



# Racial identification and assessment in Britain: a report from the RIACT subcommittee

*Chris Kehoe, on behalf of BBRC*



Male 'Black-headed Wagtail' *Motacilla flava feldegg*. Dan Powell

Throughout the past 100 years or so, interest in the racial identification of bird species has blown hot and cold. Many of today's familiar species were first described during the nineteenth century and, as interest in new forms grew, many collectors became increasingly eager to describe and name new species. Inevitably, many 'species' were described based on minor variations among the specimens collected. As attitudes towards what constituted a species changed, many of these newly described species were subsequently amalgamated as subspecies, or races (the terms 'subspecies' and 'race' are treated as synony-

mous in this paper), of a single, wide-ranging species. The ground-breaking *Handbook of British Birds* (Witherby *et al.* 1938–41) was the first popular work that attempted a detailed treatment of racial variation within the species it covered and promoted a positive approach to the identification of many races. However, as the emphasis on collecting specimens was replaced by the development of field identification skills, interest in the racial identification of species waned.

Since the 1970s, and particularly in the last ten years, improvements in the quality and portability of optics, photographic equipment

and sound-recording equipment have enabled birders to record much more detail about the appearance of birds in the field, and this has been an important factor in a major resurgence of interest in racial identification. At the same time, new techniques and approaches in taxonomy and systematics have promoted many forms previously thought of as races to full species, which has created additional interest from birdwatchers.

This article discusses BBRC's approach to the recording and assessment of rare races of species that would otherwise not fall within the Committee's remit. Some of these races (for example 'Siberian Stonechat' *Saxicola torquatus maurus*) have traditionally been assessed as rarities, but a complete list of the races that qualify as national rarities has not previously been published. We hope that this document will clarify what has sometimes been a rather grey area, and also that it will explain some recently published decisions relating to certain forms.

### What is RIACT?

Many extralimital races of common species have already occurred in Britain, and doubtless more will be discovered over time. Furthermore, some taxa currently treated as races might eventually be promoted to species status, and this in particular prompted BBRC to set up RIACT (Race Identification Amongst Changing Taxonomy) in 1999, a subcommittee with the aim of establishing criteria for the identification and assessment of races. Initially, work focused primarily on rare species already being considered by BBRC, such as the races of Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica* and Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*. Some of the work undertaken on these forms has already been published in BBRC annual reports, and it is intended that more will follow. RIACT's work has now expanded to review those races of commoner British species which are considered to be rare in a British context, or those which may be elevated to species status by the BOURC's Taxonomic Sub-committee, and this paper stems from that research.

### Scope

It is not the intention to review all of the rare races that could potentially occur in Britain. Those discussed below include all those that have previously been recorded in Britain (and are included on the British List), and a wide

selection of others suspected of occurring but not yet confirmed. Any races not listed here are either deemed too common to be assessed at national level, or would represent a 'first' for Britain. Appendix 1 lists several races that, although recorded only rarely, are assumed to be too regular to warrant the label of rarity; in most cases, they are just too subtle to be detected and therefore presumably go unnoticed. A current list of accepted species and races on the British List up to 1st April 2006 can be found in Dudley *et al.* (2006) or online at <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1474-919X.2006.00603.x>

As intimated above, BBRC is also interested in the races of a number of rarities that may be diagnosable in the field.

### Diagnosability

By their very nature, races tend to be subtle entities, but the degree of subtlety varies. At one extreme are distinctive races that seem to be as easily recognised as many full species (and in some cases these may ultimately be elevated to species level). At the other extreme are races that seem to be so poorly defined that it is questionable whether their status is justified, let alone whether their identity might be reliably confirmed if they were to occur out of range. Moreover, some individuals of a particular race may be readily diagnosed while other individuals may be effectively indistinguishable from other races. It is often the case that we simply do not know how, or even whether it is possible, to diagnose individuals of a particular race accurately in a vagrant context. Factors such as individual variation, intergrades and aberrant forms have not yet been fully researched in many cases.

Diagnosability is the key issue when it comes to recording rare races; more specifically, the degree of confidence with which an individual showing features suggestive of a particular race can be identified as *being* of that race is crucial. Historically, BBRC reported records of rare races as 'showing characters of' the race in question. Implicit within that statement is a caveat that although the individual showed all or most of the characters of the race in question, and no contrary indications, there was still an element of doubt as to whether it truly originated from the geographical area of the race in question. The degree to which such a caveat was required varied. Although we do not propose to continue

using this caveat for individual races, we will use it as a holding category for some difficult 'groups' where individuals cannot currently be assigned to an individual race with confidence (e.g. 'Eastern Lesser Whitethroats' *Sylvia curruca*).

When considering racial identification, the 'Geographical Variation' section in *BWP* makes essential reading. Many identification papers and species or family monographs provide further guidance. For passerines, Svensson (1992) provides an unparalleled guide to European passerine identification in the hand and for many species presents in-depth treatment of racial identification, although it is interesting to note how the treatment of certain forms differs from that found in, for example, *BWP*. In this report, we have listed (in parentheses at the end of the text for each species group) some of the key references available for many of the races discussed.

A word of caution about descriptions in the literature is that when describing differences between races, there is a (perfectly understandable) tendency for authors to concentrate on those characters that typify, or enable separation of, different populations. They rarely touch on the extent of variation, or the degree of overlap with other races, which are key considerations when examining a potentially extralimital vagrant. The degree of individual variation and the extent to which this, or intergrades between adjacent races, may produce something that could masquerade as a vagrant must always be a consideration. BBRC will continue the approach, already in place for some races, of accepting only 'classic' individuals (e.g. of 'American Herring Gull' *Larus argentatus smithsonianus*). We freely acknowledge that in continuing with this policy, some valid records may be found not proven, but we feel that we can accept only those individuals that clearly fall outside the range of variability of the commoner races.

In view of the uncertainties implicit in the recording of rare races, BBRC intends to introduce a system of 'informal reporting', so that observers who suspect that they have encountered an extralimital form can submit information to the Committee without fear of the record being rejected. Access to such informal reports will prove a valuable resource to RIACT as we strive to develop working criteria for identification and assessment. In some cases,

such submissions may ultimately be accepted as the form in question, in others they may reinforce the need to take a cautious approach. Observers will be kept informed of any progress made on particular issues, and we recognise that dialogue with observers is in itself a valuable tool as we try to establish whether certain forms can be effectively identified and recorded.

Of course, work on the development of criteria for judging claims should not be left to BBRC alone, and we encourage observers to help us in clarifying diagnosability issues; we much prefer to receive submissions where the observers have presented a well-researched case to support their conclusions.

*The evidence required – field notes, photographs, sound recordings, biometrics, ringing recoveries and tangible proof of origins*

For many of the races listed here, details are given of the type of evidence required to support claims. To save endless repetition, it can be assumed that one or more of the three basic types of evidence (a detailed field description, good photographs and a sound recording) is a minimum requirement in most cases. The value of examining birds in the hand will be apparent from the stated requirements for biometrics in several of the following accounts – although even for species where biometrics are useful in helping to separate races, some or even many individuals may fall into a zone of overlap. Claims of a rare race which originate from a trapped bird should be accompanied by full biometrics, similar to those required for a national rarity, ideally checked by another competent ringer and accompanied by in-hand photographs. If any body feathers are dislodged during the ringing process, these should be preserved in case molecular analysis is possible or relevant. It is important to emphasise that deliberate removal of feather samples requires a Country Agency licence, and ringers should contact the BTO Ringing Unit in the first instance. In some cases, a ringing recovery will be the most likely way to confirm a suspected vagrant race. This is often referred to below by the phrase 'tangible proof of origins', although there may be instances where molecular analysis of feather samples (for example using stable isotope analysis) can also confirm the origins of a bird, so this also qualifies as 'tangible proof'. A table which summarises the evidence required for both formal and informal submissions can

be downloaded at [www.bbrc.org.uk/riactsummarytable.htm](http://www.bbrc.org.uk/riactsummarytable.htm)

### Updates

This list and the details it contains are not set in stone. Some forms currently considered safely diagnosable may be found to be more complex and difficult to separate than imagined, while new research may indicate that other forms thought difficult or impossible to identify are actually diagnosable after all, at least in some cases. This paper will be available online at the BBRC website ([www.bbrc.org.uk](http://www.bbrc.org.uk)), and regular

updates to individual species accounts will be made there as appropriate; periodic reviews will be published in *BB* from time to time, once a significant mass of new information is available. We very much welcome informed comments that may lead us to adjust our approach to the recording of these forms. BBRC will consider any claims of the races described below from 1950 onwards, but will require the level of detail outlined here (and in the table on our website) to ensure acceptance and publication in the annual report.

## Races to be considered by BBRC

### Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus columbianus*, 'Whistling Swan'

There are two accepted records of this North American race. Claims must contain precise details (ideally photographs) of the amount of yellow on the bill, preferably including the underside. We have no evidence that European and West Siberian *C. c. bewickii* ever shows a bill pattern matching that of classic *columbianus*: all-black except for a small yellow spot in front of the eye similar in size to, but often more elongated than, the eye.

Intergradation between *bewickii* and *columbianus* has reportedly occurred in Siberia since at least the early 1970s, although the extent of this is unclear. A few reports of birds with apparently intermediate bill patterns in Europe and elsewhere may refer to intergrades, or perhaps just extreme variation within *bewickii*. Only birds with bills which match the classic *columbianus* pattern are likely to be acceptable, but we welcome images of potential intergrades as informal reports. Minor structural differences between the two forms exist, but individual variation means that this is at best a supporting feature. A potential pitfall concerns birds with mud on the bill, reducing the apparent amount of yellow.

