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# ABA Checklist Report, 1991

by Paul DeBenedictis \*

## New Species Accepted— Great Frigatebird (*Fregata minor*)

**Where.** Perry, Noble County, Oklahoma.

**When.** 3 November 1975.

**Observers.** None; specimen retrieved by Delbert Foltz.

**Published Details.** *Oklahoma Ornithological Society Bulletin* 1977, 10: 9–10.

**Documentation.** Specimen of adult male in Oklahoma State University Museum (OSU 1770), originally identified by Kenneth C. Parkes and verified by Roger B. Clapp. Color photographs of the specimen on file.

**Identification.** Frigatebird identification is one of the greatest challenges to field ornithologists, and separation of Great Frigatebird from Magnificent Frigatebird (*F. magnificens*) is particularly difficult. The smaller size of *F. minor* is unlikely to be perceptible under most field conditions. Adult male Great Frigatebirds retain a brown alar bar from their immature (pre-definitive) plumages, whereas the upper wing of male Magnificent Frigatebirds becomes uniformly dark; and the back feathering generally has a greenish rather than purplish glossy iridescence, although there is complete overlap in this trait. (Adult

female Great Frigatebirds are readily distinguished by their white throat and red orbital ring. Immatures may not always be distinguishable in the field, but they generally have a distinct buffy wash to light areas of the head and breast.) Where the two species nest together, behavioral differences are pronounced.

**Origin.** Breeds in the South Atlantic on Trinidad Island off Brazil, and on islands throughout the tropical Pacific and Indian oceans—the site closest to the ABA Checklist Area being the Revillagigedo Islands off western Mexico. Measurements of the specimen suggest that it came from a northwest tropical Pacific population (*F. m. palmerstoni*), but critical comparisons have not been made.

**Motion to add.** Lasley / DeBenedictis.

**Vote.** 7/0.

**Placement on the ABA Checklist.** Insert between Magnificent Frigatebird and Lesser Frigatebird. *Status:* A. *Birding code:* 5.

**History of this record.** This record was considered but left unresolved by an earlier ABA Checklist Committee, which was unable to obtain additional supporting information. The record is included in the *AOU Check-list*, sixth edition, and this action resolves one of the differences between the two checklists.

*Male Masked Tityra (Tityra semifasciata), left, photographed at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park in Hidalgo County, Texas, on 20 February 1990.*

## This supplement

to the fourth edition of the *ABA Checklist* reports all changes adopted since our last report (*Birding* 1991, 23: 190–196). For convenience, we refer to the AOU Committee on Classification and Nomenclature as the “AOU Checklist Committee” throughout. All observers who submitted documentation that was examined by this committee are listed in the accounts of species; those who discovered the bird are listed first.

### New Species Accepted

Great Frigatebird  
Masked Tityra  
White-throated Robin  
Yellow-faced Grassquit

### New Species Not Accepted

Rufous-tailed Hummingbird  
Antillean Crested Hummingbird

### Species Removed from List

Caribbean Coot

### Change in Scientific Name

Burrowing Owl

### Change in English Name

Neotropical Cormorant

### Change in Status

Black-backed Wagtail

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*Yellow-faced Grassquit (Tiaris olivacea), at right, photographed at Santa Anna National Wildlife Refuge in Hidalgo County, Texas, on 24 January 1990.*

*New Species Accepted—*

**Masked Tityra**

(*Tityra semifasciata*)

**Where.** Bentsen–Rio Grande Valley State Park, Hidalgo County, Texas.

**When.** 17 February–10 March 1990.

**Observers.** Charles R. Bender, Andy Farnsworth, Michael J. Austin, Greg Lasley, Charles T. Clark, Mike Krzywowski, Mel and Arlie Cooksey, Peter Gottschling, Lynne Aldrich, Oscar Carmona, Nanette Armstrong, Carl B. Haynie, Ro Wauer, Phyllis and Tony Frank, Frank D. Bumgardner, Rhandy J. Helton, Ben Archer, Jr., Mike Farmer, John Muldrow, Chuck Sexton, and numerous others.

**Published Details.** *American Birds* 1990, 44: 223, 289.

**Documentation.** Photographs in VIREO (TX020–01—TX020–11).

**Identification.** Male. The only possible alternatives for this distinctively colored and shaped species are other species of tityra, which are eliminated by plumage and bill color.

