattern of vagrancy from its normal range; and is known to be kept on farms and wildfowl collections. This case would probably be determined to be a likely occurrence of an "exotic" bird.

4.7.2.4.3 Questionable Origin

However, in between these two extremes are many cases where the obvious explanation of a bird's presence is not known or is not knowable. Seeking to rule out all possible non-natural origin situations; however, seeks to prove a negative – a logical impossibility. Possible non-natural occurrence situations could include domestic origin (e.g., hand-rearing), caged or restrained birds, importation, human intervention on a ship-assisted passage, sustained by a specific feeding program, etc. For example, a Garganey found in Maryland or the District of Columbia could theoretically either be naturally occurring Eurasian vagrant or it may be an escape from a local collection.

4.7.2.4.4 Origin – Degree of Confidence

The unqualified "accept" vote implies a vote for "natural/wild" origin. The other qualified "origin" votes should be used in cases in which there is a question or some issue of direct human assistance contributing to the bird's presence, or for species known to be held in captivity and the appearance of which at the particular location and time reported may not be due to natural vagrancy. Because it may be difficult or impossible to obtain definitive origin-related evidence, origin factors are less likely to be resolved than the question of identity. For this reason, members can hold themselves to a less high degree of confidence when considering origin than when considering identification.

4.7.3 Questions of Age, Sex, and Number

The committee reviews and accepts species, but not necessarily other factors such as age or sex. That is, if a committee member finds the reported age or sex of a bird species to be an issue, the member should still accept the identification of the species. Likewise, conflicts over the number of birds present or the size of flock should not disqualify a record, but may raise committee members' concerns. Member's comments with regard to these factors should be recorded in their ballot comments for posterity.

4.7.4 Voting Nomenclature

The nomenclature for publishing final votes is expressed as:

A-N-O, where

- A = number of votes to Accept the identification,
- N = number of votes to Not Accept the identification, and
- O = Other accept-type votes, which may represent any of the following:
 - G = Accept-Group
 - Q = ID OK/?? Origin
 - E = ID OK/Exotic Origin

The sum of A plus N plus O will always equal nine (the number of voting members).

4.7.5 Acceptance, Non-acceptance, and Recirculation

The rules of acceptance and non-acceptance are dependent on the circulation round of the report in question:

4.7.5.1 First Circulation

Reports that receive unanimous "Accept" votes of 9-0-0 are accepted without further action. Likewise, reports that receive a unanimous "Not Accept" votes of 0-9-0 are not accepted without further action. All other reports are circulated for a second round.

4.7.5.2 Second Circulation

Reports that receive votes of either 9-0-0 or 8-1-0 are accepted. Reports that receive fewer than five favorable votes are not accepted. Reports that receive votes of 7-x-x, 6-x-x, or 5-x-x are circulated for a third round.

4.7.5.3 Third Circulation

Reports that receive votes of either 9-0-0 or 8-1-0 are accepted. Reports that receive fewer than seven favorable votes (6-x-x or 5-x-x) are not accepted. Reports that receive votes of 7-2-0 were previously circulated for a fourth, final circulation (however, see next section, below).

4.7.5.4 Fourth Circulation

Traditionally, reports that receive third-round 7-2-0 votes qualified for a fourth circulation but were first discussed at the next MD/DCRC Annual Meeting before being circulated for the final fourth-round vote. Fourth circulation reports receiving votes of 9-0-0 or 8-1-0 were accepted. An unchanged 7-2-0 vote resulted in being "not accepted."

However, since the committee now uses on-line communications to conduct its reviews, rather than waiting for verbal discussions at the next Annual Meeting, the committee can now handle fourth-round discussions during the package review period immediately following the third-round 7-2-0 vote, via real-time group email exchanges. After opening and conducting on-line email discussions for a period of time, the Secretary will then "call the question" and members can then decide whether they were swayed via the discussion to change their third-round vote or not. If the revised vote changes from 7-2-0 to either 8-1-0 or 9-0-0, then the report will be considered to be accepted in that third round.

This procedure can totally obviate the need for fourth round verbal discussions and an additional circulation. The committee agreed to wait for the next fourth-round case to apply this process in real-time and to make a final decision as to whether to adopt this procedure and implement related changes to this document.

