

# ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN RARITIES COMMITTEES (AERC)

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## MINUTES of the 4th Conference of European Rarities Committees, 18 - 22 July 1997 in Blahová, Slovakia

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### AVIAN SYSTEMATICS

The meeting began with a state-of-the-art lecture presented by Andreas Helbig on DNA-systematics in birds. New insights are emerging from modern bio-molecular studies already leading to a completely revised, and much debated, systematic order of contemporary birds, published by Sibley & Monroe (1990). It seems clear that AERC is not yet ready to adopt all the changes proposed by Sibley & Monroe, and that a gradual approach is more appropriate, adopting only those changes for which clear scientific evidence, preferably from multiple sources, has been published. Andreas emphasized the fact that DNA-systematics in birds have their limitations and that only a combination of bio-molecular studies and classic taxonomy studies (including morphology, ethology, distribution...) will reveal all the complexity of avian systematics.

The ensuing discussion on species concepts revealed that there is much less conflict between the Biological Species Concept (BSC) and the Phylogenetic Species Concept (PSC) than one might think from the controversy published in some birding magazines. Both species concepts look for delimitation of all terminal, diagnosably distinct taxa. On a scientific level, many similar problems are encountered in delimiting allospecies under the BSC as with phylogenetic species under the PSC. A main difference appears in the scientific names which are always binomial in PSC, but trinomial in BSC for superspecies and their allospecies and binomial in full biospecies, thus giving more scientific information on phylogeny than does the PSC.

As these changes in taxonomy will have a direct impact on the European List, an taxonomic subcommittee was formed. This will check the scientific literature to identify those changes in taxonomy for which there is already sufficient evidence for adoption onto the European List. Of course this will be a long-term task and the European List will have to be updated regularly, thus being the most accurate list in terms of scientific knowledge. Members in this group are: Andreas Helbig, Alan Knox, David Parkin and George Sangster.

### EUROPEAN LIST

Christian Cederroth gave a brief review of the European List, and reported that it is very difficult to get full information from all countries, although most of the Rarities Committees sent in their data several months ago. This gave rise to a discussion about the information flow between the Rarities Committees, the AERC-secretary office and the working groups (see below).

Several technical problems were discussed. The European List will only show one letter

code, being the same as in the national lists (A, B, C, D, E). It is possible to include dual categories in the List e.g. recorded as a wild bird before 1950 (B), as a probable escape after 1950 (D). If there are less than 10 records from a country, the European List will include the exact number of records submitted (not of individuals involved), e.g. 3 records for the same wintering bird recorded every winter during 3 years. A second letter code giving information on the status of the bird (breeding, migrant, wintering) was not adopted.

The data collection will stay in the hands of Christian, with Christine Barthel and Tom Conzemius being responsible for the publication (including raising sponsorship).

We have to publish the list in 1998 or early 1999, well before the next AERC meeting, otherwise the whole affair will become a truly never-ending saga. Christian will continue to collect information from the different countries, trying to be as up to date as possible - this being the main point for public interest.

The second point of interest (perhaps even more important) will be the scientific update in avian systematics. The taxonomic subcommittee, after a thorough literature research in the next months, will try to produce an updated check list, to include all taxonomic changes for which there is strong scientific evidence, within about 12 months. Of course, this will be only a first step.

### **EUROPEAN REPORT 1993**

George Sangster reported the same information flow problem as Christian had encountered in his attempt to gather data from all Europe for a first draft of the 1993 European report. Some countries sent in their 1993 report without an English summary (see below), which makes it very hard for an editor to pick out the relevant data for inclusion in the European Report. Nevertheless, George will finish the 1993 report with the data already collected. Forthcoming reports will then try to be more complete.

### **INFORMATION FLOW BETWEEN RC AND AERC**

Sometimes it is very hard to get a response from a request sent out to a rarities committee. This made the work on the European List and the European Report much harder than it should be. Furthermore several countries did not participate in the Blahova meeting (or the Helgoland meeting) because there was a new secretary or a new address, and the contact just stopped. In recent months, there has been an improvement in contact with many of the rarities committees through E-mail. Communication will hopefully become very easy when every rarities committee has at least one member (or contact person) with an E-mail address (or at least a Fax number). Therefore, we are publishing a new address list of rarities committees including the fax numbers and E-mail addresses (see appendix). Please contact the AERC secretary office and communicate us your official E-mail address, your RC-Web-site, or the E-mail address of your members. We will regularly publish an update (via Newsletter, E-mail or AERC-Website).

### **GUIDELINES FOR RCs AND THEIR REPORTS**

Some National Reports do not follow the guidelines first published with the Minutes of the Texel meeting, and updated at the following meetings. Some participants at the Blahova meeting did not even know several guidelines for the work of a Rarities Committees (e.g. use of category D and E). Even if these are only guidelines, it would make international collaboration much easier if they were followed when ever possible. That is why we append a compilation of all the guidelines so far published (see appendix I). Please check if your committee could do

better!

## **ESCAPE PROBLEM AND CATEGORIES**

Following the standardisation of categories D and E in the national lists of Europe, it has become possible to keep a record of probable and proven escapes on file, and to publish these in annual reports. But each committee still has to assess every record and make a decision whether to put a new species into category A, D or E. We all know that a species recorded in several European countries may appear in Category A in some lists, and as D or E in others, while being completely omitted in others.