**Origin.** Resident from northern Mexico south at lower elevations through Middle America and northern South America to eastern Bolivia and southern Amazonian Brazil. As is the case for many records of birds in the lower Rio Grande Valley, it is impossible to preclude an origin resulting from the extensive, illicit trade in tropical birds along the border with Mexico. The habits

of this species make it an unlikely captive, and this record occurred after a severe frost that produced several other records from the lower Rio Grande Valley of birds that normally occur only as far north as northeastern Mexico.

**Motion to add.** Lasley / DeBenedictis.

**Vote.** 7/0.

**Placement on the ABA Checklist.** Insert after Rose-throated Becard. **Status:** A. **Birding code:** 5.

*New Species Accepted—*

**White-throated Robin**

(*Turdus assimilis*)

**Where.** Laguna Vista, Cameron County, Texas.

**When.** 18–25 February 1990.

**Observers.** Mike Krzywowski, Oscar Carmona, Greg Lasley, Tom Pincelli.

**Published Details.** *American Birds* 1991, 45: 230–231.

**Documentation.** Photographs reproduced in above reference and in VIREO (TX019–01—TX019–13).

**Identification.** Field identification, particularly with respect to its close South American relative, the White-collared Robin (*Turdus albicollis*), is discussed in the above reference; its separation from other Middle American thrushes is treated in various guides to Mexican birds.

**Origin.** Resident at lower and middle elevations from northern Mexico south through Middle America to western Colombia and western Ecuador.

Plumage characteristics suggest that this bird came from eastern Mexico, but its subspecific identity could not be established with certainty in the absence of a specimen. Remarks on the possible captive origin for Masked Tityra apply equally to this record.

**Motion to add.** Lasley / DeBenedictis.

**Vote.** 7/0.

**Placement on the ABA Checklist.** Insert between Clay-colored Robin and Rufous-backed Robin. **Status:** A. **Birding code:** 5.

**English Name.** There is a growing trend to call all New World members of the genus *Turdus*, except *T. migratorius* and its closest relatives, “thrush” rather than “robin,” to better indicate their taxonomic affinity. The ABA Checklist Committee currently is discussing this question but is far from consensus.

*New Species Accepted—*  
**Yellow-faced Grassquit**  
(*Tiaris olivacea*)

**Where.** Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Hidalgo County, Texas.

**When.** 22–24 January 1990.

**Observers.** David F. DeSante, F. P. (Tony) Bennett, Jane Kittleman, Theodore Koundakjian, C. G. Potter, Max and Helen Parker, Robert DeGraaf, and numerous others.

**Published Details.** *American Birds* 1990, 44: 222, 289.

**Documentation.** Photographs

Great Frigatebird (*Fregata minor*), at right, photographed at Hood Island, Galapagos, in February. This species was added to the ABA Checklist on the basis of a specimen found in Noble County, Oklahoma, on 3 November 1975. As evident here, on adult male Great Frigatebirds the back feathering generally has a greenish gloss rather than the purplish glossy iridescence of a Magnificent, although there is overlap in this trait.



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by Helen and Max Parker and Robert DeGraaf on file with VIREO (TX021-01—TX021-04).

**Identification.** Adult male—a small, short-billed, olive-green finch with a striking yellow-orange supercilium and throat broadly but diffusely bordered with black. (The female is less conspicuously marked, and the unpatterned immature is less easily distinguished from several other Caribbean species of grassquit.)

**Origin.** Resident at lower elevations from eastern Mexico south through Middle America to western and central Colombia and northern Venezuela, and in the Greater Antilles. The fresh condition of this bird's plumage is inconsistent with a captive origin, but that possibility can never be completely precluded. This species is a relatively common cagebird.

**Motion to add.** Lasley / DeBenedictis.

**Vote.** 7/0.

**Placement on the ABA Checklist.** Between White-collared Seedeater and Black-faced Grassquit. *Status:* A. *Birding code:* 5.

**New Species Not Accepted—Rufous-tailed Hummingbird** (*Amazilia tzacatl*)

**Where.** Fort Brown, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas.

**When.** June and July 1876.

**Documentation.** *Bulletin Nuttall Ornithological Club* 1876, 1: 88 and *Proceedings U.S. National Museum* 1878, 1: 118–175.

