



EVERGLADE KITE

NEWSLETTER

Monthly Newsletter for Audubon Everglades

VOL 59 | Issue 7 | March 2019



Photo: Dark-billed Cuckoo © 2019 Kenny Miller. All rights reserved.

ONE FOR THE RECORDS

by Bob Dieterich

The news is out! Palm Beach County played host to one of the most startling appearances of a bird in North America this year, if not this decade. The bird is the Dark-billed Cuckoo, a species resident in South America. The bird was found by two Friends of Audubon Everglades members, Marcello Gomes and Kyle Matera, at West Delray Regional Park. Carl Edwards and Larry Manfredi assisted them in identifying it to the correct species.

The Dark-billed Cuckoo belongs to an American genus of cuckoos, *Coccyzus*, with which many birders in our area are familiar. It is a relatively long and slender bird, similar in profile to a mockingbird, with a decurved bill and a long, graduated tail. The typical members

of this genus in North America are the Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Black-billed Cuckoo, and in Florida there is also the Mangrove Cuckoo. According to the Clements "Checklist of Birds of the World," there are six other members in this genus, including the Dark-billed Cuckoo, which are primarily found in mainland South America. One species is endemic to Cocos Island off the Pacific coast of Costa Rica; interestingly, Dark-billed Cuckoo is also found on the Galapagos Islands, far off the coast of Ecuador. [\[Range Map\]](#)

Identifying this bird was no doubt a perplexing exercise. Its field marks mix features of our native cuckoos with its own individualities: it has an all-dark bill like a Black-billed Cuckoo and a buffy underside

like a Mangrove Cuckoo. Add its yellow eye-ring, smaller size, and unique patterning of the undertail, and you have a real puzzle.



Photo: Dark-billed Cuckoo © 2019 Kenny Miller. All rights reserved.

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UPCOMING TRIPS

MARCH 2018

Always check the website calendar for details, registration links and last minute changes. Unless otherwise specified, trips are "Just Show Up."

02 SAT (7:30A-12P) STA-1E (Rick Schofield, coord.) ● ● ●

06 WED (6:30A-11:30A) Loxahatchee NWR (Fly-out) \$ (Rick Schofield) ● ● ●

07 THU (9:30A-11:30A) ★ Lion Country Safari (Clive Pincock) ● ● ●

08 FRI (4P-6:30P) Wellington Preserve (Birding by Bike Sunset Ride) (Scott Zucker) ● ● ●

09 SAT (9A-2P) ★ Lake Okeechobee (Paul Gray) ● ● ●

10 SUN (8A-10A) Jupiter Ridge (Melanie & Steve Garcia) ● ● ●

14 THU (ALL DAY) ★ St. Sebastian River Preserve SP (Jody Levin) ● ● ●

16 SAT (8:15A-11:15A) Riverbend Park (Birding by Bike) (Vicki Rogerson) ● ● ● No on-site bike rentals; No skinny tires.

17 SUN (5P-7P) Wakodahatchee (Valleri Brauer) ● ● ●

22 FRI (10A-3P) Jonathan Dickinson State Park (Wildflow-ers & Scrub-Jays) \$ (Lori & Tony Pasko) ● ● ●

23 SAT (6P-8P) Wakodahatchee (Fly-in) (Chris Golia) ● ● ●

24 SUN (7:30A-10:30A) ★ Hungryland Slough (Bart Scott) ● ● ●

MAY 2019

The following advance registration field trips in May will become available for online registration on their corresponding dates during the month of March, e.g., registration for the May 04 trip begins March 04.

