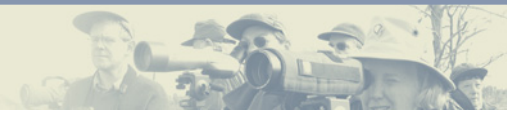


Sightings



“Sightings” appears monthly, alternating between *Winging It* and *Birding*, with the latest news, reports, and rumors from the ABA Area. Sightings are compiled from online discussion groups and RBAs, with valuable contributions from a growing network of informants continent-wide. Readers should note, however, that none of these records has yet been vetted by a records committee. All birders are urged to submit documentation of rare sightings to the appropriate state or provincial committees. For full analysis of these and other bird records, subscribe to *North American Birds*, the richly illustrated journal of ornithological record published by the ABA (www.aba.org/nab). (Italicized place names denote counties or parishes.)

COMPILED BY MICHAEL L. P. RETTER WITH THANKS TO PAUL LEHMAN, RICK WRIGHT, AND STEVEN W. CARDIFF

MID-DECEMBER 2008 TO EARLY JANUARY 2009

Summary: As is often the case in winter, TX's Lower Rio Grande Valley was the place to be: birders in the area enjoyed views of **Masked Ducks**, **Crimson-collared Grosbeak**, and **Blue Bunting**. Snowy Owls and White-winged Crossbills continued to dominate the news in the northeastern quarter of the continent, reaching as far south as KY and OK, respectively. With the cold weather, gullers were out in full force and documented a small push of Great Black-backed and “Kumlien’s” Iceland Gulls across the High Plains and interior West. On the coasts, an **Ivory Gull** in PE (Prince Edward Is.) and a **Black-tailed Gull** in CA were their most noteworthy finds. State firsts included Chestnut-collared Longspur in TN, **Rufous-capped Warbler** in NM, “Kumlein’s” Iceland Gull in MT, Yellow-billed Loon in SD, Grace’s Warbler in Coahuila, and Manx Shearwater and Sooty Shearwater in Oaxaca.

Southeast: A Brown Pelican, the state’s 5th, was first seen at Kentucky Dam, *Livingston*, KY 12/10. A Long-billed Curlew was discovered at Breaks Interstate Park in *Dickinson* 12/21; it is believed to be the first Appalachian record in VA. Video of a Snowy Owl was taken in *Henderson*, KY 12/7. WV has less than 10 records of Northern Shrike, so one in *Pocahontas* 1/5 was quite a find. A Harris’s Sparrow was in *Pocahontas*, WV 12/20. AL’s 2nd Snow Bunting was photographed 1/2 in *Baldwin*. A trio of “Richardson’s” Cackling Geese in *Putnam* 1/4 was remarkably only the 3rd record for WV. White-winged Crossbills, usually casual in the state, were widely reported in the Appalachian counties of WV. A trio of **Chestnut-colored Longspurs** in *Lake*, TN provided the state with its 1st record 12/19–21. A Western Grebe was first seen at Cherokee Lake, TN 12/28.

Mid-Atlantic: Two Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were still present at Silver Lake, *Sussex*, DE. A Barnacle Goose continued at Califon, *Hunterdon*, NJ. Yet again a **Pink-footed Goose** is wintering on NY’s Long Is.; this time in Flushing, *Queens*. Two “Common” Teal and a 1st-cycle Thayer’s Gull were in Tullytown, *Bucks*, PA on 12/20. Snowy Owls were widespread, with reports from NJ, MD, PA, and DE. A **Green-tailed Towhee** began frequenting a feeder in Collingswood, *Camden*, NJ 1/1. *Chester*, PA

hosted a Henslow’s Sparrow 1/3. White-winged Crossbills were widely reported in PA; a flock of 40 in *Carbon* 1/1–4 was noteworthy.

Northeast: Yet another adult **Slaty-backed Gull** was discovered in NL, this one on 12/28. At least one **Yellow-legged Gull** (an adult) was still being seen in St. John’s, NL. Two Thayer’s Gulls, potentially CT’s 4th and 5th, were found at a landfill in Windsor, *Hartford*. A pristine adult **Ivory Gull** was first seen at North Rustico, PE 12/26. An adult Forster’s Tern was seen at Long Beach, NL 12/14. Two Dovekies were seen from shore 12/21 at Stratford, *Fairfield*, CT following a strong coastal storm; another was found alive at the inland town of Lebanon, *New London*, CT the same day. A Varied Thrush was present under a backyard feeder in Wilton, *Fairfield*, CT 12/9–10; three more were in ME. A Yellow-throated Warbler first appeared 12/6 in Greenwich, *Fairfield*, CT. Numbers of White-winged Crossbills continue in the region.