**Comments.** This species has been listed in the *AOU Checklist* and other works as accidental in Texas on the basis of the report of two purported specimens identified by the late Robert Ridgway. The Texas Bird Records Committee removed this species from the Texas list, believing that no specimens could be located for verification. Our investigation suggests that, in fact, no specimen ever existed, and that the records are based on



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*White-throated Robin* (*Turdus assimilis*) photographed at Laguna Vista in Cameron County, Texas,

identifications by Ridgway made from descriptions sent to him by J. C. Merrill. None of Ridgway's many publications suggests that he ever examined a Texas specimen, and there is no hint of a Texas specimen in any records of the U.S. National Museum, but specimens of Buff-bellied Hummingbird (*A. yucatanensis*) were taken at Brownsville during that time period. Of the two subsequent Texas reports, one lacks supporting documentation and the other was not accepted by the Texas Bird Records Committee. The motion to add this species was made with the recommendation that all records be rejected, and our action formally establishes an additional discrepancy between the ABA and AOU checklists.

*Motion.* Binford / DeBenedictis.  
*Vote.* 0/7.

**New Species Not Accepted—  
Antillean Crested  
Hummingbird**  
(*Orthorhynchus cristatus*)

*Where.* Galveston Island, Galveston County, Texas.

*When.* 1 February 1967.

*Documentation.* Specimen in American Museum of Natural History (*Auk* 1968, 85: 322).

*Identification.* Identification of the specimen has not been questioned.

*Origin.* This species is resident from eastern Puerto Rico to the northern Lesser Antilles and is an unlikely candidate for

natural vagrancy. The details of its collection are shrouded in mystery, because its captors asked to remain anonymous. Given the circumstances, all subsequent reviews, including that by the Texas Bird Records Committee, have rejected the record on the basis of origin. The AOU Check-list Committee in 1983 questioned the natural occurrence of this specimen and did not assign the species an AOU number. Because this species sometimes appears on lists of Texas birds, the motion to add it was submitted with a negative recommendation, in order to formally reject the record once and for all.

*Motion to add.* Lasley / DeBenedictis.  
*Vote.* 1/6.

**Species Removed from List—  
Caribbean Coot**  
(*Fulica caribaea*)

*Reasons for removal.* After the initial discovery and collection in 1974 of coots with the shield characteristics of this species, discovery of similar birds, some paired and nesting with American Coots (*F. americana*), from localities throughout the U.S. raised doubts as to the validity of the Florida records as well as the taxonomic status of Caribbean Coot as a species. The question of records from the ABA Checklist Area was discussed in detail by Roberson and Baptista (*American Birds* 1988, 42: 1241–1246), who con-

cluded that none of the reports is acceptable. The AOU Check-list Committee also has decided to question all records of this species from the United States. Because both taxonomic and distributional questions were at issue, our committee left the species in the fourth edition of the *ABA Checklist*, noting that its status was questionable. A request by Roberson that we formally delete the species was conveyed to the committee, who unanimously supported the motion. There is still a great need for observations of pairing between members of the complex, especially from the Caribbean, and anyone with relevant data is encouraged to publish them and to inform the AOU Check-list Committee of said publication.

*Motion (to delete).* Binford / Remsen.  
*Vote.* 6/0.

**Change in Scientific Name—  
Burrowing Owl**  
**Replace *Athene cunicularia*  
with *Speotyto cunicularia***

*Reason for change.* The chromosome arrangement (karyotype) in the Burrowing Owl differs markedly from that in Old World species of *Athene*, suggesting that these owls do not belong in the same genus. Limited biochemical data are inconclusive. The AOU Check-list Committee adopted the change in the 38th Supplement to their checklist (*Auk* 1991, 108: 752), and our committee unanimously

agreed that we should conform.

**Motion.** Remsen / DeBenedictis.

**Vote.** 6/0.

*Change in English Name—  
Phalacrocorax brasilianus  
Replace Olivaceous Cormorant  
with Neotropic Cormorant*

**Reason for change.** Having been convinced that the bird bearing the above scientific name is the cormorant of the New World tropics (*Wilson Bulletin* 1989, 101: 101–106), the AOU Check-list Committee replaced the inaccurate English descriptor for this cormorant, Olivaceous, with Neotropic, widely used in recent monographs of Middle American and South American birds. Our committee adopted the change in scientific name in our previous supplement, but had not been informed of the pending change in its English name in time to incorporate that revision as well. Other than a minority preference (including the negative vote) for the adjectival form, Neotropical, our Committee supports this change, and this action brings the two lists back into conformity on this issue.

**Motion.** Remsen / DeBenedictis.

**Vote.** 6/1.

*Change in Status—  
Black-backed Wagtail  
(Motacilla lugens)*

**Status.** Change V to N.

**Reason for change.** This spe-

cies is well established as a rare migrant in the western Aleutian Islands and as a vagrant to the Pacific Coast as far south as California and even to the East Coast (North Carolina). Summer records from Beringia have been suggestive of nesting. Breeding has now been confirmed in the ABA Checklist Area (*American Birds* 1991, 45: 53–55), and a second confirmed nesting is known (*vide* Thede Tobish), although it is possible that nesting does not occur in our area every year.