04 SAT (7A-12P) STA-1E (Rick Schofield, coord.) ● ● ●

04 SAT (8A-11:30A) Evergreen Cemetery (with SFAS) (Paddy Cunningham) ● ● ●

11 SAT (6:30A-12:30P) ★ Pelagic \$ (Rick Schofield) ● ● ●

TRIP KEY

EFFORT/DIFFICULTY

- **Easy:** Boardwalk or paved level surface; or birding mainly from bike / boat / auto
- **Moderate:** Improved trail; dirt and uneven surfaces
- ◆ **Challenging:** Improved or unimproved trail; uneven, rocky, and/or wet surfaces

DISTANCE

- ● **Sitting/Driving:** no walking required
- ● <1 **Short:** less than 1 mile
- ● 1.5 **Medium:** 1-1.5 miles
- ● >1.5 **Long:** more than 1.5 miles

OTHER

- ★ New and/or unique trips
- \$ There is an associated cost
- 📅 Advance registration required
- 👤 Family-friendly
- ♿ Handicap Accessible
- 🐦 Audubon Everglades Friend priority

Spring Migration, A Parade of Colorful Birds

by Gail Tomei

Paddy Cunningham Pascatore | Biologist, Expert Guide, and Instructor for Birding Adventures

MAR

05

Tuesday, March 5 at 7PM

Meeting and program are free and open to the public. Doors open at 6:30PM for light refreshments, in rooms 101 and 102 at [FAU Pine Jog Environmental Education Center](#), 6301 Summit Blvd (near Jog Road) in West Palm Beach. We look forward to seeing you there!



Spring Migration is the HIGHLIGHT of the birding year. It is a parade of males in their finest and brightest plumage from a wide variety of species, including thrushes, tanagers, orioles, grosbeaks and up to 25 species of warblers. Learn about the mechanisms of migration and the best hot spots and beautiful birds you are likely to see in South Florida.

ABOUT PADDY CUNNINGHAM

Paddy Cunningham has been a naturalist in South Florida for 35 years. Her passion is birds, and she teaches a variety of classes to help birders gain advanced skills at Bonnet House & Gardens and numerous birding festivals. She has a unique teaching style in the field, and her motto is "YOU LEARN THE I.D."

Paddy's company Birding Adventures takes small groups of birders throughout Florida - Ft. DeSoto, the Keys, North Florida - and the tropics -Jamaica, Belize and more. She calls her trips "INTENSE BIRDING at a RELAXED PACE." Paddy also does private guiding for birders from throughout the world.

Paddy is a popular speaker and guide at Florida birding festivals such as Space Coast and Fairchild Gardens, and she is the Coordinator of the Everglades Birding Festival in its 11th year.

Despite being a busy mom and a full-time gifted science teacher in 2008, during a BIG YEAR, she was 1st in Florida, 20th in the Lower 48 states and 27th overall for the A.B.A. area. Her passion is teaching you to become a better birder while you find the birds you seek. Birds have always amazed Paddy, but she became more "all in" upon her retirement in 2009. She has been a member of Tampa Audubon for 10 years and served as VP for 6 years and as the Bird Protection Committee Chair since its inception. She's an avid Backyard Birder and leads an 8-week OLLI class called Natural Hillsborough. She loves to awaken people to the beautiful birds of Florida, hiding in plain sight, right under our noses!

April's Monthly Meeting will be held Tuesday, April 2 at 7PM at FAU Pine Jog Environmental Education Center. The speaker will be Reed Bowman, Ph.D, Director, Avian Ecology Program, Archbold Biological Station, presenting "Long-Term Change and the Study of the Florida Scrub-Jay: A 50 year Perspective."

Alerted by today's sophisticated birding hotline communication, people stormed into our area from across the country.

Between February 6, when the bird was first seen, and February 10, perhaps a thousand or more serious birders had seen and photographed this bird. Those lucky enough to see it were able to get generally excellent views, because the bird behaved rather nonchalantly and moved about in low shrubbery near accessible paths.

Cuckoo activity tends to be rather lethargic, unlike the frenetic pace of warblers and vireos. Perhaps this was one reason why so many people were able to get good looks at the bird. Of course, a motionless bird can also be frustratingly difficult to find!

