

## Rare Birds in Belgium in 2016

### Report of the Belgian Rare Birds Committee

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*and the members of the BRBC*



**Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*, Widooie, 31 December 2016 (Filip De Ruwe)**

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## **Abstract – rare birds in Belgium in 2016**

*This report of the Belgian Rare Birds Committee (BRBC), dealing with 2016, concerns a total of 309 records of rare birds in Belgium, of 79 (sub)species and species pairs. The vast majority refers to 2016; a minority to previous years. 204 records have been accepted into category A, two in category B, one in category D, 18 in category E and 84 records have been rejected. In 2016, one new species Eastern Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus coronatus* has been added to the Belgian list and retrospectively, the 1988's Elegant Tern *Sterna elegans* has been accepted which also constitutes the first record for the country. In 2016, a third record for Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* and Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*, a fourth record for Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*, Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius* (from 2013, retrospectively identified from picture) and Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan* and a the fifth record for Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* were reported and accepted.*

## **Introduction**

This is the report of the Belgian Rare Birds Committee (hereafter: BRBC), dealing with records of rare bird species and subspecies that were recorded in Belgium in 2016. It also contains records of earlier years that have not yet been published before. Some records from 2016 are still pending and are not dealt with in this report. These records will be published in our next report.

This report will be published in English on our website. Dutch and French versions will be available in the magazines *Natuur.oriolus* and *Aves*.

The work of a rare birds committee is largely dependent on the activity of birdwatchers. In recent years, the outlook of this activity has changed significantly with the arrival of new online databases where observers can easily insert their observations. Not too long ago, even if there were databases, rarebirds records were not available online and it could take a long time before the information was spread amongst the birding community. Records were sometimes made public weeks or months afterwards. It was not an easy task for a rare birds committee to gather all the necessary information about rare bird records. There was a great dependency on the willingness of observers to provide this information.

As mentioned in last year's report, we strongly encourage every observer of a rare bird, as well as ringers, to either report their observation on [www.waarnemingen.be](http://www.waarnemingen.be) / [www.observations.be](http://www.observations.be) or to submit their data directly through our website (<http://www.belgianrbc.be>).

## Recent decisions and developments

No specific decisions and developments.

## What makes a rare bird species?

What bird species are considered to be rare in Belgium so that their records will be assessed by the BRBC? A species is considered to be a national rarity if there has been an average of maximum three accepted records per year over the previous 10 years period, so a maximum of 30 accepted records in total for that period or with no records in at least 3 out of these 10 years. The latter should prevent species reaching Belgium in high numbers only during exceptional influxes (for example Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*) to be treated as candidates for removal from the list. The fairly long period of 10 years should guarantee a stable trend of the rarity status of a species. The same rule applies to rare subspecies. The BRBC will annually review the list of homologation species to check if species still meet the current threshold.

The updated list of homologation species can be checked on our website: <http://www.belgianrbc.be>.

## How to submit a rare bird report to the BRBC

As stated before, observers of rare birds in Belgium are advised to report their observations either directly to the BRBC through the online tool available on <http://www.belgianrbc.be>, or through the database [www.waarnemingen.be](http://www.waarnemingen.be) / [www.observations.be](http://www.observations.be). It is kindly requested to provide as much information as possible for each record, such as a description and photographs when available, sketches, sound recording and any other source of information that can allow the members of the committee to assess the record with optimal and objective information. A written description is always of great value even if it accompanies a set of pictures or a sound recording.

## Acknowledgements

Firstly, the BRBC wishes to thank Natuurpunt Studie and Aves-Natagora.

More acknowledgments go to the photographers who provided us with pictures of rare birds for this report.

Last but definitely not least: we wish to thank all the observers for submitting their records of rare birds in one way or another.

## BRBC members

The following persons are members of the BRBC and have assessed all records in this report, in alphabetical order: Peter Collaerts, Miguel Demeulemeester, Joris Elst, Wouter Faveyts, Robin Gailly, Tom Goossens, Raphaël Lebrun, Pierre Loly, Laurent Raty and Frédéric Vanhove.

We welcome Robin Gailly as a new member!

## 2016 in a nutshell

Highlights of 2016 can be summarized as:

- The following new species were added to the Belgian list: Elegant Tern *Sterna elegans* in 1988 and Eastern Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus coronatus* in 2016.
- Third record for Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* and Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*.
- Fourth record for Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*, Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius* in 2013) and Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan*.
- Fifth record for Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*.
- Record numbers for Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* (eight birds, including nest building by two birds!), Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus* (five birds), Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus* and Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* (ten birds).
- Barely making the headlines anymore due to the annual occurrence of the species in Belgium nowadays, a total of 30 Griffon Vultures *Gyps fulvus* is still worth mentioning as a highlight.
- Two accepted records of Common Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis* were the firsts since 2000.
- A male Red-spotted Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica svecica* raised youngs with a female of unknown provenance, likely *cyaneola*. This record could prove to be more significant than the 30 accepted records in the period 1966-1997, as many of these records may not survive a closer look.
- There were again new category E records of both Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus* and Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus*.



**Elegant Tern *Sterna elegans*, June-July 1988, Zeebrugge (Peter Boesman)**

## Use of the systematic list in this report

### Taxonomy and species names

The BRBC follows the taxonomic rules of the AERC TAC (the taxonomic committee of the Association of European Records and Rarities Committees – <http://www.aerc.eu/tac.html>).

Scientific and english bird names follow the AERC TAC WP Bird List, most recently updated in July 2015.

### Record information

Every record in this systematic list contains the following information:

- 1) The date(s) of the record. Unless mentioned otherwise, the year is 2016.
- 2) The name of the area of the record, if such an area name is specifically known.
- 3) The name of the municipality of the record if known. The smallest municipal unit is used: officially named parts of municipalities will be used where possible. Names of municipalities must be indexed on the most recent municipality map. Names of locations are provided in Dutch when situated in the Flemish Region, in French when situated in the Walloon Region and in Dutch and French when situated in the Brussels Capital Region. Although, this hardly ever occurs anymore in modern times, a record is also acceptable when it is only known to be from a particular Belgian province, without reference of its exact municipal location. In this case, the name of the province is given.
- 4) The number of birds of the record.
- 5) Information about sex, age and/or plumage of bird(s) of the record, when available.
- 6) The name of the person who submitted the record directly to the BRBC. In case of a record that has been retrieved from the [www.waarnemingen.be](http://www.waarnemingen.be) / [www.observations.be](http://www.observations.be) database, without any extra information provided by the discoverer and/or observer(s), the BRBC is considered to be the reporter. In that case, no observer is mentioned at the end of the record.