4.7.6 Resolving Group Votes

When a report achieves enough votes to "accept," but the votes are divided between "accept (as the taxon submitted, at the species/subspecies level)" and "accept-group", the report will be circulated once more. After this circulation, the final acceptance decision will be assigned to the narrowest classification that receives at least eight votes. For example, "accept (species/subspecies)" is narrower than "accept group" since the narrower species classification is included within the genus.

4.7.7 Resolving Origin Votes

Once the identification question has been decided, then the question of origin can be resolved. For any report accepted as to identification, unless there is an unanimity of votes for one of the three categories for origin (i.e., "natural," "questionable," or "exotic"), that report will be discussed and then voted upon a final time. To be accepted as "origin natural," during that final vote, the report must receive at least eight votes for "origin natural." To be accepted as "exotic origin," during that final vote, the report must receive at least eight votes for "exotic origin." For all other final vote combinations, reports will be recorded without further voting as the broader category, "origin questionable."

4.7.8 Resolving Combinations of Groups and Origin Votes

Occasionally, a report under review will require additional voting rounds to simultaneously resolve both (a) species and groups issues, and (2) origin issues. The process permutations could be somewhat arcane to fully define and describe here; however, the Secretary and the Chair will carefully explain the options to the members and guide the process to most expeditiously reach resolution on the issues.

4.8 Confidence Codes

4.8.1 Background

At the 1994 MD/DCRC Annual Meeting, a subcommittee was formed to develop experimental voting "categories." This project was undertaken to address the fact that reports submitted to the MD/DCRC, in reality, come in a continuum of compellingness and that having ultimately to vote either to "accept or "not accept", forces these reports into artificial all-or-nothing categories. The subcommittee prepared a series of "confidence" categories, as an experiment, to evaluate in parallel with the existing voting system. Through this experiment, the committee realized that these voting confidence codes conveyed additional useful information regarding considerations in members' minds at the time of his/her vote. These confidence codes may be useful to other committee members, to interested persons now and in the future, and to the submitters of reports and records. Therefore, at the 1999 Annual Meeting, the committee decided to make confidence code determination a standard element of the committee's voting procedures.

4.8.2 Procedures

In addition to votes to "accept," "not accept," etc., each member also designates into which confidence category, as defined below (A, B, C, D, E), his/her vote would most comfortably fit. For a vote in category C, members also select one of more of the subcategories, C1 through C5.

4.8.3 Confidence Categories

- A. Unequivocally correct; specimen, recognizable photo, video, or recording available as proof
- B. A compelling written report for which objective proof is lacking. This could include reports for which a photo, video, or recording, if available, was judged to be equivocal, but for which the written documentation was convincing
- C. A report that leaves questions:
 - C1. The report omits features that leave questions
 - C2. Some described features seem incorrect or conflicting
 - C3. Uneasiness with the circumstances or the timing of the observation
 - C4. Discrepancies exist between multiple observer reports
 - C5. The report was written long after the observation or after consulting field guides
- D. Report appears to be incorrect, but no unequivocal evidence
- E. Report is unequivocally incorrect, as evidenced by a specimen, photo, video, or recording (e.g., report of a Rock Wren accompanied by a photo of a House Wren)

4.8.4 Feedback

Members are encouraged to submit suggestions for new confidence categories whenever the existing ones seem inadequate for the situation.

Part 5. Publications and Information

5.1 Package Summaries

Upon completion of a package circulation, the Secretary will email a summary to each member, indicating a tally of the committee's votes, the decision on each report, and a summary of the decision rationale. Members will have two weeks to respond to the Secretary if any discrepancies are noted in the package summary.

5.2 Maryland Yellowthroat Decision Synopsis

The Secretary will periodically send a list of final decisions to *The Maryland Yellowthroat* editor for publication.

5.3 Maryland Birdlife Decision Reports

Periodically, the MD/DCRC will publish more detailed and scholarly articles in *Maryland Birdlife* to further document and discuss its decisions.

5.4 Official Lists

The MD/DCRC maintains and publishes the Official List of the Birds of Maryland and the Official List of the Birds of the District of Columbia.

5.4.1 Baselines

The MD/DCRC baselines (starting points) for the Official Lists are the following:

5.4.1.1 Maryland Baseline

The Maryland baseline is *The Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia*, 1958, by Robert E. Stewart and Chandler S. Robbins.