A pressing issue is how this bird got to South Florida from its native habitat in South America. Did it get here on its own or was it transported in some way? Dark-billed Cuckoo is known as an austral migrant, which means it migrates between the temperate zone of the Southern Hemisphere and the Tropics. This is the time for the northward migration, so did this presumably juvenile individual just overshoot its migration destination? Dan O'Malley goes into more detail about this in his article in this newsletter.

Dark-billed Cuckoo is relatively common where it normally occurs, but there are very few records outside of South America. There is one record from southernmost Nicaragua and a puzzling occurrence of a bird that was brought to a rehab station in Brownsville, Texas (February 1986). That Texas bird died in rehab and was not accepted as an official record by the American Birding Association, the designated birding scorekeeper. If the ABA accepts our bird, it will be the first official record of this species in North America. That's quite amazing, and it will confirm Palm Beach County's place among the elite birding destinations. Who knows how much economic boost to the local area its appearance has triggered?

This is a bird no one expects to see in South Florida, but its identification is an example of how diligent observation can add to our knowledge of the comings and goings of our avian friends. I'd like to thank Kenny Miller, Dan O'Malley and Kyle Matera for providing photographs for the article and Dan O'Malley for providing critical information to help me put this piece together.



Photos above: Crowds gather to view the Dark-billed Cuckoo © 2019 Kenny Miller. All rights reserved.



Photo: Dark-billed Cuckoo © 2019 Kyle Matera. All rights reserved.



Photo: The bird was observed feeding on caterpillars (Gulf Fritillary caterpillar here) amid Brazilian Pepper bushes, a behavior common to our native cuckoos. © 2019 Dan O'Malley. All rights reserved.

Federal Court Sides with Conservation Organizations against Outgoing District Managers on Everglades Water Quality

by Scott Zucker



Photo: Flamingos flying past Storm Water Treatment Area 2 pump stations in 2016 © Scott Zucker. All rights reserved.

Audubon Everglades joined several conservation organizations - Earthjustice, Florida Wildlife Federation, National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club, National Parks Conservation Association, and Defenders of Wildlife - in a Miami Federal Court on the afternoon of February 11, 2019, to oppose the motion by the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) to withdraw from the Consent Decree.

The Consent Decree is the historic 1992 legal agreement the State made with the Department of Justice and the Miccosukee Tribe over violations of the Clean Waters Act. It provides federal oversight of Everglades Water Quality and requires that water flowing south into the Everglades and Everglades National Park be clean.

Earthjustice Attorney Alisa Coe ably represented the conservation organizations, and Audubon Florida and the Miccosukee Tribe, who were also present to oppose the motion, had separate representation.

The SFWMD's attorney Brian Accardo argued that the Consent Decree was hindering ongoing restoration efforts by keeping water from being moved south into Everglades National Park. What he did not mention is that Everglades Agricultural Area farms continue to release water heavily laden with phosphorous and nitrogen, mainly because the State has only a

voluntary Best Management Practices program in place to regulate farm runoff. These waters must be cleaned, or Everglades National Park, which is a low nutrient ecosystem, will suffer.

Federal Court Judge Moreno, the judicial official overseeing the Consent Decree order, rejected the petition, calling it "premature," and, on multiple occasions, he questioned the attorneys representing SFWMD regarding their timing in filing the motion. It was inappropriately close to Gov. Ron DeSantis' assumption of office, and, as a result, the new governor demanded the resignation of all nine SFWMD Governing Board members, who had been appointed by the Scott administration.

Past president and current board member Paton White, who represented Audubon Everglades at the hearing, said, "We didn't expect going in that the Judge would rule so decidedly in our favor, and we were pleased when he told the SFWMD that he didn't want to see them in his courtroom again anytime soon on this issue."

Judge Moreno's ruling against the district may not end the matter, since he dismissed the motion without prejudice. This means that the SFWMD can file again, if it so chooses. It was also made clear at the hearing that discussions to modify the Consent Decree are

currently underway between the SFWMD, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the U.S. Government and include developing some sort of "exit criteria." This exit plan action had begun in former Governor Rick Scott's DEP. However, the US Government and the DEP opposed the current District's action.