AERC is urging all national committees to take a closer look at the categorisation of escapes in their neighbouring countries as well as in the rest of Europe. A new species should be put to Category D, unless it is almost certainly a genuine vagrant (in which case it enters Category A). If it is certainly an escape from captivity (because it bears a commercial ring, shows abnormalities associated with captivity, is incapable of reaching Europe as a vagrant, or has a very low likelihood of vagrancy) it should be put directly in Category E.

The category D becoming more and more important, we suggest to make it 'tickable'.

We also would like to remind all the committees of the existence of category E. It is becoming increasingly important to collect and, wherever possible, publish all data relating to escaped birds to give other rarities committees the opportunity to evaluate the situation across Europe. If a committee knows that a species is recorded regularly as an escape in its neighbouring country, it is less likely to put the first record in its own country in category A!

## **AERC-LIST OF ID-EXPERTS**

According to Item 11 of the Texel guidelines for rarities commissions, we should seek expert advice if our own commission has difficulty in judging a report or photograph of an extreme rarity. But who are the experts? AERC is compiling a list of people who might be able and willing to share their knowledge on certain groups or species. Some have already agreed to answer questions, but we are still looking for more to cover the whole range of identification problems. The national rarities committees should ask their experts to join the group and send name and address to the AERC-office.

The following rules seem to be essential to a smooth and long-time running of such a system:

- § the experts' list is only for internal use
- § experts should only be called in cases of real emergency and desperation
- § a SAE is included with every request
- § an answer is not expected within days

Per Alström: <b>pipits</b>	Kungsgatan 3, S-462 33 Vänersborg, Sweden
Peter Barthel: <b>waders</b>	Über dem Salzgraben 11, D-37574 Einbeck-Drüber Fax:+49-5561-82289
Peter Clement: <b>thrushes and wheatears</b>	69 Harecroft road, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, PE13 IRL, GB, tel: 01943-582801, fax: 173368834
Dick Forsman: <b>raptors</b>	PO Box 25, SF-02421 Korvas, Finland
Lars Jonsson: <b>large gulls</b>	Norrgarde Hamra S-62010 Burgsrik Sweden
Jan Lontkowski: <b>eagles and harriers</b>	Muzeum Przyrodnicze, Uniwersytet Wroclawski ul. Sienkiewicza 21, PL-50-335 Wroclaw, Poland
Klaus Malling Olson: <b>smaller gulls, terns and skuas</b>	Gartnerivej 3,1 DK-2100 Copenhagen O, tel: +45-3118-3918
Urban Olsson: <b>buntings</b>	Länkhavsgatan 26, S-42466 Angered, Fax +46-31-314184

## WEB Site

Gabor Magyar is in charge of creating a homepage for the AERC, so we are looking for a Web-Site (if possible free of charge) where we can publish this. Any proposals are most welcome and should be addressed to Gabor (E-mail: [gmagyar@micro.uoguelph.ca](mailto:gmagyar@micro.uoguelph.ca)). Walter Mergen offered technical support from Carl Zeiss®.

The contents of such an Homepage could include a European Rarity Reporting form (which could be downloaded and printed) and the address-list of all European Rarities committees, thus making it easier for birdwatchers to send in their holiday-reports to the relevant address. There should also be a short presentation from each national committee, how it works, the members and the latest annual report, together with a list of all published reports of Europe compiled by Tadeusz Stawarczyk. Regular updates of the European List could also be first presented on our homepage, as well as the minutes of the meetings and the guidelines for Rarities Committees. The homepage could be an ideal place to publish records put in category E and become a news forum on escapes all over Europe. More ideas and any help to design the homepage are most welcome and should be E-mailed to Gabor.

## MEETING 1999

There were three offers to organize the 1999 AERC-meeting: Ukraine, Austria and the Czech Republic. After each candidate presented the possibilities and advantages of their country, the matter was settled by vote (every country present, one vote), with three votes for Austria, seven votes for Ukraine and nine votes for the Czech Republic. Josef Chytil will organize the 1999 meeting in the Czech Republic. It will start on Friday 17th September (arrival) and finish Monday evening 22nd September 1999.

## IDENTIFICATION

Lars Jonsson's lecture of the large Gull puzzle (argentatus-fuscus-cachinnans complex) with special attention to the siberian forms heuglini-taimyrensis-vegae-barabensis took a whole day and an evening, and showed that the keys to this difficult complex are to be found on the breeding grounds.

Paul Mosimann's lecture on moult limits in passerines clearly showed that it needs more than a first look to age a bird.

Last but not least Klaus Malling Olsen presented three different topics: the South Polar Skua, white rumped Common Swift versus Fork-tailed Swift and a slide show on eastern

paleartic vagrants to Europe with photos from Kasakhstan, Siberia and China.

### **TASK LIST FOR ALL EUROPEAN RARITIES COMMITTEE**

- ☞ Check the address list (appendix III) and communicate your official E-mail address or the E-mail addresses of your committee members.
- ☞ Contact Gabor Magyar if you want to participate in the creation of the AERC-Homepage.
- ☞ The identification experts' list is far from complete, please tell us who in your country is willing to participate.