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ABA Checklist
Committee
2023 Report

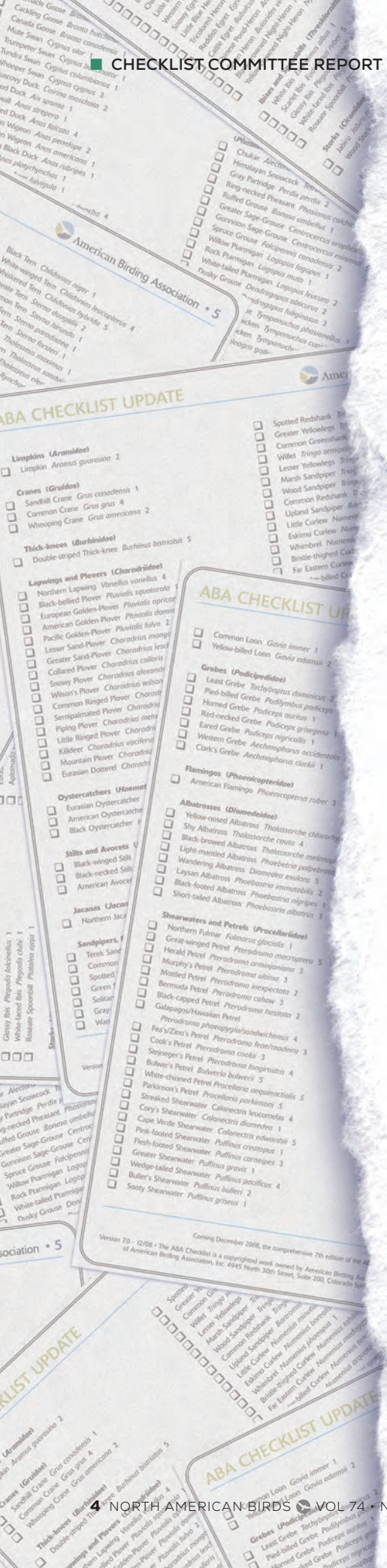
Winter 2022-2023
Finch
Irruption



Markham's
Storm-Petrel
in Mexico

2023 *Check-list*
Supplement Redux

Regional Reports Online
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34th Report of the ABA Checklist Committee 2023

Western Marsh Harrier, Siberian House-Martin, and Icterine Warbler added

This is the 34th published report of the ABA Checklist Committee (ABA-CLC), covering deliberations during late 2022 and 2023. The primary role of the ABA-CLC is to consider the addition of new species to (and, in rare cases, the removal of species from) the ABA Checklist. Secondary roles include reviewing and revising ABA Codes covering ease of observation in the ABA Area and updating and maintaining the ABA Checklist regarding taxonomic sequence, common and scientific names, and four-letter alpha codes.

The ABA-CLC consists of eight voting members who serve staggered four-year terms. Each year, two members typically cycle off and are replaced by re-elected or newly elected members. Members may be re-elected after their first four-year term but must take at least one year off after two consecutive terms. Two terms were expiring after 2023, that of Mark Lockwood after eight consecutive years of service and that of Peter Pyle, who filled in for Mary Gustafson as a voting member for records submitted in 2023. Therefore, two vacancies for voting members needed to be filled beginning in 2024, and we have nominated and ac-

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cepted Lauren Harter and Matt Heindel to become new ABA-CLC members. The ABA-CLC thanks Mark for his two terms (16 years) of excellent service and welcomes Lauren and Matt as new ABA-CLC members. The current committee is also saddened to acknowledge the excellent service of two members who have recently passed away: Mary Gustafson, who served as a member from 2016 up to her passing in November 2022, and Tom Johnson, who served as a member from 2015 to 2022.

For each species under consideration, each member votes to accept or not accept its addition to the *ABA Checklist*, based on evidence from one or more records in the ABA Area (Pranty et al. 2008). A tally of 8–0 for acceptance automatically results in the species's addition to the *Checklist*, whereas a tally of 0–8 results in automatic non-acceptance. Intermediate vote tallies result in automatic recirculation if 6–2, 5–3, or 4–4 or recirculation at the request of any member if 7–1, 3–5, 2–6, or 1–7. Species can circulate for up to three rounds, at which point an 8–0 or 7–1 tally is needed for acceptance to the *Checklist*.

Records finalized by the ABA-CLC in 2023

In 2023, the ABA-CLC finalized voting on five species that would represent additions to the ABA Area. Three were accepted and added to the *ABA Checklist*, whereas two were not added to the *Checklist*. Accounts for these species are provided below.

