

# 31st Report of the **ABA** Checklist Committee 2020

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## Common Wood-Pigeon, Pallas's Gull, Pallas's Grasshopper-Warbler, and Tricolored Munia added to the Checklist

This is the 31st published report of the ABA Checklist Committee (hereafter, ABA-CLC or “the Committee”), covering deliberations during 2020. 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*. A secondary role includes reviewing and revising ABA Codes covering ease of observation in the ABA Area.

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 reelected or newly elected members. Members may be reelected after their first four-year term, but they must take at least one year off after two consecutive terms. Since our previous report (Pyle et al. 2019), the terms of Andrew Kratter and David Sibley were up after four years of service. Both members agreed to serve and were voted to serve an additional four years of service. Thus, the ABA-CLC membership will remain unchanged between 2020 and 2021.

For each record under consideration, members vote to accept or not accept a species 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 of a record automatically results in the addition of the species 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 the dissenting (if 7–1) or any accepting (if 3–5, 2–6, 1–7) member. Records can circulate for up to three rounds, at which point an 8–0 or 7–1 tally is needed for acceptance of the species to the *Checklist*.

### Records reviewed by the ABA-CLC in 2020

In 2020, the ABA-CLC voted on records of six species that would represent additions to the ABA Area, of which four were accepted and added to the *ABA Checklist* and two were not accepted. Accounts for all six species are provided here. In addition, and according to *ABA Checklist* convention, all taxonomic and nomenclatural 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. 2020, 2021) resulted in one addition (Mexican Duck, *Anas diazi*) and one removal (Northwestern Crow, *Corvus caurinus*) of species from the *ABA Checklist* on taxonomic grounds, due to a split from Mallard (*A. platyrhynchos*) and a lump with American Crow (*C. brachyrhynchos*), respectively. The common name of two species and scientific names of seven species on the *ABA Checklist* have also been revised, and linear sequences among and within several

## CHANGES IN BRIEF:

### Species Added Based on Established Populations or New Distributional Records

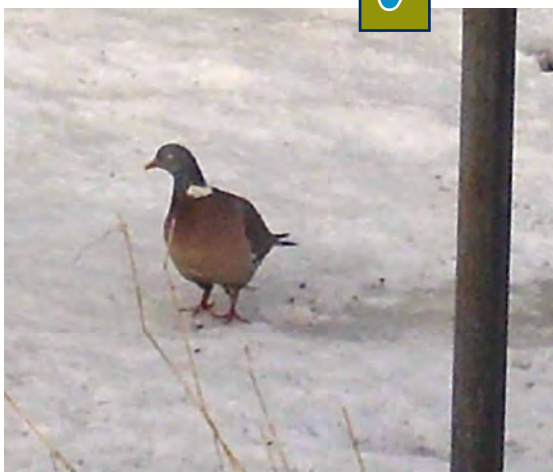
☐ **Common Wood-Pigeon**  
(*Columba palumbus*),  
ABA Code 5

☐ **Pallas's Gull**  
(*Ichthyaeetus ichthyaeetus*),  
ABA Code 5

☐ **Pallas's Grasshopper-Warbler**  
(*Helopsaltes certhiola*),  
ABA Code 5

☐ **Tricolored Munia**  
(*Lonchura malacca*),  
ABA Code 5

**Figure 1 • Common Wood-Pigeon.**  
5 Sep 2019. La Romaine, Québec.  
Photos © Denis Desjardins.







families were re-ordered, as discussed later in this report. The addition of four species reported here has increased the ABA Checklist to 1,120 species.

### New Species Accepted to the ABA Area

**Common Wood-Pigeon** (*Columba palumbus*)—ABA-CLC Record #2020-02 (8-0; May 2020). The CLC voted on a record of a Common Wood-Pigeon recorded at La Romaine, Quebec from 5–13 May 2019 (Fig. 1), following acceptance by the Quebec Bird Records Committee in Oct. 2019. The CLC had no issues with the identification, but some concern was expressed by members about the wood-pigeon's natural occurrence (i.e., its possibly being an escapee or a ship-assisted vagrant). Photographs were not detailed enough to determine the age of the bird or assess it for signs of captivity. However, Common Wood-Pigeon numbers have increased and expanded northward in Europe over the past century (Cramp and Simmons 1985), they are now regularly recorded in Iceland, especially in spring (eBird 2020), and consideration of these distributional changes helped result in unanimous acceptance by the CLC on the first round. There is a previous report from Allan Brooks of a Common Wood-Pigeon aboard a ship crossing the Atlantic toward Newfoundland in May 1935 (Gosselin 1992), but it is unknown whether or not it remained aboard as the ship entered waters of the ABA Area. The record in Quebec presumably refers to the nominate subspecies of Europe, *C. p. palumbus*. Following Clements et al. (2019), the Common Wood-Pigeon is listed after Rock Pigeon (*C. livia*) in the ABA Checklist sequence. It is given ABA Code 5.

