



Maryland/District of Columbia Records Committee
Skins Workshop
March 9, 2002

On March 9, 2002, 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, Barry Cooper, Patty Craig, Matt Hafner, Marshall Iliff, Bonnie Ott, and Fran Pope.

1. Searches and Photography of Maryland/DC Reviewable Museum Specimens

An advanced party of Paul O'Brien, Phil Davis, Marshall Iliff and Mary Gustafson arrived early to continue the committee's efforts to locate and photograph reviewable USNM specimens. Eleven specimens were located during this visit. Mary Gustafson and Patty Craig photographed some of these specimens during this visit. Mary Gustafson placed other specimens aside for later photography. Skins located included:

a. Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*)

Eight target specimens were located:

DC/1999-207	USNM #80297	"DC 10-4-1879"
DC/1999-209	USNM #153333	"DC 4-13-1893"
DC/1999-210	USNM #256469	"DC 10-13-1900"
MD/1999-133	USNM #211632	"Laurel, MD 3-12-1909"
MD/1999-211	USNM #149784	"Patuxent River 10-17-1906"
DC/1999-134	USNM #253757	"DC 5-20-1917"
MD/1999-212	USNM #272890	"wings only – Dorchester, Co 11-17-??"
MD/1999-135	USNM #300346	"Patuxent River 10-02-1929"

b. Purple Gallinule (*Porphyryla martinica*)

One target specimen was located: DC/1999-089.

c. Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*)

One target specimen was located: MD/1999-092.

d. Thick-billed Murre (*Uria lomvia*)

Marshall Iliff looked through all Thick-billed Murre skins in search of Maryland specimens. All known Thick-billed Murre specimens were found, although he noted two additional interesting VA specimens of Thick-billed Murre:

- One female, Virginia Beach, 19 Jan 1981, USNM #598416, collected by Ned Brinkley and P.W. Sykes.
- One immature, Four Mile Run, Arlington, VA, 22 Nov 1899, USNM #170579, Thomas Taylor Jr., received from Henry Talbot. Marshall noted that the specimen tag on USNM #154200 ([1999-171]) read as follows: female, "Occoquan Creek, VA" (on one side) and "Potomac River, New bird for DC!" on the other side, 20 Dec 1896.

e. Dovekie (*Alle alle*)

Marshall also looked through all Dovekie specimens in search of Maryland specimens. One target specimen was located (USNM #566566, collected Fruitland, Wicomico County) and was added to those to be photographed.

f. Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*)

One target specimen was located: USNM, Mar 1856, Potomac River, DC, USNM #607220. MD/DCRC members were unsure as to what subspecies this bird was referable - the specimen tag had read *flavirostris* (I think-MJI), but this was crossed out and *albifrons* was written in. Presumably this is an error since *albifrons* is currently considered to be the European subspecies that is yet unknown from the USA.

g. Wilson's Storm-Petrel (*Oceanites oceanicus*)

Marshall conducted a partial search of Wilson's Storm-Petrel specimens (looking for the Marshall Hall, Prince George's County, specimen [1999-065]) and Leach's Storm-Petrel specimens (e.g., [1999-056]). He was only able to check a couple drawers of Leach's but got to look through most Wilson's drawers, and all drawers from the Atlantic. It is possible that the individual in the "Birds of DC" collection (see below) is either the Marshall Hall specimen or [1999-064], collected on "Potomac River".

One target specimen was located: From Chesapeake Beach, Chesapeake Bay, Calvert County, 21 Jun 1924, USNM #573319 (not on review list, but very close to review area for species - specimen is certainly noteworthy enough to be maintained in the committee files) listed as *O.o oceanicus*.

In conjunction with his subspecies research, he noted that Maryland specimens of Wilson's Storm-Petrel had been identified as *O.o.oceanicus*. He noted that he found no specimens of *O.o. exasperatus* away from the Marshall Islands.

h. Band-rumped Storm-Petrels (*Oceanodroma castro*)

Jonathan Alderfer measured both Band-rumped Storm-Petrel specimens from DC.

i. Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*)

One target specimen was located: From The Mall, D.C., found dead by Rick Blom and labeled as "*mearnsi*" by Browning. This bird was added to the specimens to be photographed file. [Note: this bird was first noticed at the 2001 Skins Meeting, and is certainly not a straightforward example of *mearnsi*, if it is in fact assignable to that subspecies. M Iliff]

j. "Shufeldti" Oregon Junco (*Junco hyemalis shufeldti*)

The members looked through many of the Junco drawers in an attempt to find the reported 1890 Ridgway "*shufeldti*" Oregon Junco specimen from Laurel, MD [MD/1999-130]. We were not successful.

k. Corn Crake (*Crex crex*)

Marshall also looked through all Corn Crake specimens in search of Maryland specimens.