Adult Ivory Gull, North Rustico, Prince Edward Island, 31 Dec. '08. © Dwaine Oakley

South-Central: Two Long-tailed Ducks were reported from TX: one at Hagerman NWR (along the OK border) and the other at Kaufer-Hubert Park, *Kleberg*. At least 6 **Masked Ducks** were discovered in *Willacy*, TX 12/14; they continue to be seen. A Purple Sandpiper was wintering on South Padre Is., *Cameron*, TX. AR’s 2nd **Broad-billed Hummingbird** reappeared at a different address in Conway, *Faulkner*. An adult male Fork-tailed Flycatcher was discovered 1/3 in *Willacy*, TX. A rare winter Varied Bunting was reported from *Wharton*, TX 1/4. Single **Blue Buntings** were present in *Hidalgo*, TX at both Bentsen-Rio Grande SP and the Frontera Audubon Thicket in Weslaco. A female **Crimson-collared Grosbeak** was discovered at the latter location 12/15. A male White-winged Crossbill was showing well at a *Cleveland*, OK feeder in early Jan.



Pink-footed Goose, Kissena Park, Flushing, NY, 28 Dec. '08. © Angus Wilson

North-Central: A **Yellow-billed Loon** discovered 12/29 in *Charles Mix* and *Gregory*, SD was the state’s 1st record. A 1st-cycle Glaucous-winged Gull was first reported from Madison, IL 12/6. Both “Kumlien’s” and Great Black-backed Gulls were found in NE. A Tufted Titmouse was found in Faribault, *Rice*, MN 12/20. Rare anywhere in SD, a Carolina Wren was particularly unexpected in Spearfish, *Lawrence* (the

Black Hills area) in early Jan. Two Varied Thrushes were present in northern IN: one, a male, was found at the same location in *Porter* as a Spotted Towhee; another, a female, has been frequenting a *Marshall* feeder since early Dec. A Northern Parula was in Toronto, ON 12/13. As elsewhere, Northern Shrikes, White-winged Crossbills, and Snowy Owls were being seen in good numbers south of their normal winter haunts. A report of 75–90 White-winged Crossbills in *Lake*, IL 1/11 was noteworthy.



Basic male Black-capped Gnatcatcher, Guadalupe Canyon, NM, 29 Dec. '09. © Cole Wolf

Southwest: Two Brant were in Denver, CO 1/1; unfortunately, the subspecies was not reported, making future categorization problematic should the species be split. A Tundra Swan was in *Cochise*, AZ 12/28–1/2. Unprecedented numbers of Brown Pelicans were reported at scattered locations in southern AZ. A Yellow-billed Loon was in *La Paz*, AZ 12/30; another was in Sparks, NV. A Red-necked Grebe was in *Mohave*, AZ 12/12. A Reddish Egret was in *Maricopa*, AZ 12/27–1/3. The *Maricopa*, AZ **Northern Jacana** was last reported 12/18. One or possibly 2 Ruffs were seen by many at Antelope Island, *Davis*, UT. A Red Phalarope visited *Santa Cruz*, AZ 12/19–20. A “mini-invasion” of both “Kumlien’s” and Great Black-backed Gulls, possibly related to the NE sightings, was underway along CO’s Front Range. An Acorn Woodpecker appeared in Las Vegas, NV in late Dec. Single Gray Vireos were in *Santa Cruz*, AZ 12/14 and *Pima*, AZ 12/12. A Northern Shrike was in *Yavapai*, AZ 1/3. The ABA Area’s 1st **Sinaloa Wren** was still present in *Santa Cruz*, AZ. Both a **Rufous-capped Warbler** (the state’s 1st) and two pairs of **Black-capped Gnatcatchers** were reported from NM’s Guadalupe Canyon, NM. Three more Rufous-capped Warblers were discovered 12/19 in *Pima*, AZ; they shared their canyon with a Kentucky Warbler 12/27–1/2. A **Blackburnian Warbler** discovered on the Tucson, AZ CBC 12/21 was still present 1/5. Unusual warblers in CO included a Northern Parula in *Garfield* 12/15, a Black-throated Blue Warbler in *La Plata* 12/24, and a Pine Warbler in *Denver* 12/7. A Snow Bunting delighted NM birders at Stubblefield Lake, *Colfax* in mid-December.

