

# Ten Years on



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## An Analysis of “The Next New ABA Birds”

**W**e’ve all done it. We’re birders. We can’t help it. What’s going to be the next new species in my yard, in my state, in the lower 48, in the ABA Area, you name it? About ten years ago, *Birding* ran a series of articles in which expert birders in seven rare bird-rich areas of the ABA region predicted what the next new species for the ABA Area would be. With the recent publication of the seventh edition of the *ABA Checklist* and later additions (published annually in *Birding*), how have those predictions turned out?

Can we really predict what will happen next? Or is birding life just full of surprises? This article compares the predictions of experts a decade ago with what actually happened, and leaves it up to you to judge their accuracy. No matter what, questions of occurrence—the predictability and unpredictability of bird species—are always fun topics for discussion and an integral part of birding.



The *Birding* articles started in December 1998 by reminding us that the idea traced back to California birder Don Roberson. Roberson had gathered a panel of ten birding experts in 1988 to predict the “next birds for North America.” Their predictions were published in the December 1988 edition of *Birding*. The more recent series of articles finished in December 2000. Each area had a panel of from eight to 12 members with a “lead” or two—the authors of the articles. Each panel member predicted the five bird species, new to the ABA Area, considered most likely to next appear in his or her region. The most likely was given a score of 5, the next-most-likely a 4, and so forth. These lists were forwarded to the lead(s) who, after first chuckling, arranged the top six by point total.

Ground rules were applied. For example, panel members could not include established exotics not on the *ABA Checklist*. Neither could they include species then under review by the ABA Checklist Committee (CLC). In some cases, the nominated birds had been seen (sometimes by the panel members themselves) in the region, but were not yet “official,” often due to inadequate documentation.

Let’s now review these seven areas in the order in which they appeared in *Birding*, and see what’s actually happened over the past 10–12 years. The predictions, results, and surprises are summarized in the main table for this article, pp. 37–43.

**T**he **Southern Arizona and Southwestern New Mexico** area predictions were published in *Birding* in December 1998. The nine-member panel consisted of six experts from Arizona (Chris Benesh, Troy Corman, Doug Danforth, Steve Ganley, Gale Monson, and lead Roy Jones) and three from New Mex-



**Sinaloa Wren** (top) was a successful prediction of the Arizona–New Mexico committee. A bird found in Arizona in August 2008 stayed for almost 18 months. The species was the fourth among the panel’s top six. *Sayulita, Nayarit; January 2008*. © Rick Bowers.

**Gray-collared Becard** (middle) was the top vote-getter in the honorable mention category for the Arizona–New Mexico panel. An individual of this species was a one-day wonder in Arizona’s fabled Chiricahua Mountains. It showed well for a few hours, then was never seen again. *South Fork–Cave Creek, Arizona; 5 June 2009*. © Jillian Johnston.

**Brown-backed Solitaire** (bottom) was a problematic success for the panels. The species was one of the top six in the Texas panel’s enumeration. However, the species received no consideration from the Arizona–New Mexico panel. In blatant disregard for these panels’ judgments, one or two Brown-backed Solitaires decided to visit not Texas, but Arizona, in the summer of 2009. *Ramsey Canyon, Arizona; 30 July 2009*. © Christopher H. Taylor.



**Mountain Trogon** (top) was ranked second by the Arizona–New Mexico committee, but the species has not yet vagrated to the ABA Area. Or has it? A vagrant Mountain Trogon could easily be dismissed as an Elegant Trogon. In predicting vagrants, it is important to consider the “human factor” of detection. *Barranca Rancho Liebre, Sinaloa; October 1999. © Doug Wechsler.*

The species wasn’t on anybody’s radar. Certainly, it wasn’t predicted by any of the panels. Nonetheless, a **Sungrebe** (middle) found its way to New Mexico in November 2008. The bird’s identity is unquestioned, but the ABA Checklist Committee will have to address the matter of the bird’s origin. Could it have been an escape from captivity? *Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico; 18 November 2008. © Jerry R. Oldenettel.*

None of the panels predicted **Crowned Slaty-Flycatcher** (bottom). And the species has not shown up within any of the six regions covered in the original *Birding* series. Nonetheless, the species is a recent addition to the *ABA Checklist*. One was collected in Louisiana, a “dead zone” between the areas of coverage for the Texas and Florida panels. *Peveto Beach Woods, Cameron Parish, Louisiana; 3 June 2008. © Paul Conover.*

ico (John Parmeter, Sartor O. Williams III, and Dale Zimmerman). This area had had 13 new species for the ABA Area in the previous 35 years (1958–1992). Unsurprisingly, these were all Mexican and other tropical American species. The predicted next arrivals, both the top six and the eight honorable mentions, were also cross-border vagrants.

Most of these species occur in northwestern Mexico, with some having been documented within 100 miles of the U.S. border. Of the top six, only Black-headed Siskin was stated to “not pose a significant identification problem.” Others were considered to pose interesting identification challenges: Rusty Sparrow vs. Rufous-crowned Sparrow; Mountain Trogon vs. Elegant Trogon; Mangrove Swallow vs. Tree and Violet-green swallows; Sinaloa Wren vs. Bewick’s Wren (and throw Happy Wren into the mix); and Sinaloa Martin vs. female Purple and Gray-breasted martins.

Of the top six, the arrival of the now-famous Sinaloa Wren on 25 August 2008 at The Nature Conservancy’s Patagonia–Sonoita Creek Preserve in Arizona was the only success. To the delight of many hundreds, this bird sang loudly for prolonged periods, built a nest, and continued in the same small area to the end of 2009. A second bird was found on 14 April 2009 in Huachuca Canyon, Arizona. Although the Mangrove Swallow, a prediction of this panel, has not been recorded in this region, it did arrive at the Viera Wetlands, Brevard County, Florida, on 18 November 2002. Among the honorable mentions, the discovery of a Gray-collared Becard in the South Fork Zoological and Botanical Area near the Southwestern Research Station in the Chiricahuas on 5 June 2009 was followed by a second (or the same bird) in Sunny Flats Campground, also in the Chiricahua Mountains, Arizona, on 19 June 2009.