Escapes of *columbianus*, and also the larger, but essentially similar Trumpeter Swan *C. buccinator*, have occurred. Descriptions should indicate how the latter was excluded through reference to size, structure and bare-part (face pattern) details. (Evans & Sladen 1980; Madge & Burn 1988; Kemp 1999; Syroechkovski 2002; Sangster *et al.* 2004)

### Bean Goose *Anser fabalis johanseni*, *A. f. middendorffii* and *A. f. serrirostris*

Although birds of eastern origin have been suspected in Britain, there have been no confirmed records. These three races breed to the east of the two familiar European forms, 'Taiga Bean Goose' *A. f. fabalis* and 'Tundra Bean Goose' *A. f. rossicus*. In the taiga zone, the range of nominate *fabalis* grades into that of *johanseni*, which in turn grades into that of the conspicuously large-billed *middendorffii*. Across the tundra, north of these three races, *rossicus* grades into *serrirostris*; some of the latter have a very large bill but, since variation is clinal, these two races are sometimes regarded as synonymous.

Further studies are required to establish consistent morphological characters to separate the eastern forms. Probably the most likely to occur here, but also perhaps the most difficult to identify, is *johanseni*, which winters in eastern parts of the Western Palearctic. Biometric data or a ringing recovery might well be required to confirm the identity of the eastern races, but images of birds resembling these forms are welcomed as informal reports. (Madge & Burn 1988)

### White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons frontalis*, *A. a. elgasi*, *A. a. gambelli* and *A. a. albicans*

Only *A. a. albifrons* from northern Europe and western Siberia and *A. a. flavirostris* from Greenland are on the British List. The diagnosability of potential vagrant races has been poorly studied, though quite large differences exist in biometrics and structure and, more subtly, in plumage and bill colour.

Biometric data or a ringing recovery would be the ideal evidence of extralimital forms, but field observations, if accompanied by detailed notes and, preferably, photographs would be welcome as informal submissions. (Palmer 1976; Madge & Burn 1988; Kaufman 1994; Ely 2005; Reid 2006)

### Greylag Goose *Anser anser rubrirostris*

Birds that resemble *rubrirostris* have been recorded in Britain but their status is unclear, and this eastern race is not on the British List. Birds from the reportedly wide intergrade zone between nominate *anser* and *rubrirostris* pose a potential identification pitfall, but may be no more likely to occur than genuine *rubrirostris*.

Introduced populations of *rubrirostris* on the near continent have apparently now been 'genetically swamped' by local *anser* populations, but it is not known whether ancestral characters could reappear in offspring hatched several generations later.

BBRC welcomes reports of birds showing characteristics of *rubrirostris* (e.g. large individuals with typically broader pale fringes to upperparts and wholly raspberry-pink bills) with images confirming the key characters. The reporting of known or obvious escapes is an important means of monitoring the status of this race. (Owen *et al.* 1986; Madge & Burn 1988)



Martin Garner

**348.** Greylag Goose *Anser anser*, Salthouse, Norfolk, October, 2006. This bird shows the classic raspberry-pink *rubrirostris* bill, but the body plumage was only marginally paler than that of the accompanying nominate Greylags, suggesting that the bird was not pure *rubrirostris*.

### Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens caerulescens*, 'Lesser Snow Goose', and *A. c. atlanticus*, 'Greater Snow Goose'

The status of Snow Goose is extremely difficult to establish because of the ever-present spectre of escapes from waterfowl collections or wandering feral birds, but this species is possibly a scarce rather than rare visitor to Britain. However, the constituent races of Snow Goose seem more likely to occur at levels that would make them rarities. A detailed description, and preferably photographs, should be submitted of any individual that can be racially identified. Details should be submitted of potential vagrants only – i.e. those with flocks of wild geese or, perhaps, small flocks in spring or early summer away from known feral populations. (Madge & Burn 1988; Sibley 2000)

### Greater Canada Goose *Branta canadensis canadensis*, 'Atlantic Canada Goose', *B. c. interior*, 'Todd's Canada Goose'/'Interior Canada Goose' and *B. c. parvipes*, 'Intermediate Canada Goose'

'Canada Goose' was split into two species by BOURC in 2005 following the same decision by the AOU. It is on the British List only as a category C species, represented by *B. c. canadensis* – i.e. the long-established, introduced and naturalised population. All three taxa listed here are potential vagrants and individuals showing characters of both *interior* and *parvipes* have been recorded in Britain in an apparently wild state. BBRC is in the process of establishing key criteria for identifying each form. Observers are encouraged to submit full details, particularly of size, structure and plumage tones, and preferably with photographs, of individuals in circumstances suggesting wild origin (e.g. with other

wild geese). Knowledge on identification is still incomplete and taxonomic issues are evolving as new information, from both breeding and wintering grounds, emerges. (Fox *et al.* 1996; Kristiansen *et al.* 1999; Batty & Lowe 2001; Batty *et al.* 2001; Berlijn *et al.* 2002; Hanson 2005; [www.oceanwanderers.com/CAGO.Subspecies.html](http://www.oceanwanderers.com/CAGO.Subspecies.html))

### Lesser Canada Goose *Branta hutchinsii hutchinsii*, 'Richardson's Canada Goose'/'Hutchins' Canada Goose', *B. h. taverneri*, 'Taverner's Canada Goose' and *B. h. minima*, 'Cackling Canada Goose'

This species is not yet on the British List, but *hutchinsii* is clearly a potential vagrant and individuals showing characteristics of this form have been recorded in Britain. The status of *taverneri* and *minima* is clouded by the question of their likely natural vagrancy, escape possibility and, particularly in the case of *taverneri*, identification. BBRC is attempting to establish identification criteria for each form; and details of suspected Lesser Canada Geese should be submitted as described for the preceding species.

### Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*

'Grey-bellied Brant', a somewhat intermediate- (and variable-) looking population from the Canadian High Arctic (and at present not a formally recognised race), has been suspected in Britain, usually with 'Pale-bellied Brent Geese' of Canadian origin but on at least one occasion with 'Dark-bellied Brent Geese' on the English east coast. BBRC is reviewing the diagnosability of this difficult form in a British context; any submissions will be treated as informal reports initially, and photographs are essential supporting evidence. (Madge & Burn 1988; Garner 1998; Garner & Millington 2001; Buckley & Mitra 2003; Hutt & Taylor 2006; [www.oceanwanderers.com/IntrmBrantNY.html](http://www.oceanwanderers.com/IntrmBrantNY.html))

### Common Eider *Somateria mollissima dresseri*, 'American Eider', and *S. m. borealis*, 'Northern Eider'

Various extralimital taxa could occur in Britain; at present, claims of only adult or near-adult males are sought, but submissions of birds in other plumages will be kept on file pending further research.

There are no accepted British records of the distinctive North American *dresseri*, although one claim is under consideration. Possibly, intergrades with *borealis* may pose problems, so only individuals that show all the characters of *dresseri* and no anomalous features are likely to be acceptable.

The Arctic-breeding *borealis* is on the British List based on biometric evidence from a tideline corpse; there have been several other claims, which are currently in circulation. The status of *borealis* in Britain is unclear, and it may even be a scarce rather than rare migrant, the occurrence pattern of which has been clouded by diagnosability issues and past neglect. We are particularly keen to receive claims with biometric support, but research into the practicalities of assessing *borealis* based solely on field observations is ongoing. Bill colour alone is not necessarily diagnostic of the race *borealis*, as British *mollissima* frequently exhibit bright mustard tones on the bill, and many *borealis* (especially birds from the eastern part of the range) have unexpectedly dull bills and overlap with *mollissima*. The presence of prominent pointed 'sails' (which occur frequently in *borealis*) may exclude *mollissima*, though research on this topic is ongoing. However, the combination of bright orange at the bill base and prominent scapular 'sails' may prove to be diagnostic. Submission of photographs and field notes of any suspected *borealis* in Britain is encouraged. (Madge & Burn 1988; Garner & Farrelly 2005)

### Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena holboellii*, 'Holboell's Red-necked Grebe'

This North American and northeast Asian taxon is on the British List based on a single specimen record which pre-dates BBRC; there are also at least five records for Iceland.

