

Operating Procedures Manual
Iowa Ornithologists' Union Records Committee
Updated October 2023

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AUTHORITY, FUNCTIONS, AND DEFINED PROCEDURES

Constitution and bylaws

- The Records Committee is a Standing Committee of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union as defined in the Constitution of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union (*Iowa Bird Life* 55:116-119, 1985). According to the Constitution, "Appointments to standing committee [sic] shall be approved by the Board of Directors." and "Standing committees shall operate under bylaws approved by the Board of Directors and not inconsistent with this constitution." (see Appendix)
- The "Bylaws of the Records Committee" were approved by the Board of Directors on 20 August 1985 (*Iowa Bird Life* 56:111, 128, 1986, see Appendix).
- The following action by the Board of Directors clarified responsibilities for the Field Checklist: "... that the Treasurer be responsible for printing, selling, and financial record keeping of the field checklist." and amended "to include all other IOU materials." (Board of Directors Meeting, 7 December 1991, *Iowa Bird Life* 62:61-62, see Appendix).
- The bylaws were clarified by the following "amendment": "...to make the Records Committee officially responsible for archiving photographs submitted to the IOU as well as records for all birds, whether officially reviewed or not." (Board of Directors Meeting, 7 December 1991, *Iowa Bird Life* 62:61-62, see Appendix).
- Item 3 under committee structure in the bylaws was formally amended to preclude any retiring member of the committee from being reappointed for at least one year (Board of Directors Meeting, 7 November 1992, *Iowa Bird Life* 63:55-59, see Appendix).

Functions

- construct a Review List of and evaluate reports of rare and unusual bird species in Iowa, including feedback to contributors and publication of an annual report
- maintain a file of records and physical evidence of birds sighted in Iowa whether or not the record is formally reviewed by the committee
- submit a new edition of the Official List of Iowa Birds to *Iowa Bird Life* at least every ten years
- prepare the *Field Checklist of Iowa Birds* for publication as needed
- promote activities that improve the quality and quantity of knowledge of Iowa birds

Committee structure and general procedures

- The committee consists of six rotating members each with a staggered six-year term and a Secretary who serves at the pleasure of the other members.
- The only required officer is the Secretary; other positions are at the discretion of the committee.
- The committee may set up its own procedures.
- The committee may, on occasion, use non-members to evaluate records, either as substitutes or as a special subcommittee. Previous members have been used for this function.
- Committee decisions other than those on records (see below) are made by majority vote (four). If all members are not present at a meeting, four votes are still required. Four members constitute a quorum.
- Committee meetings may be conducted in-person or electronically. An annual meeting will be held each fall, usually in October.

Appointment procedure

- One new member is nominated each year by the committee, and the nomination is forwarded to the Board of Directors for approval.
- Nomination is done at a committee meeting. A list of potential nominees is constructed and discussed. By secret ballot, or electronic communication to the secretary, each member provides two top choices in no special order. Four votes are required for nomination with the top vote-getter being the nominee. In the event that the nominee declines the nomination, the second-place finisher may be nominated provided he/she received at least four initial votes. If a nominee is not determined on the first ballot, the top two choices and ties are voted on until one receives at least four votes.
- Terms begin on January 1 of the year of appointment. The Secretary will forward the nomination to the Board of Directors for approval prior to the commencement of the term.
- Vacancies are filled in the same manner as expiring terms. Nominees for vacancies may be determined before or after the nominee for a full term, but by separate ballot. A vacancy may be filled at any time and appointments will be for the remaining time of the term.
- Retiring members, whether from a full or partial term, cannot succeed themselves, but may be reappointed after one year.

