

## MINUTES OF THE AERC MEETING HELD IN THE DANUBE DELTA

26<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2003

### 1. AERC Taxonomic Recommendations

The main topic of the meeting was the work of the AERC's Taxonomic Advisory Committee (TAC) over the past two years. The methodology and results were presented by the TAC's Chairman, Gunter De Smet, who was able to table the 10<sup>th</sup> draft of the TAC's recommendations.

At the AERC meeting of 2001, the TAC had been presented with a number of tasks. It should provide:

- a) a digitally available updated list of the birds of the Western Palearctic (including subspecies and range).
- b) a working document showing the progress made in agreeing taxonomic recommendations and
- c) a list of pending decisions and taxonomic problems to be worked upon in the future.

At the Hel meeting in 2001, the Term of Reference agreed for the AERC TAC was that 'taxonomic recommendations should preferably be made unanimously by the TAC; if two members disagree, the final recommendation will be postponed; if one member does not agree, the chairman may make the decision.' Working from this apparently simple basis, GDS had to develop objectives, a methodology and consequences and these were all presented as part of the 10<sup>th</sup> draft tabled at the meeting. The compilation of the text of the recommendations, running to over 100 pages, is the work of GDS. This would not have been possible without the cooperation of TAC representatives, individual TC members, RC members and other referees. Members of AERC were unanimous in their praise of the immense effort that GDS and all contributors had put into this project.

Following each species account in the draft, a table allowed the individual national taxonomic committees to cast votes for each recommendation, either voting to accept, reject or pend. The actual taxonomic details were not discussed during the Danube Delta meeting, but the methods of voting and decision-making were. In particular, discussion centred around what to do where there were four votes for a recommendation (or three if one country was not considering a particular taxon) and one pend. Most 'pends' had come from the BOURC-TSC (15) but a small number had also come from the CAF and STC. A proposal that only those taxonomic recommendations that were accepted unanimously was considered by the meeting but rejected. Eric Meek (BOURC) argued for more time to be given for the BOURC-TSC to consider those proposals that they had pended, but those present at the meeting were reluctant for the process to be delayed further. ERM, successfully argued for Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra* and Velvet Scoter

*M. fusca* to be moved to the pending list as work was actively being carried out on these by Dr. Martin Collinson. ERM was unsuccessful in seeking to move the Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* complex to the pending list as those present felt that there was now agreement throughout the rest of Europe on this group (although not on the Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus* group) and that a firm decision could now be made. ERM agreed to ask the BOURC-TSC to attempt to come to a decision on this and the other 'pends' before November 15th 2003 after which it was agreed that the AERC's taxonomic recommendations should be published in December 2003. The decision as to just which recommendations should be published and which should be pended after that date was to be left to the judgement of GDS.

The last draft will be made available to all RCs for comments and corrections.

The question of how publication of the recommendations should take place was also discussed. For publication to take place in December 2003, it would only be possible for the document to appear on AERC webpage. At a later stage, agreement will be needed on a final version of the Western Palearctic list as well as agreement on the species sequence suggested in the "Helbig list" (see below). The publication of the taxonomic recommendations on the AERC webpage should include the rationale and methodology employed by the TAC and also include brief reference to all pending decisions. A press release with a summary of all taxonomic recommendations will be sent to all birding journals referring them to the AERC webpage for full details.

Another document tabled at the meeting was the list of European birds prepared by Andreas Helbig. This document obviously reflected the taxonomic inclinations of the author and relied on the superspecies concept. It was agreed that this document be circulated within the AERC-TAC for discussion especially in relation to the ordering of species within the list.

## 2. List of the Birds of the Western Palearctic

The 10<sup>th</sup> draft of this list is included as appendix to these minutes and every national Records Committee is asked to check it carefully for errors, omissions and spelling mistakes and correct it accordingly. Also, it should be made concordant with the latest version of the recommendations, which is not yet the case.