The current question on the minds of environmental groups is why the DEP under Governor DeSantis continues to work toward an exit from the Consent Decree? Severing the commitment to send only clean water south is incompatible with the goals of Everglades Restoration and with our new Governor's well-publicized declaration of his support for funding for the project and for cleaning up Florida's water.

Jim Murphy, director of legal advocacy for the National Wildlife Federation, said, "For decades, this agreement has been instrumental in protecting the sensitive Everglades ecosystem. But the work is far from done, and these protections continue to be needed."

2019 NATURAL AREAS FESTIVAL

Winding Waters Natural Area
Saturday, March 9
7:30AM-2 PM
6161 Haverhill Road North
West Palm Beach

Join Audubon Everglades at this Environmental Resource Management (ERM) event in the bird-iful 31,000 acre Winding Waters Natural Area. There will be a 5k run (the only event you must pay to enter), guided hikes and kayak tours, wildlife presentations, kid zone, food trucks, environmental exhibitors and much more. [Contact Vicki](#) for information or to volunteer.

FINDING THE DARK-BILLED CUCKOO

by Kristen Murtaugh



Photo: Marcello Gomes



Photo: Kyle Matera

They did not expect their outing that day to be anything extra-special, but today Marcello Gomes and Kyle Matera look back on the afternoon of February 6 with disbelief (and enormous grins!). The original plan was to meet at the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, but, on his way there, Marcello thought it would be fun to introduce Kyle to the West Delray Regional Park. The WDRP is not one of the most popular birding hot spots in Palm Beach County, but it is worth knowing, and it was just down the road from Loxahatchee. So, Marcello called Kyle, who was already at the Refuge, and told him to meet him at the Park. The two had spent about an hour walking around; there had not been much to see; they had not even started a list; the thought had been to just get an idea of the WDRP. Coming along the east side of the bike trail along the lake as they began to head for the exit, Marcello saw a bird that looked like a cuckoo. It was back lit, but it looked like it had a black bill. Could this be the elusive Black-billed Cuckoo, a species neither of the two had ever seen?! Suddenly a passing biker flushed the bird into the sunlight 15-20 yards away from them. They had a much better view of it. Yes, it was a cuckoo with a caterpillar in its black bill! The two friends hugged. They had spent many hours looking for a Black-billed Cuckoo last year in Corkscrew Swamp. But, wait, there were no winter records for BBCU. And then they noted the bird's buffy breast and under-tail pattern. They changed their ID to Mangrove Cuckoo. But what was a Mangrove Cuckoo doing so far from its usual habitat? And, as unusual a sighting the Mangrove Cuckoo would be there, the two were more disappointed that they hadn't finally gotten the Black-billed Cuckoo.

24 hours later, after they had contacted expert birders and posted their photos on eBird and after what they called "an army" of people had worked on identifying

the bird (Juvenile Black-billed? Juvenile Mangrove?), the ABA Code 5 Dark-billed Cuckoo ID was made. After seeing the photos, Carl Edwards had told Marcello, "Pray for a Dark-billed Cuckoo; anything is possible." If the ID is confirmed by the Florida Ornithological Society and the ABA in their record review process, this will be the first confirmed record in North America. And, so, for the next five days, hundreds of birders from across the country came to see this most unlikely visitor from South America in the West Delray Regional Park. They watched in awe as a rather nonchalant bird seemed to almost pose for photos as it moved about the Brazilian Pepper bushes, happily eating caterpillars. Marcello and Kyle had first spotted the bird at 5:01PM on February 6; by 9AM on February 10, it was gone.

Marcello and Kyle continue to feel incredible elation and excitement. Their adrenaline is still high. It's not hard for them to answer the question, what's your favorite bird?! Lots of fun things have happened for the two friends as a result of their sighting. They have received phone calls from internationally famous birding experts, who thanked them for finding the bird. Kyle said his friend requests on Facebook have multiplied! They got a call from a company that designs tee-shirts for ABA Code 5 Birds. They are free for the people who find the birds and are for sale to others. Their design for the Dark-billed Cuckoo is terrific. Everyone who saw the bird can buy one and get it autographed by Marcello and Kyle! The curator of the Division of Ornithology at the Florida Museum of Natural History in Gainesville has encouraged them to write a note about the bird for publication in a scientific journal and has offered his assistance in doing so.