Role of secretary

- Serves as the administrative arm of the committee and, in the absence of an elected chair, is responsible for organizing and chairing the annual meeting
- Periodically (not less than every ten years) updates the published version of the Official Iowa Checklist
- Manages on-line application for Records Committee which includes:
 - Preparation of all Review List documentations received for committee action
 - Entry of hand-written documentations into the system (with archiving of originals)
 - Tracking of responses from committee members and getting records to final disposition

- Working with seasonal reports editors to evaluate possible additional records to go into review status
- Correspondence with outside experts as indicated or requested
- Provision of results and comments to submitters (by e-mail when possible)
- Summarizes and submits for publication an annual report of committee activities
- Works with designees who track data for annual status reviews and early-late dates
- Maintains a current working checklist of Iowa birds
- Maintains list of all documentations reviewed and the result
- Maintains paper copies of all documentations
- Archives paper copies at Iowa State University

REVIEW OF RECORDS OF BIRDS RECORDED IN IOWA

Criteria for review of a record

- For a current record, written or physical evidence (specimen, image, sound recording) must be available for review.
- For records prior to 1980, the first published listing of the species and any subsequent mention of specific records have been or will be reviewed.
- For review of newly discovered specimens in curated collections, the following information should be requested:
 - Is the specimen in question still in possession of your institution?
 - In your opinion, is the specimen identified correctly?
 - Does the information on the tag match that which is entered in your database?
- All reasonable and available evidence of Review List species as defined at the time of review will be evaluated.
- Records of any species seen at a very unusual date or location will be reviewed at the request of Field Reports Editors and/or at the discretion of the Secretary.

Classification of records

- A-S = Accepted record based on a specimen. One of the following conditions must be met: (1) The specimen currently exists in an accredited collection and the correctness of its identification and labeling verified by the curator of the collection or by a member of the Records Committee; (2) A specimen that was previously in a collection for which there is an identifiable published photograph or photograph in the IOU Photo File; or (3) A specimen that was not kept or is not in an accredited collection that was verified as to date, place, and collector and was photographed by or under the direction of a Records Committee member.
- A-P = Accepted record for which the identification is based on a diagnostic photograph. Any type of image obtained with a "camera" is included in this category. The photograph must be labeled as to date, place, and photographer. The photograph must be published or otherwise available for future review, usually in the IOU Photo File.
- A-R = Accepted record for which the identification is based on a diagnostic recording or sonogram. The recording must be labeled as to date, place, and person who obtained the recording. The recording must be available for future review, usually in the IOU Photo File.
- A-D = Accepted sight record based on written evidence. The evidence may be a published account, formal documentation, or in some other form that is acceptable to the committee. Records accompanied by suggestive but not diagnostic photographs fall into this category.
- NA = Not Accepted. The category covers all records that are not accepted in one of the other categories; i.e., the identification or location are not beyond reasonable doubt. Records in this category include records of birds that are not substantiated as being in Iowa, that do not have enough detail for committee members to make a valid judgment, that may be or probably are another species, that are probably or definitely escaped or released birds, and that are not seen long enough or well enough to confirm their identification. If the evidence definitely indicates that a bird is of a species different from that which it was purported to be, it will be designated to that species and accepted. The category Not Accepted does not necessarily mean that the identification was incorrect. It is the task of the committee to identify records of rare birds in Iowa that have been conclusively identified based upon the evidence available for review and the judgment of the committee.

Voting criteria for classification

- On first review, a record shall be Accepted if all seven committee members vote Accepted (A-S, A-P, A-R, or A-D), or if six members vote Accepted and one member is unable to participate or for some other reason fails to vote. On first review, all records with one to three votes of Not Accepted will be re-reviewed.
- A record shall be Accepted after re-review if at least six members vote Accepted.
- A re-review of a record to the genus level will follow the same procedures; i.e., the first review will be considered a new record and may be re-reviewed.
- Upon re-review, a record that has previously been Accepted, will be changed to Not Accepted if at least four members vote Not Accepted.
- The subclass of a record within the categories A-S, A-P, A-R, and A-D is determined by majority vote (four or more).
- If a record is determined to be Not Accepted to species, any committee member may request a re-review to genus level.