Biometric differences are diagnostic, with *holboellii* being distinctly larger than nominate *grisegena*; average bill and wing lengths fall largely beyond the maximum of *grisegena*. Biometric details are currently required for acceptance. A further distinction is the bill pattern of breeding birds – *holboellii* typically has extensive yellow on the lower mandible – but this may be only an average character and may be partly age-related; more research is required. Images of birds in breeding plumage with extensive yellow on the lower mandible would be welcomed. (Ogilvie & Rose 2002; McGowan 2006)

### Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea diomedea*, 'Scopoli's Shearwater'

'Scopoli's Shearwater' is not on the British List, although one claim is currently being considered by BOURC and others have been suspected. Work to establish reliable and consistent assessment guidelines is ongoing, as knowledge of the key features of this Mediterranean form, and of variation within *C. d. borealis* populations, develops. There may be some degree of mixing between *diomedea* and *borealis*, and there is evidence of *borealis* breeding in the Mediterranean (Martinez-Abraín *et al.* 2002). In the short term, claims should be accompanied by good-quality images showing the vital underwing-pattern. (Gutiérrez 1998; Martinez-Abraín *et al.* 2002; Fisher & Flood 2004)

### Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo lucidus* and *Ph. c. maroccanus*

Neither of these African taxa is on the British List, although a recent claim of *maroccanus* is under consideration, and others have been suspected; work on practical assessment guidelines is underway, but detailed notes and photographs will be a minimum requirement. Both *maroccanus* and *lucidus* are rather distinctive races and are unlikely to have been overlooked, but occasional (aberrant?) individuals of the two European breeding forms, *carbo* and *sinensis*, may superficially resemble either of these white-faced North African races. Differentiating between *lucidus* and *maroccanus* should be straightforward with good views, but intergrades do occur and some may be acceptable only as *maroccanus/lucidus*. (Alström 1991)

### Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis desmarestii* and *Ph. a. riggenbachi*

Neither *desmarestii* of the Mediterranean basin nor *riggenbachi* from coastal Morocco is on the British List. Immatures show marked differences in the colour of the underparts compared with young nominate *aristotelis*. A small proportion of birds fledged in Britain appear similar, however, and such birds perhaps account for a few suspected occurrences of the southern races in Britain. Minor average differences in facial pattern and structure exist but biometric data are likely to be a minimum requirement for acceptance (*desmarestii* is notably smaller and most should be identifiable on biometrics). Nonetheless, photographs of suspected *desmarestii* or *riggenbachi* would be welcome for reference purposes. (Flumm 1993; Brown 2004)

### Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax hoactli*

This North American taxon is not on the British List. Biometrics are the safest means of identification, but some adults can also be identified by facial pattern. Images of suspected *hoactli* are welcomed but formal submissions should contain biometrics. (Hancock & Kushlan 1984)

### Great White Egret *Ardea alba egretta*, 'American Egret'

This common and widespread North American taxon is not currently on the British List. However, it is a likely vagrant and a few claims are under consideration. Differences in bare-part colours between European nominate *alba* and *egretta* do exist but may be only average differences, and efforts to establish practical identification and assessment guidelines are underway; biometrics are diagnostic, however. Other races (all of which, like *egretta*, are smaller) could conceivably occur; e.g. *A. a. modesta* has been claimed elsewhere in Europe. The issue of the natural vagrancy of other races would be a point of contention and further investigation. Descriptions and images depicting any particularly small birds, or birds with *egretta*-like bare-part colours or aigrettes are welcomed as informal reports. (Hancock & Kushlan 1984)

### Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus hudsonius*, 'Marsh Hawk'

This North American taxon is not on the British List, though some (previously not accepted) claims have been reviewed recently by BBRC, and one is now being considered by BOURC. Extant claims refer to birds in juvenile plumage, and future submissions of juveniles should include precise details of the head, underparts and underwing pattern, preferably with supporting photographs. Adult males seem to be the most easily diagnosable and adult females seem to be the most difficult category to separate. (Grant 1980, 1983; Riddiford 1983; Thorpe 1988; Wheeler & Clark 1995; Wallace 1998; Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001)

### Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis atricapillus*

There is one accepted record of this North American taxon. We know of no safe means of diagnosing this race in the absence of biometrics or a ringing recovery, and only submissions containing such evidence are sought. It is possible that even biometric or molecular data may be compromised by the presence of *atricapillus* genes within the introduced UK population, although this requires confirmation. (Forsman 1999; Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001)

### Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo vulpinus*, 'Steppe Buzzard'

This strongly migratory taxon, which breeds in eastern Europe, was recently removed from the British List after the single accepted (specimen) record was reviewed. Widespread intergradation between nominate *buteo* and *vulpinus* clouds the identification of this taxon in an extralimital context. Furthermore, a small proportion of *buteo* originating in Britain appear to show some plumage characters normally associated with *vulpinus*, such as distinct rufous plumage tones. Possibly, no plumage characters are fully diagnostic of *vulpinus*, with the possible exception of entirely dark birds, which may not occur within the range of nominate *buteo*.

As well as *Buteo* hybrids, escaped Red-tailed Hawks *B. jamaicensis* present a potential identification pitfall. Full biometrics are essential for acceptance, although a ringing recovery or molecular support would be ideal to confirm *vulpinus* in Britain. At present, we are keen to receive images of birds resembling *vulpinus* in Britain (including any *Buteo* with obviously rufous tones), but claims that lack at least biometric support will not be assessed formally. (Shirihai & Doherty 1990; Forsman 1999; Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001; Harrop & Collinson 2003)

### Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus sanctijohannis*, 'Rough-legged Hawk'

There are currently no accepted British records of this small North American form, although it has occasionally been suspected. Dark-phase birds seem to provide the most likely means of recording this form in Britain and current evidence suggests that such individuals do not occur in the European population. Biometrics are diagnostic, but images of suspected *sanctijohannis* (size, structure, perhaps plumage, and in particular location may offer clues) are welcome as informal reports. (Forsman 1999; Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001; Mullarney & Murphy 2005; Jensen 2006)

### Merlin *Falco columbarius columbarius*, 'Taiga Merlin'



349. Adult male 'Taiga Merlin' *Falco columbarius columbarius*, showing the all-important tail pattern to perfection; New Jersey, October 2006.

A previously accepted record is no longer supported by BOURC and was apparently the product of a Meintzshagen fraud. Photographs would seem to be a prerequisite for claims of suspected *columbarius*, including essential details of the tail pattern. Similarly, we are interested in images of Merlins which show characters inconsistent with the two regularly occurring taxa, European *F. c. aesalon*, and *F. c. subaeson* from Iceland. (Forsman 1999; Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001; Garner 2002)

### Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus calidus*, *F. p. anatum* and *F. p. tundrius*

There are no British records of the Arctic-breeding *calidus*, although several have been suspected. Given its distribution and long-range migratory movements, *calidus* may be expected to occur in Britain, perhaps even as a scarce passage migrant. Currently, we know of no means by which this race can be safely diagnosed in the absence of clear biometric support, and perhaps a ringing recovery. Good-quality images of potential *calidus*, and also of birds apparently different from typical nominate *peregrinus* are welcomed. Note that not all apparently large, pale Peregrines are necessarily *calidus*, or even this species given the presence of falconer's hybrids and backcrosses.

The only previously accepted record of a North American bird (*F. p. anatum*) was recently reviewed and removed from the British List. Immature *anatum* and *tundrius* appear to closely resemble some *calidus*, and there are no known plumage characters which can separate these three races in the field. A ringing recovery is the minimum requirement to confirm the occurrence of the North American races in Britain. (Forsman 1999; Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001; Harrop 2004)

### Dunlin *Calidris alpina sakhalina*, *C. a. hudsonia*

Dunlin of the races *C. a. alpina*, *C. a. schinzii* and *C. a. arctica* occur frequently in Britain, but there are no accepted records of any extralimital taxa. One claim of *sakhalina* is under consideration, and birds of the North American race *hudsonia* have occasionally been suspected. Birds from central northern Eurasia (so-called 'centralis'), which occur regularly in the Baltic and appear to bridge European and Pacific populations, are likely to occur in Britain and may be a new race for the British List as well as a serious identification pitfall with respect to other eastern taxa.

Racial identification of Dunlins is clearly difficult, and we are currently uncertain how extralimital taxa may be confirmed in Britain in the absence of a ringing recovery. Biometric support could enable some individuals to be confirmed as one of several extralimital taxa, but would not necessarily establish which particular race was involved.

Sometimes marked differences in breeding plumage exist among some races, partly as a result of the timing of moult (and consequent levels of abrasion). This also applies among the regular taxa – for example, differences between *schinzii* and *alpina* are magnified in midsummer, which may cause some of the latter to resemble more exotic races. Some plumage characters highlighted in the literature are primarily relevant to adjacent races and do not apply in a European context; for example, the frequently mentioned flank-streaking of juvenile/first-winter *hudsonia* is relevant in relation to plain-flanked Pacific taxa but flank-streaking is not unusual in European birds, though it probably never matches that on more extreme examples of *hudsonia*.

We are keen to receive details, preferably with photographs, of birds felt to show characters of vagrant races. Ringing recoveries of birds from North America or east of the Yamal Peninsula, Arctic Russia, would be of particular interest. (Browning 1977; Greenwood 1984; Hayman *et al.* 1986; Wenink *et al.* 1993; Wenink 1994; Warnock & Gill 1996; Paulson 2005)

### Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago delicata*, 'Wilson's Snipe'

There are currently no accepted records of this North American taxon, but a small number of birds have been suspected (and one is still under consideration; BBRC in prep.). Although there are quite marked average plumage differences between *delicata* and nominate *gallinago*, individual variation in the latter is significant and suspected *delicata* will be extremely difficult to prove without reference to fine details of tail structure and pattern. A BBRC paper outlining acceptance criteria and providing a review of past claims is in prep. Future claims should be accompanied by good images of the underwing and tail, together with a detailed discussion of all aspects of appearance (preferably including tail structure though it is acknowledged that this is difficult to see and assess). (Leader 1999; Legrand 2005)

### Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus* and *N. p. variegatus*

BBRC has routinely assessed claims of the North American *hudsonicus* and there are just four accepted records. Detailed field notes, preferably supported by photographs, are required for claims of this distinctive race.