So, who are these two special birders whose find brought an incredible life bird to hundreds of people?

Marcello Gomes grew up in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, a city where there are 700 species of birds, including, of course, the Dark-billed Cuckoo. He came to this country in 1986. He has his master's degree in Multicultural Education from Florida Atlantic University and has been teaching ESOL students in Palm Beach County Schools for 18 years. He always enjoyed birds, but his intense interest in birding evolved as he developed an interest in photography. His wife is a photographer and, when he first looked at a Common Gallinule at Wakodahatchee Wetlands through her zoom lens, he was hooked. At first, he just photographed the birds, not caring what species they were. Then, about eight or nine years ago, he started really looking closely at birds and learning about them. Now he is an avid birder and has almost 500 U.S. birds on his life list. Kyle Matera has a Master's in Social Work and teaches in the School of Social Work at FAU. He grew up on Long Island, New York and has always loved hiking and being in the outdoors. His undergraduate degree in Psychology is from Florida Gulf State University, a truly nature-oriented institution. Like Marcello, Kyle got into photography for nature and birds. He has been a serious birder for three - four years now and has a U.S. life list of over 450 species.

It's obvious that the friendship between Marcello and Kyle is special. The two have been birding together for almost two years now. They met for the first time scouting out the Vermilion Flycatcher that had turned up at Loxahatchee two years ago. The friends do what is known as "hard-core" birding, driving for hours to chase down special species. They are gifted birders. Marcello is particularly strong in identifying bird sounds, and his love of teaching carries over into the field. Learning about new birds, figuring out what the species of unknown birds are, and studying guide books are like games for them. Like everyone, they "dip" sometimes and they "win" sometimes, but they are persistent; they keep on trying. Finding the Dark-billed Cuckoo on February 6, 2019 was the ultimate experience. They had joked that they had gotten an ABA Code 3 Bird (Smooth-billed Ani) and Code 4 Bird (Bahama Mockingbird) last year, but would they get a Code 5? Well, not only did they get it, but they were the ones to find it! They were in the right place at the right time. Marcello said God put that bird there for them to find. It was like winning the lottery without buying a ticket. What's next for the two? How about the ABA Code 6 Ivory-billed Woodpecker?

CURRENT VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

by Susan McKemy

Audubon Everglades is an all-volunteer organization. We are lucky to have wonderful volunteers who plan and implement all of our programs, events, trips, birding habitat programs, conservation efforts, communications, and community events. We couldn't do it without them!

If you enjoy any of these activities, won't you consider becoming involved as a volunteer? There are many ways to volunteer; one is certain to be a fit for your interest, skills and abilities. We would love to have you join the team of Audubon Everglades volunteers.

If you have a special interest or talent or simply want to give back to Audubon Everglades as a volunteer, please check the list of volunteer opportunities for an area where you might get involved. If your interest area is not listed and you are ready to volunteer, get in touch with us and let us know your interest; there are new ways to get involved all the time.

If you would like more information or are ready to get involved, please send an email to President@AudubonEverglades.org. We look forward to having you on our team!



WE ARE LUCKY
TO HAVE SO MANY
WONDERFUL
VOLUNTEERS!

CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES

Citizen Science Projects

(bird surveys, habitat projects, etc.)