### Signs and abbreviations

Belgium has 10 provinces. The Brussels Capital Region is treated as a separate 11<sup>th</sup> unit.

(A)	Antwerpen	(Lx)	Luxembourg
(Br)	Brussels Capital Region	(N)	Namur
(BW)	Brabant Wallon	(O)	Oost-Vlaanderen
(H)	Hainaut	(VB)	Vlaams-Brabant
(L)	Limburg	(W)	West-Vlaanderen
(Lg)	Liège		

### Sex, Age & Plumage

m.	male
f.	female
1cy, 2cy, ...	first calendar year, second calendar year, ...
1cy+, 2cy+, ...	first calendar year or older, second calendar year or older, ...
ad.	adult
juv.	juvenile
imm.	immature
br.	breeding plumage
wi.	winter plumage
ec.	eclipse plumage

Cardinal points are marked as N=North, S= South, E= East and W=West

## Count

For most species, the bird name is followed by four figures in brackets:

1. Number of individuals from 1800-1949;
2. Number of individuals from 1950-2015;
3. Number of individuals from 2016.

These figures are to be considered correct once published in a report. However, due to the ongoing work of the BRBC, older records may be accepted after our publication. Therefore, it is advisable to use the database on the BRBC website as the prime source of information about the exact account of records for a particular species. In a few cases, a different character is given: '/' means that the species was no longer on the homologation list in that year; '-' means that the species was recorded during that period but that the exact number is still under scrutiny at the time of writing. The latter happens for species that have a considerable number of older records (pre 1950).

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## Systematic list

### 1. Accepted records

#### **Lesser White-fronted Goose** *Anser erythropus* (1,165,3)

29 January - 7 February, De Hees, Sint-Lenaarts (A), 1 ad.

7 - 8 February, Woumen (W), 1 ad.

25 - 27 November, De Wezelse Heide, Wuustwezel (A), 1 ad.

#### **Red-breasted Goose** *Branta ruficollis* (1,85,6)

2 - 16 January, IJzervallei, Reninge en Merkem (W), 1

19 January, Prosperpolder, Kieldrecht (O), 1

21 - 22 January, Uitkerke (W), 2

23 November - 4 December, Uiterwaarden, Aldeneik (L), 1

25 November - 20 January 2017, IJzervallei, Lo-Reninge (W), 1

#### **Cory's Shearwater** *Calonectris diomedea* (0,29,1)

9 October, De Panne (W), 1 (D. Gregoire)

The bird was not seen well enough to establish the subspecies level. There have been 29 accepted Cory's Shearwaters in Belgium up until 2014. Most records are birds passing far out at sea, so it's impossible to see if they belong to either Cory's Shearwater *C. diomedea borealis* or Scopoli's Shearwater *C. d. diomedea*. In the Dutch version of this report, this bird is wrongly published as Cory's Shearwater/Cape Verde Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea/edwardsii*.



**Pygmy Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*. De Blankaart, 15 October 2016 (Johan Seys)

**Pygmy Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* (0,3,1)

18 September - 25 October, IJzervallei, De Blankaart, Woumen (W), 1 1cy

Despite an increase in southeastern Europe that spills over into a regular occurrence in parts of Central Europe (Lawicki *et al.* 2012), Pygmy Cormorant is still a major rarity in northwestern Europe, including Belgium. The 2016 record was only the fourth accepted bird. It constitutes the longest staying individual. The bird stayed over a month in the Blankaart marshland in western Belgium.

**Squacco Heron** *Ardeola ralloides* (4,42,8)

5 June – 24 August, Marais d’Harchies, Harchies (H), up to 2 ad., including nest building

14 June, Molsbroek, Lokeren (O), 1 ad.

22 - 25 June, Rangeerstation Antwerpen-Noord - Grote Kreek, Antwerpen (A), 1 ad. br.

25 June, De Blankaart, Woumen (W), 1 ad. br.

30 June - 4 July, Bourgoyen, Gent (O), 1 ad. br.

17 July - 5 August, Bazelse Polder, Bazel (O), 1 ad. br.

7 September – 20 October, Marais d’Harchies, Harchies (H), 1 1cy

Record year with a staggering eight accepted birds! Even better, nest building was observed at the mixed heronry at the Marais d’Harchies (A. Malengreau *in litt.*), where up to two adults were observed. Despite that the heronry was well watched, no behaviour indicating a successful nesting was observed. Intriguingly however, a juvenile was observed from at least 7 September onwards. Perhaps this bird was the result of successful breeding by the Harchies adults just across the border in France, where suitable habitat also exists? Given the late date, it can just as well have been a juvenile that was raised further south in the regular breeding range of the species, having moved north after the breeding season. This type of behaviour is known from other southern heron species like Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* and Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*. The juvenile stayed very late, constituting by far the latest record ever in Belgium. Before this, there were no accepted records of Squacco Heron in September or October. Records of this species have been on the rise in Belgium since the turn of the century. There are no historical breeding records of Squacco Heron known for Belgium. It is believed to have bred in the Netherlands up until around 1860 (van den Berg & Bosman 1999). In the period 1970-1990, the European breeding population decreased severely, corresponding with a period of severe droughts in the African wintering quarters in the Sahel region. The population is growing again since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Zwarts *et al.* 2009). The French population grew from 106 pairs in 1989 to 576 pairs in 2007, growing further in later years with 605 in the Camargue alone in 2014. The northernmost breeding site, occupied by 1-2 pairs since 2011, is not so far from the Belgian border at the Lac du Der-Chantecoq in the Marne department (Caupenne & Kayser 2015). A census of the Spanish population in 2011 recorded 2.076 pairs, a sharp increase from 850-1.100 pairs detected in 2003 (De Juana & Garcia 2015). Will this species follow the same trends as other southern herons and Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* and start colonizing northwestern Europe?

**Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* (72,81,11)

10 December 2015, Het Vinne, Zoutleeuw (VB), 1

18 January, IJzerbroeken, Merkem (W), 1

27 January – 7 February, Marais d’Harchies, Harchies (H), 1

1 April, Kluzendok, Gent (O), 1

18 April – 25 May, Prosperpolder Noord, Doel (O) and Kallo (O), 1. Considered the same wide ranging bird.

4 May, Westerplas, Sint-Martens-Latem (O), 1

6 May, Kalken (O), 1 wearing scientific ring

27 - 28 June, Kleine Netevallei, Nijlen (A), 1

8 - 14 July, Beveren-Stavele (W), 1

23 - 31 August, Décanteurs, Genappe (BW), 1

29 September, Herentals (A), 1

With eleven accepted records, 2016 is the second best year ever, after 2014. Glossy Ibis maintains its recently established new status of a regular scarcity. The birds are quite mobile and move around between sites. It becomes increasingly difficult to keep track and to avoid double counts.

**Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus* (0,17,5)

14 - 15 April, Lummen (L), 1 adult

25 April, Langemeersen, Petegem (O), 1

24 May - 1 July, Mosselgoren, Geel (A), 1 2cy  
12 August, Kasterlee (A) en Doel (O), 1, considered as same bird  
11 November, Angreau (H), 1

A record of five accepted records in one year is yet another sign of the clear increase of this species. The two records on 12 August were about 50 kilometer apart, but based on time of the day and flight direction, both were deemed to be related to the same bird.



**Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*, Geel, 28 May 2016 (Rudy Aeschlimann)**

**Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* (3,375,30)**

6 June 2015, Houdremont (N), 1  
7 May, Sint-Denijs (W), 11  
5 June, Wingene (W), 1  
5 June, Loker (W), 9  
26 June, Libin (Lx), 8  
2 July, Balegem (O), 1

**Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina* (3,5,1)**

6 September, Honnay (N), 1 (A. De Broyer)

A well described record without pictures. This shows that the BRBC has taken the position that well described sightings of spotted eagles spec. *Aquila pomarina/clanga* can still be accepted without photographic evidence. This is not an easy stance in view of the regular hybridization of both Lesser Spotted Eagle and Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*. We feel that we should not discard these records especially when it comes to Lesser Spotted Eagles: pure individuals of the latter species still far outnumber known or alleged hybrids. This can not be said anymore for Greater Spotted Eagle at the western edge of its range. Acceptance of the latter species is thus likely to be more difficult. The BRBC will assess every record on its own. An old record from 2006 has finally been rejected (see below) because the description was not conclusive enough.

**Lesser Spotted Eagle/Greater Spotted eagle *Aquila pomarina / clanga* (0,1,0)**

26 October 2015, Bocholt (L), 1

**Steppe Eagle** *Aquila nipalensis* (0,2,1)

18 August, Ransart (H), 1 2cy

The third Steppe Eagle for Belgium was clearly on a mission: the next day it was seen over 160 kilometer to the northeast at Viersen, Nordrhein-Westphalen, Germany. Based on plumage details and on the direction of the bird migrating at the Belgian location on 18 August, it can be assumed that it was the same bird. The time of the year and the fact that this bird moved rapidly over a large distance were considered as good arguments for a wild bird.

**Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos* (9,4,1)

3 September, Vielsalm (Lx), 1 3cy (R. Thunus)

18 September, Korbeek-Dijle (VB), 1 imm.

After some debates, the bird from Vielsalm has been considered to be the same bird that was observed last year in Vierves-sur-Viroin, on 17 May 2015, accepted as the 13<sup>th</sup> record for Belgium (Faveyts *et al.* 2016). This is an unlikely decision, as it concerns birds that were seen almost fourteen months apart at locations quite widely separated. Deciding on whether birds seen at different locations and separate dates are the same or different individuals is a difficult task. This decision is based on the fact that the Vielsalm bird was considered to be a 3cy (Dick Forsman *in litt.*) whereas the bird from Vierves-sur-Viroin appears to be a 2cy and on the fact that Golden Eagle is a major rarity in Belgium. We feel it is safer to consider it to be the same bird that either ranged in southeastern Belgium and adjacent areas for a long time without being noticed in between, or that the eagle revisited this part of the country on various occasions during its immaturity. Based on differences in plumage and moult stage, the bird seen at Korbeek-Dijle is considered as a different one from the bird in Vielsalm. Quite remarkable for two Golden Eagles to be seen in Belgium in a two-weeks period! Before 2015, the previous record dates back from 1988!

**Booted Eagle** *Aquila pennata* (0,18,3)

17 May - 9 July, Marais d'Harchies, Harchies (H), 2, both pale morphs (V. Dufour)

19 May, Wuustwezel (A), 1, pale morph (P. Symens)

Two Booted Eagles together is new for Belgium. Apart from the birds seen together on 11-12 June, only one bird at a time has been observed during this long period. Observers have reported on 11 June that the birds were performing a display behaviour. Although a good sign in itself, these behaviours were not supporting any breeding attempt. However, it is worth keeping in mind that the species breeds in France, less than 200 kilometers from the Belgian border, in the regions of Centre and Bourgogne. The French population, numbering 585-810 breeding pairs, has shown a moderate increase during the period 1989-2012. On the downside, the northern edge of the French breeding range has been abandoned in the last decades. Booted Eagles used to breed in Lorraine and Champagne-Ardenne. In the latter region, the last breeding attempts already date back from 1985 (Thiollay & Bretagnolle 2004; Caupenne *et al.* 2015). Although there is no indication that the species has ever bred in Belgium, it is not totally inconceivable that this could happen. The species is not very demanding from an ecological point of view, there are quite a lot of potential habitats especially in southeastern Belgium. In the period 1991-1996, the species was present in the Hakel area of north central Germany, with a pair breeding at least in 1995. This location was about 750 kilometer from the nearest known nesting area (Gedeon *et al.* 2014). The occurrence of Booted Eagle is clearly on the rise in Belgium: 13 out of a total of 21 accepted birds have been recorded since 2010.

**Bonelli's Eagle** *Aquila fasciata* (1,6,0)

14 June 2015, Maubray (H), 1

**Little Crane** *Porzana parva* (4,40,1)

11 - 14 July, Het Vinne, Zoutleeuw (VB), 1 ad. m.

**Baillon's Crane** *Porzana pusilla* (4,29,0)

15 August 2015, Brecht, Groot Schietveld (A), 1

**Eurasian Stone-curlew** *Burhinus oedicnemus* (9,74,3)

4 April, Zwijndrecht (A), 1 ad.

15 April, Wareme (Lg), 1

6 May, Mortsel (A), 1

With again three accepted records in 2016, the Eurasian Stone-curlew keeps up with the increasing trend that it has shown in the past years.

**Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* (0,8,0)

11 – 20 November 2013, Doel (O), 1  
3 January – 19 February 2014, Doel (O), 1  
16 October – 17 December 2014, Doel (O), 1  
6 November – 27 December 2015, Doel (O), 1  
19 November, Doelpolder Noord, Doel (O), 1

These records are from the same returning bird. The bird accompanied wintering European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, and it could be difficult to find. Interestingly, there are 2 accepted records of a Pacific Golden Plover in the same area on 19 – 21 November 2008 and on 30 October – 9 December 2009. Larger waders can reach a considerable age, so it would not be impossible that it has been the same bird visiting the area and partly wintering there in at least some winters since 2008. However, as the area is birded quite heavily, we believe that the gap of four years without a record points at at least to two different birds. The BRBC should look into whether the 2008 and 2009 records could be attributed to one single bird as well. Apart from the regular reoccurrence of Pacific Golden Plover in the Doel area, it is surprising how rare the species is in Belgium compared to some neighbouring countries. In The Netherlands, it is an annual guest with a total of no less than 67 accepted records up to 2016 (webreference 1). In Great Britain, there are on average three accepted records per year, with a total of 90 accepted records up to 2015 (Hudson *et al.* 2016).

**Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Calidris falcinellus* (4,28,2)

21 May, Het Vinne, Zoutleeuw (VB), 1  
12 June, Prosperpolder Noord, Doel (O), 1

**Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* (0,43,0)

1 October 2015, Fagne de la Polleur, Robertville (Lg), 1 (D. Kever)  
Another accepted record brings the number for 2015 to eight records, further highlighting the influx in that year.

**Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius* (2,2,0)

16 November 2013, Canal Pommeroeul-Condé, Hensies, (H), 1 1cy  
This new record of Spotted Sandpiper was not identified as such in the field, but was determined in retrospect by a member of the BRBC when scrutinizing pictures of Common Sandpipers *Actitis hypoleucos* in the national bird database of [www.waarnemingen.be](http://www.waarnemingen.be) / [www.observations.be](http://www.observations.be). The observer of the bird can be easily excused as the distinction between both species in non-breeding plumage is very hard and Spotted Sandpiper is big rarity in the country that it not on anyone's radar. Common Sandpipers are regular but rare in Belgium in winter. This record shows that it can pay off to give these wintering birds a closer look.

**Franklin's Gull** *Larus pipixcan* (0,3,1)

27 December – 4 January 2017, Visé (L), 1 ad. wi.  
The fourth Franklin's Gull for Belgium constitutes the second winter record after the one in early February 2000. It was seen at the river Meuse around the city of Liège in eastern Belgium, a very good area for gulls in the country.

**Iceland Gull** *Larus glaucoides* (2,70,3)

22 January 1995, Houbenhof, Kessenich (L), 1 2cy (J. Jansen)  
15 January, Marais d'Harcies, Harchies (H), 1 ad.  
7 April, Oostduinkerke (W), 1 2cy  
30 November - 2 December, Uiterwaarden, Kessenich (L), 1 3cy  
A record of an Iceland Gull in Brussels from 28 December 2015 until 21 February 2016 was already accepted in the previous report (Faveyts *et al.* 2016).

**Elegant Tern** *Thalasseus elegans* (0,1,0)

12 June - 15 July 1988, Voorhaven Zeebrugge (W), 1 ad.  
For many years, records of terns that looked like Elegant Tern in several western European countries have been debated. Some birds were promising, but nevertheless there have always been some doubts whether these



**Gull-billed Tern** *Sterna nilotica* (19,131,2)

1 May, Oostduinkerke (W) and Zeebrugge (W), 2. Same birds seen migrating north along the coast line at two locations separated by about 40 kilometers.

**Atlantic Puffin** *Fratercula arctica* (6,103,/)

22 December 1950, Doel (O), 1 1cy (collection of Jules Desideratus De Blieck, report J. Jansen and W. Faveyts)  
An old record from a well known bird collector, photographically documented thanks to Justin Jansen. Atlantic Puffin is no longer a homologation species since 1 January 2015 (Faveyts *et al.* 2016),

**European Roller** *Coracias garrulus* (21,29,1)

2 - 14 September, Vallei van de Zwarte Beek, Koersel (L), 1 1cy, colour-ringed in Latvia

The first European Roller for Belgium since 2003 had a special extra feature. The bird wore a colour ring which showed it had been ringed as a nestling in Garkalnes, central Latvia, on 10 July 2016. It was the smallest chick of a brood of four and the offspring of one of only about 20 remaining pairs of European Rollers in Latvia (Edmunds Račinskis *in litt.* via Joachim Pintens). The European population of European Roller has seen a continuous decline in its entire range since the 19th century. The species became extinct in a number of countries and continues to decrease in almost all countries (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997, BirdLife International 2004). This big decline is reflected in the strong decrease in records from Belgium, almost all accepted records dating from before 1990.



**European Roller** *Coracias garrulus*, Koersel - Vallei van de Zwarte Beek, 13 September 2016  
(Alphonse Willems)

**Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla* (8,32,2)

13 September, IJzermonding, Nieuwpoort (W), 1 trapped  
5 October, Broedvlakte; Zwijndrecht (A), 1

**Red-rumped Swallow** *Cecropis daurica* (0,49,4)

7 April, Kalmthoutse Heide, Kalmthout (A), 1  
5 May, De Fonteintjes, Zeebrugge (W), 1  
6 May, De Fonteintjes, Zeebrugge (W), 1  
8 May, Wenduine (W), 1

An above average year. All but six accepted Belgian records are from this century, a testimony to a clear increase. The population in southwestern Europe, the likely source for most or all of our Red-rumped Swallows,

has been increasing for several decades. The Spanish and Portuguese populations both consist of several 10.000's of pairs although accurate recent data seem to be lacking (BirdLife International 2004, De Juana & Garcia 2015). The French population numbers only 100-200 pairs but is also increasing (Issa & Audrevarde 2015). Interestingly, Red-rumped Swallow is a relatively recent addition to the avifauna of southwest Europe. It was first recorded in Iberia only in the 19th century where the first breeding record was described only in 1919 (De Juana & Garcia 2015).

**Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* (0,14,3)

19 April, Brechtse Heide, Malle (A), 1 m.

20 April, De Maten, Genk (L), 1 m.

3 - 4 May, Beneden Netevallei – Anderstad, Lier (A), 1 ad. f.