East Asian *variegatus* has occasionally been suspected in Britain. Typical *variegatus* generally

Dan Powell

'Hudsonian Whimbrel' *Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*

resemble nominate *phaeopus*, although they are more variable in appearance. Some juveniles show quite extensively dark rumps, and thus resemble *hudsonicus*, while others display a similar extent of white to *phaeopus*, but most fall somewhere between these two extremes. More work is needed on the diagnosability of *variegatus*, and also on the variation within *phaeopus*. We encourage informal reports with good photographs of birds in Britain showing *variegatus*-like traits. (Hayman *et al.* 1986; Doherty 1990; Bosanquet 2000; Paulson 2005)

### Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata orientalis*

Although *N. a. orientalis* is not on the British List, it has been suspected here and would appear to be a likely vagrant. Some *orientalis* are quite striking, especially when structural differences, in particular bill length, are at the top end of the range, beyond those of nominate *arquata*. Actually proving one will, however, be difficult as plumage variations within nominate *arquata* mean that it overlaps in appearance with *orientalis*, and the existence of a potentially broad zone of intergradation around the Ural Mountains seems certain to add to identification difficulties.

The possibility that a set of diagnostic plumage, moult, and structural characters might allow some *orientalis* to be identified in the field cannot be ruled out, but early research is not encouraging; it might never be possible to fully rule out intergrades. It would be interesting to see biometrics of exceptionally large Eurasian Curlews in Britain or ringing evidence indicating an origin to the east of the Urals. Images of suspected *orientalis* would be similarly welcome, for reference purposes. (Hayman *et al.* 1986; [www.birdguides.com/birdnews/article.asp](http://www.birdguides.com/birdnews/article.asp) 22.07.2004)

### Turnstone *Arenaria interpres morinella*

This North American taxon is not on the British List, though it has been suspected here. Some male *A. i. morinella* in breeding plumage may be noticeably brighter and whiter-crowned than typical male nominate *interpres*, but differences are subtle and possibly inconsistent. Some biometrics may be indicative, especially wing:bill/tarsus ratios (*morinella* has relatively shorter wings and longer bill and tarsus) but there is no single diagnostic measurement. A ringing recovery would confirm its occurrence, but biometrics and photographs of suspected *morinella* would be welcome as informal reports. (Hayman *et al.* 1986)

### Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus pallescens*

One previously accepted record of this race, which breeds in North America, Greenland and eastern Siberia, has recently been removed from the British List as it was apparently the product of a Meinerzhagen fraud. The status of *pallescens* is unclear and clouded by diagnosability issues; current evidence suggests that there are only average differences in the appearance of adults and that nominate *longicaudus* in Scandinavia occasionally match the characteristically pale-bellied appearance of

*pallescens* (contra *BWP*). Conceivably, such individuals are *pallescens* breeding outside their usual range, but there is sufficient reason to doubt that even an extensively pale-bellied appearance is unique to *pallescens*. There are no published differences in non-adult plumages and perhaps no conclusive biometric differences, although *pallescens* may be longer-winged. Claims are not sought unless supported by tangible proof of origins, but images of Long-tailed Skuas that show the classic pale-bellied appearance of adult *pallescens* are welcomed for reference purposes; the occurrence of pale-bellied birds in Britain seems to be genuinely rare. We would also welcome details of birds with a wing length in excess of the published range of nominate *longicaudus*. (Olsen & Larsson 1997)

### Common Gull *Larus canus heinei*, *L. c. kamtschatschensis*, 'Kamchatka Gull', and *L. c. brachyrhynchus*, 'Mew Gull'

We would like to encourage submission of images and biometrics of birds that are potentially of one of the extralimital races, i.e. adults that are conspicuously large and darker mantled (*heinei* and *kamtschatschensis*), or which show the distinctive wing pattern of *brachyrhynchus*. At present, claims will not be assessed formally unless they refer to classic *brachyrhynchus*. More research is required.

The race *heinei* breeds in Russia, east of nominate *canus*, and is on the British List following ringing recoveries from the breeding range. Without such proof, we believe that *heinei* is not safely diagnosable, owing primarily to the difficulty of excluding intergrades with nominate *canus*. Based on its distribution and movements, it seems likely to be of regular occurrence in Britain and dark-mantled Common Gulls in eastern Britain in winter may well be of this form. The larger *kamtschatschensis* breeds to the east of *heinei*, and is not on the British List but has been suspected here. Some individuals seem distinctive in various plumages but more work is needed to establish whether any combination of characters allows confident identification of extralimital birds. The extent to which eastern *heinei* might closely resemble *kamtschatschensis* is unclear, as is the extent to which the two might intergrade. The distinctive North American *brachyrhynchus* has been suspected but is not on the British List. Exceptionally, the characteristic wing pattern of adult *brachyrhynchus* can be suggested by rare variant *canus*, and a full range of plumage and structural characters, with good photographs, will be a prerequisite for an acceptable record of the American form. (Shepherd & Votier 1993; Carey & Kennerley 1996; Olsen & Larsson 2003)

### Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus fuscus*, 'Baltic Gull'

'Baltic Gull' is on the British List on the basis of a ringing recovery from the breeding range. Many older published records pre-date the recognition of the commonly occurring *L. f. intermedius*, and are no longer acceptable.

Quite marked average differences exist between nominate *fuscus* and the other races (especially *L. f. graellsii*), although many *intermedius* appear closer to nominate *fuscus* than to British *graellsii*. In recent years, differences in moult have been highlighted; although it is acknowledged that some moult characteristics attributed to *fuscus* may not now be unique, certain moult patterns and resulting plumages are very unusual among *intermedius* but typical of *fuscus*. However, the problem of intergrades further confounds matters. At present, BBRC does not consider this taxon safely diagnosable in a vagrant context without tangible proof of origins, most likely a ringing recovery. For reference purposes, however, we seek details of suspected *fuscus* when these include good images and supporting moult analysis. Based on its distribution and movements, it seems possible that *fuscus* is, or at least once was, a scarce migrant rather than a true rarity. (Jonsson 1998; Olsen & Larsson 2003; Gibbins 2004; Altenburg *et al.* 2006; Koskinen & Rauste 2006; Winters 2006a)

### Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis atlantis*, [*L. m. 'lusitanicus'*], [*L. m. 'cantabricans'*], 'Atlantic Yellow-legged Gull'

There are no British records of birds of the subtle west Iberian and Atlantic island races (some of which are of disputed validity), although reports of potential ringing recoveries are being investigated (e.g. a third-calendar-year bird from the Berlenga Islands, Portugal, controlled at Gloucester). Individuals from the highly pelagic population in the Azores can appear quite distinctive, and have been suspected in Britain. Photographs and detailed notes of such birds would be welcomed as informal reports.

### Herring Gull *Larus argentatus cachinnans*, 'Caspian Gull', and *L. a. smithsonianus*, 'American Herring Gull'

Records of *L. a. cachinnans* were assessed by BBRC up to 2000, by which time it was clear that Caspian Gull is a scarce visitor to Britain, not a true rarity. In future, it is planned that records of *cachinnans* will be monitored through the Scarce Migrants Report. A paper covering the identification of 'Caspian Gull' and its assessment at regional/county level is in preparation.

BBRC has routinely assessed claims of the North American *smithsonianus*, and there are currently ten accepted records. BBRC policy is to accept only individuals that show the full suite of features characteristic of the most distinctive birds. Inevitably, this means that some genuine *smithsonianus* will slip through the net but we believe that our approach is preferable to one of adopting a more lenient stance that would allow for the acceptance of not-infrequent look-alikes. Birds resembling *smithsonianus*, particularly first-years with dark tails, occur regularly in the European Herring Gull population; these are perhaps most likely to be *L. a. argentatus* from Arctic colonies, and represent a significant identification pitfall. Photographs of a potential *smithsonianus* help record assessment considerably and, of all the relevant plumage features for separating *smithsonianus* from similar-looking *argentatus*, the patterns on the rump and vent may be especially useful.

At present, only first-years have been accepted, as the few claims of older birds are awaiting clarification of the diagnosability of other age classes. A further potential pitfall may involve darker examples of Glaucous Gull *L. hyperboreus* × Herring Gull hybrids. (Olsen & Larsson 2003; Lonergan & Mullarney 2004; Adriaens & Mactavish 2004)

### Other large white-headed gull taxa

Tangible proof of origin is required to confirm the identity of any large white-headed gull taxa not listed above, including 'Heuglin's Gull' *L. a. heuglini* and the form *barabensis*, which is of uncertain taxonomic affinity. Nonetheless, we encourage observers to submit photographs and detailed notes of birds which potentially belong to such races, as informal reports.