Quite unanticipated was a Sungrebe at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico, on 13 November 2008. This readily identifiable, secretive, and sedentary bird of slow-moving rivers and humid forests is not usually found in collections, but the question of origin will surely be taken up in due course by the ABA CLC.

The region’s attractiveness to rarities continued with the discovery of a Brown-backed Solitaire in Miller Canyon in the Huachuca Mountains, Arizona, on 16 July 2009. It is nice that a party of young participants with Camp Chiricahua found it; they starred on National Public Radio a few days later. On 18 July, another, or the same, was reported at nearby Ramsey Canyon. Interestingly, this species had been reported from Madera Canyon, Arizona, in early October 1996, but it was not added to the *ABA Checklist* because of questions of origin. This species is one of the commonest cage birds in central Mexico because of its attractive song. The ABA CLC has not yet rendered judgment on the recent Brown-backed Solitaire sighting(s) in Arizona. By the way, this species was sixth in neighboring Texas’ top six.

Speaking of which, the nine-man panel for Texas consisted of co-leads Greg Lasley and Mark Lockwood, together with Victor Emanuel, Brush Freeman, Brad McKinney, Tom Pincelli, Martin Reid, Willie Sekula, and Barry Zimmer. Their report appeared in *Birding* in April 1999. The area covered had had 26 new ABA Area species in the period 1971–1996. Of note is that one of these was a White-chinned Petrel, which was found in poor condition in the surf near Rollover Pass, Galveston County, on 27 April 1986. Despite being correctly identified, the bird had been rejected by the ABA CLC in 1992 because of uncertainty regarding its origin; however, the species was added to the *ABA Checklist* in 2007. A Dark-billed Cuckoo of 1986 was not so fortunate; it has not been added to the *ABA Checklist*, also because of uncertainty regarding its origin. Needless to say, the panel's selections were primarily from Mexico and southward.

Although none of the panel's top six has arrived in Texas in the past ten years, two have occurred elsewhere in the ABA Area: Mangrove Swallow in Florida and Brown-backed Solitaire in Arizona. The recent sighting of an Amazon Kingfisher on Zacate Creek in Laredo on 24 January 2010 filled a void in the honorable mentions list. The rather extensive list of "also-rans"—those species receiving at least one vote from the panel—produced two winners, both from Bentsen–Rio Grande Valley State Park. A Social Flycatcher was found there on 7 January 2005 and stayed a week, and a Bare-throated Tiger-Heron was discovered there on 21 December 2009. A bird identified as a Pine Flycatcher in Choke Canyon State Park on 13 December 2008 took some time to morph into something else; hasty birders from 26 states looked for the bird while it was still thought by some to be a Pine Flycatcher.

The first of two big surprises not even close to being on anyone's radar was the discovery of a Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush in a yard in Pharr on 28 May 2004. Present until 29 October 2004, it was one of the longest-staying ABA Area firsts. The second surprise was the discovery of a White-crested Elaenia on South Padre Island

## Table. Summary of the Panels' Predictions

FIRST COLUMN: Species name (scientific name in parentheses).

SECOND COLUMN: Number of votes by the panel; "--" denotes no votes reported.

THIRD COLUMN: Status in ABA Area as of April 2010.

Please note: This table offers only a basic summary of the results! Please read the main text of the article for additional details and context. For a full understanding of some of the nomenclatorial issues, please see the original series in *Birding* (1998–2000).

Please also note: Methods were not uniformly employed by the panels. For example, the Texas and Florida panels did not report vote totals; the Atlantic Pelagic panel lumped honorable mentions and also-rans; the Northeastern panel added a category for "Real Long Shots"; and so forth. See the text for full details.

Species marked with an asterisk have not yet been evaluated by the ABA Checklist Committee.

## Southern Arizona and Southwestern New Mexico

### PREDICTED SPECIES: THE TOP 6

Rusty Sparrow ( <i>Aimophila rufescens</i> )	24	Not Found
Mountain Trogon ( <i>Trogon mexicanus</i> )	19	Not Found
Mangrove Swallow ( <i>Tachycineta albilinea</i> )	17	Found Outside Region
Sinaloa Wren ( <i>Thryothorus sinaloa</i> )	15	<b>Found!</b>
Sinaloa Martin ( <i>Progne sinaloa</i> )	11	Not Found
Black-headed Siskin ( <i>Carduelis notata</i> )	11	Not Found

### PREDICTED SPECIES: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Gray-collared Becard* ( <i>Pachyramphus major</i> )	7	<b>Found!</b>
White-striped Woodcreeper ( <i>Lepidocolaptes leucogaster</i> )	6	Not Found
Russet Nightingale-Thrush ( <i>Catharus occidentalis</i> )	5	Not Found
Striped Sparrow ( <i>Oriturus superciliosus</i> )	4	Not Found
Golden-crowned Emerald ( <i>Chlorostilbon auriceps</i> )	3	Not Found
Military Macaw ( <i>Ara militaris</i> )	1	Not Found
Squirrel Cuckoo ( <i>Piaya cayana</i> )	1	Not Found
Hooded Grosbeak ( <i>Coccothraustes abeillei</i> )	1	Not Found

### SPECIES NOT PREDICTED BUT SUBSEQUENTLY FOUND IN REGION

Sungrebe* ( <i>Heliornis fulica</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>
Brown-backed Solitaire* ( <i>Myadestes occidentalis</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>

## Texas

### PREDICTED SPECIES: THE TOP 6

Tawny-collared Nightjar ( <i>Caprimulgus salvini</i> )	--	Not Found
Plumbeous Kite ( <i>Ictinia plumbea</i> )	--	Not Found
Mangrove Swallow ( <i>Tachycineta albilinea</i> )	--	Found Outside Region
Elegant Euphonia ( <i>Euphonia elegantissima</i> )	--	Not Found
Streaked Flycatcher ( <i>Myiodynastes maculatus</i> )	--	Not Found
Brown-backed Solitaire* ( <i>Myadestes occidentalis</i> )	--	Found Outside Region