A record year for Citrine Wagtail in Belgium. The only other year with more than one accepted bird was 1997 (two). Despite a clear westward expansion, the species remains a rarity in Belgium, although there has been a remarkable surge in records since 2010 (only missing in 2014). Whereas spring and autumn records were roughly equivalent in number, spring records have taken up recently. The number of European countries with breeding records of Citrine Wagtail has risen (Slack 2009). The first breeding record for the Netherlands was discovered in 2011: a male Citrine Wagtail breeding with a female Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* (Draaijer & Slaterus 2012). A future breeding attempt or at least a territorial bird in Belgium would not be inconceivable.

**Thrush Nightingale** *Luscinia luscinia* (0,36,1)

22 August 2015, Bokrijk (L), 1 1cy, trapped

18 August, Mechels Broek, Mechelen (A), 1 1cy, trapped



**Red-spotted Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica svecica*, Stabroek, 6 July 2016 (Ben Steeman)

**Red-spotted Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica svecica* (x,x,1)

3 – 16 July, Stabroek (A), ad. m., successfully breeding

The first accepted record of a Red-spotted Bluethroat in Belgium since 1997 turned out to be the first breeding record in the country. The male was discovered already quite late in the breeding season. The bird was paired with a female of unknown subspecies and was feeding fledged young. It is very likely that the female belongs to *cyaneola* subspecies (White-spotted Bluethroat), the common breeding taxa in the low lying parts of Belgium. The European breeding population of *cyaneola* has been estimated at 3.500-4.500 pairs in the first decade of the 21st century (Vermeersch *et al.* 2004; Simar 2010). Driessens (2016) gives a full account of the record and of the occurrence of the *svecica* subspecies in Belgium, but erroneously puts 3 June 2016 as the

date of the bird's record. Red-spotted Bluethroats are extremely rare in Belgium, despite breeding as close as southern Norway. Both subspecies have a clearly different wintering area, resulting in a dissimilar occurrence in the country. *Cyanecula* winters in southwestern Europe south to West-Africa (Arizaga *et al.* 2016), whereas *svecica* migrates to the East Africa and the Indian subcontinent (Lislevand *et al.* 2015). As Driessens (2016) suggests, a review of the old accepted records of Red-spotted Bluethroat in Belgium appears to be due. There are no less than 30 accepted records in the period 1966-1997, which contrasts strongly with the complete lack of records between 1997 and 2016. Most accepted records are of birds trapped by ringers. By now, it has turned out that separating the subspecies in the hand is often impossible. This could lead to the conclusion that the majority of the old records are no longer acceptable by today's standards.

**Red-flanked Bluetail** *Tarsiger cyanurus* (0,7,1)  
28 October, Oostdam, Zeebrugge (W), 1



**Siberian Stonechat** *Saxicola maurus*, Zeebrugge, 3 October 2016 (Johan Buckens)

**Siberian Stonechat** *Saxicola maurus* (0,11,3)

9 October 2015, Groot Schietveld, Brecht (A), 1

25 September, Zwin- Zwinvlakte, Knokke (W), 1 f. (Y. Pieters)

3 October, Voorhaven – Westdam, Zeebrugge (W), 1 f. 1cy

14 - 16 October, Paardenschor, Doel (O), 1 f. 1cy

2016 was a record year for this species. This record occurrence was part of an influx of Siberian passerines into northwestern Europe during the autumn 2016.

**Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka* (0,2,1)

10 October, Voorhaven – Westdam, Zeebrugge (W), 1 m. 1cy

It took us quite some years to add this species to the Belgian list. After the first record in 2011, Pied Wheatears seem to have found the way, as 2016 provided already the third accepted record.



**Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka*, Zeebrugge, 10 October 2016 (Johan Buckens)

**Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti* (0,4,1)

26 - 29 October, Gedempt Doeldok, Doel (O), 1 m. 1cy

Ten years had gone by since the previous Desert Wheatear, so the new record in 2016 was well received. Interestingly, the bird chose a location which is probably one of the places in Belgium which most similarly looks as its regular habitat of low vegetated (semi) desert: a sparsely vegetated sandy plain in the Antwerp harbour area. Its status of a big rarity in Belgium is in stark contrast to the situation in some other northwest European countries like Great Britain (about four per year on average, 144 accepted records until 2015, Hudson *et al.* 2016) or The Netherlands (44 accepted records until 2016, webreference 2).

**Common Rock Thrush** *Monticola saxatilis* (5,1,2)

3 May, Groot Schietveld, Brecht (A), 1 m. 2cy (H. Nuytemans)

6 May, Tienne Breumont, Nismes (N), 1 m. ad.

16 years had passed without a single record of Common Rock Thrush, and now two birds showed up in just a few days! Both birds were clearly in migration mode, as their stays were short. Both were photographed. Together with an accepted record from 13 April 2000, these are the only modern records of the species in Belgium. The first five records date back from the 19th century or the early 20th century. Common Rock Thrush underwent a big historical decline in the early 20th century, possible caused by changes in climate but possibly also because of habitat changes. In those times, it even bred in southern Belgium, with at least one confirmed breeding record near La Roche (Lx) and several other records that could have related to (potential) breeders (Jacob 2015). The European population seems now to have stabilized and even locally increased in recent decades, but it has never fully recovered from its historical decline (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997, BirdLife International 2004).

**River Warbler** *Locustella fluviatilis* (0,29,2)

8 May, Griesbroek, Balen (A), 1

28 - 31 May, Les Abattis, Etalle (Lx), 1 male (R. Thunus)

**Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola* (0,39,2)

3 September, Tongeren (L), 1 1cy, trapped

24 October, Saive (Lg), 1 1cy (R. Ponsen)

**Blyth's Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum* (0,23,4)

27 August, Rangeerstation Antwerpen-Noord - De Kuifeend, Antwerpen (A), 1 1cy, trapped

7 September, Berendrecht (A), 1

11 September, Bellem Oost, Bellem (O), 1 1cy, trapped

6 October, Lanaken (L), 1 trapped



**Booted Warbler** *Iduna caligata*, Heist, 11 September 2016 (Joachim Pintens)

**Booted Warbler** *Iduna caligata* (0,12,1)

27 August 2012, Koksijde (W), 1 trapped

11 September, De Sashul, Heist (W), 1 1cy

The influx of Siberian passerines in the autumn of 2016 brought a welcome Booted Warbler to Belgium. An record from 2012 was also accepted. The previous record before that dated back already to the year 2000. Between 1988 and 2000, no less than 11 records were accepted, contrasting sharply with the dearth of records afterwards. Oddly, no such lack of records was reported in neighbouring countries like Great Britain (4-5 per year on average, totalling 161 records up to 2015) and The Netherlands (27 accepted records up to 2016, including 19 since 2000, webreference 3).