In addition, and according to the *ABA Checklist* convention, all taxonomic and nomenclatorial decisions of the American Ornithological Society (AOS) are automatically recognized by the ABA-CLC. This year, decisions by the AOS's North American Classification Committee (Chesser et al. 2023) resulted in the deletion of one species due to the lumping of Pacific-slope and Cordilleran flycatchers into Western Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*). The common names of two species are changed based on taxonomic splits affecting species on the *ABA Checklist*: Northern Goshawk becomes American Goshawk (*Accipiter atricapillus*) and Common House-Martin becomes Siberian House-Martin (*Delichon lagopodum*), the latter species accepted by the ABA-CLC in 2023 (see below). Capitalization for the common name of one species is also changed, to Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush (*Monticola saxatilis*) from "Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush," and the scientific names of two species on the *ABA Checklist*, Paint-billed Crane (*Mustelirallus erythroptus*) and Crimson-collared Grosbeak (*Periporphyrus celaeno*), have also been revised. For more details

on these and other 2023 decisions by the AOS, see Michael L. P. Retter's "Check-list Redux" beginning on p. 22 of this issue. The deletion of one species and addition of three species results in a total of 1,135 species on the *ABA Checklist*.

New Species Accepted to the ABA Checklist

Western Marsh Harrier ■ (*Circus aeruginosus*)—ABA-CLC Record #2023-01 (8–0, Jul 2023; Figures 1a & 1b). The ABA-CLC unanimously accepted this species to the *ABA Checklist* based on records of (almost certainly) the same female documented 25–27 Aug 2022 in Maine and 8–19 Nov 2022 in New Jersey. These records were also unanimously accepted by the Maine Bird Records Committee in Oct 2022 (Bevier et al. 2023) and the New Jersey Bird Records Committee in April 2023. On 19 Nov the bird was struck and killed at the Newark International Airport and its identification was confirmed by genetic analyses of feathers at the National Museum of Natural History (C. Dove, in litt.; Mendenhall 2023). This species is included in the *AOS Check-list* based on records from the West Indies (e.g., Merkord et al. 2006). A previous sight record from Chincoteague, Virginia, on 4 Dec 1998 (Shedd et al. 1998), was not accepted to the primary list by the AOS (American Ornithologists' Union 2000) and was not considered by the ABA-CLC. An alternate common name previously used by Clements/eBird for this species is "Eurasian Marsh-Harrier." Following the sequence of the *AOS Check-list* (Chesser et al. 2023), Western Marsh Harrier follows Northern Harrier (*Circus hudsonius*) in the *ABA Checklist*, and the CLC has assigned it ABA Code 5.

Siberian House-Martin ■ (*Delichon lagopodum*)—ABA-CLC Record #2023-05 (8–0, Aug 2023; Figure 2). Following the decision by the AOS to split

CHANGES IN BRIEF

Species Added to the *ABA Checklist*
Based on Distributional Records

- **Western Marsh Harrier** (*Circus aeruginosus*), ABA Code 5
- **Siberian House-Martin** (*Delichon lagopodum*), ABA Code 4
- **Icterine Warbler** (*Hippolais icterina*), ABA Code 5

Species not Added to the *ABA Checklist*

- **Variable Hawk** (*Geranoaetus polyosoma*)
- **Black Catbird** (*Melanoptila glabrirostris*)

what was formerly known as “Common House-Martin” into Siberian and Western (*D. urbicum*) house-martins (Chesser et al. 2023), the CLC decided to vote on both of these vagrant species before adding either to the *ABA Checklist*, due to the potential challenges in identification among these two species and Asian House-Martin *D. dasypus* (Leader et al. 2021). The Siberian House-Martin has already been accepted to the Alaska state list by the Alaska Checklist Committee (AK-CLC; Gibson and Withrow 2015) as based on a specimen (Hall and Cardiff 1978) and subsequent sight and photographic records including at least 27 individuals through 2023 (A. Lang, in litt). The CLC had no issues accepting this species to the *ABA Checklist* based on the confidence of the AK-CLC and photographic evidence (cf. Figure 2). A decision on the acceptance of Western House-

Martin to the *Checklist* is pending (see below).

Following the sequence of the *AOS Check-list* (Chesser et al. 2023), Siberian House-Martin follows Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) on the *ABA Checklist*, and the CLC has assigned it ABA Code 4.