### PREDICTED SPECIES: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Amazon Kingfisher* ( <i>Chloroceryle amazona</i> )	--	<b>Found!</b>
Bat Falcon ( <i>Falco ruficularis</i> )	--	Not Found
Melodious Blackbird ( <i>Dives dives</i> )	--	Not Found
Canivet's Emerald ( <i>Chlorostilbon canivetii</i> )	--	Not Found
Blue Ground-Dove ( <i>Claravis pretiosa</i> )	--	Not Found
Laughing Falcon ( <i>Herpetotheres cachinnans</i> )	--	Not Found
Russet Nightingale-Thrush ( <i>Catharus occidentalis</i> )	--	Not Found

### PREDICTED SPECIES: ALSO-RANS

Wedge-tailed Sabrewing ( <i>Campylopterus curvipennis</i> )	--	Not Found
Great Black-Hawk ( <i>Buteogallus urubitinga</i> )	--	Not Found
Lineated Woodpecker ( <i>Dryocopus lineatus</i> )	--	Not Found
Social Flycatcher ( <i>Myiozetetes similis</i> )	--	<b>Found!</b>
Spot-breasted Wren ( <i>Thryothorus maculipectus</i> )	--	Not Found
Bare-throated Tiger-Heron* ( <i>Tigrisoma mexicanum</i> )	--	<b>Found!</b>
Golden-browed Warbler ( <i>Basileuterus belli</i> )	--	Not Found
Altamira Yellowthroat ( <i>Geothlypis flavovelata</i> )	--	Not Found

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on 9 February 2008. Fortunately, it called continuously, which not only hastened its identification, but also enabled its subspecies (*chilensis*) to be determined, and facilitated acceptance of the proposition that it was an austral migrant overshoot.

Coincidentally and close to Texas, another species known to be an austral migrant, the Crowned Slaty-Flycatcher, was seen on 3 June 2008 and subsequently collected in Cameron Parish, Louisiana, 25 miles east of the Texas border. This same area, a “dead zone” between the Texas and Florida–Southern Gulf Coast regions, had also produced the ABA Area’s first Blue Bunting, in 1979.

**B**ird species new to North America occurring in the **Florida and Southeastern Gulf Coast** area in the period 1832–1995 numbered 25, all from Florida. Of that total, 17 occurred in Monroe County—the Florida Keys, the Dry Tortugas, and the western half of the Everglades—alone. And three of the 25, although not “official” at the time of the panel’s deliberations (*Birding*, June 1999), were subsequently added to the *ABA Checklist*. Those retroactive additions were Belcher’s Gull, European Turtle-Dove, and Cuban Pewee. The ten-member panel consisted of lead Bill Pranty, seven other Florida birders (Bruce Anderson, Lyn Atherton, Wes Biggs, Bob Duncan, David Goodwin, Wayne Hoffman, and William B. Robertson, Jr.), Greg Jackson from Alabama, and David Muth from Louisiana. Their top six, with one exception, were long-expected strays from Cuba and The Bahamas. Ironically, the lone nominee from Central or South America—Piratic Flycatcher in fifth place—had already been found on the Dry Tortugas in March 1991 but had remained identified as a Variegated Flycatcher until just before this panel published its list; thus, Piratic Flycatcher was allowed to be considered a contender, as it still was not on the ABA CLC’s

**Amazon Kingfisher** (top) received an honorable mention from the Texas panel. In getting to Texas, this individual may have benefited from habitat change in Tamaulipas. As natural habitats in northern Mexico are cleared for agriculture, dispersal barriers to Texas are reduced or eliminated. *Laredo, Texas; 28 January 2010.* © Bruce Sherman.

Rated a “real longshot” by the Newfoundland–to–Delaware Bay panel, a **White-crested Elaenia** (middle) showed up in—wait for it—Texas. Thanks to the splendid new technology of digital photography, the bird was analyzed with the sort of detail previously thought possible only via museum specimens. *South Padre Island, Cameron County, Texas; 10 February 2008.* © Erik Breden.

Close, but no cigar. **Cuban Black-Hawk** (bottom left) made the list of honorable mentions for the Florida panel. A bird found in Georgia in April 2009 was just a bit outside the panel’s region of coverage. This record awaits evaluation by the ABA Checklist Committee, which will have to wrestle with the question of the bird’s origin. *Callaway Gardens, Georgia; 10 April 2009.* © Kelly and Jason Floress.

**Juan Fernandez Petrel** (bottom right) was the top vote-getter—by a comfortable margin—for the Pacific Pelagic panel. At this writing, the species has been a no-show in ABA Area waters. *Isla Robinson Crusoe, Juan Fernandez Islands, Chile; February 2000.* © Greg Lasley–VIREO.

“pending species” list. Piratic Flycatcher was the Florida panel’s only “hit.”

The honorable mention list of ten species includes four species that have since been recorded in the ABA Area—but not one of them in the Gulf Coast region. First, a Cuban Black-Hawk (or “Cuban Crab Hawk”), a mangrove specialist from Cuba, was discovered and photographed at Callaway Gardens, a resort near Pine Mountain, Georgia, on 8 April 2009. Debate on its origin continues. Second, a Social Flycatcher was found in Texas. Third, Bulwer’s Petrel was found off both the North Carolina and the California coasts. Fourth, Black-bellied Storm-Petrel was twice found on North Carolina pelagic trips.

There was also a hit from the list of also-rans, but, again, it was from outside the Gulf region: Gray Heron. Gray Herons were found in Newfoundland in 1996—but not correctly identified until 2002—and on the Pribilof Islands of Alaska in 1999 and 2007. Meanwhile, Gray Herons reported in Orange County, Florida, in December 2003 and February 2004 have not been reviewed by the records committee for Florida.