**Eastern Crowned Warbler** *Phylloscopus coronatus* (0,0,1)

24 October, Ingooigem (W), 1 1cy, trapped

If Belgium did not get its anticipated part of the huge Siberian Accentor's *Prunella montanella* influx into northern Europe in the autumn of 2016, this was somewhat balanced by an exceptional species from the far east: an Eastern Crowned Warbler that hit the nets of a ringer on 24 October. It is only the 12th ever to be recorded in Europe! The influx of Siberian passerines during the autumn of 2016 seriously raised the number of records of this *Phylloscopus* in Europe: the pre-2016 total of eight records was added by four records. The Belgian record was the last of these four, three of which were in the very narrow time frame of 21-24 October and were from Great Britain on 6 October, The Netherlands on 21 October and France on 22 October (Lawicki & van den Berg 2016, Mitchel 2017). Remarkably, the Belgian bird was trapped inland, nowhere nearby any migrant trap. Not too long ago, it was deemed impossible that birds from beyond the Lake Baikal watershed could reach western Europe. Since then, it has been confirmed repeatedly and by various species that migrant

birds from the furthest eastern edges of the Palearctic are able to reaching us. This tiny Eastern Crowned Warbler, weighing 8-10 grams, made it across the entire Eurasian landmass, a truly remarkable achievement. Instead of flying about 5.000 kilometer to its South East Asian wintering grounds, it flew over 8.000 kilometers towards North-Western Europe.



**Eastern Crowned Warbler** *Phylloscopus coronatus*, Ingooigem, 24 October 2016 (Miguel Demeulemeester)

**Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides* (0,15,2)

6 July, Brugge (W), 1 singing

24 September, Voorhaven – Westdam, Zeebrugge (W), 1 1cy

This third record of a singing bird was of a bird briefly singing in front of a birder's house in a suburb area in Brugge (W)!

**Hume's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus humei* (0,11,2)

21 - 26 October, Harendijke, Blankenberge (W), 1

23 December - 8 January 2017, Sint-Pieters (W), 1

Two records including one at a wintering site for at least a few weeks. This is the first record of a bird with a prolonged stay in winter. Previous winter birds on 28 December 1988 and 2 December 2011 were one-day birds. Bearing in mind records of long staying wintering birds elsewhere in western Europe, it is clear that these small Siberian gems should be on the radar in winter. It is likely that they can easily go overlooked.

**Radde's Warbler** *Phylloscopus schwarzi* (0,27,1)

8 October, Bos Maleveld, Assebroek (W), 1 1cy, trapped

**Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* (0,46,3)

9 October, Duinbossen, De Haan (W), 1

30 October, De Sashul, Heist (W), 1

14 November, Grembergen (O), 1 trapped

**Iberian Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus ibericus* (0,10,2)

14 April 2014, Membach (Lg), 1

17 - 24 May, Esneux (Lg), 1

30 May, Schoterheide, Gerhagen (L), 1

With an extra accepted record, 2014 becomes the record year for this species with three records. Given the fact that odd singing chiffchaffs, or even potential hybrids, do show up sometimes, it is essential to support the identification by sound recordings.



**Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*, Blankenberge, 25 October 2016 (Filip De Ruwe)**

**Siberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita tristis* (-,-,10)**

14 October 2009, Heist, Bosje (W), 1

31 October 2009, Brecht, Groot Schietveld (A), 1

10 October 2010, Genk, Domein Bokrijk (L), 1 first calendar-year trapped

15 September 2012, Lommel, Kristallijn/Maatheide (L), 1 trapped

16 October 2013, Koksijde, Doornpanne (W), 1 trapped

16 October 2013, Zeebrugge, Strand Westdam (W), 1

21 October 2013, Sint-Pieters-Woluwe (RB), 1

17 November 2013, Haagje, Heist (W), 1

23 November 2013, Gravière, Amay (Lg), 1

15 March 2014, Paardenschor, Doel (O), 1

12 October 2014, Strand Westdam, Zeebrugge (W), 1

29 December 2014 – 10 January 2015, Nuchten, Zandbergen (O), 1

12 October 2015, Zeebrugge (W), 1

27 October 2015, Woumen (W), 1 1cy, trapped

11 November 2015, Tongeren (L), 1

31 January, Aartselaar (A), 1

1 April, Putten Weiden, Kieldrecht (O), 1

17 April, Bourgoyen, Gent (O), 1 trapped

17 October, Bezinkingsputten, Tienen (VB), 1

22 October, Bosje, Heist (W), 2

3 November, Ideeëntuin, Nieuwpoort (W), 1

15 - 18 November, De Sashul, Heist (W), 1

23 November, Kortrijk (W), 1

11 - 14 December, De Fonteintjes, Zeebrugge (W), 1

18 December, Hensies (H), 1

After some years of not dealing with this taxon of Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, due to the still ongoing discussion on its identification, the BRBC has decided to make a move. A sound is considered to be the strongest element to pin down a positive identification, but the BRBC believes it would be too strict to throw out all other data. Our policy is to accept records supported by good photographs showing the main features of *tristis*. Based on this decision, the BRBC has worked through all the Siberian Chiffchaff's records from the past five years (2012-2016) to determine if the taxon still deserves its national rarity's status. The result of this will provide us with the necessary numbers to decide whether this taxon still rightfully belongs to the list of rarities to be assessed by the committee or not. As it will probably not be easy to go back for a full ten years period (the countrywide record database [waarnemingen.be/observations.be](http://waarnemingen.be/observations.be) has not been available for that long) and because we expect it to be above the rarity threshold of at least three accepted records per year, the five year period 2012-2016 will act as the working period for this assessment. For 2016 alone, no less than 10 records were accepted. Siberian Chiffchaff is no longer considered as a rarity in other European countries like The Netherlands and Great Britain where no less than 344 birds were recorded in 2014, a record year (White & Kehoe 2017)!

**Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva* (0,103,3)

14 May 2011, Molse zandputten, Mol (A), 1

19 September, Voorhaven, Oostende (W), 1 m. ad.

4 - 17 October, Duinen Fort Napoleon, Oostende (W), 1 m. ad.

Two records of adult males in the same area just a few weeks apart are remarkable. Their differing throat patterns revealed them to be different birds.



**Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva*, Oostende, 8 October 2016 (Filip De Ruwe)

**White-headed Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus caudatus* (-,-, winter 2015-2016: 66 / winter 2016-2017:2)

4 November 2015, Aische-en-Refail (N), 2

7 November 2015, Bosje, Heist (W), 2

7 November 2015 - 9 January 2016, Hollogne-Sur-Geer (Lg), 1

11 November 2015, Beauvechain (BW), 8  
 14 November - 20 December 2015, Westkapelle (W), 2  
 16 November 2015, Kalkense Meersen, Schellebelle (O), 1  
 29 November 2015, De Gavers, Harelbeke (W), 1  
 29 November 2015, Assesse (N), 3  
 5 December 2015, Blaarmeersen, Gent (O), 2  
 5 December 2015, Rosmeer (L), 1  
 17 December 2015, Woluwe-Saint-Pierre (RB), 2  
 17 December 2015, Waggelwater, Sint-Andries (W), 3  
 20 December 2015, Hulshout (A), 2  
 23 - 27 December 2015, Genappe (BW), 1  
 26 December 2015, Raspaillebos, Geraardsbergen (O), 1  
 26 December 2015, Vilvoorde (VB), 1  
 30 December 2015, Beverbos, Wemmel (VB), 1  
 31 December 2015, Grootloon, Borgloon (L), 2  
 31 December 2015, Flobecq (H), 1  
 31 December 2015, Uiterwaarden, Aldeneik (L), 1  
 3 January, Koningshooikt (A), 1  
 7 January, Sint-Martens-Lennik (VB), 1  
 9 January, Gravière Amay (Lg), 1  
 10 January, Jette (RB), 2  
 17 - 18 January, Zonhoven (L), 1  
 19 January, Uccle (RB), 1  
 25 January, Aische-en-Refail (N), 1  
 7 - 13 February, Kinrooi (L), 1  
 11 February, Wemmel (VB), 1  
 13 - 20 February, Kessenich (L), 1  
 13 February - 11 March, Getevallei, Tienen (VB), 1  
 13 February, Kortrijk (W), 1  
 16 February, Durbuy (Lx), 4  
 19 February, Oud-Heverlee (VB), 1  
 20 February, De Gavers, Harelbeke (W), 1  
 20 February, Jette (RB), 2  
 20 February, Hoepertingen (L), 1  
 20 February, Kessenich (L), 1  
 26 February, Louveigné (Lg), 1  
 26 February, Gastuche (BW), 1  
 27 February, Soheit-Tinlot (Lg), 2  
 3 March, Sint-Genesius-Rode (VB), 1  
 7 March, Tilff (Lg), 1  
 31 October, Olen (A), 1  
 25 December - 29 January 2017, Lanaye (Lg), 1

Autumn 2015 and the following winter 2015/2016 brought the strongest influx of White-headed Long-tailed Tit in Belgium since the winter 2010/2011 during which a record influx was noted. Due to the large number of records and to the fact that many records were acceptable based on pictures or description, it was then decided to deal with that record influx by registering all records. This gave a result of no less than 908 registered White-headed Long-tailed Tits for the winter 2010-2011 (Faveyst *et al.* 2012)! The winter 2015-2016 influx was clearly of a much smaller scale. Besides the 66 accepted birds listed above there were also 52 rejected records (92 birds, see list of rejected records below). Many of those records were rejected because they were insufficiently documented. It is possible that they involved White-headed Long-tailed Tits after all, which would have brought the total number of birds involved in this influx possible well over 100. Other rejected birds showed features that are deemed not acceptable for pure *caudatus*. The BRBC will consider in the future whether White-headed Long-tailed Tit still merits its place in the list of rare taxa to be assessed by the committee. Observers must be aware of the greater likelihood of hybrids than pure birds. A set of criteria is necessary to dismiss these hybrids, the pure white head being one of them.

**Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria* (2,11,0)

31 December 2015 - 10 January, Carrière de Chanxhe Chanxhe, (Lg), 1 (R. Gailly)

The fourth accepted record for the period 2013-2016. It is an intriguing thought that Wallcreeper may be a regular winter visitor to rocky habitats in southern Belgium. As these are not the most birded areas, it is possible that some Wallcreepers are still being overlooked. Some ambitious young birders, including new BRBC member Robin Gailly, took the challenge and found several birds!



**Radde's Warbler** *Phylloscopus schwarzi*, Assebroek, 8 October 2016 (Filip De Ruwe)

**Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus* (0,5,0)

11 October 2008, de Kuifeend, Oorderen (A), 1 1cy, acceptance changed from Turkestan Shrike *Lanius isabellinus phoenicuroides* to Isabelline Shrike, without assignment to any subspecies.

Given the considerable difficulty of determining 1cy Isabelline Shrikes to subspecies, the BRBC has decided to take a more cautious approach. The 2008 record was first accepted as the first record of Turkestan Shrike for the country (Faveyts *et al.* 2011). This decision means that the Belgian list currently holds four accepted records of 1cy Isabelline Shrikes that have not been assigned to subspecies. The fifth record is the only one to have been accepted to subspecies level: a 2cy Daurian Shrike *Lanius isabellinus isabellinus* on 27 September 2013. The BRBC follows the taxonomic decisions of the AERC TAC (see elsewhere in this report), which still treats Isabelline Shrike as one single species.

**Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator* (-,162,3)

22 - 23 April, Defensieve dijk, Zwijndrecht (A), 1 ad. f.

3 - 4 June, Groot Schietveld, Brecht (A), 1 ad. m.

5 July, Quévy-le-Petit (H), 1 m. 2cy

**Hooded Crow** *Corvus corone cornix* (-,since 2011: 11,1)

10 April 2014, Ingooigem (W), 1

11 November, IJzermonding, Nieuwpoort (W), 1 dead (tideline corpse at North Sea beach)

This formerly common winter visitor has been a homology species since only 2011. The meagre total of only 12 accepted records since then is a proof of the rarity it has become nowadays. The only acceptable

record for 2016 was of a bird washed up dead along the North Sea shores during the autumn migration.