I. Full Mount Collection

The full mount section of the collection was only briefly checked. Mary Gustafson recommended that we focus our searches there on our next visit.

m. Extralimital Massachusetts Record

Matt Hafner found a significant out-of-state specimen. It was a Le Conte's Sparrow collected in "West Newton, MA", USNM #233863, quite some time ago (actual date not noted). This specimen is not listed in Veit & Petersen's *Birds of Massachusetts*, which indicates just 14 records from the state and just one specimen.

n. Previously Photographed Specimens:

- **Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) [MD/1997-432].** This previously photographed Maryland specimen was put aside for later measurement.
- **Common Ground-Dove (*Columbina passerina*) [DC/1999-103].** This previously photographed DC specimen was put aside for re-photographing the specimen tag.

2. Skins Studies

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

a. Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*)

The subspecies *flavirostris* (Greenland) and *frontalis* (= *gambeli*, Western North America) were compared.

It was noted that *flavirostris* shows a somewhat smaller, orange-yellow bill that is not as deep as that of *frontalis*. In addition, *flavirostris* is reported to have a darker head and more extensive dark barring on the belly. The possibility that *flavirostris* may have less white on the tail than *frontalis* was investigated since Kemp (2001; Kemp, J. 2001. Identification of the Greenland White-fronted Goose. *Birding World* 14:103-105) suggested that the tail pattern is of use in separating *flavirostris* from *albifrons*, the Old World subspecies. It seemed that the tail pattern characters suggested by Kemp followed for *frontalis* vs. *flavirostris*, but were not as marked as he suggested, with *frontalis* having slightly broader white terminal bands to the tail versus the very narrow terminal bands shown by *flavirostris*.

The width of the fringes on the tertials and greater secondary coverts were also examined, but seemed to show relatively little difference that would be useful in the field. The width of the white flank stripe was examined and this generally appeared to be slightly more extensive in *frontalis*. The most useful and consistent difference appeared to be the color of the head, which appeared reddish-brown in the one specimen of *flavirostris* and was clearly washed with grayish, especially on the throat, in all specimens (about 10) of *frontalis*.

Mary Gustafson commented that *flavirostris* might be more often associated with Greater Snow Geese than Lesser Snow Geese.

b. Jaegers (Genus *Stercorarius*)

Jaegers were examined briefly, comparing plumage and tail shapes of adults. In the juveniles, the warm tones in the light barring of the tail coverts in Parasitic, *Stercorarius parasiticus*, contrasted with the white barring in *pomarinus* and *longicaudus*. In the latter, the elongated posterior and flat gray mantle color were conspicuous. A comparison of the nail on the bills of all three was inconclusive – the differences not being as obvious as sometimes seen in the field

c. California Gull (*Larus californicus*)

California Gulls were examined briefly. Hafner and Iliff pointed out some of the essential field marks for adults, notably the darker back color, the extensively dark 8th primary, the dark eye, the yellowish/greenish legs, the more extensive, blotchy hood streaking, the smaller size and

smaller bill, and the distinctive bill pattern of adults with red and black subterminal spots. Second and third-year birds were examined as well but the field marks were not discussed in length, although it was pointed out that the extensively dark 8th primary should be visible on 3rd year birds. However, several of the spread wing mounts were in primary molt, with p8 or p9 missing, which complicated the wing pattern differences, and the same problem may occur in the field.

Two or three specimens of apparent *albertainensis* were examined and their back color compared with *smithsonianus* Herring Gulls. The back colors of the two were almost indistinguishable in the museum, compared to the *californicus* specimens, which were quite obviously darker-mantled.

d. Kelp Gull (*Larus dominicanus*)

A search was made for adults in basic plumage to determine whether there was any head streaking, as has been noted in the Sandgates, Maryland Kelp Gull (KEGU) [MD/1999-035].