Community Event Support

Conservation Advocacy Team

Education and Outreach

Audio Visual Support

Newsletter Coordinator

Program room set-up and closing

Social Media

Volunteer Organizer

Event Partnership Report: 20th Annual Everglades Day

by Vicki Rogerson

Everglades Day 2019 was an interesting challenge for Audubon Everglades, not only because of the 35-day government shutdown, during which critical Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge employees were not able to plan, meet or talk to anyone on the planning committee, but also because, immediately after setting up this year, we had an extended rain shower. Instead of giving people shelter from the sun, we sheltered them from the rain at our Audubon Everglades Shade & Water tent staffed by Project Perch. We also aided a fellow non-profit, the Atala Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association by setting up and staffing a tent for them. Our main tent was the Audubon Everglades Information Tent, located right at the beginning of the festival, where we greeted and directed attendees. We, too, gave shelter from the rain to event goers! Fortunately, Scott Zucker was able to lead a birding hike between the raindrops. Unfortunately, the rain reduced attendance to 1,800 from the typical 4,000.

As soon as the sun came out, the people arrived in droves by shuttle bus from West Delray Regional Park. Interestingly, the buses picked people up very close to where the ABA Code 5 Dark-billed Cuckoo was being seen! Each of our tents gave out specialized information and answered questions from "What is that amazing white bird in the median with the yellow beak that hunts bugs?" to "What is the difference between a Burrowing Owl and an Eastern Screech Owl?" We facilitated the Everglades Challenge, a game that encourages youth and their families to visit as many exhibitors as they can and then come back and see us for a special prize. We had some awesome Safari Toob animals for prizes, and there were no complaints when they got to pick out a cool bird, insect, or butterfly. We handed out Florida Backyard Birds posters to thrilled adults who participated in other refuge challenges. The day may have started out soggy, but it finished with sunshine and some very happy visitors who had come out for Everglades Day and to see the northernmost part of the Everglades that we protect and hold dear.

A huge thank-you to all of the volunteers from Audubon Everglades who made this happen: Sue Revie, Paton White, Bill and Jeannie Mauser, Elaine Siegel, Kat Rahla, Linda Hignite, Steve Hoher, Mary Young, Scott Zucker, Susan and Don Davis, Doris Chafin, Allan Summersgill, Fred Quan, Ginny Gong, Debbie Smith, Karen Lindquist, Nila Wilbur, Ron Frendreis, and, last but not least, Sue and Roy Snyder.

PROJECT PERCH DEBUTS AT EVERGLADES DAY

by Mary Young

Our Burrowing Owl puppet made its debut at Everglades Day, February 9, when Susan Davis and Mary Young, with a team of volunteers, gave out "wanted posters" and owl fact sheets, asking the public if they had seen Florida Burrowing Owls. Using a poster highlighting the differences between the Screech Owl and the Burrowing Owl, we showed how the two are easily confused. We spoke to families and individuals about why Burrowing Owls are a threatened species and told them about our efforts to update the 1999 Palm Beach County Burrowing Owl census.

The Project Perch crew would like to thank our volunteers who helped us inform the public about the Burrowing Owl crisis: Elaine Siegel, Doris Chafin, Fred Quan and Alan Summersgill. We look forward to more fun at our next tabling event. If you would like to volunteer to help the adorable Burrowing Owls, please call (856) 857-5922 or (561) 876-8815 or email.us.

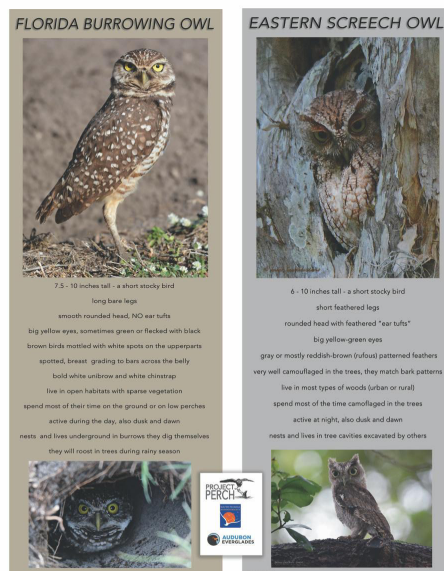


Photo: Poster designed and photographed by Susan
Faulkner Davis © 2019. All rights reserved.