A specific problem with this list involves first records of a taxon made in a country without a Records Committee. It was agreed that GDS would make a list of these taxa and the countries involved and that AERC should offer to help in the verification of these records. The AERC also agreed that it is prepared to gather records of major rarities made in countries without Records Committees and to keep them on file until a national RC is in operation. Several members, however, noted the need for this work to be carried out sensitively and without offence to birders in the countries concerned.

One unsolved problem is the use of 'Category D' in various countries. A record of a particular species may be put into 'D' in one country but into 'C' or 'A' in others. However, it was acknowledged that AERC should not seek to change decisions taken by national RCs.

### 3. New name for AERC

Philippe J. Dubois (CAF) proposed a change in the name of the AERC from the 'Association of European Rarities Committees' to the 'Association of European Records Committees' or the 'Association of European Records and Rarities Committees' whilst retaining the acronym AERC. He argued that the AERC is no longer just working on rarities and that the work of Records and Taxonomic Committees is becoming more and more important. Christian Cederroth (Sweden), however, argued for the retention of the original name, saying that the Association was just becoming well-known and that it would be unwise to change things now.

A first proposal for 'Association of European Records Committees' resulted in six votes for and six against with six abstentions! A second proposal for 'Association of European Records and Rarities Committees' resulted in 13 votes for, three against and two abstentions. This second proposal was therefore adopted.

### 4. European List

Magyar Gabor (Hungary) presented the latest version of the European List (including data by 25 RCs) and, following discussion, several decisions were taken in relation to this work:

- a) that the work should be finished as soon as possible
- b) that the national lists already published on the AERC webpage should be updated and
- c) that the presentation of the webpage should be improved by the use of a database that would be more user-friendly.

### 5. AERC Home-page: [www.AERC.be](http://www.AERC.be)

Considerable efforts had been made by the AERC's webmaster Marnix Vandegehuchte, to improve the homepage. More and more galleries are now available (e.g. orange-billed terns, African Chaffinch, Southern Grey Shrikes). Every national RC can request reference material via the AERC mailing list and available pictures can be put online. Some ideas for new reference material were suggested at the meeting (e.g. rufous Buzzards in Europe within the *B.b.buteo* range, redstart hybrids looking like *Phoenicurus ochruros semirufus* or *Phoenicurus phoenicurus samamisisicus*). Other ideas or requests for photographs of other pitfalls or rarely depicted taxa would be most welcome.

It was anticipated that the AERC webpage would become more widely known following the publication of the decisions of the TAC. Nevertheless, all national RCs were

reminded to publish the internet address of the AERC homepage in the introduction of their national rarity reports. This is already done by many countries but not yet by all.

#### 6. Unidentified species on national lists

Christian Cederroth raised the question of how to count a taxon in a national list if it has not been identified to specific level e.g albatrosses, frigate-birds, soft-plumaged petrels and others that were presented as 'slash species' in reports. Those present agreed that there was no easy answer to this and that national totals could only be presented as the total number of identified species *plus* 'slash species'.

#### 7. Operation of Records/Rarities Committees using the Net

Eduardo de Juana (Spain) reported on the way in which the Spanish Rarities Committee operated by using electronic circulation of records and presented several examples of records that had recently circulated the Spanish committee. This method of working was widely admired by members of those committees who had not yet used this approach and everyone present found it a most useful presentation.

#### 8. Sponsorship

Bad news came via Tom Conzemius from Walter Mergen (Carl Zeiss Germany) who was unfortunately unable to be present at the meeting but who had reported that Carl Zeiss will no longer sponsor the activities of AERC because of changed priorities in sponsoring. All those present acknowledged the immense help and support that had been received from Zeiss from the AERC's inception to the present day and Walter Mergen's help in all of this was gratefully acknowledged. It was agreed that AERC stay in close contact with Zeiss through Walter Mergen in the hope that future projects may still be of interest to the company.

#### 9. AERC Meeting 2005

The next AERC meeting will be organised by Christian Cederroth in Sweden in early autumn 2005.