**Pallas's Gull** (*Ichthyaeetus ichthyaeetus*)—ABA-CLC Record #2020-01 (8-0; May 2020). The ABA-CLC voted unanimously to accept a record of a Pallas's Gull from Shemya Island, Alaska 2–4 May 2019 (Fig. 2), following acceptance by the Alaska Checklist Committee in Nov 2019. It was an adult in definitive alternate plumage, leaving no questions about its identification. The bird perished on the last day of observation and was salvaged for the collection at the University of Alaska Museum (UAM 43,000), Fairbanks, where it was sexed as a female and determined to lack signs of captivity or ship assistance. Although only breeding east to central Asia, Pallas's Gull winters as far south as southern India; it has become a near-annual vagrant to Japan (Brazil 2018); and it exhibits east–west trajectories during migration (Liu et al. 2018). Following Clements et al. (2019), the Pallas's Gull is listed after Franklin's Gull (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) in the ABA Checklist sequence. It is given ABA Code 5.

**Pallas's Grasshopper-Warbler** (*Helopsaltes certhiola*)—ABA-CLC Record #2020-05 (8-0; May 2020). Following acceptance by the Alaska Checklist Committee in Apr 2020, the ABA-CLC voted unanimously to accept a record of a first-fall (formative) Pallas's Grasshopper-Warbler from Gambell, Alaska 9–12 Sep 2019 (Fig. 3). The identification was fully supported by Asian bird experts



**Figure 2 • Pallas's Gull.** 3 May 2019. Shemya I., Alaska.

Photo © Richard A. Fischer.





**Figure 3 • Pallas's Grasshopper-Warbler.** 10 Sep 2019. Gambell, Alaska.  
Photo © Brad Benter.

Peter Kennerley and Chris Goodie, who also noted no signs of hybridism with Middendorff's Grasshopper-Warbler (*H. ochotensis*); hybridization has been reported from the lower Amur River basin of Siberia (Kennerley and Pearson 2010). Although subspecies could not be determined, the bird's appearance was consistent with the northernmost breeding subspecies and longest-distance migrant, *H. c. rubescens*. Nomenclature follows that of the American Ornithological Society (Chesser et al. 2020), who changed this genus from *Locustella* to *Helopsaltes*; and, following Clements et al. (2019), the Pallas's Grasshopper-Warbler is listed prior to Middendorff's Grasshopper-Warbler as the first species of Family Locustellidae in the ABA Checklist sequence. It is given ABA Code 5.

**Tricolored Munia** (*Lonchura malacca*)—ABA-CLC Record #2018–03 (8-0; May 2020). Tricolored Munia is a species of the Indian subcontinent and southern China that has been introduced in the West Indies and Venezuela. Between 1999 and 2015 there have been at least six records of Tricolored Munia in Florida, with at least five records from the Dry Tortugas (e.g., Fig. 4). Following acceptance by the Florida Orni-

thological Society Records Committee (FOSRC) in 2014 (Greenlaw 2016), the ABA-CLC considered adding Tricolored Munia to the ABA Checklist but preferred to await more documentation that the closest populations of the species, in Cuba, were established according to ABA standards (Pranty et al. 2014). Tricolored Munia had been considered abundant near Havana since the 1990s (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000); and subsequent data from eBird (eBird 2020) indicate that the species had become abundant in western Cuba as well,

with many recent checklist counts of over 100 individuals. As such, the current ABA-CLC had no problem considering Cuban populations of this prodigious species as established, and unanimously accepted it as a vagrant of an exotic species to the ABA Checklist. The FORSC had established that it was extremely unlikely that caged munias may have been transported by Cuban refugees (Greenlaw 2016), and evidence of the formerly conspecific Chestnut Munia's (*L. aticapilla*) traveling between Hawaiian Islands (Pyle and Pyle 2017) indicated that individuals from introduced populations of this genus are capable of crossing large expanses of water. Following Clements et al. (2019), the

Tricolored Munia is listed after Scaly-breasted Munia (*L. punctulata*) in the ABA Checklist sequence. It is given ABA Code 5.