5.4.1.2 District of Columbia Baseline

The District of Columbia baseline is the last Checklist of the Birds of the District of Columbia produced by the former District of Columbia Records Committee and published in the *Atlantic Naturalist* in 1985.

5.4.2 Additions to the Official Lists

Species are added to the official lists by one of the following methods:

5.4.2.1 Proclamation

This process was used twice, as described below, to add species to the Official List of the Birds of Maryland:

- a. **Regularly Occurring Species.** A number of species were not included in Stewart and Robbins when it was published in 1958; but were established as regularly occurring Maryland species when the MD/DCRC published its first Official List of the Birds of Maryland. These species were voted onto the Maryland list at the 1995 MD/DCRC Annual Meeting by a unanimous vote of the members present based on current information without need for additional review. These species included:

Northern Fulmar
Sooty Shearwater
Manx Shearwater
Audubon's Shearwater
Razorbill

Rock Dove
House Finch

- b. **Trumpeter Swan.** This species was also added to the Official List of the Birds of Maryland as an extirpated species via the proclamation process at the 1998 Annual Meeting based on research that provided descriptive evidence of Trumpeter Swans in Maryland in historical times. (Later, in 2015, Trumpeter Swan was accepted as a regularly occurring Maryland species.)

5.4.2.2 First Record Acceptance

Species accepted by the MD/DCRC that are new to Maryland and the District of Columbia are added to the Official List of the Birds of Maryland and the Official List of the Birds of the District of Columbia.

5.4.3 Record Evidence Types and Updates

On the official lists, the committee will cite the form of evidence for each species. Evidence types are:

- a. **Specimen.** An unequivocal specimen or photograph of a specimen.
- b. **Photographic/videographic.** An unequivocal photographic slide, print, or digital image; or a video sequence or a still frame taken from a video.
- c. **Audio.** An unequivocal analog or digital recording of the bird vocalizing.
- d. **Written report.** A written report based on field notes which may also include sketches, artwork, or banding measurements.

This is a dynamic process. For example, if the committee adds a species onto an official list based on a written report and then later accepts a photographic record, the committee will add an additional evidence type indicator for that additional documentation type. A similar change would also be made if the committee subsequently accepted a specimen record.

5.5 MD/DCRC Information Repository

5.5.1 Files and Records

The Secretary maintains the MD/DCRC report and record files, related information, and the Committee's final decisions.

5.5.2 Public Availability of Reports and Committee Deliberations

Submitted reports are available to interested researchers.

5.5.3 Information Archives

The MD/DCRC archives both hardcopy and electronic documentation as a part of its information repository objective.

Part 6. Document Change Process

6.1 Change Procedures

The following procedures govern implementing changes to this Goals and Procedures document.

6.2 Normal Change Process

Proposed changes are normally discussed at the Annual Meeting. Members are encouraged to distribute proposed changes in advance of the Annual Meeting. However, changes may be adopted at the same meeting where they were proposed. Adoption requires the favorable votes of a majority of the members, the Chair, and the Secretary if present at the meeting. If the general intent of a proposed change is agreed to at an Annual Meeting, but the specific language is not finalized or agreed to, the matter can be resolved via a post-meeting follow-up circulation and voting on the proposed change and final language. Voting in this situation is limited to those present at the annual meeting where the issue was discussed.

6.3 Urgent Change Process

In rare instances where a change merits immediate consideration before the next Annual Meeting, the proposed change may be circulated to all current members for consideration and a vote. Adoption of changes to this document under this provision requires a two-thirds concurrence of those eligible to vote.

6.4 Minor Changes

Minor changes to this document may be implemented at any time by the Secretary and the Chair. Members will be advised of any such changes.

Part 7. Literature Cited

Czaplak, David., and Floyd. E. Hayes. 1985. Six species of birds new to the District of Columbia. *Atlantic Naturalist* 35:19-22.

Stewart, Robert E. and Chandler S. Robbins. 1958. *Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia*. US Dept. Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, N.A. Fauna No. 62.

Part 8. Contacting the Secretary

Please submit reviewable sighting reports to the MD/DCRC Secretary:

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MD/DCRC Secretary
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Davidsonville, MD 21035

Email: pdavis@ix.netcom.com
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