### Little Tern *Sternula albifrons antillarum*, *S. a. athalassos* and *S. a. browni*

There is one accepted record of a bird from the North American 'Least Tern' group. A combination of voice and relevant plumage detail, in particular rump and tail colour, is required to confirm identity. Submissions should ideally contain photographs, while sound recordings are currently a prerequisite for acceptance. Since there appears to be no way to differentiate the North American races in a vagrant context, records will continue to be published as *antillarum/athalassos/browni* for the time being. (Olsen & Larsson 1995)

### Black Tern *Chlidonias niger surinamensis*, 'American Black Tern'

There is currently one accepted British record of this North American taxon. Identification in all plumages, but especially of juveniles, is often relatively straightforward. Submissions should contain detailed notes on all aspects of appearance and preferably photographs. (Olsen & Larsson 1995; Adriaens 1999; McGeehan 2000; Andrews *et al.* 2006)

### Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis acuflavida*, 'American Sandwich Tern'

Ringling recoveries confirm that this North American race has occurred in Britain at least twice, suggesting that it probably occurs more frequently; diagnosability issues may be clouding its true status here. In addition to size differences (*acuflavida* is distinctly smaller than the nominate), there are subtle plumage and phenological differences, but in the absence of ringling/molecular data only informal reports of *acuflavida* are encouraged at present; these should contain photographs and a detailed discussion of the identification. (Olsen & Larsson 1995)

### Barn Owl *Tyto alba guttata*, 'Dark-breasted Barn Owl'

This taxon is on the British List, and its occurrence has been confirmed by ringling data. The recent report that a pair of typically pale, British *T. a. alba* reared a dark, *guttata*-like chick complicates identification matters (French 2006); it seems that simply looking like *guttata* is not definite proof of

origins, although we believe that the overwhelming majority of dark birds, especially those on the east coast and in the Northern Isles during migration periods, are likely to be *guttata*. We urge observers to submit further evidence of apparently normal *alba* rearing *guttata*-like young so that we can better understand this phenomenon in Britain. Apart from the problem of unusually dark *alba*, there is overlap between the palest *guttata* and darkest *alba*, meaning that only darker *guttata* (predominantly females) are reasonably safely diagnosable, while pale *guttata* may be overlooked.

BBRC proposes to assess all claims of this continental race forthwith, and will publish all records of birds resembling classic *guttata*, with the caveat that some might be unusually dark *alba*. Detailed notes and, where possible, images are required to support claims. We shall not review older, locally published records unless requested to do so and photographs are available. (Mikkola 1983; Osborn 1999; French 2006)



Hugh Harrop

350. 'Dark-breasted Barn Owl' *Tyto alba guttata*, Reawick, Shetland, January 2005.

### Common Swift *Apus apus pekinensis*, 'Eastern Common Swift'

This Asian taxon is not on the British List but has occasionally been suspected in Britain. There are still considerable gaps in our knowledge of the movements and identification of these swifts. Until the situation is clearer, only a ringing recovery from the core range of *pekinensis* or molecular support is likely to confirm this subtle taxon in a vagrant context. We welcome good photographs of suspected *pekinensis* as informal reports. (Lewington 1999; Corso 2000)

### Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major pinetorum*

There are no British records of *pinetorum* from the near continent but some were suspected during the invasion of 1962. In the absence of a ringing recovery, how individuals of this race may be safely distinguished from, for example, *pinetorum* × *major* intergrades (or even some variant British *D. m. anglicus*) is unclear; biometrics may help (but see Odin 2006). Claims of *pinetorum* should be supported by biometrics and photographs of the trapped bird. These will be treated as informal until assessment criteria are investigated further. The Scandinavian *D. m. major* is regarded as a scarce rather than rare migrant to Britain (Appendix 1).

### Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

Although birds of both southern and eastern origin are assumed to occur, racial identification beyond the breeding range is fraught with difficulty. Short-toed Larks in Britain will continue to be regarded as being of undetermined race, and claims of particular races are not sought at present. A ringing recovery would be the best way to establish geographical origin (and race, or racial group) of British migrants. Nonetheless, we welcome good-quality photographs of birds in Britain (and indeed full biometrics of any birds trapped) for our files, and as new information emerges it may be possible to establish to which racial grouping some individuals belong.

### Shore Lark *Eremophila alpestris*

There are no accepted British records of birds of extralimital origin but at least one individual of suspected North American origin, showing characters closest to *E. a. alpestris*, has occurred. Until diagnosability issues are investigated further, only informal claims, with photographs, are requested. (Garner 1999; Pétursson & Ólafsson 1999; Small 2002)

### Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica transitiva* and *H. r. erythrogaster*, 'American Barn Swallow'

Birds resembling *transitiva*, from southeast Europe, and *erythrogaster*, from North America, have been suspected in Britain. It seems that *transitiva* differs from British *rustica* only in the intensity of colour on the underparts. The vagrancy potential of the former is obscured by the not-infrequent presence of *transitiva*-like individuals during spring migration in Britain, which appear to be variants within the west European population. Consequently, on current knowledge, a ringing recovery or molecular data would be needed to prove the occurrence of *transitiva*.

The North American *erythrogaster* is rather distinctive and consistent in appearance. Differences relate to the head and underparts, with *erythrogaster* lacking the dark band below the chestnut throat. Although *rustica* may (rarely) resemble *erythrogaster* – e.g. some juvenile *rustica* may show a weaker, broken breast-band – such resemblances are superficial, and carefully observed *erythrogaster* should be identifiable in a majority of cases. Claims should be supported by detailed notes and, ideally, images and we welcome photographs of unusual-looking birds for our files. (Turner & Rose 1989; Sibley 2000; Jiguet & Zucca 2005)

### Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava feldegg*, *M. f. cinereocapilla*, *M. f. iberiae*, *M. f. simillima*, etc.

Only *M. f. flavissima*, *M. f. flava* and *M. f. thunbergi* are considered to be regular visitors to Britain, and all other races are vagrants. Of these, only *feldegg* has traditionally been assessed by BBRC, although several other forms are on the British List and others have been suspected of occurring. Owing to individual variation and racial intergrades at their range boundaries, positive racial identification is sometimes extremely difficult. Well-documented claims (of males only, unless specified otherwise) of the following taxa are encouraged, as are informal reports with photographs of any taxa not listed below. Formal submissions should contain a detailed description, preferably with photographs and a sound recording; for some races, written notes are important to convey subtle plumage colours that may be difficult to capture accurately with a camera.



John Carter

351. Male 'Black-headed Wagtail' *Motacilla flava feldegg*, South Huish Marsh, Devon, August 2005.

**'Black-headed Wagtail' *M. f. feldegg***

There are nine accepted records. Acceptance guidelines for males have been tightened following a well-observed bird that was ultimately found not to be acceptable (Rowlands 2003). However, information on individuals which display small anomalies yet otherwise closely resemble *feldegg* should still be submitted; we are keen to monitor the status of birds with potential intergrade characters, which fall into a broader 'Black-headed Wagtail group'. Some darker-headed *thunbergi* also represent an identification pitfall. Many female *feldegg* are rather distinctive and photographs and descriptions of suspected female *feldegg* are welcome. (van den Berg & Oreel 1985; Svensson 1988a,b; Corso 1997; Corso 2001a; Dubois 2001a,b; Alström & Mild 2003; Rowlands 2003)

**'Ashy-headed Wagtail' *M. f. cinereocapilla***

This form is on the British List and the evidence indicates that it is a rare visitor to Britain, which suggests that BBRC should assess future records. The extent to which intergrades between other races (i.e. *flava* and *thunbergi* and their backcrosses) might produce birds that suggest *cinereocapilla* is unclear (but is perhaps not a major problem). Of possibly greater concern is the issue of *iberiae* × *cinereocapilla* intergrades, and some birds may be acceptable only as *iberiae/cinereocapilla*. Although accepted records of this taxon will ultimately be published, any claims will be treated informally until diagnosability issues are investigated further. (Dubois 2001a, 2003; Dubois & Roy 2003; Alström & Mild 2003; Nieuwstraten 2004)

**'Spanish Wagtail' *M. f. iberiae***

This taxon is not on the British List. An extremely detailed claim, which included high-quality illustrations but which lacked voice details and photographs, has been assessed by BBRC and BOURC; a first for Britain will require all key characters to be covered, including voice. Intergrades are a potential problem but some apparent *flava* can also show quite extensive white on the throat and could be an *iberiae* pitfall. (Dubois 2001a, 2003; Dubois & Roy 2003; Alström & Mild 2003; Winters 2006b)

**'Eastern Yellow Wagtail' *M. f. tschutschensis***

The east Asian forms *simillima*, *angarensis* and *zaissanensis* are synonymised with *M. f. tschutschensis* here (and treated as a separate species by some authorities). This form is on the British List, based upon two specimen records, although these are currently under review by BOURC. Some genuinely grey-and-white birds in autumn may be of east Asian origin, although whether individuals of any of the west European or central Asian forms, such as *M. f. beema*, can appear similarly grey and white is unclear. The more buzzy, Citrine Wagtail *M. citreola*-like, calls of this eastern group may help identification but other races (e.g. *feldegg*) also have buzzy calls, which could complicate this issue. BBRC would like to create a photographic and sound archive of such birds, although we shall not assess claims formally at present unless these are supported by photographs, biometrics and/or DNA.