Submission of records to the committee for review

- Most documentations are submitted electronically through the IOU website. The Secretary and Field Reports Editors for *Iowa Bird Life* have instant access to these and are notified by e-mail when one has been submitted. Hard copy or e-mailed documents may be sent directly to the Secretary who prepares them for electronic review by entering the information into the electronic form. The original document will be archived along with a copy of the electronic submission.
- Documentations of Accidental and Casual species will automatically be reviewed. Other records will be reviewed at the request of the Field Reports Editor, CBC Compiler, or at the discretion of the Secretary. The remaining documentations will be filed by species as part of the Records Committee's file. Every attempt should be made to obtain and maintain the original copy of documentations. Field Reports Editors should also submit all photographs and recordings related to reviewable records to the Secretary so that they can be included in the record.
- Specimens should be sent to Iowa State University or other museum licensed to receive specimens.
- Any old published record that has not been previously reviewed will be reviewed as soon as it is brought to the attention of the Secretary.
- Any person may request the re-review of a record by writing a letter to the committee that indicates the reason for the request such as new evidence, new interpretation of the evidence, or interpretations of the committee based on incorrect evidence. Requests for re-review should not be done simply in an attempt to get a more favorable vote on a second try. The Secretary may deny the request for re-review by requesting that more evidence for re-review be presented. The denial may be appealed and overturned by a majority vote of the committee.

Process of review

- Each record and all documents and physical evidence associated with it will be given a unique number. Photos and other physical evidence will have a sequential number appended to the actual record number; i.e., photos for record number 2008-04 will be labeled 2008-04-1, 2008-04-2, etc. For current records (records of birds seen within a current year), the six digit record number will comprise the four digits of the year plus a dash (-) plus a two digit sequence number (01, 02, 03, etc.). Records re-reviewed at the genus level will be numbered with the original record with a preceding G; i.e., a Rufous Hummingbird, with record number 2008-43 might be re-reviewed as *Selasphorus* Hummingbird as record number 2008-G43. For old records, the first four digits will be the year that the record is first reviewed, and the last two digits will be an alphabetic sequence (AA, AB, AC, etc.).
- Any subsequent review of a record or labeling of additional evidence will use the original record number.
- The first review of any current record will be done individually by members of the committee with written votes and comments supporting the vote. Members shall not discuss the records under review with each other prior to voting, but may discuss the records with non-committee members. Members should refrain from giving their opinion about a record that is under review to non-committee members prior to completion of the review (including discussion in a public forum, such as online listservs), but they may seek additional information from such persons.
- Reviews of old records or re-reviews of current records will ordinarily be done individually with written votes and comments, but may be done at a committee meeting by secret ballot. For reviews of old records or re-reviews committee members are encouraged to discuss the merits of the records among themselves and to solicit outside opinions and new evidence.
- The criteria for acceptance of records shall be that the bird is present and identified within Iowa, and the identification is beyond reasonable doubt. The boundaries of Iowa are as described by Kent (1985, see Appendix). A bird that is identified outside of Iowa and remains in continuous view until it enters Iowa is acceptable. The "identification" may be delayed or made by other individuals based on the written and/or physical evidence. Acceptance is the collective opinion of the committee members based on such factors as what was observed and/or heard, difficulty of identification, viewing conditions, physical evidence, probability of occurrence at the particular place and time, chain of evidence (firsthand, secondhand, etc.), whether notes were made promptly, and the experience and ability of the observers. Ultimately, members should base acceptance on what they can tell about the bird itself, weighing in the possible influence of the other factors. The record does not have to be perfect, just beyond reasonable doubt.
- In general, records are evaluated as soon as committee members are notified by the Secretary that new records are available for review. Birds observed by a single person can be reviewed upon receipt of the documentation, but a reasonable amount of time should be allowed for multiple observers of the same bird to submit their documentations. In order to expedite action prior to publication of seasonal Field Reports, the Secretary may prepare records for evaluation when several documentations have been received from multiple observers. Additional documentations received after the evaluation has been completed will be added to the official record and committee members will be notified. Any committee member may request that the record be opened for re-review based upon this additional evidence.
- As records become available, they are posted by the Secretary to the IOU Records Committee website for online review by committee members. Documentations are generated dynamically from the data entered on-line by the observer or the Secretary. In some cases the original may be scanned as an image or converted from an electronic document (Word files or e-mails) and placed into an on-line template. The goal is to have all rare bird documentations entered electronically for ease in searching the information.
- A member may request a printed copy of any non-electronic documentation from the Secretary at any time.
- Votes and comments must be entered by committee members into the web forms on the Records Committee website. In the event a member is unable to do this, written votes and comments will be accepted by the Secretary for entry.

