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President-Elect, American Ornithologists' Union
Chairman, A.O.U. Committee on Classification
and Nomenclature

5 June 1990

Mr. Ronald E. Goetz
909 S. Gore Avenue
Webster Groves, MO 63119

Dear Mr. Goetz:

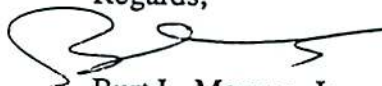
You sure do ask hard questions! The A.O.U. Committee has tried to stay away from the decisions concerning the "validity" of vagrant records and the "man-assisted" aspect, generally relying on the A.B.A. for data gathering and confining decisions to species-level ones (i.e., whether the bird is appropriate for an A.O.U. number or not). Of course, we have to make decisions that will show up in ranges, as you mention with *Cyanocitta stelleri*. The reason why the Quebec record is accepted and the Illinois is not is simply that it was that way in the 5th edition of the Check-list; to change from that, one of the Committee or one of the 26 regional reviewers would have had to have brought it up, which did not happen. So the species' range in the 6th edition reflected that of the combined races in the 5th edition. Personally, there is no more doubt about the first Illinois record than the Quebec one; specimen records are firm, only the "origin" might be in question here. Whatever, both records should be in the same boat. As for the banded record, the species identification would be satisfactory but the subspecies would not; the sight record, of course, is just that, but would be satisfactory for mention as a "sight record" if the state committee accepted it (doubt if you would with no details reported). There seems to be some general pattern of occasional, even long-range, vagrancy in this species so unless data were forthcoming to show man-assistance, the substantiated records are probably valid.

The Scrub Jay, on the other hand, poses a serious problem, not only with the occurrence being natural or not but also with the identification. This species will likely be split before the 7th edition into three or four species. Even if you have marginal photographs, they may be insufficient to establish the population (species) of origin (obviously, the most likely would be *woodhousii*), but that will not suffice for the A.O.U. Committee.

I agree with Bruce Peterjohn about the Barnacle Geese. To me, the records seem to all (or at least mostly) reflect escapes. I think a more consistent pattern, especially in the extreme northeast, needs to be established before we can accept natural vagrancy in this species.

So far as the Oklahoma frigatebird record goes, both the A.B.A. and the A.O.U. have been trying to track down the record without success. So it probably will be dropped if we can't come up with some verification. However, once again, there doesn't seem to be any way to identify the Illinois bird to species. The mere probability of Magnificent doesn't cut any ice. Sorry, but this plumage needs to be collected to be verified. Treating it as "frigatebird sp." is okay if your committee accepts the identification that far.

Regards,



Burt L. Monroe, Jr.

BLM/bm

909 S. Gore Ave.
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23 May 1990

Dr. Burt L. Monroe, Jr.
Chairman, A.O.U. Committee on Classification and Nomenclature
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Dear Dr. Monroe:

Many thanks for your informative letter of 30 March. I have a few additional thoughts on my previous questions, as well as a few additional queries.

The information on subspecies of Large-billed Tern came as a surprise, but not having to deal with the subspecies question in this case will probably be a relief. The IORC and I are most anxious to hear the results of the A.O.U. evaluation of the United States records, particularly the Illinois record, of course. It might be noted that the record has traditionally been accepted by Illinois authorities, and I expect that the IORC will follow suit unless given a substantial argument against the record. Again, I would very much appreciate it if you could keep me informed of any relevant information turned up in the A.O.U. review.

I thought you might be interested to know that Bruce Peterjohn informed me several years ago of two sources of escaped Barnacle Geese in Ohio alone; one of these locations in particular apparently allowed at least 7 Barnacle Geese to wonder off between 1974 and 1977. Bruce felt that these birds had contributed to the reports of the species from the Middlewestern Prairie and Central Southern Regions.

One of the IORC Members has informed me that the Monk Parakeet population in Chicago is apparently even larger and more widespread than I had thought. Let me know if further information on this population would be of interest.

On to new business. First, the IORC is attempting to decide the status of Steller's Jay on the Illinois state list. There are, surprisingly, three records for Illinois, all occurring in late spring and summer. The first of these is based on a still extant specimen taken 12 June 1911 (although present for some time prior to that) in Chicago. The specimen is held at the Chicago Academy of Sciences and has been identified as *Cyanocitta stelleri macrolopha*; it shows no obvious sign of having been held in captivity. The second record was an individual banded at Highland Park on 13 July 1952 and supposedly identified as *C. s. annectens* -- I am not sure at this point how much (if any) evidence for this record is still extant. Finally, there is a sight record with no details from Palos Hills Forest Preserve (Cook County), 25 May 1965. Obviously, the essential question here is whether or not any of these birds traveled to Illinois naturally; although seemingly rather implausible, these records (especially the specimen) have traditionally been accepted by authors writing on the birds of Illinois or Chicago. I was hoping you might be able to let us know why the Quebec record is included in the A.O.U. 6th Edition, while the Illinois records are not. More generally, if you have any opinions on the Illinois records, are interested in more information on them, or know of someone else who might be interested in assisting our evaluation of these records, I would be most grateful if you would let me know.

A similar case, although more recent, is that of the only Illinois record of Scrub Jay. The bird was probably from the *woodhouseii* group, and was seen (and marginally photographed) at Illinois Beach State Park from 29 September to 30 October 1984. It seemed extremely wary to observers and had no obvious

signs of having been held in captivity (i.e., no obvious deformities of the bill or feet, no missing flight feathers). The timing of the record is rather plausible, but the record is difficult to evaluate because the location seems to be 600+ miles from the nearest known occurrence of the species, and, as far as I have been informed, no individual Scrub Jay has been known to fly more than about half that distance. Your thoughts on the matter, or referral elsewhere, would again be appreciated.

Finally, in the fall of 1988, Illinois had its first entirely unambiguous record of a frigatebird. Unfortunately, the bird was an immature (second stage juvenile) and the physical details alone apparently do not allow for the absolute elimination of Great Frigatebird. Consultants have been of two opinions: either to list *Fregata*, sp. on the state list (rather than make the assumption that the individual belonged to the expected species); or to list Magnificent Frigatebird on the state list (since "to treat the bird as anything other than an immature Magnificent Frigatebird would be presumptuous"). Essentially, the division of opinion is due to different thoughts on the likelihood of the occurrence of Great Frigatebird in North America. Several reviewers have felt that it can be ruled out in the case of the Illinois bird on geographic grounds alone, especially since the Illinois frigatebird occurred amidst a wave of inland frigatebirds, most of them positively identified as Magnificent. In any case, the question of whether Great Frigatebird should be seriously considered depends to an extent on the provenance of the Oklahoma specimen, and two of the consultants openly questioned whether this specimen had been conclusively identified; I attempted to check this question, but in the only publication I could find, Heller and Barclay (1977, *Bull. Oklahoma Ornithological Society* 10:9-10) listed the identification as preliminary. I noticed also that the latest ABA Checklist does not list the species. Can you tell us if in fact this specimen has been critically examined, and, in any case, how we should treat the Illinois frigatebird?

Thanks again for your time and assistance.

Sincerely yours,



Ronald E. Goetz

Secretary

Illinois Ornithological Records Committee