As for the unpredicted arrivals, there is an excuse for not venturing Loggerhead Kingbird: All reports of this species prior to the panel’s article in *Birding* were discounted in 2000 due to identification difficulties. There have been three credible recent reports in the area. The first was in Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park in Key West on 8 March 2007, the second was discovered on the Dry Tortugas on 14 March 2008, and the third was again in Taylor Historic State Park on 12 April 2009. A Gray-hooded Gull found on 26 December 1998 in Apalachicola, Franklin County, Florida, was presumably too late to be mentioned in the panel’s report; therefore, the species must qualify as an unpredicted arrival. Also not predicted by the Florida committee, but predicted by both the Arizona–New Mexico and Texas panels, a Mangrove Swallow was picked out among other swallows at the Viera Wetlands in Brevard County, Florida, on 18 November 2002.

The December 1999 issue of *Birding* presented predictions from the **Western**

Azure-crowned Hummingbird ( <i>Amazilia cyanocephala</i> )	--	Not Found
Yellow-headed Parrot ( <i>Amazona oratrix</i> )	--	Not Found
Red-ored Parrot ( <i>Amazona autumnalis</i> )	--	Not Found
Yellow-throated Euphonia ( <i>Euphonia hirundinacea</i> )	--	Not Found
Blue-crowned Motmot ( <i>Momotus momota</i> )	--	Not Found
Pine Flycatcher ( <i>Empidonax affinis</i> )	--	Not Found-See Text
Squirrel Cuckoo ( <i>Piaya cayana</i> )	--	Not Found
Blue-black Grassquit ( <i>Volatinia jacarina</i> )	--	Not Found

#### SPECIES NOT PREDICTED BUT SUBSEQUENTLY FOUND IN REGION

Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush ( <i>Catharus mexicanus</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>
White-crested Elaenia ( <i>Elaenia albiceps</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>

### Florida and Southeastern Gulf Coast

#### PREDICTED SPECIES: THE TOP 6

Cuban Emerald ( <i>Chlorostilbon ricordii</i> )	--	Not Found
Red-legged Thrush ( <i>Turdus plumbeus</i> )	--	Not Found
Bahama Yellowthroat ( <i>Geothlypis rostrata</i> )	--	Not Found
Olive-capped Warbler ( <i>Dendroica pityophila</i> )	--	Not Found
Piratic Flycatcher ( <i>Legatus leucophaeus</i> )	--	<b>Found!</b> -See Text
Greater Antillean Bullfinch ( <i>Loxigilla violacea</i> )	--	Not Found

#### PREDICTED SPECIES: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Blue-and-white Swallow ( <i>Notiochelidon cyanoleuca</i> )	--	Not Found
Pearly-eyed Thrasher ( <i>Margarops fuscatus</i> )	--	Not Found
Cuban Black-Hawk* ( <i>Buteogallus gundlachi</i> )	--	Found Outside Region
Social Flycatcher ( <i>Myiozetetes similis</i> )	--	Found Outside Region
Streaked Flycatcher ( <i>Myiodynastes maculatus</i> )	--	Not Found
White-throated Kingbird ( <i>Tyrannus albogularis</i> )	--	Not Found
Alpine Swift ( <i>Tachymartus melba</i> )	--	Not Found
Bulwer’s Petrel ( <i>Bulweria bulwerii</i> )	--	Found Outside Region
Plumbeous Kite ( <i>Ictinia plumbea</i> )	--	Not Found
Black-bellied Storm-Petrel ( <i>Fregatta tropica</i> )	--	Found Outside Region

#### PREDICTED SPECIES: ALSO-RANS

Soft-plumaged Petrel ( <i>Pterodroma mollis</i> )	--	Not Found
West Indian Whistling-Duck ( <i>Dendrocygna arborea</i> )	--	Not Found
Gray Heron ( <i>Ardea cinerea</i> )	--	Found Outside Region
Violet Sabrewing ( <i>Campylopterus hemileucurus</i> )	--	Not Found
Chestnut-collared Swift ( <i>Streptoprocne rutila</i> )	--	Not Found
Gray-rumped Swift ( <i>Chaetura cinereiventris</i> )	--	Not Found
Caribbean Martin ( <i>Progne dominicensis</i> )	--	Not Found
Small-billed Elaenia ( <i>Elaenia parvirostris</i> )	--	Not Found
Giant Kingbird ( <i>Tyrannus cubensis</i> )	--	Not Found
Cuban Bullfinch ( <i>Melopyrrha nigra</i> )	--	Not Found

#### SPECIES NOT PREDICTED BUT SUBSEQUENTLY FOUND IN REGION

Loggerhead Kingbird ( <i>Tyrannus caudifasciatus</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b> -See Text
Gray-hooded Gull ( <i>Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>
Mangrove Swallow ( <i>Tachycineta albilinea</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>

### Pacific Pelagic: British Columbia to California

#### PREDICTED SPECIES: THE TOP 6

Juan Fernandez Petrel ( <i>Pterodroma externa</i> )	40	Not Found
Kermadec Petrel ( <i>Pterodroma neglecta</i> )	21	Not Found
Solander’s Petrel* ( <i>Pterodroma solandri</i> )	21	<b>Found!</b>
Black-winged Petrel ( <i>Pterodroma nigripennis</i> )	18	Not Found
Southern Giant-Petrel ( <i>Macronectes giganteus</i> )	12	Not Found
Townsend’s Shearwater ( <i>Puffinus auricularis</i> )	8	<b>Found!</b>

#### PREDICTED SPECIES: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Parkinson’s Petrel ( <i>Procellaria parkinsoni</i> )	6	<b>Found!</b>
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Seabird taxonomy is highly complex. The top three selections by the Atlantic Pelagic panel were “species” of uncertain taxonomic nature. **Brown Skua**—the panel’s top pick—apparently hybridizes with South Polar Skua, a regular visitor to ABA Area waters. Genetic analysis may be the only recourse for definitive proof of Brown Skua in our region. *Falkland Islands; November 2009.* © Bob Steele.