Two specimens were examined, one marked as a third year male (#264135) collected on March 13, 1922 in the South Shetlands. Even though it was noted on the tag as a 3rd year bird, our opinion was that it was a 4th year bird with adult primaries.

A note on the tag indicated that the iris was "light brown" (a feature known in sub-adult KEGU) and the orbital ring orange. The bill had a dark smudge near the tip, supporting the sub-adult designation. There was significant flecking in the crown and nape, a single mirror on P10 and tongues on P5, 6 and 7. This mirror and tongue pattern is typical of birds from the Antarctic examined by Frederic Jiguet.

The other basic KEGU (#496757) was a full adult male collected April 20, 1965 off Valparaiso Harbor, Chile. It was a smaller bird than #264135 with a darker mantle and a typical adult bill. A note on the tag said that the feet were "grayish cream", typical of basic KEGU. It showed light flecking on the crown and nape, a single mirror on P10 and obvious tongues on P4 and 5 with a trace on P6. This is the mirror and tongue pattern found on birds from western South America by Jiguet. Thus it appears that in some races basic KEGUs can exhibit the light head streaking noted in the Sandgates bird.

The head streaks on both birds were photographed.

e. *Archilochus* Hummingbirds

Archilochus hummingbirds were examined to compare Ruby-throated, *A. colubris*, with Black-chinned, *A. alexandri*. Particular attention was paid to the shapes of the primaries: a broader tip on P10 and P6 in *alexandri*, with an emarginated P6 in *colubris*. But these differences were not outstanding on some specimens. The back color on *colubris* is a deeper green and includes the crown whereas *alexandri* is a bluer green with a dusky crown. In the tail, *colubris* exhibits rounded feathers, with R4 the longest, while *alexandri* has nipple-shaped R4 and R5.

The broad club-shaped P10 was obvious on nearly all specimens of *alexandri* while the comparatively narrower P10 on *colubris* also appeared fairly consistent in shape. MD/DCRC members noted that some *colubris* appeared to show nipple-shaped retricies, but examination of bill corrugations usually proved these to be immature birds. The longer R4 appeared to be a consistent character that was useful in examination of skins, but will require exceptionally good views in the field, or exceptionally fortuitous photos, to assess.

f. Ammodramus Sparrows

Both *henslowii* and *leconteii* were examined, more for the aesthetics than for specific identification purposes. Iliff and Hafner noted that all Maryland specimens of *henslowii* (numerous pre-1950 specimens from Laurel, Ocean City, Assateague, and Point Lookout) pertain to the more easterly subspecies *susurrans*.

g. Common Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*) and Hoary Redpoll (*Carduelis hornemanni*)

Two subspecies of each were studied: *rostrata* are the largest and darkest with a noticeably larger bill than the others. Comparing trays of *flammea* with *hornemanni* and *exilipes*, the pigmentation is obviously greatest in *flammea* and least in *hornemanni*, with *exilipes* intermediate, but direct comparisons of individual *flammea* with *exilipes* did not always permit easy differentiation. More helpful was the single black shaft streak in the undertail coverts of *exilipes*, the absence of warm color on the back (black and white vs. brown and buff streaks) and the flat-faced, tiny-billed appearance. Because of their larger size, heavier chest and much paler overall plumage, *hornemanni* were easy to distinguish. *Exilipes* are probably often indistinguishable from *flammea*.

The *exilipes* drawers appeared to contain a large series of specimens from Bering Island, all collected by Stejneger. These birds seemed universally to correspond better with *flammea*, given that the backs were fairly dark brown, the bills fairly deep, the undertail coverts often broadly streaked, and the rumps often heavily marked.

These individuals were originally labeled only as *Carduelis* sp., and nowhere on the specimen tag are they assigned to species or subspecies. This seemed to create a fair amount of confusion in examining the drawers of redpolls, since birds in the *exilipes* drawer were regularly found exhibiting all the characters of *flammea*. While the MD/DCRC recognizes that this is a difficult identification and taxonomic question, it seems that the specimens were more confusing than necessary as a result of this Bering Island sample, which at least some members (Iliff, Hafner) thought universally referred to *flammea*. Future examinations of this species group should be careful of this and use only specimens collected well within the breeding range of *exilipes* and NOT the birds from Bering Island.

h) Small Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*)

Smaller subspecies of Canada Geese (*minima*, *hutchinsii*) were briefly examined with regard to a small Canada Goose photographed on the Potomac River at Hunting Creek, VA, (almost in MD/DC) that was identified as *minima*. The photograph was shown to committee members and at least several (Cooper, Alderfer, Iliff) agreed that it represented *minima*.