Icterine Warbler ■ (*Hippolais icterina*)—ABA-CLC Record #2022-06 (8-0, Mar 2023). The CLC unanimously voted to add this species to the *ABA Checklist* based on a record from Gambell, St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, on 22 Sep 2022, after unani-

mous acceptance by the AK-CLC in Nov 2022 (see Pyle et al. 2022 for a photograph). Following Clements et al. (2022), Icterine Warbler is listed after Thick-billed Warbler (*Arundinax aedon*) on the *ABA Checklist*, and it has been assigned ABA Code 5.

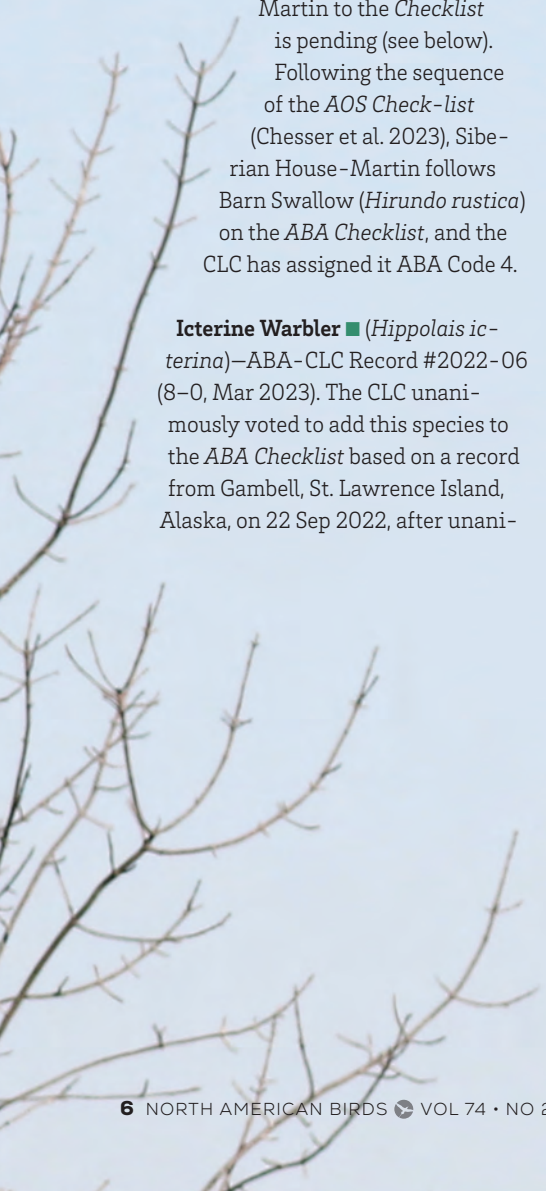
Species not Accepted to the *ABA Checklist*

Variable Hawk ■ (*Geranoaetus polyosoma*)—ABA-CLC Record #2022-02 (5-3, Jun 2022; 5-3, Dec 2022; 3-5, Jul 2023). Following three circulations, this species did not achieve the 7-1 vote necessary to add it to the *ABA Checklist*, as based on records from Colorado and New Mexico. In Colorado, an adult individual was observed sporadically near Gunnison from 1987 to 1994 (Figure 3), and in New Mexico, there is a photographic record from Torrance County south of Albuquerque on 2 Oct 2017. Addition of this species to the Colorado state list was not accepted by the Colorado Bird Records Committee (CBRC) in 1989, as based on concerns of origin and natural occurrence (Nelson 1991), but the CBRC subsequently accepted it to the Colorado state list in 2021 as a naturally occurring vagrant (Leukering 2022). The New Mexico record was not accepted by the New Mexico Bird Records Committee (in Jan 2020) based on concerns of identification, including from some raptor experts (Williams and Baumann, in press).

The identification of the Colo-




✓ **Figs. 1a & 1b** ■ Western Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*). Knox Co, Maine. 26 Aug 2022 (top photo © Liz Southworth) and Morris Co, New Jersey, 9 Nov 2022 (bottom photo © Milton Collins). These two records are widely considered to involve the same individual. The bird had begun prebasic molt while in Maine, with the inner 1-2 primaries being replaced, and by the time it reached New Jersey, the molt had reached the sixth primary (p6)—an expected feather-replacement rate for this species. While in Maine, it was considered to be a one-year-old bird undergoing its second prebasic molt (Bevier et al. 2023), but further analysis of the better images from New Jersey indicate that the unmolted feathers appear to be basic (note the “molt cline” among primaries 7-10 in the image below), making the bird at least two years old when photographed. In either case, the lack of gray in the primaries and secondaries indicates a female, and the identification of female Western Marsh Harriers is straightforward.




rado bird was not questioned by the CLC and some members believed that the New Mexico bird was also correctly identified. In any case, the CLC was split on whether the migratory status of Variable Hawks in South America (cf. Howell et al. 2014, Juhant 2022) was documented well enough, or whether migration patterns were substantial enough, to result in an individual reaching the ABA Area on its own accord, in light of the lack of records from Mexico and Central America (see Leukering 2022 for detailed discussion). Some members indicated that they may accept Variable Hawk to the ABA Checklist if another individual is documented to establish a more robust vagrancy pattern.