**Other races**

Two central Asian forms, 'White-headed' *M. f. leucocephala* and 'Sykes's Wagtail' *M. f. beema* are on the British List based on old records that pre-date BBRC. The status of these races is under review by BOURC and results will be published in due course. It is thought likely that most birds resembling *beema* (of which there are many) and *leucocephala* (of which there are few) represent variants of *flava* or intergrades, and that occasional birds resembling the yellow-headed *M. f. lutea* (which is not on the British List) are most likely to be variant *flavissima*. Photographs of birds resembling these races are most welcome, but will be treated informally at present. (Hathway *et al.* 1997; Wallace 1997; Alström & Mild 2003; Vinicombe 2004)

**White Wagtail *Motacilla alba leucopsis*, etc.**

Apart from *M. a. alba* and *M. a. yarrelli*, all other races of White Wagtail are rarities in Britain. There are no accepted records of other races but one claim of *M. a. leucopsis* is being assessed, while an apparent *M. a. personata* has occurred recently in Norway. We follow Alström & Mild (2003) in considering that *M. a. dukhunensis* is synonymous with nominate *alba*, although we welcome images of

apparent nominate *alba* with extensive white in the wing. Several other forms seem likely candidates for westward vagrancy, and well-documented claims of extralimital forms should be submitted for review. (Alström & Mild 2003; Addinall 2005)

### Dipper *Cinclus cinclus cinclus*, 'Black-bellied Dipper'



Hugh Harrop

**352.** 'Black-bellied Dipper' *Cinclus cinclus cinclus*, Channerwick, Shetland, October 2005.

BBRC has not previously assessed records of 'Black-bellied Dippers', but we aim to do so at least until status issues are further clarified. Only birds that completely lack any hint of chestnut on the breast are likely to be acceptable, although a limited/narrow brown band is not unusual in this race, while some nominate *cinclus* show a narrow chestnut band at the breast-belly interface. Birds showing chestnut on the underparts probably cannot be distinguished from darker individuals of the British forms *C. c. gularis* and *C. c. hibernicus*, or from *C. c. aquaticus* from central Europe, which has occasionally been suspected here. Informal reports of any unusually

dark birds which seem to fall short of classic nominate *cinclus* are welcome, especially when accompanied by good photographs.

### Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos hafizi* and *L. m. africana*

There are currently three accepted records of *L. m. hafizi* on the British List. Identification of this central Asian form seems relatively straightforward, but it is believed that a minority of nominate *megarhynchos*, especially first-winters, show some *hafizi*-like plumage traits. Identification should be based on a full set of relevant plumage, structural and behavioural characters, preferably supported by photographs. It is possible that *L. m. africana*, which breeds in western Asia, could also occur in Britain. It is unclear whether *africana* is safely diagnosable in an extralimital context, although it appears to resemble nominate *megarhynchos* rather than *hafizi* in general appearance. Accepted records which do not fully exclude *africana* will be published as *hafizi/africana*. (King 1996)

### Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros ochruros/phoenicuroides*, 'Eastern Black Redstart'

BOURC has recently reviewed and rejected four hitherto accepted British records of *P. o. ochruros* and/or *Ph. o. phoenicuroides*, as it was found that none fully excluded the possibility of a Black Redstart × Common Redstart *Ph. phoenicurus* hybrid. BBRC is currently working on a set of robust identification and assessment guidelines by which these 'eastern' Black Redstarts can be safely diagnosed in a British context. New claims are welcome, preferably those supported by good photographs; any ringer handling a potential 'eastern' Black Redstart should collect any feathers lost during processing for molecular analysis. Any images of birds felt to resemble 'eastern' Black Redstarts, even if these are suspected to be hybrids or variants, are welcomed. (Steijn 2005)

Mark Lawlor



**353.** First-winter male 'Eastern Black Redstart'  
*Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides*, Guernsey, Channel  
Islands, October 2003.



Patrick Palmén

**354.** First-winter male 'Eastern Black Redstart'  
*Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides*, IJmuiden, Noord-  
Holland, The Netherlands, October 2003.

### Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus samamisticus*, 'Ehrenberg's Redstart'

BBRC has routinely assessed claims of *Ph. ph. samamisticus* and there are currently four accepted records. A review of all past records, including those previously not accepted, is in progress and a small number of new claims are being assessed. At present, only males are considered diagnosable. Males differ from those of nominate *phoenicurus* most obviously in showing a white wing-panel in the secondaries and tertials; in adults this appears large and extensive, but on some first-winters is restricted to a thin white border on the innermost secondary and outermost tertial, with other tertials showing broad buff fringes; such birds are easily overlooked. Accurate ageing and precise details of the wing-panel (exact colour, extent and shape) are essential; photographs and an in-hand description are ideal. Females may not appear particularly pallid, as sometimes suggested, and some fresh female *phoenicurus* show a contrasting pale buff wing-panel, as do some well-marked males of the nominate race. At present, female *samamisticus* appears not safely identifiable, although we welcome images of suspected females.

Some Common Redstart × Black Redstart *P. ochruros* hybrids may resemble *samamisticus* so care is needed to eliminate this pairing; similarly, the possibility of Hodgson's Redstart *Ph. hodgsoni* as a potential escape should be considered.

### Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus rubicola*, *S. t. maurus/stejnegeri*, 'Siberian Stonechat', and *S. t. variegatus*, 'Caspian Stonechat'

Common Stonechats breeding in continental Europe belong to the form *S. t. rubicola*, which is not formally on the British List. Males in particular have often been suspected here, because birds with subtly brighter and more contrasting plumage than would be expected for British *hibernans* have been seen on suitable dates and in suitable locations for migrants. There are even suggestions of a regular spring passage of *rubicola*-like birds in southern and eastern England, but many birds showing proposed *rubicola* characters refer to breeding males holding territory. Unfortunately, variation among British *S. t. hibernans* and the existence of an intergrade zone on the near continent makes positive identification of *rubicola* extremely difficult, and tangible proof of origins would be required for the first record (one such claim is under review), even though *rubicola* is probably a regular visitor to Britain.

BBRC routinely assesses claims of 'Siberian Stonechat', the vast majority of submissions being of the west Asian form *maurus*. First-winters in fresh autumn plumage are readily identifiable, although a few unusually pale western birds can be superficially similar; consequently, it is important to record the full suite of identification characters, most especially the rump pattern. Spring males, although often striking, are less straightforward and are almost matched in appearance by some brighter, more contrasting western birds, especially presumed *rubicola*. Spring Siberians can still usually be identified by a set of established characters; rump and uppertail-covert pattern is predominant but underwing colour, the extent of the neck collar and breast and flank pattern are very useful (male *maurus* has black axillaries and underwing-coverts and this subspecies probably never shows obviously dark-streaked flanks as many *rubicola* do). Although *maurus* occasionally breeds in Finland, *rubicola* is not known to come into

contact with *maurus* during the breeding season, and the likelihood of intergrades is probably low; nonetheless, photographs of suspected intergrades would be extremely welcome.

Several authors have questioned the validity of the east Asian *stejnegeri*, and it is unclear whether it can be diagnosed with confidence (it differs only subtly from *maurus*, being on average a little darker and with the colours more saturated, rather as *hibernans* is to *rubicola* in the west), and the possibility of a *stejnegeri* × *maurus* intergrade could never be fully excluded. The one accepted British record should be reviewed, and we do not seek further claims of this taxon.

There are currently two accepted records of the west Asian *variegatus*, which displays a particularly distinctive wheatear *Oenanthe*-like tail pattern. Although *maurus* can show limited white at the base of the tail, this never matches the amount shown by *variegatus*, and most *maurus* appear dark-tailed. As *variegatus* is such a distinctive race, we welcome all claims; although the precise tail pattern is best assessed from photographs or in the hand, this is not essential for acceptance. Exceptionally, as for *maurus*, Whinchat *S. rubetra* × Common Stonechat hybrids may superficially recall *variegatus*. More research into potential intergrades between *variegatus* and both *maurus* and *rubicola* is needed, while the race *S. t. armenicus* should also be considered; nonetheless, we feel that it is safe to continue to record birds showing the distinctive appearance of *variegatus*. (Stoddart 1992; Corso 2001b; Walker 2001; Urquhart 2002)

### Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus alpestris*

One recent claim and four previously accepted records are currently being examined. These are currently listed as *alpestris/amicorum*; perhaps based on misunderstandings about the characters or relationships between the races. We believe *amicorum* to be an unlikely though not impossible vagrant. Separation of the races may not be as straightforward as the literature suggests, and observers familiar with nominate *torquatus* in worn plumage in spring or summer may be surprised by the hoary or scaly appearance of some autumn birds in fresh plumage. Detailed notes and photographs that show the body plumage, in particular the centre of the belly and the undertail-coverts, are required, although in-hand examination is highly desirable and may prove to be a prerequisite for acceptance. (Clement & Hathway 2000)

### Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti albiventris*, 'Eastern Cetti's Warbler'

This central Asian taxon is not on the British List but one claim is under review. Research to establish the variation within nominate *cetti*, and also the diagnosability of *albiventris* in relation to *C. c. orientalis*, an intermediate form that seems to form a clinal bridge between the eastern and western populations, is ongoing. Biometrics are required to support claims, as the plumage characters of *albiventris* may be replicated in some *orientalis* and perhaps even some nominate *cetti*. Images of Cetti's Warblers with a noticeably cold and grey appearance would be very welcome for reference purposes.

### Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia straminea*, 'Eastern Grasshopper Warbler'

There are no accepted British records of this taxon or any other eastern races. Four claims of *straminea* were assessed recently but all were regarded as not proven (BBRC in prep.). Full biometrics are required to support claims, ideally with supporting photographs, but images of any unusually small, grey and heavily streaked Grasshopper Warblers would be valuable for reference.

### Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus fuscus*, 'Caspian Reed Warbler'

This eastern race is not on the British List. A number of claims have been assessed recently but none was considered conclusive, even though some contained in-hand images and full biometrics. Owing to variation within nominate *scirpaceus*, as well as *fuscus*, establishing the occurrence of the latter in Britain is thought not possible without tangible proof of origins. Any feathers lost from a suspected *fuscus* during ringing operations should be collected for molecular analysis. (Pearson *et al.* 2002; Votier & Riddington 2005)

### Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca minula*, 'Desert Lesser Whitethroat', and *S. c. halimodendri*, etc.