Skins of *minima* supported the subspecific characters outlined by other authors, including the dark, almost purplish breast of *minima*, its relatively dark back, very small size, very short bill, and very short neck. Comparatively, *hutchinsii* (which is regular in small numbers in MD) is somewhat larger, longer-necked, longer billed, has a pale breast, and usually pale gray tertials and coverts which lend a pale-backed appearance. This held up in examination of specimens. One Maryland specimen of *hutchinsii* was noted: one immature male collected 16 Nov 1966 at Cambridge, Dorchester County, USNM #529435.

Mary Gustafson commented that *minima* is one of the most common Canada Goose subspecies in captivity, and that the Bird Banding Laboratory has had no band returns away from California, and that it does not appear to occur often as a vagrant away from its regular wintering range, not even in the interior USA. She considers it a most unlikely natural vagrant.

i) Brant (*Branta bernicla*)

Iliff, Hafner, and Gustafson were able to briefly examine specimens of *B.b. nigricans* and *B.b. bernicla*. *Bernicla* specimens differed from *nigricans* in having an incomplete white necklace (always complete on *nigricans*) and reduced white on the flanks. Backs tended to be paler and the bellies slightly less dark. Some *nigricans* collected in Washington State appeared to be intermediate, and these may be the “Gray-bellied” Melville Island Brant recently discussed by Sibley (2000) and others.

3. Inspection of the “Birds of Washington, D.C.” Museum Case

After we completed the formal Skins Workshop, members of the committee inspected the “Birds of the District of Columbia” museum case on the ground floor of the Museum of Natural History. It is believed that when this display was constructed an attempt was made to use local specimens, as much as possible. Unfortunately, there seems to be no listing or index of the exact specimen numbers included in this case. We were told that current museum management is in favor of discontinuing this display to free up the space for other exhibits. If this happens, the committee might be able to determine specimen numbers when the mounts are removed from tags that are currently hidden from view.

Reviewable MD/DCRC species noted, or other species of interest, included:

#	Common Name	Scientific Name	Comments
1	Heath Hen	<i>Tympanuchus cupido cupido</i>	Placard indicates a date of “04/10/1846”
1	Yellow Rail	<i>Coturnicops noveboracensis</i>	
1	Carolina Parakeet	<i>Conuropsis carolinensis</i>	
2	Northern Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	Specimens look “old”
1	Kirtland’s Warbler	<i>Dendroica kirtlandii</i>	“Ft. Meyer” (may be from Virginia)
2	Yellow-headed Blackbird	<i>Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus</i>	Specimens look “new”
1	Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	<i>Tyrannus forficatus</i>	Specimen looks “new”
3	White-winged Crossbills	<i>Loxia leucoptera</i>	
1	Lark Sparrow	<i>Chondestes grammacus</i>	
3	Sharp-tailed Sparrows	<i>Ammodramus nelsoni / caudacutus</i>	Two Nelson’s and one Saltmarsh
1	Bachman’s Sparrow	<i>Aimophila aestivalis</i>	
1	Bewick’s Wren	<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	
2	Red Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicaria</i>	One juvenile, one in partial breeding plumage
1	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	
1	Long-billed Curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	
1	Wood Stork	<i>Mycteria americana</i>	
1	Thick-billed Murre	<i>Uria lomvia</i>	“Seven specimens from 12/14/1986 – 1/1/1897”
1	Wilson’s Storm-Petrel	<i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>	

Comments

The Wood Stork, Long-billed Curlew, Heath Hen, Northern Shrike, Thick-billed Murre, Wilson’s Storm-Petrel, Yellow Rail, Bachman’s Sparrow, Red Phalarope, and many of the other specimens seem very likely to represent missing specimens for which the MD/DCRC had searched unsuccessfully.

4. Adjournment

The Workshop and museum display case inspection ended at approximately 2:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul O'Brien, Chair

and

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