- Each record to be reviewed is entered into the IOU database by the Secretary. This database also collects the results of the vote and comments of reviewers. It serves to generate record reports that are used to give feedback to the committee members and documenters, and to provide a record summary sheet to be filed with the original and the two copies of each record.
- Feedback of the outcome of the vote along with committee comments is sent to primary documenters upon completion of review. This feedback may also be available on-line for those individuals who submitted electronic documentations.
- The Secretary is responsible for maintaining the committee membership on-line to set security on the website.

Files associated with records reviewed by the committee

- Original file of records, which includes a record summary sheet, documentations, photographs, letters, articles, request for re-review, etc. Scanned copies of supporting materials may also be stored electronically in the Committee's secure site. Records are filed sequentially by record number in acid-free folders, ten records per folder.
- Two copies of records, one filed by species in acid-free folders, and the other to be filed at some permanent safe location.
- Correspondence to the committee is filed by year. The original of letters pertaining to records are filed here, and duplicate copies are filed with each copy of the record to which they pertain.
- Photos submitted in support of a record will be named using the record number assigned to the documentation. Although most photos are now submitted as digital images, any print media will be scanned and saved digitally. The original photo will be filed in the archives. Digital images will be printed as a part of the documentation for archive purposes.
- The pre-2000 IOU Photo File contains the "master" copy of photos that pertain to records. It may contain more photos of a bird than were used for review. Photos reviewed by the committee are also filed with each copy of the record. Since 2000 and the proliferation of good digital photography, all photos are filed with the record and a separate photo file is not maintained

Expectations of Records Committee members relating to review of records

- Members are expected to document any bird that they find or go to see that will or might be reviewed by the committee.
- Members are expected to attend all meetings of the committee and to notify the Secretary at the earliest possible moment of any conflicts in date or time.
- Records may be reviewed at any time, but should be reviewed within three weeks of the close of the season in which the bird(s) was seen.
- All Not Accepted (NA) votes need to be explained in comments.
- Upon re-review, each reviewer should comment on the pros and cons for acceptance brought up by the previous review. In other words, reviewers should not repeat their original analysis, but rather address opposing points.
- Comments should be directed toward the birds, not the observers, except in extreme circumstances when there is a serious problem that needs to be pointed out to the observer.
- Comments on the age, sex, and plumage are highly appropriate if not addressed by the observer.
- Well-substantiated Accepted records need no comment. The lack of a comment indicates a well-described bird that is beyond reasonable doubt.
- Borderline acceptable records likely to receive a mixed vote should have a comment that explains the reason for acceptance.
- Comments should be presentable to documenters and others.

BIRD RECORDS NOT REVIEWED BY THE COMMITTEE

Documentations not reviewed by the committee

- These are filed by species. They date back to the 1970s when the process of documenting rare sightings came into vogue. Most of the documentations forms that have been received by the Field Reports Editors are in this file. On-line documentations are filed electronically by the year submitted.

Original field reports submitted by contributors

- These seasonal reports are filed in packets by year and season. They date back to the early 1970s. They are occasionally used to check on birds reported in the Field Reports. They contain more information than that which is published in the Field Reports section of *Iowa Bird Life*. The seasonal reports are periodically archived by the editors in the Special Collections at IowaStateUniversity.

IOU RECORDS FILE

Subject matter

- A record consists of all evidence related to the identification of a reported bird
- The file contains written documentation from one or more persons, photographs (slides, prints, negatives, digital images), videotapes, movie films, and digital video, along with sound recordings on various formats.
- Photographs maintained by the Records Committee pertain to rarities and have either been submitted to the Field Reports Editors with field reports or submitted to the Secretary as physical evidence for documentation purposes. Some have been acquired in the process of Records Committee review of old records.

File structure and maintenance

- Most photos received are digital images which are attached to the documentation they are supporting.