AUDUBON EVERGLADES PHOTOGRAPHY CLUB

by Scott Zucker



Photo: Photography Club members capturing floral beauty at Mounts Botanical Gardens
© Lora Lekos 2019. All rights reserved.

The Photography Club invaded Mounts Botanical Gardens on February 23. All 17 participants were armed with cameras, and some also sported tripods, flashes and other accessories to capture images of flora for the special subject category Macro (extreme close-up) Nature. This was part of the club's February 25 photo competition, which also included our regular "Nature Only" category (any type of nature image). A number of the images captured that morning received ribbons at the competition. The field trip participants relished the opportunity to photograph a wide array of flowers and insects (sometimes together) that morning. As always, Club President Pete Lekos and the more experienced photographers offered the novice photographers individual tips on how to capture great images.

The February competition was expertly judged by award-winning photographer and past presenter, Art Silvergate, who enlightened our club last year with his informative and practical program, "Become a Better Photographer Without New Equipment." About 200 breathtaking photographs were entered

from all three levels (Beginner, Advanced, and Salon) and showed the continuing improvement that club members are making in their craft. [The winners and the titles of their winning images can be seen on the Competition Results page.](#)

Our February 25 monthly program [4th Monday of the month] will feature Barry Heimlich. Barry, who was a past president of South Florida Audubon, will describe how and where he has captured the wide-ranging types of subjects that will be featured in his presentation. Barry has also been an important regional voice for conservation.

Please join us at our next meeting or outing and make your photography more rewarding and enjoyable. Club meetings begin at 7 PM at St. Michael's Lutheran Church, 1925 Birkdale Drive, Wellington FL 33414

For more information please contact [Dr. Pete Lekos](#) at 201-600-646 or [visit us online.](#)

Passport, please! Will the Dark-billed Cuckoo make it to the Official State List of the Birds of Florida?

by Dan O'Malley

Bird record committees (BRC) have the unenviable job of deciding whether bird records are legitimate and should be included as part of the official scientific record of bird distribution within their respective state or province. In Florida, this committee is organized by the [Florida Ornithological Society \(FOS\)](#). [Reports from the records committee](#) can be read in [The Florida Field Naturalist](#), the scientific journal published by FOS. All birders active in Florida should consider joining this organization.

The first part of the process involves determining whether the bird in question was correctly identified by the observer. With the recent proliferation of inexpensive digital cameras with zoom lenses, most submitted records are now accompanied by high quality photographs, making this task easier than in years past, when committees had to rely heavily on field notes and field sketches because photographs or specimens were not available. Contention can arise, especially in cases of species that are known to hybridize or are difficult to identify without measurements or vocalizations (e.g., *Empidonax* flycatchers), but, when good photographs are available, the identity of the species is usually easily resolved, as will likely be the case for the February 2019 Dark-billed Cuckoo.

The second part of the review process concerns the provenance of the bird, that is, where it came from and how it got to be in the place where it was discovered. This is often much less straightforward than establishing that the species was correctly identified. Considerations include whether there is

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[Scott Zucker is mentioned in a recent Sun Sentinel editorial.](#) Great job Scott! Thanks to Marcia Yeip for passing this along to us!

any precedent of the species occurring in the state. A first state record, such as the Dark-billed Cuckoo, faces much more scrutiny than a species that already has accepted records, because it will result in a new addition to the list of the state's avifauna. The existence of a pattern of vagrancy in the region is also considered and, when the record fits with an established pattern, concerns about the origin of the bird are allayed. The main concern with determining provenance is that a bird may not be of wild origin or may not have traveled under its own power to the location where it was discovered.