*Burgas, Bulgaria; April 2006.* © Steve Mlodinow.



*Seahouses, Northumberland, United Kingdom; June 2007.* © Stuart Elsom–VIREO.

**Mediterranean Gull** (upper) and **Meadow Pipit** (lower) seem to be on just about everybody’s short list of next new birds for the ABA Area. They were tied for second place in the Newfoundland–to–Delaware Bay panel’s reckoning. Is it just a matter of time before they show up?

**Pelagic** area, stretching from British Columbia in the north to the California–Mexico boundary in the south. Countable species in these and all other oceanic waters must occur within 200 miles of the North American continent. The ten-person panel was headed by Debra Love Shearwater and comprised eight California residents: Steve Howell, Peter Pyle, and Sophie Webb from the north; Stephen Bailey, Steve Rottenborn, and Shearwater from central California; and Kimball Garrett and Guy McCaskie from the south. Bill Tweit and Terry Wahl from Washington were also on the panel. First ABA records from the Pacific Pelagic region had totaled 14 species in the period 1951–1998. At the time of the panel’s report, six species had been accepted by the California Bird Records Committee, but not by the ABA CLC. These have since been taken on board by the ABA. One of them, the “Dark-rumped Petrel,” was split by the AOU into two species—the Galapagos and Hawaiian petrels—in 2002. Birds in this complex are currently treated by the ABA CLC as a two-species complex equivalent to a single “tick” on one’s life list.

You might think that with the lesser pool of pelagic species (no land birds for the committee to ponder), predictions would have been easier. Not so. The Juan Fernandez Petrel was by far the favorite of the panel, but it has not yet been found in the ABA Area. However, the sixth-ranked species of the top six has arrived in the past decade—though not at sea. It’s a strange story. A Townsend’s Shearwater (of the distinctive subspecies *newelli*) was captured after it had been dive-bombing railroad workers on the line north of Del Mar, San Diego County, on the night of 1 August 2007. Another potential recent addition to the *ABA Checklist* is Solander’s Petrel, ranked third among the committee’s top six. This one is a bit strange, too, as the bird was not provisionally identified as a Solander’s Petrel until later examination of the photos. The bird was photographed off British Columbia on 6 October 2009, and the record is currently being evaluated by the ABA CLC.

Among 11 honorable mentions, Parkinson’s Petrel has been found twice, once off the California coast (1 October 2005) and once off the Oregon coast (22 October 2005). And there have been recent records of two storm-petrel species that received no votes from the panel. One was a Ringed (or “Hornby’s”) Storm-Petrel, discovered and well photographed on 2 August 2005 near San Miguel Island, Santa Barbara County, California. Also, a Tristram’s Storm-Petrel, which breeds on Hawaii and on islands south of Japan, was captured on, measured on, and released from Southeast Farallon Island, California, on 22 April 2006.

The acknowledged difficulty in identifying poorly known birds with similar plumages and characteristics led some panel members to discount them from their list of possible additions to the *ABA Checklist*. Townsend’s Shearwater and Tristram’s Storm-Petrel were two such species. However, the fortuitous captures and subsequent identifications of both

species just go to show that such rare birds really are out there. With the amazing advances in—and widespread use of—digital photography over the past ten years, such identification problems are becoming much easier to solve.

The Atlantic Pelagic–Gulf Stream region was treated in the April 2000 issue of *Birding*. The ten-person panel was led by Edward S. Brinkley and comprised Alan Brady, P. A. Buckley, Mary Gustafson, Harry LeGrand, Brian Patteson, Butch Pearce, Mike Tove, Dick Veit, and Angus Wilson. This region had had ten prior ABA Area records, with seven at sea and three from the adjacent coast and islands. Brinkley pointed out that at least four additional Atlantic pelagic species on the ABA list were first recorded on land following storms: Black-capped Petrel (1846), Yellow-nosed Albatross (1885), Band-rumped Storm-Petrel (1893), and Herald Petrel (1933).

As noted in Brinkley’s “Felicitous Prefatory Note,” two species were excluded because of a technicality. Even though they weren’t on the *ABA Checklist* at the time of the panel’s deliberations, there had been recent sightings of both species; therefore, the panel bypassed them. One species was Bulwer’s Petrel, first seen off North Carolina on 1 July 1992 and accepted by the state committee but not by the ABA until a second one off North Carolina was photographed on 8 August 1998, just days after one was photographed off Monterey Bay, California, on 26 July 1998. The other was Swinhoe’s Storm-Petrel, also off North Carolina on that same magical date of 8 August 1998; it was accepted by the North Carolina records committee but not by the ABA CLC. A second Swinhoe’s for North Carolina was well documented on 2 June 2008 and is considered to be the first ABA Area record.

On the whole, the panel did well. Two of the top seven (seven species, because there was a tie for sixth place) have been added to the *ABA Checklist*: Cape Verde Shearwater and Black-bellied Storm-Petrel. The Cape Verde Shearwater, split by some authorities from Cory’s Shearwater in 1995 but not en-

Cape Petrel ( <i>Daption capense</i> )	4	Not Found
Waved Albatross ( <i>Phoebastria irrorata</i> )	4	Not Found
Gray-backed Tern ( <i>Onychoprion lunatus</i> )	3	Not Found
Gray-headed Albatross ( <i>Thalassarche chrysostoma</i> )	3	Not Found
Tahiti Petrel ( <i>Pterodroma rostrata</i> )	3	Not Found
Christmas Shearwater ( <i>Puffinus nativitatis</i> )	2	Not Found
Southern Skua ( <i>Stercorarius antarcticus</i> )	2	Not Found
Markham’s Storm-Petrel ( <i>Oceanodroma markhami</i> )	2	Not Found
Chilean Skua ( <i>Stercorarius chilensis</i> )	1	Not Found
Gray Petrel ( <i>Procellaria cinerea</i> )	1	Not Found