- Photos received as prints, slides, or negatives will be digitized and included in the record. Physical images will be labeled with the record number, date, location, and photographer and will be archived with a paper copy of the entire record.
- Digital photos are labeled with the record number and placed on the IOU website and should be printed on photographic paper for archiving.

LISTS OF IOWA BIRDS

Official Checklist of Iowa Birds

- An updated complete list of Iowa birds is published in *Iowa Bird Life* periodically as changes warrant, at least every ten years.
- Changes in the list are based on the actions of the committee on individual records, committee decisions on the status of species, published information on nesting status, and on changes in nomenclature and taxonomy made by the American Ornithological Society and American Birding Association.
- The list is prepared for publication by the Secretary or some other designated individual(s).

Field Checklist of Iowa Birds

- The Field Checklist will be updated as the current supply diminishes or major changes are indicated.
- The Records Committee will work in conjunction with the Publications Committee to achieve the printing of this field checklist.
- Expenses related to the printing and distribution of this checklist will be separate from the normal operations of the Records Committee and will be referred to the Treasurer of the organization.
- The Records Committee will maintain a printable checklist of the birds of Iowa on the IOU website.

ANNUAL REPORT

- When records have been completed for a year, the Secretary will prepare an annual report to be published in *Iowa Bird Life* which will be reviewed by at least one member of the committee prior to publication.
- The annual report will explain the circumstances and rationale of all Not Accepted records.

ARCHIVES

Iowa State University Special Collections

- Records Committee material prior to 2000 has been archived at Iowa State University
- File structure of pre-2000 photos
 - Most of the file consists of 35mm color transparencies (slides) and 3.5 x 5 inch color prints. These are filed in notebooks by species in archival quality 8.5 x 11 inch plastic protector sheets. There are some black and white prints and larger color prints, which are also kept in plastic protector sheets.
 - Most of the negatives are in the form of 35mm strips, and have been generated when slides were copied and prints made for use by the Records Committee in reviewing records, or when the photographs were to be sent to the Regional Editor of American Birds or used for publication in *Iowa Bird Life*. These strips are kept in 8.5 x 11 inch archival quality plastic protector sheets in a notebook. They are filed in the chronological order in which they are obtained with labels printed from the computer index file (see below).
 - When a new photograph is received, it is logged in by hand in an accession notebook, which serves as a backup in case the computer file is lost. A new photograph is one or more photos of a single bird by a single photographer. Each entry contains the accession number, species, date, place, contributor, and contributor's address. Accession numbers are assigned sequentially in the form P-####.
 - The accessioning information is entered into a computer file. The number and type of photos are entered. Labels are printed from the computer file and placed on the photographs before they are filed in the IOU Photo File.
- The Secretary will periodically transport original documentations and photographs to Iowa State University
- Field Reports Editors will archive original seasonal field reports in the Special Collections

Electronic Archival Procedures

- The Secretary will generate hard copy of each documentation and any related photos for the paper file. Copies are maintained as outlined above.
- All photographs will be printed on photographic paper with appropriate labeling. Slides and prints will be stored as described above.
- At the end of each season, PDF (portable document file) files are created for each documentation, voting summary, and annual report. These are burned to CD or DVD with one copy remaining with the Secretary and the other to be archived at ISU.
- As technology changes, the Secretary may be required to convert/upgrade these files and provide ISU with a newer version.

RECORDS COMMITTEE AWARD

- The Records Committee Award was created to acknowledge extensive support and contribution to the knowledge of Iowa birds
- Any member may make a nomination when he/she becomes aware of an extraordinary contributor
- The award is based upon a majority favorable vote by the committee
- The award will be presented at either the spring or fall meeting of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

APPENDIX

Items from Constitution and Board of Directors Minutes

1985. Constitution of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union. *Iowa Bird Life* 55:116-119 (from pages 117-118)

1992. Board of Directors Meeting. *Iowa Bird Life* 62:61-63 (from pages 61-62)

Sickels, S.A. 1993. Board of Directors Meeting. *Iowa Bird Life* 63:55-59 (from pages 55-56)

Kent, T. H. 1985. When is a bird in Iowa? *Iowa Bird Life* 55:79-80.