Correspondingly, the status of this species has been elevated from Visitor to Nester; its Birding Code is unchanged.

**Motion.** Tobish / DeBenedictis.

**Vote.** 6/0.

*Criteria for Acceptance of Records*

The ABA Checklist Committee generally follows the recommendations of state and provincial bird records committees, in the sense that we are unlikely to consider a record that a local committee has found unacceptable. We have no such restrictions as to the reverse. We expect the AOU Check-list Committee to treat our proceedings in the same way. Some local bird records committees, however, require specimen, photographic, or some other form of “tangible” documentation before accepting first records from their area. In view of this question, an informal poll of our

committee brought agreement that, in principle:

1. Such “tangible” evidence is not a necessary condition for adding a species to the ABA Checklist. Records that a local bird records committee has not accepted solely because it is a sight record would be reviewed independently by our committee, and a contrary decision by this committee, should it arise, would be explicitly so acknowledged. Independent substantiating evidence always facilitates a decision by any bird records committee, and birders are encouraged to obtain it whenever circumstances permit.

2. We would review records of species rejected by a local records committee as possible escapes from captivity, but only if a specific or highly probable source for that bird could not be established. Experience suggests that such cases are likely to spend long sojourns as unresolved records, and may even be tabled until subsequent records that establish a pattern of occurrence are obtained.

3. We would review a report submitted by a single observer, provided that was the sole reason for its failure to be accepted by a local records committee. The likelihood that our committee would accept a report increases as the number of reports we receive increases. We point to Crane Hawk as an example of a record that finally was accepted, even though this bird’s identity was substantiated by photos, only because of the numerous reports available to us (*Birding* 1991, 23: 190–191). We encourage all observers to prepare and submit reports of rarities which they observe to the appropriate bird records committee(s). These decisions were made in

the spirit that, as representatives of a birding organization, we should not arbitrarily reject reports that would have been found acceptable if prior records substantiated by tangible evidence had existed. We recognize that other bird records committees may have more stringent criteria, and we will communicate any such differences in all such cases. A statement of what you should do when you find that really great bird will appear in a subsequent report.

## **Introductions and Related Issues**

The recent release of California Condors from captive breeding stocks has raised the obvious question, "Can they now be counted?" Although this question is technically under the jurisdiction of the ABA Rules Committee, we note that our committee considers this release

to be an introduction, subject to the same review process as any other introduction would be. We certainly hope for its success. At the same time, we recognize that the activity of birders to view this species in the wild provides an important economic incentive for maintenance of suitable habitat in an area where economic pressures are severe. We can think of no reason why this listing technicality should prevent any birder from enjoying a wonderful bird, and we encourage all who partake to make both their presence and economic impact (e.g., "I came from . . . just to see condors!") known to local residents.

In a similar vein, we note that the introduction of Whooping Cranes to Idaho, as foster chicks in an established Sandhill Crane population (which winters in New Mexico), has been declared a failure by the U.S. Fish and

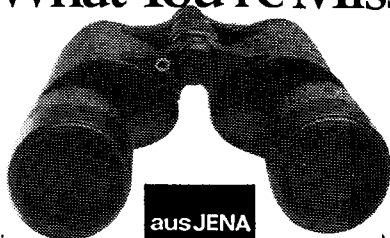
Wildlife Service, which plans to recapture all survivors for use in captive breeding and future introduction programs. We repeat our appeal for information on the status in the ABA Checklist Area of a variety of parrot species (especially Monk Parakeet and Rose-ringed Parakeet), Eurasian Collared-Dove, and other introductions to our area of species not presently included in the *ABA Checklist*.

Our committee decides only that at least one population of an introduced species is established in the ABA Checklist Area. Having made this determination, we accept the opinions of state and provincial bird records committees as to the status of introductions in their areas. The ABA Rules Committee will discuss elsewhere to what extent birders should be bound by these decisions when counting introduced species for purposes of reporting list totals.

## **Work in Progress**

The committee is currently considering or preparing for deliberation the following motions: to delete Mugimaki Flycatcher and to add White-chinned Petrel, Kermadec Petrel, Pin-tailed Snipe, Band-tailed Gull, Black Catbird, Pine Bunting, and Eurasian Siskin. Possible changes to the English names of some species on our checklist, to achieve world-wide consistency, are in the earliest stages of discussion.

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