Although *S. c. blythi* is regarded as an invalid taxon by some recent authors, it is currently listed as a

scarce migrant by BOURC. There are no accepted records of any other Asian races of Lesser Whitethroat, but c. 20 reports of birds of other eastern races stretching back over 20 years are currently awaiting assessment or review, and it is possible that some eastern races may turn out to be scarce but regular visitors to Britain.

The taxonomy and identification of the Lesser Whitethroat complex is a particularly thorny topic. At present, there seems little consistency about which races are recognised or which subspecies grouping they may fit into, and we have little faith that any criteria on which assessment decisions might be based would stand up to universal scrutiny. Consequently, the assessment of claims is on hold, but we recognise that distinctive-looking and -sounding individuals do occur and that these most probably represent one or more vagrant races. We continue to welcome high-quality submissions, especially those containing images and voice data. Trapped birds should have full biometrics taken and any feathers lost during the handling process should be preserved for molecular analysis. Molecular evidence already exists for some past claims but needs to be considered in relation to a wider taxonomic framework not yet in place. Although claims may not be assignable to a specific form, it may be possible to assign them to a group, such as 'Southeastern Lesser Whitethroats'. (Shirihai *et al.* 2001)

### Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis icterops* and *S. c. rubicola*

These eastern races of Common Whitethroat are not on the British List, although a number of claims of *icterops* are under review. Both *icterops* and *rubicola* may be identifiable owing to their cold, grey plumage tones (with greatly reduced rufous tones on the wings), while biometrics and moult strategy may offer some support. However, it is unclear whether *S. c. volgensis*, which forms a clinal bridge between the familiar *S. c. communis* and eastern *rubicola*, may resemble *icterops* and *rubicola* in certain key characters. Consequently, a ringing recovery from breeding birds seems the only way to be certain of racial origin at present.

We welcome reports of suspected eastern races, which will be treated informally at present. Photographs, recording of song, detailed biometrics and stray feathers lost during ringing may be particularly valuable. Although claims may not be allocated to a specific form, it may be possible to assign them to a group, such as 'Eastern Common Whitethroats'. (Shirihai *et al.* 2001)

### Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans albistriata* and *S. c. moltonii*

Records of races other than nominate *cantillans* should be submitted to BBRC, as these are still genuine rarities. There are currently a number of accepted records of the relatively distinctive south-east European *albistriata*; claims should be supported by detailed notes and, preferably, photographs. There are no British records of *moltonii*, from the west Mediterranean islands. Although Gantlett (2001) suggested that a bird at Portland, Dorset, in 1975 was of this race, this proved not to be the case; the published photograph was not an accurate colour reproduction of the bird, owing to deterioration of the original slide, while contemporary notes on the underpart coloration and the call prove that this bird was a *cantillans*. This race is currently thought to be diagnosable only by call, and claims will be considered only if detailed notes on vocalisations (and preferably recordings) are available. BBRC is currently attempting to establish criteria for the separation of ages other than adult males. Once that process is complete, we will then assess records of other age/sex groups. (Gantlett 2001; Shirihai *et al.* 2001)

### Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides nitidus*, 'Green Warbler', and *Ph. t. plumbeitarsus*, 'Two-barred Greenish Warbler'

There is just one accepted British record of *nitidus*, from the Caucasus Mountains region, and three of the east Siberian *plumbeitarsus*. Although some first-year *nitidus* are striking, a minority of (the regular) *P. t. viridanus* may appear somewhat similar, while some worn *nitidus* appear indistinguishable from *viridanus*, at least in the field. In terms of 'Two-barred Greenish Warbler', some *viridanus* can show a median-covert wing-bar, so this feature alone is not sufficient to confirm identification; a full set of *plumbeitarsus* characters is required. The identification of both races requires care, and detailed notes, ideally supported by photographs and perhaps sound recordings, are a prerequisite; only classic examples are likely to be accepted. (van der Vliet *et al.* 2001)

### Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita tristis* (including *Ph. c. fulvescens*), 'Siberian Chiffchaff'

Although the occurrence of 'Siberian Chiffchaff' in Britain is supported by specimen records, its status here is unclear. The numbers reported suggest that it is a scarce but regular migrant and, to some extent, a winter visitor. However, the criteria used to assess records vary markedly from region to region, and there are suggestions that it is being over-recorded and may actually be rather rare in western Europe.

Genuine *tristis* can be identified by a combination of voice and plumage details; the strongest evidence is plumage coupled with song, but over-reliance on song would seriously affect any attempts to establish status and might lead to the conclusion that *tristis* was a rare spring migrant. Plumage alone offers the weakest support for identification, and it is not apparent that the real characters of *tristis* are fully understood. Some of the most distinctive 'eastern' Common Chiffchaffs are strikingly pale and grey, with white underparts; these do not correspond to the typical appearance of *tristis* and are better regarded as presumed eastern *Ph. c. abietinus*, which is a regular migrant to Britain. Calls are useful but rarely diagnostic, as many of these grey-and-white birds and even some recently fledged juveniles of British *Ph. c. collybita* utter calls similar to the plaintive monosyllabic note typical of *tristis*.

BBRC proposes to regard this taxon as a genuine rarity pending clarification of its status; we do not yet intend to assess claims, but would like to monitor records from county and regional reports before deciding on the best way forward. We would distinguish between birds which are seen but not heard; seen and heard calling; and seen and heard singing. Some counties already categorise records along these lines, and we encourage all local and regional committees to seek detailed submissions of this race, and sound recordings wherever possible. A good *tristis* appears rather brown on the upperparts, has a 'mackintosh-buff' wash along the flanks and on the ear-coverts, lacks yellow in the plumage except at the bend of the wing, has olive confined to the fringes of the wing and tail feathers, has a rather short and predominantly black bill, and utters a plaintive, monosyllabic 'iihp' call-note. Any chiffchaff which does not match these criteria should not be assigned to *tristis*. (Dean & Svensson 2005; Constantine *et al.* 2006)

### Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus yakutensis*

There are no accepted records of this race, which breeds in eastern Siberia, but several have been suspected. Owing to marked plumage variation within the western races, especially *Ph. t. acredula* (a regular passage migrant which intergrades with *yakutensis* in Siberia), biometric data, preferably supported by photographs, will be a minimum requirement for acceptance.

### Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus caudatus*, 'Northern Long-tailed Tit', and *A. c. europaeus*

BBRC has not previously assessed claims of vagrant Long-tailed Tits but we now propose to consider reports of white-headed *caudatus*. We also welcome images of birds approaching, but not quite matching, the typical appearance of *caudatus*, and details of ringing recoveries that indicate the occurrence of other races.

'Northern Long-tailed Tit' is on the British List and, although its occurrence has not been closely monitored, it seems genuinely rare (with perhaps fewer than 30 British records), although prone to occasional small invasions. In most cases, identification is straightforward, as classic white-headed *caudatus* is a striking and beautiful bird. However, as well as the possible pitfall of a leucistic or otherwise aberrant local bird, intergrades should be borne in mind (*caudatus* interbreeds freely with the central European *europaeus* across a narrow band from Denmark eastwards and these intergrades could potentially occur in Britain). Key identification features include head pattern (although some pure *caudatus* do show some faint grey streaking on the head-sides behind the eye), tertial pattern (the precise extent of white on each feather), and the colour of the underparts.

The continental *europaeus* is also on the British List, but is extremely difficult to identify. Differences from British *A. c. rosaceus* are often slight, but paler *europaeus* (with reduced colour saturation, plainer and paler ear-coverts and underparts and restricted lateral crown-stripes) might be detectable; and these are themselves difficult to distinguish from some *europaeus* × *caudatus* intergrades (and biometrics offer



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355. 'Northern Long-tailed Tit' *Aegithalos caudatus caudatus*, Westleton Heath, Suffolk, February 2004.

no support). Furthermore, variation within British *rosaceus* causes further complications, as do occasional records of *caudatus* (or *caudatus*-like) birds intergrading with *rosaceus*, the offspring of which may resemble the somewhat intermediate *europaeus*. Given these difficulties, the validity of British *rosaceus* is perhaps questionable; nonetheless, images of any Long-tailed Tits resembling one of the rare races would be welcomed. (Harrap & Quinn 1996; <http://www.warbler.phytoconsult.nl/gallery.htm>)

### Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus cristatus* and *L. c. mitratus*

Both continental taxa are on the British List and most of the (few) records of Crested Tit away from core breeding areas of the Scottish *L. c. scotica* probably refer to one of the continental races. Racial identification is difficult, even in the hand, but we are keen to receive details of any birds away from Scotland when good photographs exist. A ringing recovery may be required to determine precise racial origin, and reports will be treated as informal at present. A review of existing records is planned.