#### SPECIES NOT PREDICTED BUT SUBSEQUENTLY FOUND IN REGION

Ringed Storm-Petrel ( <i>Oceanodroma hornbyi</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>
Tristram’s Storm-Petrel ( <i>Oceanodroma tristrami</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>

### Atlantic Pelagic: The Gulf Stream

#### PREDICTED SPECIES: THE TOP 6 (7, ACTUALLY)

Brown Skua ( <i>Stercorarius antarcticus lonnbergi</i> )	35	Not Found
Cape Verde Shearwater ( <i>Calonectris edwardsii</i> )	26	<b>Found!</b>
Yelkouan/Balearic Shearwater ( <i>Puffinus yelkouan/mauretanicus</i> )	23	Not Found
Black-bellied Storm-Petrel ( <i>Fregetta tropica</i> )	13	<b>Found!</b>
Southern/Northern Giant-Petrel ( <i>Macronectes giganteus/halli</i> )	12/13	Not Found
Gray Petrel ( <i>Procellaria cinerea</i> )	10	Not Found
Southern (Subantarctic) Skua ( <i>Stercorarius antarcticus antarcticus</i> )	10	Not Found

#### PREDICTED SPECIES: HONORABLE MENTIONS AND ALSO-RANS

Cape Gannet ( <i>Morus capensis</i> )	9	Not Found
Soft-plumaged Petrel ( <i>Pterodroma mollis</i> )	7	Not Found
White-bellied Storm-Petrel ( <i>Fregetta grallaria</i> )	7	Not Found
Zino’s Petrel ( <i>Pterodroma madeira</i> )	6	Not Found
Magellanic Penguin ( <i>Spheniscus magellanicus</i> )	6	Not Found
Audouin’s Gull ( <i>Ichthyaetus audouinii</i> )	5	Not Found
Gray-headed Albatross ( <i>Thalassarche chrysostoma</i> )	4	Not Found
Cape Petrel ( <i>Daption capense</i> )	4	Not Found
Atlantic Petrel ( <i>Pterodroma incerta</i> )	4	Not Found
European Shag ( <i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i> )	3	Not Found
Antarctic Tern ( <i>Sterna vitatta</i> )	3	Not Found
Brown-hooded Gull ( <i>Chroicocephalus maculipennis</i> )	2	Not Found
White Tern ( <i>Gygis alba</i> )	1	Not Found
Jamaican Petrel ( <i>Pterodroma hasitata caribbaea</i> )	1	Not Found

### Northeastern North America: Newfoundland and Labrador to Delaware Bay

#### PREDICTED SPECIES: THE TOP 6

Gray Heron ( <i>Ardea cinerea</i> )	43	<b>Found!</b>
Meadow Pipit ( <i>Anthus pratensis</i> )	26	Not Found
Mediterranean Gull ( <i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i> )	26	Not Found
Yelkouan/Balearic Shearwater ( <i>Puffinus yelkouan/mauretanicus</i> )	5	Not Found
Blue-and-white Swallow ( <i>Notiochelidon cyanoleuca</i> )	5	Not Found
Spotted Crane ( <i>Porzana porzana</i> )	5	Not Found

#### PREDICTED SPECIES: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Blackcap ( <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i> )	3	Not Found
Song Thrush ( <i>Turdus philomelos</i> )	3	<b>Found!</b>
Purple Heron ( <i>Ardea purpurea</i> )	3	Not Found
Collared Pratincole ( <i>Glareola pratincola</i> )	2	Not Found
Carriion Crow ( <i>Corvus corone</i> )	2	Not Found

#### PREDICTED SPECIES: ALSO-RANS

Black Kite ( <i>Milvus migrans</i> )	1	Not Found
Eurasian Sparrowhawk ( <i>Accipiter nisus</i> )	1	Not Found

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No question about it: This is a **Common Shelduck** (top).

But how did it get to Newfoundland, where it was photographed? Was it an escape, or was it a true vagrant? More than any other taxon, waterfowl are endlessly vexing to records committees. No panel nominated *any* waterfowl species for *any* category, perhaps reflecting the automatically problematic nature of any potential vagrant waterfowl species. *St. John's, Newfoundland; 17 November 2009.* © Bruce Mactavish.

When predicting vagrants, it's not a bad idea to "think outside the box." Accordingly, the Newfoundland-to-Delaware Bay panel submitted a list of "real long shots." One of their 29 "long shots" was **Red-footed Falcon** (middle), destined to become one of the most watched and most cooperative vagrants in the history of birding in the ABA Area. *Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts; 10 August 2004.* © Jeremiah Trimble.

**Song Thrush** (bottom) was an honorable mention for the Newfoundland-to-Delaware Bay panel. In interpreting occurrences of vagrants, it is helpful to be aware of broader patterns of avian status and distribution. The sighting of this Song Thrush, for example, coincided with an unusually heavy flight of Song Thrushes to Iceland. *Saint-Fulgence, Quebec; 16 November 2006.* © Claude Samson.

dorsed by the AOU until 2006, was found off Hatteras Inlet, North Carolina, on 15 August 2005, and another was well documented off Worcester, Maryland, on 21 October 2006. The first Black-bellied Storm-Petrel was found off Oregon Inlet, North Carolina, on 31 May 2004, and a second was found off Hatteras, North Carolina, on 16 July 2006.

Only two panels had two hits among their top six. Both were the pelagic panels. It could be argued that these two pelagic panels had the fewest birds to choose from, and therefore a greater chance of success. Maybe so, but let's give credit where credit is due. Many more trips have been going out in the pelagic environment in recent years, and those excellent pelagic eyes are paying big dividends.

**P**redictions for the **Northeastern North America–Newfoundland and Labrador to the Delaware Bay** region appeared in *Birding* in October 2000. The lead was taken by Wayne Petersen, and the ten other contributors were Dennis Abbott, Ken Able, P. A. Buckley, Walter Ellison, Blake Maybank, Bruce Mactavish, Ian McLaren, Simon Perkins, Mark Szantyr, and Richard Veit. The region boasted 30 species new to the ABA Area in the period 1820–1995, with 16 occurring in the last 40 years of that time span. More than two thirds of the previous additions had been Palearctic land birds, and, not surprisingly, the panel's top choices centered on the same origin of candidates, with only the Blue-and-white Swallow, a South American austral migrant, hailing from elsewhere.