West Coast and Northwest: A Short-tailed Albatross was seen offshore at Cordell Bank, *Sonoma*, 12/29. A Little Blue Heron wintering at Siletz Bay, *Lincoln*, OR was probably the same bird seen 15 mi. to the north in Nov. A Red-necked Grebe was in Casper, *Natrona*, WY 12/30. A

Swainson’s Hawk remained near Vancouver, WA through late Dec. A **Black-tailed Gull** was photographed in San Mateo, CA 12/29, providing the state with its 2nd record. A Lesser Black-backed Gull at Buena Vista Lake, CA 12/21 provided Kern with its 1st record. MT’s 1st “Kumlien’s” **Iceland Gull**, a 1st-cycle bird, was originally located at the *Flathead* landfill 12/7. A White-eyed Vireo was found 1/9 in *Imperial*, CA. An “Eastern” Winter Wren was in *Santa Barbara*, CA 1/3. A male “Black-backed” White Wagtail was photographed on Adak Is., AK 1/7. CA hosted at least 5

Worm-eating Warblers. Other interesting warblers included a Yellow-throated in *Los Angeles* and Grace’s in *Mendocino*, *Santa Barbara*, and *San Diego*. Rusty Blackbirds were found in 3 CA counties: *Del Norte*, *San Diego*, and *Imperial*. (now gone). A Pine Warbler, OR’s 2nd, appeared at a LaGrande, *Union* feeder 12/20 Dec. OR’s 1st **Pyrrhuloxia** continued in Peoria, *Linn*. A Black Rosy-Finch was found in a flock of Gray-crowns 12/17 in *Mono*, CA.

Mexico: Highlights from a series of pelagic trips 12/15–18 off Puerto Ángel, Oaxaca included a remarkable 15,000 “Galapagos” Audubon’s Shearwaters, 1–2 **Manx Shearwaters**, and 2 **Sooty Shearwaters**. A dark-morph “Harlan’s” Hawk was found 12/16 during the Mexicali, Baja California (BC) CBC. Birders at El Cielo Biosphere Reserve, Tamaulipas were excited to find an adult Ornate Hawk-Eagle 12/6. An adult Thayer’s Gull was found at La Pesca, Tamaulipas two days earlier. An apparent **Western Wood-Pewee** was seen in Puerto Ángel, Oaxaca mid-Dec.; it may be the first winter record north of South America. Tecate, BC continued to host a **Brown Thrasher** throughout the period. (Escaped) Black-throated Magpie-Jays were confirmed nesting near Mexicali, BC. Highlights from the Ensenada, BC CBC on 12/15 included “Prairie” (*richardsoni*) Merlin, Common Murre, “Siberian” (*japonicus*) American Pipit, Tennessee Warbler, and Orchard Oriole. A **Grace’s Warbler** in Coahuila above San Antonio de las Alanzas 12/2 may have been the state’s 1st record. A territorial pair of Hooded Yellowthroats was observed 12/13 at Las Minas, Veracruz, seemingly a new location for the species. A female Bronzed Cowbird was found at the La Paz, BCS sewage ponds 12/7. A male **Rusty Blackbird** was found at the Puerto Peñasco, Sonora landfill 12/19.

New Bird Species Discovered

In 2008, at least two new bird species have been described to science. Ornithologists described a new species from the Togian Islands of Indonesia – *Zosterops somadikartai*, or Togian White-eye, in the March edition of *The Wilson Journal of Ornithology*. The Togian White-eye was first seen by Mochamad Indrawan, an Indonesian field biologist at the Depok Campus of the University of Indonesia, and Sunarto (some Indonesians use a single name), who is now working on a doctorate at Virginia Tech, 12 years ago during their first trip to the Togian Islands.

The new bird is believed to be endangered. The white-eye has been seen only near the coasts of three small islands of the Togian Islands in central Sulawesi. Unlike most white-eye species, it appears the new species is uncommon, even in small range. Because of small numbers and limited distribution, it falls into the World Conservation Union category of endangered. The discovery of the new species establishes the Togian Islands as an endemic bird area.

More information on the discovery can be found here. http://news.msu.edu/story/995/&topic_id=13

In the central African country of Gabon, Smithsonian researchers have discovered a new species of bird, a member of the Muscipidae or Old World Flycatchers, and it was named Olive-backed Forest Robin (*Stiphornis pyrrholaemus*). It was discovered during a biodiversity assessment of southwestern Gabon in two protected areas – Loango and Moukalaba-Doudou National Parks. The research expedition that discovered the new bird was part of the Smithsonian Institution’s Monitoring and Assessment of Biodiversity Program (SIMAB).

According to the authors, the new species of forest robin is common and “inhabits primary lowland forest and forages on or near the ground like the other members of the genus *Stiphornis* of central and western Africa [and] unique phenotypic features of the new species include the male’s bright orange chin, throat, and breast, creamy yellow belly, olive green back and rump, and gray flanks.” Photographs of the bird can be seen here. <http://conservationreport.com/2008/08/17/new-species-new-bird-species-of-bird-discovered-in-gabon-africa/>.