When there is no established pattern of vagrancy, the records committee undertakes an investigation into various factors to allow members to make an informed vote on the record. First, photographs of the bird are scrutinized for evidence of captivity, such as a leg band or feather and bill abrasion associated with captivity. However, these physical clues are only useful if the bird has been in recent captivity. If a bird has molted since it became free, feather wear would not be apparent. It is also important to determine if the species has a history of occurring in the pet trade or if it has documentation as part of an aviary collection. A species that has not been documented to occur in the pet trade or in aviary collections faces fewer concerns regarding provenance. For species known to be in aviary collections, managers of collections documented to include the species are contacted to determine whether all the individuals in their collection are accounted for. It seems unlikely for Dark-billed Cuckoo to be kept as a pet or in a collection and photographs do not appear to show leg bands or feathers with cage wear, but people have diverse tastes and stranger things have happened. Only the due diligence of the BRC will determine whether there is evidence to suggest the bird may have a captive origin.

Once the hurdles above have been cleared, the committee will review the literature and consult experts on the species to determine how the bird may have successfully undertaken the journey from its likely origin within its native range to the location it was discovered. This is where ship-assistance comes into play. If a species shows up near an international shipping port or cruise ship terminal, suspicions are raised. Suspicions are raised even more when the species has been documented aboard ships at sea. [European Robin](#) is a recent

example of a Florida bird record that seems unlikely to be accepted because of these concerns. When these more obvious concerns are not at play, as it would appear in the case of the Dark-billed Cuckoo, the focus shifts to whether the species is physically capable of traveling unassisted from its native range.

This is where precedent becomes important. In the case of Dark-billed Cuckoo, there is a record of an individual in south Texas on 10 February 1986. This hints at a possible pattern of vagrancy in North America. While two observations hardly make a pattern, the fact that the two North American records occur at almost the exact same time of year is likely not a coincidence. How does this timing match up with the species' biology? Well, in parts of its range (Argentina, southern Brazil, Paraguay), it is an austral migrant, "present only from October to *January or February*" ([Damon 2012](#); italics mine). This means that individuals from these populations are migrating north in January and February, suggesting that the two February North American records may very well be overshoots from wild populations. Austral migrants spend the Southern Hemisphere winter (our summer) in the tropics and migrate to temperate regions of the Southern Hemisphere to breed during their summer (our winter). A well-known austral migrant that occurs with regularity in the US is Fork-tailed Flycatcher. Another example is Crowned Slaty Flycatcher, for which there is a [June 2008 record from Louisiana](#).

The likelihood of Dark-billed Cuckoo being able to make a direct long-distance flight over water, an island-hopping route involving many large water crossings, or a truly epic circum-Gulf migration will be discussed by the committee with input from species experts, a thorough review of the published literature about the species, and a review of weather events that may have impacted the likelihood of the bird completing such a journey. This evidence will be weighed against any evidence suggesting the bird may have had a captive origin or travel assistance, and each member will have to decide if it is more likely a wild bird, a liberated captive bird, or a stowaway. On the surface the Dark-billed Cuckoo seems like a good candidate for acceptance, but it is up to the committee to complete their investigation and deliberations to arrive at the best possible decision.

CHECKLIST CODES

CODE-1 AND CODE-2: *Regularly occurring North American avifauna.*

Includes regular breeding species and visitors. There is no firm designation between Code-1 and Code-2 species, except that logically Code-1 species are more widespread and are usually more numerous. Code-2 species have a restricted North American range, are more widespread, but occur in lower densities, or are quite secretive making their detection often difficult. We readily acknowledge that some Code-2 species are harder to find than some species that have higher codes.

CODE-3: *Rare.*

Species that occur in very low numbers, but annually, in the ABA Checklist Area. This includes visitors and rare breeding residents.

CODE-4: *Casual.*

Species not recorded annually in the ABA Checklist Area, but with six or more total records—including three or more in the past 30 years—reflecting some pattern of occurrence.

CODE-5: *Accidental.*

Species that are recorded five or fewer times in the ABA Checklist Area, or fewer than three records in the past 30 years.

CODE-6: *Cannot be found.*

The species is probably or actually extinct or extirpated from the ABA Checklist Area, or all survivors are held in captivity (or releases are not yet naturally re-established).

For more information on Birding Codes please see pages 13-14 of "ABA Checklist: Birds of the Continental United States and Canada" Sixth Edition 2002.

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