### Willow Tit *Poecile montanus borealis*, 'Northern Willow Tit', and *P. m. rhenanus*

There are two accepted records of the north European *borealis* (and several other claims are under review), while the central European *rhenanus* has been suspected in Britain at least once. Many *borealis* seem readily diagnosable but some worn individuals of the British race *P. m. kleinschmidti* pose a potential pitfall. Also within the '*borealis* group', the races *P. m. baicalensis* and *uralensis* could potentially occur here. It would be difficult to confirm *rhenanus* without a ringing recovery, although photographs of suspected *rhenanus* would be welcomed as informal submissions. (Limbirt 1984; Harrap & Quinn 1996)

### Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator badius*, 'Balearic Woodchat Shrike', and *L. s. niloticus*

In terms of accepted British records, there are three of the west Mediterranean *badius*, but none of the southeast European *niloticus*. Identification of *badius* depends on accurate assessment of wing pattern supported by a range of plumage features and bill structure as described by Small & Walbridge (2003). Occasionally, juvenile Woodchats in autumn may be suspected of being *niloticus* based on unusually advanced post-juvenile moult and wing- and tail-plumage details; claims will be treated informally at present while diagnosability issues are further investigated. (Small & Walbridge 2003)



Dan Powell

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula soemmerringii*

### Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula soemmerringii*

Owing to variation within nominate *monedula*, which is a regular but seemingly under-recorded migrant from Scandinavia, together with intergrades between that form and the eastern *soemmerringii*, we are not aware that the latter can be safely identified in the absence of tangible proof of origins. Nonetheless, we welcome photographs of suspected *soemmerringii* for our files. (Harrop 2000; Offereins 2003; <http://www.xs4all.nl/~calidris/monedula.htm>)

### Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris faroensis*, *S. v. poltaratskyi* and *S. v. tauricus*

Only the breeding and regular migratory races *S. v. vulgaris* and *S. v. zetlandicus* are on the British List, although birds from western and central Asia have occasionally been suspected here. Subtle variations in the colour of plumage gloss and, in some cases, the colour of fringing on flight feathers are the key differences between the races. It may be possible to confirm that a bird originates from beyond the range of the regularly occurring races without establishing exactly which race is involved. Biometrics may offer limited support but are unlikely to be diagnostic, and a ringing recovery would be the ideal way to establish origins; claims will be treated informally at present.

### Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs spodiogenys/africana*, 'African Chaffinch'

Since the early 1990s, several birds showing characters suggesting the North African forms *spodiogenys* and *africana* have been reported from Britain and elsewhere in northwest Europe. All those reported from Britain have shown clear and distinctive African Chaffinch-like traits but also important and often recurring anomalies which prevent their acceptance as either form; exactly what such birds are remains a mystery. We encourage submission of all records of birds resembling Chaffinches of either of these North African races, in particular those accompanied by photographs, biometrics and/or recordings of the calls, which may provide important identification clues. (Clement 1993; *Brit. Birds* 97: 211; Constantine *et al.* 2006; Mullarney 2006)

### Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni hornemanni*, 'Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll'

Arctic Redpoll was removed from the BBRC list at the end of 2005, but the Greenland race *hornemanni* (of which there are currently 24 accepted records) currently still fulfils the criteria for a national rarity, and does not seem prone to irruptions (unlike *C. h. exilipes*). However, the criteria for the separation of this race in the field are not clear, and *hornemanni* has surely occurred more often than the published record indicates. We encourage the submission of photographs of any Arctic Redpolls considered to be good candidates for *hornemanni*, the larger of the two races, but it is possible that positive identification may depend on biometrics. (Millington 1996; Riddington & Votier 1997; Votier *et al.* 2000; Pennington & Maher 2005)

### Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

Recent work based mainly on vocalisations suggests that various forms of Common Crossbill coexist in western Europe. Each 'population' appears morphologically identical but has vocalisations which may be sufficiently distinct to prevent intermixing. If this is the case, some forms may warrant recognition at racial (or specific) level. Work on this topic is still in its infancy and at present we have no means of assessing claims; voice recordings of suspected vagrants would be welcome for our files. (Robb 2000; Constantine *et al.* 2006)

### Lapland Bunting *Calcarius lapponicus subcalcaratus*

Lapland Buntings from Northeast Canada and Greenland have long been suspected of occurring in Britain (Williamson & Davis 1956) and circumstantial evidence indicates that in some years they may outnumber nominate *lapponicus*, which presumably originate in Scandinavia or farther east. This race is not on the British List, since confirmation of its occurrence (by either a ringing recovery or biometrics) is lacking. However, a recent review of statistics from Fair Isle, Shetland, showed that seven males trapped there had wing lengths above 98 mm, the first of these being on 10th October 1953. A recent review of biometric data suggests that any Lapland Bunting with a wing length above 98 mm should be recorded as *subcalcaratus*. We welcome the submission of data on trapped birds, both past and present, which show a wing length over 98 mm (this should include bill measurements). Data will be collated to help to establish patterns of occurrence and this race may turn out to be a scarce or even regular migrant. (Garner in press.)

### Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis vlasowae*, 'Siberian Snow Bunting'

This eastern taxon is not on the British List but has occasionally been suspected. Diagnosis is extremely problematic, owing to variations within other taxa, and we seek only informal submissions, of images of birds showing characters of this race. (Byers *et al.* 1995)

## Appendix I. Races presumed to be occurring regularly in Britain

The following taxa are examples of races that are rarely or erratically recorded in Britain, but which are presumed to occur too frequently to be regarded as real rarities. All are considered likely to be significantly under-recorded owing to diagnosability problems; some are evidently irruptive, and consequently erratic in their occurrence. Claims are not sought by BBRC, although in many cases we will attempt to monitor locally published records, and in some cases records will be summarised in the Scarce Migrants Report.

### Common Guillemot *Uria aalge hyperborea*

This race is on the British List based on biometric evidence, which seems to be the only means to confirmed identification in a British context. Based on its distribution and movements, this race probably occurs regularly in British waters, where it remains largely undetected. Ideally, locally published records should contain the biometric data used to establish identification.

### Razorbill *Alca torda torda*

### Little Auk *Alle alle polaris*

Comments as for the *hyperborea* form of Common Guillemot.

### Great Spotted Woodpecker

### *Dendrocopos major major*

Great Spotted Woodpeckers of Scandinavian origin are assumed to occur too frequently for this subspecies to be classed as a genuine rarity but birds are usually hard to detect (unless trapped), except by context (e.g. as migrants in the Northern Isles).

### Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica cyaneola*, 'White-spotted Bluethroat'

Annual reports of this central and southern European race might suggest that it is a genuine rarity in



Kit Doy

356. Male 'White-spotted Bluethroat' *Luscinia svecica cyanecula*, Landguard, Suffolk, March 2005.

and is better regarded as a scarce rather than rare migrant, we are keen to confirm its status. For example, all 40 Shetland records (at least those trapped or collected, or seen well in the field) refer to this race. We are particularly keen to see details of birds known to be ringed on the breeding grounds in northern Europe.

### Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius glandarius*

Occasional large-scale irruptions provide the clearest indication of the occurrence of this rather subtle race. The paler, colder appearance of some *glandarius* might attract attention, although the appearance of many Scottish breeders (*G. g. caledonicus*) approaches that of the nominate form. Since new arrivals may disperse inland quite widely, identifying single individuals is probably impossible without the benefit of biometrics.

### Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis carduelis*

There are no confirmed British records of this continental race but it presumably occurs here, at least as an occasional passage migrant. The difficulty of diagnosing nominate *carduelis* in Britain may actually call into question the subspecific validity of the local breeding race *C. c. britannica*; at present, we seek only claims supported by a ringing recovery.

### Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea islandica* and *C. f. rostrata*

Based on locally published records, Common Redpolls of northwestern origin (Iceland and Greenland) occur annually in Britain in some numbers, especially in the Northern Isles. Others are presumably overlooked to some extent. (Riddington & Votier 1997; Reid & Riddington 1998; Pennington & Maher 2005).

### Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula pyrrhula*, 'Northern Bullfinch'

Occasional large-scale invasions of the nominate form from Scandinavia are well known. Small numbers, less readily detectable outside irruption events unless supported by biometrics, are known to occur in most years. Recent work suggests that the recently documented 'trumpet' call is diagnostic of 'Northern' Bullfinch and does not occur in other populations. (Constantine *et al.* 2006; Pennington & Meek 2006)

Britain, but since only spring males are considered safely diagnosable it is clearly under-recorded and is more likely to be a scarce migrant.

### Coal Tit *Periparus ater ater*

This continental taxon appears to be a scarce annual visitor to Britain but there are occasional reports of larger irruptions. Owing to the difficulty of identification, many probably go unnoticed. We are particularly keen to see descriptions of known continental birds, based upon ringing recoveries.

### Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris familiaris*

Although we suspect that this race, which breeds in Scandinavia, occurs in Britain quite regularly

## Acknowledgments

BBRC members, past and present, have conducted original and sometimes extensive research into the diagnosability of many of the taxa listed, and it is planned to make the outcome of such research available in BB in many cases. In addition, we thank all those who have answered our queries about the diagnosability of various taxa via informal discussions and requests for information, and all who have conducted and published their own research which we have consulted when drawing our own conclusions.

## References

In addition to BWP and Svensson (1992), all of the available family monographs that give details of the taxa listed have been consulted, as have a wide range of British and European magazines and journals. In addition, the eurobirding.com website at <http://www.eurobirding.com/birdingmagazines/articlesearch.php> offers a useful search function that allows recent papers, articles, notes and letters discussing racial identification from the following journals and magazines to be identified: *Alula* (Finland); *Birding World* (UK); *Birds Illustrated* (UK); *Birdwatch* (UK); *British Birds* (UK); *DOFT* (Denmark); *Dutch Birding* (The Netherlands); *Fugle i felten* (Denmark); *Fugle og Natur* (Denmark); *Ornis Svecica* (Sweden); *Ornithos* (France); *Vår Fågelvärld* (Sweden).

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'Northern Long-tailed Tits' *Aegithalos caudatus caudatus*

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