The clear winner among the region's top six was the Gray Heron. Ironically, one had already been found moribund at Lear's Cove, Avalon Peninsula, Newfoundland, on 11 October 1996; however, it was thought to be a Great Blue Heron, and it was not correctly identified until 2002 and so was eligible for inclusion in 2000. Meanwhile, another Gray Heron had arrived on the other side of the continent at St. Paul Island on the Pribilof Islands, Alaska, on 1 August 1999, unbeknownst to the committee; the same location produced another on 1 October 2007. Meadow Pipit and Mediterranean Gull received substantial support as next in line, but are still awaited.

Of the five honorable mentions, a Song Thrush was found in a yard at Saint Fulgence, Saguenay Lac St. Jean, Quebec, on 11 November 2006. More than three dozen were reported from Iceland in the fall of 2006, an unusual concentration. Of the 13 species nominated as also-rans, garnishing just one vote each, Gray-headed Gull (now Gray-hooded Gull) was found in Florida in 1998, and Willow Warbler was discovered at Gambell on St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, in 2002 and subsequently.

This panel added a list of 29 "real long-shot possibilities." These included Red-footed Falcon, which turned up at the Katama Airpark on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, on 8 August 2004. Also on this list were White-crested Elaenia, found in Texas in 2008, and Yellow-browed Warbler, found at Gam-

bell on St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, in 1999 and subsequently.

The area produced an unpredicted species and a first for the ABA Area, a Graylag Goose. I suspect the panel discussed and then dismissed this possibility because of the notoriety of domestic or waterfowl collection escapes. The accepted first record was of one that landed on a drill ship 200 kilometers off St. John's, Newfoundland (and so within territorial waters), on 24 April 2005. On a related note, a Common Shelduck at St. John's on 17 November 2009 will raise the inevitable question of provenance.

The Western Alaska panel's deliberations were published in the December 2000 edition of *Birding*. Alaskan Thede Tobish headed up the eight contributors, who numbered four other home-staters, Dan Gibson, Steve Heintz, Buzz Scher, and Dave Sonneborn, and three others well acquainted with the region, Larry Balch, Jon Dunn, and Gary Rosenberg. The enormous list of ABA Area firsts from this region—about 85 species from 1911 to 2000—signified that this panel had a huge job to predict the next arrivals. The difficulty of their task is reflected in the low point totals for the top picks. As Tobish noted, “The experts had little agreement. Indeed, of the top six on this list, there was overlap on only four species.” Additionally, “The panelists nominated...25 different species between them, and only seven species received more than one vote.”

How did they do? They picked one winner in the top six—but with a qualifier we've already encountered. The first occurrence of the species—it was Gray Heron—in the ABA Area was to be in Newfoundland, not Alaska. They also picked one winner from among their 11 honorable mentions: Willow Warbler, found at Gambell, St. Lawrence Island, on 25 August 2002. And they picked one possible winner in their also-ran list of eight species: Solitary Snipe, currently being evaluated by the ABA CLC, reported from St. Paul Island in the Pribilof Islands on 10 September 2008. Another also-ran candidate, Greater Sand-Plover, was found at Bolinas Lagoon, Marin County, California,

Gray-hooded Gull ( <i>Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus</i> )	1	Found Outside Region
Little Tern ( <i>Sternula albifrons</i> )	1	Not Found
Common Wood-Pigeon ( <i>Columba palumbus</i> )	1	Not Found
Alpine Swift ( <i>Tachymartus melba</i> )	1	Not Found
Asiatic Dowitcher ( <i>Limnodromus semipalmatus</i> )	1	Not Found
White-winged Swallow ( <i>Tachycineta albiventer</i> )	1	Not Found
Lemon-rumped Warbler ( <i>Phylloscopus chloronotus</i> )	1	Not Found
Chiffchaff ( <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i> )	1	Not Found
Willow Warbler ( <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i> )	1	Found Outside Region
European Greenfinch ( <i>Carduelis chloris</i> )	1	Not Found
Lesser Antillean Bullfinch ( <i>Loxigilla noctis</i> )	1	Not Found

#### PREDICTED SPECIES: "REAL LONG SHOTS" (29 TOTAL; ONLY THE 3 "HITS" LISTED HERE)

Red-footed Falcon ( <i>Falco vespertinus</i> )	--	<b>Found!</b>
White-crested Elaenia ( <i>Elaenia albiceps</i> )	--	Found Outside Region
Yellow-browed Warbler ( <i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i> )	--	Found Outside Region

#### SPECIES NOT PREDICTED BUT SUBSEQUENTLY FOUND IN REGION

Graylag Goose* ( <i>Anser anser</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>
Common Shelduck* ( <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>

## Western Alaska

#### PREDICTED SPECIES: THE TOP 6

Eurasian Sparrowhawk ( <i>Accipiter nisus</i> )	14	Not Found
Black-faced Bunting ( <i>Emberiza spodocephala</i> )	12	Not Found
Gray Heron ( <i>Ardea cinerea</i> )	10	<b>Found!</b> -See Text
Carrion Crow ( <i>Corvus corone</i> )	10	Not Found
Chinese Goshawk ( <i>Accipiter soloensis</i> )	5	Not Found
Eastern Crowned Leaf-Warbler ( <i>Phylloscopus coronatus</i> )	4	Not Found