### Species Not Accepted as Additions to the ABA Area

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** (*Accipiter nisus*)—ABA-CLC Record #2018–02 (4-4, Sep 2019; 5-3, June 2020; 6-2, Aug 2020). At the request of the observer, the ABA-CLC considered and decided to circulate a report of a Eurasian Sparrowhawk from Adak Island, Alaska, 21 Sep 2016 (Fig. 5; see Pyle et al. 2019). The record includes two photographs of the upperparts, partially obscured by vegetation, and an analysis by the observer of the bird's size that concluded that it was too small for a Northern Goshawk (*A. gentilis*), the most likely contending species. The Alaska Checklist Committee deliberated over this record in 2017 and considered it likely correct but, despite support of the identification from Eurasian raptor experts, considered the documentation not substantiated enough to add the species to the state list. Despite slowly gaining support through three rounds of voting, the record failed to be accepted to the ABA Checklist by the ABA-CLC on the third and final round, by a 6-2 vote. Supporters of the record pointed to several field marks that, alone or when combined, eliminated Northern Goshawk (see

**Figure 4 • Tricolored Munia.** 17 Dec 2013. Dry Tortugas, Florida.  
Photo © Judd Patterson.



Fig. 5), while those not in support of the record agreed that Northern Goshawk was eliminated but did not find the documentation sufficient for a first ABA Area record.

**Small-billed Elaenia** (*Elaenia parvirostris*)—ABA-CLC Record #2020-04 (6-2, Jun 2020; 5-3, Aug. 2020; 5-3, Sep. 2020). In Mar 2020, the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee (IORC), after lengthy debate, accepted a record of an elaenia recorded in Chicago during 17–22 April 2012 (Fig. 6) as a Small-billed Elaenia. The debate concerned the elimination of White-crested Elaenia (*E. albiceps*), which can be extremely difficult to distinguish from Small-billed. Comments to the IORC from expert reviewers familiar with this identification in South America generally supported the identification of Small-billed Elaenia, although one or two reviewers were equivocal, indicating that a White-crested Elaenia in fresh plumage could possibly match what was documented (see Fig. 6). As with the Eurasian Sparrowhawk, the dissenting CLC members felt that the identification was very likely correct, but they did not feel it was sufficiently determinate to add the species to the ABA Checklist.

### AOS Taxonomic and Nomenclatural Changes Affecting the ABA Checklist

The 61st supplement to the AOS Check-list of North and Middle American Birds (Chesser et al. 2020) presents changes that affect the

naming and placement of species on the ABA Checklist. As a matter of course, the ABA-CLC adopts all such changes. For details, see Michael L. P. Retter's "Checklist Redux, v. 2020," beginning on p. 52 of this issue. We have also revised the name of McCown's Longspur (MCLO) to Thick-billed Longspur (TBLO) following Chesser et al. (2021).

### ABA Code Updates

The ABA has developed a coding system to reflect the abundance of a species in the ABA Area and the ease of detecting it (Pranty et al. 2008; and see [tinyurl.com/ABA-codes](http://tinyurl.com/ABA-codes)). The codes range from 1 (most common and easily seen) to 5 (five or fewer records in the ABA Area) and 6 (presumed extinct). ABA codes are used by eBird in its algorithms for rare bird notifications and are relied upon by many birders. No changes to ABA codes were proposed or adopted by the ABA-CLC in 2020; the four species added to the list all received ABA Code 5 (as previously mentioned).

### Four-letter Alpha Codes

In 2017, at the request of ABA members, four-letter alpha codes were added to the ABA Checklist. Alpha codes are abbreviations of avian common 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 for eBird data entry, and the codes employed by both the ABA Checklist and eBird for North American birds follow those maintained by the Institute for Bird Populations ([tinyurl.com/IBP-codes](http://tinyurl.com/IBP-codes)), which are updated each year in July following release of the AOS Check-list supplement. Codes for the five species newly added to the ABA Checklist are as follows: Mexican Duck, MEDU; Common Wood-Pigeon, COWP; Pallas's Gull, PAGU; Pallas's Grasshopper-Warbler, PAGW; and Tricolored Munia, TRMU. Only two changes to alpha codes on the ABA Checklist were affected by changes by the AOS (Chesser et al. 2020, 2021): the code for Warbling White-eye (formerly Japanese White-eye) was changed from JAWWE to WAWWE and the code for Thick-billed Longspur (formerly McCown's Longspur) was changed from MCLO to TBLO. In addition, a code-assignment error occurred with the addition of Yellow-chevroned Parakeet by Pyle et al. (2019); it is now changed from YCHP to YCPA (see [tinyurl.com/IBP-codes](http://tinyurl.com/IBP-codes) for details).

