

Maryland/District of Columbia Records Committee Skins Workshop March 31, 2001

On March 31, 2001, the Maryland/District of Columbia Records Committee (MD/DCRC) held a Skins Workshop at the Division of Birds, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution. Our hosts were Roger Clapp and Mary Gustafson of the US Geological Survey – Biological Resources/Patuxent Wildlife Research Center.

Committee Attendees

Paul O'Brien (Chair), Phil Davis (Secretary), Jonathan Alderfer, Patty Craig, Marshall Iliff, Gail Mackiernan, Fran Pope, Bob Ringler, and Sherman Suter.

Skins Studies

The workshop began after 9:30 am following badging and signing-in. In the Bird Division specimen case area on the 6th floor, the following specimens were examined:

1. Loons

The committee looked at Yellow-billed and Common Loons. The size, size and color of the bills, color of the webs, and most plumage details overlapped on the Common and Yellow-billed Loons. The Common Loons varied in size from Arctic Loon-size to larger than the Yellow-billed. The Yellow-billed seemed consistent in size. The only characteristics that were invariably different were the shape of the bill, the color of the culmen and the white shafts of the Yellow-billed primaries.

It was noted that an excellent Loon reference (although in Swedish) is:

Jonsson, L. & Tysse, T. 1992. *Lommar*. Sveriges Ornitologiska Förening, Stockholm (*Vår Fågelvärld*, suppl. 15).

Even though the text is in Swedish, the art and photo captions provide valuable information. Additional information on this reference can be found here ...

http://www.naturbokhandeln.com/bokinf/enstbok/3450.html

2. Terns

The committee looked at several *Sterna* terns: Bridled (*S. anaethetus*), Sooty (*s. fuscata*), and Gray-backed (*S. a. recognita*).

3. Slaty-backed Gull (Larus schistisagus)

The committee looked at several specimens.

4. Selasphorus Hummingbirds

The committee looked at several species including Rufous (*S. rufus*), Allen's (*S. sasin*), Broadtailed (*S. platycercus*), as well as the similar Calliope (*Stellula calliope*).

5. Dark-eyed Junco (Junco hyemalis)

The committee looked at Oregon (*oregonus*) and Pink-sided (*mearnsi*) specimens. One specimen (#576384) located was the DC 10/26/1979 *mearnsi* specimen from the DC Mall

(found dead by Rick Blom). Another specimen (#564995) located was the MD immature female *cismontanus* from Irish Grove, Dorchester County, collected by Chan Robbins. It was also noted that Dave Czaplak has a photo of a Pink-sided Junco on his web site.

6. Gambell's White-crowned Sparrow (Zonotrichia leucophrus gambelii)

Jonathan Alderfer led this study session. Jonathan is co-author of the article entitled White-crowned Sparrow Subspecies: Identification and Distribution, 1995, *Birding* 25(3):182-200. The following are his notes and comments, submitted after the workshop:

Identifying "Gambel's" White-crowned Sparrow in Maryland Jonathan Alderfer (March 2001)

Although there are five subspecies of White-crowned Sparrow, only two have been recorded in Maryland (or the eastern US). They are the regularly wintering "Eastern" White-crown (*Zonotrichia l. leucophrys*) and the widespread western "Gambel's" White-crowned (*Z. l. gambelii*). The MD/DCRC has received several reports of Maryland Gambel's White-crowned Sparrows and will soon review them. The MD/DCRC will review any additional records of "Gambel's" White-crowns and encourages observers to submit any sightings.

For a full account of the identification of all five subspecies of White-crowned Sparrow (including photographs and artwork) see Dunn, Garrett and Alderfer, 1995, Birding 27(3): 182-200. Summarized below are the main points to consider when separating *gambelii* from *leucophrys*. These criteria hold true for adults and immatures, except as noted.

- The bill of "Gambel's" is candy-corn orange with a small (or absent) dusky tip versus the pinkish to reddish-pink of "Eastern." The bill color of "Eastern" birds is often variably obscured with blackish, especially on the upper mandible, however some of the pinkish color remains visible. Bill color is a very consistent difference.
- On "Gambel's" the pale supercilium continues forward above the eye to the bill, through the so-called supraloral region, where it is pale grayish. "Eastern" White-crowns are black (adults) or brown (immatures) in this area; the pale supercilium being pinched off before it reaches the bill. This dark area between the eye and the bill on "Eastern" birds is somewhat variable. Birds with reduced dark in this area may represent either standard variation within the subspecies or possible intergrades with "Gambel's" from where their breeding ranges overlap in the region of Hudson Bay (e.g., Churchill). There have been reports of hybrids. However, any bird with a clearly orange bill and the pale supercilium extending uninterrupted to the bill, should be safely assignable to gambelii.
- Other than the above differences, the plumage and structure of these two subspecies is quite similar. Some observers have noted that the lateral crown stripes of immatures tend to be a more even, rufous-brown color (=paler) in "Gambel's" versus a dark rufous-brown, especially towards the base of the bill (=darker) in "Eastern" birds.
- The song of both subspecies is quite similar.
- There is overlap in all measurements of both subspecies, however "Eastern" birds average larger.

- These two subspecies overlap in their winter ranges in a zone east and west of the Mississippi River. In our area, vagrant "Gambel's" may be underreported or overlooked, for example, there are multiple records for Cape May.
- In the Sibley Guide, the "Gambel's" subspecies (*gambelii*) is labeled "West Taiga" and the nominate "Eastern" subspecies (*leucophrys*) is labeled "East Taiga." In the NGS Guide they are labeled with their correct Latin names.
- In Maryland, one should closely examine any White-crowns encountered and all birds in any flocks of "Eastern" White-crowns.

The workshop ended at approximately 2:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Phil Davis, Secretary 2549 Vale Court

Davidsonville, MD 21035

This Dans

pdavis@ix.netcom.com