Black Catbird ■ (*Melanoptila glabrirostris*)—ABA-CLC Record #2022-02 (6-2, May 2022; 4-4, Jul 2022; 5-3, Dec 2022; Figure 4). The ABA-CLC considered two records of Black Catbird from the ABA Area: a specimen reportedly collected in or near Brownsville, Texas, on 21 Jun 1892 (Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences #42944), and one observed unrestrained and photographed aboard a vessel that had moved from off the Yucatán Peninsula to about 200 miles (322 km) off the barrier islands of southern Louisiana, where last seen on 4 or 5 Jun 2013. Despite the collection locality of the specimen in question (cf. Oberholser 1974:647-648), the Texas record was accepted to the state list by the Texas Bird Records Committee (Lasley 1991), but it was not added to the ABA Checklist in 1992-1993 based on concerns of specimen location (DeBenedictus 1994). The ship-board record was not accepted by the Louisiana Bird Records Committee due to their policy regarding man-assisted birds (Dittmann and Cardiff 2016).

The CLC voting on this species was complicated, in that different members voted to accept the Texas but not the Louisiana record and vice versa, but in the end, neither record garnered enough support to be accepted. CLC members had differing philosophies on whether birds riding ships could be considered of natural occurrence in the ABA Area. Several members agreed that species which are thought unlikely to fly on their own over large expanses of

 **Fig. 2** ■ Siberian House-Martin (*Delichon lagopodum*), Gambell, St. Lawrence I., Alaska, 4 Jun 2023. The AOS split Common House-Martin into this species and Western House-Martin (*D. urbicum*) in 2023, after which the CLC voted on and accepted the addition of Siberian House-Martin to the ABA Checklist (see account). The ratio of the width of white feathering from lower back to uppertail coverts relative to the visible length of the tail, at any angle, appears to be an important character separating these three house-martins (Leader et al. 2021), and the large ratio for this bird confirms Siberian House-Martin. Birds in this plumage cannot be aged (beyond at least a year old) or sexed. Photo © Brian Gibbons.

 **Fig. 3** ■ Variable Hawk (*Geranoaetus polyosoma*) near Gunnison, Colorado on 1 Sep 1987. The identification of this Colorado bird was not in question, whereas the identification of a bird from New Mexico (eBird Checklist S39525704) was debated by raptor experts (Williams and Baumann, in press), some believing that White-tailed Hawk was not ruled out. The ABA-CLC voted to not add Variable Hawk to the ABA Checklist over concerns that a pattern of vagrancy had not been well-enough established to assume this short-distance migrant species of South America (cf. Juhant 2022) could reach the ABA Area on its own. Photo © Peter Gent.


 **Fig. 4** ■ A Black Catbird (*Melanoptila glabrirostris*) aboard the vessel *MV Munin Explorer* in the Gulf of Mexico off Louisiana on 4 Jun 2013. The ABA-CLC did not accept this species to the ABA Checklist due to questions in the minds of some committee members regarding the precise location of the observation and varying philosophies about whether to accept ship-assisted birds. The bird is in formative plumage, as based on molt limits among the tertials and wing coverts and by the shape and condition of the outer primaries and rectrices; sex cannot be determined by plumage in this species. Photo © Sean Minns.



Fig. 5 ■ The ABA-CLC is currently deliberating on the identification of this *Accipiter*, as either Gundlach's Hawk (*A. gundlachi*) or Cooper's Hawk (*A. cooperi*). It was photographed on a rooftop in Coral Gables, Miami-Dade Co, Florida on 1 Jan 2023. Photo © Zoe McClinton.

water (e.g., resident or semi-resident passerines) should not be considered of natural occurrence, and they referred to several other similar cases for species not on the *ABA Checklist*. Despite GPS coordinates being taken while the bird was onboard, some still had questions about whether the individual was observed in the ABA Area, which extends to 200 miles (322 km) offshore. As with Variable

Hawk, some members who did not accept Black Catbird to the *ABA Checklist* could reconsider if another individual is documented from the ABA Area.