### Anticipated/Possible Future Votes and Other Decisions

At the end of 2020 the ABA-CLC was in the process of reviewing four species, all of which had been accepted by local bird records committees: Northern Giant-Petrel (*Macronectes halli*) based on a record from Washington on 8 Dec 2019 (Fig. 7); Blue-and-white Swallow based on a record from Texas on 20–21 July 2020; Hooded Crane (*Grus monacha*) based on a record from Alaska in late September 2020; and Mitred Parakeet (*Psittacara mitratus*), which was accepted by the Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee as being an established exotic species. Mitred Parakeet had already been accepted by the AOS to their Check-list. The Alaska Checklist Committee also considered adding Naumann's Thrush (*Turdus naumanni*) to the Alaska Checklist (see p. 60 in this issue), following its split from Dusky Thrush (*T. eunomus*) by Chesser et al. (2020), but the species was not added over concerns of hybridism with Dusky Thrush. No CLC member has yet requested this species be considered. Following non-acceptance of 1987–1994 and 2017 Variable Hawk (*Geranoaetus polyosoma*) records by the Colorado and New Mexico Bird Records Committees, respectively, the ABA-CLC did not consider adding this species to the ABA Checklist.

The ABA-CLC considered a proposal from an ABA member to re-establish a supplemental list for species of unknown origin that could be acceptable, but there was little

**Figure 5 • Possible Eurasian Sparrowhawk.**

21 Sep 2016. Adak I., Alaska.

Photo © Frank Haas.



**Figure 6 • Possible Small-billed Elaenia.**

21 April 2012. Chicago, Illinois.

Photo © Ken Koontz.





**Figure 7 • Possible Northern Giant-Petrel. 6 Dec 2019. Pacific Co., Oregon. Photo © Zed Blue.**



interest among committee members to do this. A reminder that the ABA-CLC only functions to maintain the ABA Checklist and that decisions on the countability of species in states, provinces, and other ABA jurisdictions fall under the guise of the ABA Records Standards and Ethics Committee (RSEC). The CLC was also asked for its opinion on changing eponymous and other Common (English) Names, and committee members were unanimous in supporting and following the AOS's North American Classification Committee for all nomenclatural changes, as stated in the bylaws of the ABA-CLC.

## Corrigendum

The specimen number for the skin of the Dark-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus melacoryphus*), at the Louisiana State University Museum of Natural Science, listed in our previous report (*Birding*, Dec 2019, p. 37), is #164956; the number listed (#23733) refers to tissue samples from this specimen.

## 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: Quebec Bird Records Committee (Samuel Denault), Alaska Checklist Committee (ABA-CLC member Aaron Lang), Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee (ABA-CLC member Andy Kratter), Illinois Ornithological Records Committee (Geoff Williamson), Washington Bird Records Committee (Brad Waggoner and Matt Bartels), Texas Bird Records Committee (Eric Carpenter), Colorado Bird Records Committee (Mark Peterson), and New Mexico Bird Records Committee (Jodhan Fine and Sandy Williams). We also thank all of the photographers listed in this report for permission to publish their images, and we are grateful to the many ABA members and other birders who contributed or posted photographs of these birds to help with the ABA-CLC's evaluations.

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For more detailed analysis, be sure to check out the expanded online version of this article: [aba.org/nab](http://aba.org/nab)

## 31st Report of the ABA Checklist Committee–2020

### Figure Captions

Figure captions were omitted from the printed report in error but have been appended to this pdf version.

**Figure 1. Common Wood-Pigeon** (*Columba palumbus*), La Romaine, Quebec, 9 May 2019. Although photographs are not detailed enough to determine age (formative or definitive basic plumage) or assess evidence of past captivity, the ABA-CLC had no problem confirming this easily identified species and considering it most likely a natural vagrant, as based on documented increases in range and numbers of this migratory species in northern Europe and Iceland. The dark and bold coloration to the head and breast suggest a male, although sex is best left undetermined. The record presumably refers to the nominate subspecies of Europe, *C. p. palumbus*. Photo by © Adam Desjardins.