#### PREDICTED SPECIES: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Daurian Redstart ( <i>Phoenicurus aureoreus</i> )	2	Not Found
Brown-headed Thrush ( <i>Turdus chrysolaus</i> )	2	Not Found
Gray's Warbler ( <i>Locustella fasciolata</i> )	2	Not Found
Chestnut-cheeked Starling ( <i>Sturnia philippensis</i> )	2	Not Found
Oriental Reed-Warbler ( <i>Acrocephalus orientalis</i> )	2	Not Found
Siberian Thrush ( <i>Zoothera sibirica</i> )	2	Not Found
Black-browed Reed-Warbler ( <i>Acrocephalus bistrigiceps</i> )	2	Not Found
Blue-and-white Flycatcher ( <i>Cyanoptila cyanomelana</i> )	2	Not Found
Willow Warbler ( <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i> )	2	<b>Found!</b>
White-cheeked Starling ( <i>Sturnus cineraceus</i> )	2	Not Found
Japanese Sparrowhawk ( <i>Accipiter gularis</i> )	2	Not Found

#### PREDICTED SPECIES: ALSO-RANS

Greater Sand-Plover ( <i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i> )	1	Found Outside Region
Solitary Snipe* ( <i>Gallinago solitaria</i> )	1	<b>Found!</b>
Latham's Snipe ( <i>Gallinago hardwickii</i> )	1	Not Found
Pale-legged Leaf-Warbler ( <i>Phylloscopus tenellipes</i> )	1	Not Found
Lemon-rumped Warbler ( <i>Phylloscopus chloronotus</i> )	1	Not Found
Radde's Warbler ( <i>Phylloscopus schwarzi</i> )	1	Not Found
Japanese Bush-Warbler ( <i>Cettia diphone</i> )	1	Not Found
Scaly Thrush ( <i>Zoothera dauma</i> )	1	Not Found

#### SPECIES NOT PREDICTED BUT SUBSEQUENTLY FOUND IN REGION

Lesser Whitethroat ( <i>Sylvia curruca</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>
Spotted Flycatcher ( <i>Muscicapa striata</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>
Intermediate Egret ( <i>Egretta intermedia</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>
Pallas's Leaf-Warbler ( <i>Phylloscopus proregulus</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>
Brown Hawk-Owl ( <i>Ninox scutulata</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>
Yellow-browed Bunting ( <i>Emberiza chrysophrys</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>
Sedge Warbler ( <i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>
Rufous-tailed Robin ( <i>Luscinia sibilans</i> )	0	<b>Found!</b>



The challenge for the Alaska panel was immense. Birders have come to *expect* some ABA Area first to show up in migration most years in Alaska, but accurate predictions are difficult. This marvelous **Brown Hawk-Owl** (top) was not on the Alaska panel's list. *St. Paul Island, Alaska; 27 August 2007.* © Jake Mohlmann.

Even though the Alaska panel predicted quite a number of Old World warblers, **Sedge Warbler** (middle) was not among their predictions. This bird was found at Gambell, on Alaska's St. Lawrence Island—the best place in the past decade for adding new species to the *ABA Checklist*. *Gambell, St. Lawrence Island, Alaska; 30 September 2007.* © Gary H. Rosenberg.

What will be the next addition to the *ABA Checklist*? When asked that question, ABA Checklist Committee Chairman Bill Pranty stated, "We're generally bad at predicting avian vagrancy."

Then he added, "But I will predict that an unquestionably wild **Southern Lapwing** (bottom) will be found in the ABA Area...within the next eight years." Time will tell. *Pantanal, Brazil; date unknown.* © Arthur Morris-VIREO.

on 29 January 2001.

Eight species have showed up that were not on the panel's list of 25, one of which—Rufous-tailed Robin—was removed from the panel's honorable mentions list because a June 2000 report on Attu occurred just before publication of the panel's predictions. That report was not subsequently accepted by the ABA CLC, making an 8 June 2008 record on the Pribilof Islands the official first record. Also from St. Paul Island came the amazing find of a Brown Hawk-Owl, roosting in crab pots in the little harbor on 27 August 2007. This was quickly followed by a second record, with one found dead on Kiska Island in the western Aleutians on 1 August 2008. Close by, Buldir Island produced a first when a freshly deceased body of an Intermediate Egret was found on 30 May 2006.

Five others have been found by Paul Lehman and colleagues at Gambell, St. Lawrence Island. They are Lesser Whitethroat (8 September 2002), Spotted Flycatcher (14 September 2002), Pallas's Leaf-Warbler (25 September 2006), Yellow-browed Bunting (15 September 2007), and Sedge Warbler (30 September 2007). The story of their discovery is chronicled in a WebExtra for this article, "The Lehman Effect" <[aba.org/birding/v42n3p44w1.pdf](http://aba.org/birding/v42n3p44w1.pdf)>.

## Conclusions

Out of 43 top picks over the seven regions, just eight (counting Gray Heron twice) obliged, a 19% success rate. Of 66 honorable mentions, just five arrived, a success rate of only 8%. In the also-ran category, to which not all regions contributed, and omitting the Northeast's long-shots, just three out of 47 showed up, for a 6% success rate. Meanwhile, nine other predicted species *did* show up, just not in the areas they were supposed to!

Taking into account all predicted species that subsequently showed up in the ABA Area, the overall success rate is 16% (25 new species out of 156 guesses). Most interesting is the number of unpredicted species that arrived: 18. (Bear in mind that Loggerhead Kingbird and Rufous-tailed Robin, discussed above, were somewhat problematic.)

In an interview question with *Birding* in November 2009, Bill Pranty, Chairman of the ABA CLC, was asked: "What do you think will be some of the next new species added to the *ABA Checklist*?" His response was honest: "Considering that we're generally bad at predicting avian vagrancy (see, for instance, the 'next new birds' series published in *Birding*, 1998–2000), I'm hesitant to say too much. But I will predict that an unquestionably wild Southern Lapwing will be found in the ABA Area, perhaps along the western Gulf of Mexico, within the next eight years."

We shall see.

What are *your* predictions? Go on. Write them down. In another ten years, dig them out and see how you did. Judging by the past performance of our expert birders, the only thing we can predict with absolute certainty is that something we didn't predict will happen. Isn't that what makes birding so much fun?