ABA Code Updates

The ABA-CLC has developed a coding system to reflect the ease of detecting and abundance of each species in the ABA Area (Pranty et al. 2008; and see aba.org/aba-checklist). The Codes range from 1 (most common and easily detected) to 5 (five or fewer records from the ABA Area) and 6 (presumed extinct). As mentioned above, the species added to the *ABA Checklist* in 2022 received ABA Code 5 for Western Marsh Harrier and Icterine Warbler and ABA Code 4 for Siberian House-Martin. The code for Western Flycatcher remains as 1. One

other code change was made by the CLC in 2023: Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*) was changed from 2 to 3 to reflect its status as a vagrant relative to other Eurasian shorebirds.

Four-letter Alpha Codes

Alpha codes are abbreviations of common (English) names used by ornithologists and birders as shorthand, allowing quicker data recording and entry than full species names. Four-letter alpha codes are also now an option offered by Cornell Lab of Ornithology for eBird data entry and searching for Macaulay Library images and Birds of the World accounts. The codes employed by both the *ABA Checklist* and Cornell follow those maintained by the Institute for Bird Populations (tinyurl.com/IBP-codes), which uses the nomenclature of the AOS, and the codes are updated for species additions or name changes after release of each *AOS Check-list* supplement (e.g., Chesser et al. 2023). Codes for the three species newly added to the *ABA Checklist* are as follows: Western Marsh Harrier (WMHA), Siberian House-Martin (SIHM), and Icterine Warbler (ICWA). New codes reflecting taxonomic or nomenclatorial changes are Western Flycatcher (WEFL) and American Goshawk (AGOS). The change of Northern Goshawk to American Goshawk also results in a change of the code for American Goldfinch (*Spinus tristis*) from AMGO to AGOL (see tinyurl.com/IBP-codes for more information).

Discrepancies between eBird/Clements and the AOS

Pyle et al. (2022) discussed listing format in the *ABA Checklist* for discrepancies in common and scientific names between those of the AOS (Chesser et al. 2023) and those of Clements et al. (2022), the latter of which are followed by eBird. In the *Checklist*, we list the nomenclature used by Clements followed by that of the AOS in parentheses; for example, "Purple (Gray-headed) Swamphen *Porphyrio (poliocephalus) porphyrio*," which represents the only species in the *Checklist* for which discrepancies occur in both com-

mon and scientific names. There are currently 16 discrepancies listed, eight each for common and scientific names, all of which involve either exotic (non-native) or vagrant species. More discrepancies will be added following updates to the Clements list in October 2023.

Anticipated/Possible Future Votes and Other Decisions

The ABA-CLC is currently circulating records of Eurasian Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) based on records from Labrador and Alaska (Chesser et al. 2023), Gundlach's Hawk, based on a record from Florida (Figure 5), Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) based on a record from Alaska, and Western House-Martin based on a record from Saint Pierre et Miquelon (Chesser et al. 2023). We are also aware of records of Southern Lapwing (*Vanellus chilensis*) from Michigan and other states in the ABA Area, of Gray Gull (*Leucophaeus modestus*) from Florida, and of Ainley's Storm-Petrel (*Hydrobates cheimomnestes*) from California. As per tradition, the ABA-CLC will await the decisions of local bird records committees before considering these species for addition to the *ABA Checklist*.

Acknowledgments

The decisions of local bird records committees are instrumental in ABA-CLC evaluation of records, and we thank the following committees and their corresponding members for providing comments or additional information on species considered herein: Maine Bird Records Committee (Louis Bevier); Virginia Avian Records Committee (Chris Monahan); Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee (ABA-CLC member Andy Kratter); Alaska Checklist Committee (Aaron Lang, Dan Gibson, and ABA-CLC member Luke DeCiccio); Colorado Bird Records Committee (Tony Leukering); New Mexico Bird Records Committee (Sandy Williams and Matt Baumann); Texas Ornithological Committee (Eric Carpenter); Louisiana Bird Records Committee (Donna Dittmann and Steve Cardiff); Michigan Bird Records Committee (Scott Terry); and California Bird Records

Committee (Tom Benson). We are also grateful to the many ABA members and other birders and experts who contributed documentation to local records committees, thereby assisting with ABA-CLC evaluations. We thank Ted Floyd for suggesting the ABA Code change for Wood Sandpiper. Finally, we acknowledge the thousands of individuals who have contributed images to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Macaulay Library and for agreeing to the license allowing use for research purposes, and we thank the photographers listed in the figure captions for permission to publish their images.

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