**Figure 2. Pallas's Gull** (*Ichthyiaetus ichthyiaetus*), Shemya Island, Alaska, 3 May, 2019. Pallas's Gull shows a distinct wing pattern and striking head and bill colors in definitive alternate plumage. As in most gulls, males and females are similar; unfortunately this individual perished on 4 May but was salvaged for the specimen collection at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks, where it was sexed as a female by internal organs and determined to lack signs of captivity or ship assistance. Photo by © Richard A. Fischer.

**Figure 3. Pallas's Grasshopper-Warbler** (*Helopsaltes certhiola*), Gambell, Alaska, 10 September 2019. Features that separate this species from Middendorff's Grasshopper-Warbler (*H. ochotensis*) and other Palearctic warblers include reddish-brown to reddish crown and upperparts with distinct and bold black streaks, warm buff to reddish-brown margins to the greater coverts and tertials, blackish centers to the uppertail coverts, prominent supercilium extending to the nape, and unmarked undertail coverts. Although subspecies could not be determined, the bird's appearance was consistent with the northernmost breeding subspecies and longest distance migrant, *H. c. rubescens*. The yellowish to yellowish-buff wash to the face and underparts, as well as the replaced formative scapulars and upperwing greater coverts contrasting with the more-worn juvenile primary coverts and remiges, indicate a first-fall bird in formative plumage. Photo by © Brad Benter

**Figure 4. Tricolored Munia** (*Lonchura malacca*), Dry Tortugas National Park, Florida, on 17 December 2013. One of several records from the Dry Tortugas and elsewhere in southern Florida in 1999-2015, the ABA-CLC agreed with the Florida Ornithology Society Records Committee that this was a natural vagrant from established, introduced populations in Cuba. The bold plumage indicates it has molted out of juvenile plumage and is an adult or first-year bird, both of which can achieve definitive appearance, plumages in which sexes are similar. This species is monotypic. Photo by © Judd Patterson.

**Figure 5.** The ABA-CLC was divided on this record of a **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** (*Accipiter nisus*) from Adak Island, Alaska, on Sept. 21, 2016. The eastern Asian subspecies of Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*A. n. nisosimilis*) differs from other subspecies in having a bolder supercilium

and face pattern, features that make it resemble the much larger Northern Goshawk (*A. gentilis*) to a greater extent. It is an adult in definitive basic plumage. CLC members supporting the record pointed to the combination of bold white tips to many scapulars, a feature found in juvenile but not adult Northern Goshawks, and the peach wash to the throat, not found in Northern Goshawks. In addition to these two features, the small-headed profile is typical of Eurasian Sparrowhawk but not of Northern Goshawk. However, despite efforts by the observer to calculate the size of the bird from surrounding objects, it could not be determined with confidence; two CLC members, although agreeing that it was not a Northern Goshawk, felt that better documentation all around was needed to establish a first ABA Area record of Eurasian Sparrowhawk. *Photo by © Frank Haas.*

**Figure 6.** This elaenia, photographed in Chicago, Illinois, 21 April 2012, was circulated by the ABA CLC as a **Small-billed Elaenia** (*Elaenia parvirostris*), following extensive research on the identification of this bird and acceptance as such by the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee. The only contending species is the White-crested Elaenia (*E. albiceps*), of which subspecies *E. a. chilensis* shows similar range to Short-billed Elaenia, both of which are also long-distance austral migrants in South America. One of the primary features to separate these elaenias is the presence in Short-billed of white tips to the lowest row of lesser coverts (forming a third wing bar) as evident in this individual. However, observers familiar with these two species indicated that White-crested Elaenia can show this feature in fresh plumage. Assuming molts and plumages are similar in White-crested and Short-billed elaenias, the very worn juvenile upperwing primary coverts (as shown in this photo) and retained juvenile inner two primaries and outer two secondaries, contrasting with the fresher remaining wing feathers, indicates an individual in worn formative plumage (see Pyle et al. 2015). Despite worn plumage favoring Small-billed Elaenia, three CLC members would have preferred additional supporting documentation in the form of DNA or vocalizations before accepting Small-billed Elaenia to the ABA Checklist. *Photo by © Ken Koontz.*

**Figure 7.** At the end of 2020 the ABA-CLC was in the process of reviewing records of four species, all of which had been accepted by local bird records committees, including one of this **Northern Giant-Petrel** (*Macronectes halli*), photographed by a fisherman off Ocean Park, Pacific County, Washington, 8 Dec 2019. *Photo by © Zed Blue.*