**Rosy Starling** *Sturnus roseus* (17,47,1)

3 - 7 September, Achterhaven - Rietveld Pelikaan, Zeebrugge (W), 1 1cy

**Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus* (0,77,3)

22 May - 1 June, Kruibeke Polder, Kruibeke (O), 1 m.

8 June, Barvaux-Condroz (N), 1 m.

9 June, Lanaken (L), 1 2cy, trapped

**Pine Bunting** *Emberiza leucocephalos* (1,20,1)

29 December - 12 March 2017, Widooie (L), 1 m.

A remarkable year for Pine Bunting! On 7 May 2016 - 23 May 2016, a much debated female-type bunting *Emberiza spec.* was observed at Rochefort (Lx.). This bird was not accepted for the reasons mentioned below in section 5 (rejected records). Before that, there was another much debated bird on 26 December 2004 – 29 January 2004 at Hoegaarden (VB), that was eventually assessed as a hybrid Pine Bunting x Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*. The fear that a pure Pine Bunting in Belgium had become an impossibility due to the whole hybridisation issue was shattered by a nice adult male discovered in the very last days of 2016, by observer Geert Beckers, who had been systematically looking for this species in bunting flocks in Limburg province, in view of the autumn influx of Siberian passerines (including good looking Pine Buntings) In the same flock, a female bunting resembling Pine Bunting was also discovered but the jury is still out on that bird, given the big ID problems with female types. Later in the same winter, in February 2017, another male was found at Westouter (W). That bird will be treated in the next report. Amazingly, the latter bird was also accompanied by a female type bunting possessing Pine Bunting's features!

**Cirl Bunting** *Emberiza cirlus* (125,84,0)

3 March 2015, Buzenol (Lx), 1 ad. m.

**Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* (6,69,10)

17 September, Opstalvallei, Berendrecht (A), 1

25 September, Opstalvallei, Berendrecht (A), 1

4 October - 26 November, Averbode Bos en Heide, Tessenderlo (L), 1

5 - 25 October, Strand, Oostduinkerke (W), 2 1cy

10 October, Bezinkingsputten, Tienen (VB), 1

16 October, Industriezone, Wetteren (O), 1 trapped

28 October, Bezinkingsputten, Tienen (VB), 1, sound recorded

1 November, Kalmthoutse Heide, Essen (A), 1

11 - 24 December, Beverbeekse heide – Noord, Hamont-Achel (L), 1

And yet another record year for this pretty little northern bunting! If this trend continues, Little Bunting could disappear from the list of rare species to be assessed by the BRBC rather soon!

## 2. Category B records

**Baikal Teal** *Anas formosa* (2,4,0)

January 1931, Sinaai (O), 1 (collection of Jules Desideratus De Blicck, report J. Jansen and W. Faveyts)

An old record from a well known bird collector, photographically documented thanks to Justin Jansen. There is no accurate date for this collected bird, which becomes the second record for Belgium.

**Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator* (-,162,3)

April 1929, Wijnegem (A), 1.

An old record from a well known bird collector, photographically documented thanks to Justin Jansen. There is no precise date for this collected bird. In those days, Woodchat Shrike was still a regular breeding bird in Belgium, also in the part of Flanders where the bird was collected. In 1925 and 1926, breeding records were mentioned for the municipality where the 1929 bird was collected (Desmet 1987). Due to the regular breeding occurrence in those days, the record is not included in the count of Belgian records.

### 3. Category D records

#### **Dalmatian Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus*

7 October, Marais d'Harchies, Harchies (H), 1 imm.

A well photographed bird that flew by and was later seen at various locations in France (15 September, Etang de Flicourt, Guerne, Val-d'Oise and 21 September, Mayenne). The BRBC was tempted to accept this bird as a first for Belgium, but as there have been quite a few occurrences of pelicans in Belgium (both Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* and Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens*) that were of a certain or suspected dubious origin, we take a cautious stand. The French Rarities committee has not decided yet on this bird. The BRBC has decided to put the bird in category D1 for the time being. The decision of the French committee will be awaited and once we receive information on that, it can still be decided if the bird will go into another category.

### 4. Category E records

#### **Great White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus*

11 June 2015, Insteekdok, Vilvoorde (VB), 1

15 - 17 April, Kanaal Dessel-Kwaadmechelen, Olmen (A), 1

#### **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus*

21 April, Muizen (A), 2, wearing leg ring indicating captive origin

#### **Greater Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus roseus*

12 June, Oud-Heverlee (VB), 1

#### **Lesser White-fronted Goose** *Anser erythropus*

18 May 2009, Getevallei, Tienen (VB), 2

16 July - 5 August, Sint-Laureins (O), 1

10 September - 17 October, Het Zwin, Knokke-Heist (W), 1

#### **Red-breasted Goose** *Branta ruficollis*

19 - 20 March, De Vijvers, Averbode (VB), 1

4 October, Uitkerke (W), 1

18 - 30 October, Neerharen (L), 1

25 October - 29 December, Bourgoyen, Gent (O), 1

17 November, Gravière, Amay (Lg), 1

#### **Hooded Merganser** *Lophodytes cucullatus*

30 November, De Palingbeek, Zillebeke (W), 1

#### **Bearded Vulture** *Gypaetus barbatus*

9 May, IJzervallei, Oostvleteren (W), 1

The fifth record for Belgium, and the fourth since 2011. Appearance of young Bearded Vultures in late Spring (May – June) are seemingly turning into an almost annual event. All records have been put into category E because of their proven or possible origin from a reintroduction scheme in southern Europe. The 2016 bird undergoes the same fate. It was photographed sitting on an arable field. No information is known if the bird did or did not show markings that showed it was directly introduced; such birds receive wing markings upon release in the form of a unique bleached feather pattern. As said before, we chose to take a cautious position towards these Bearded Vulture, certainly when there is no definite information if a bird was marked or not.

#### **Cinereous Vulture** *Aegypius monachus*

30 May 2015, Retie (A), 1 imm.

A young bird photographed in a meadow. Two days earlier, two Cinereous Vultures were reported at Dave (N), and two days later, one bird was observed at On (Lx). These other birds were accepted into category E as well (Faveyts *et al.* 2016). It is assumed that this record in Retie could be attributed to the same birds. The bird of the record in On on 1 June 2015 wore a leg ring. Shortly before the Belgian records, two Cinereous Vulture were observed in the French Lorraine region, not far south from the Belgian borders. Those birds were

determined by their markings to belong to a French reintroduction scheme, more specifically in the Grand Causses area. Both were born in 2014 in nests in the wild, from parents of unknown origin (introduced or free-born). All Belgian records from 2015 are considered to be attributable to these two birds, and are thus assigned to category E. For more information, see also Vandevyvre (2016).

#### **Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus*

2 december 2015, Edegem (A), 1 2cy.

A bird that was discovered in a bad shape in a garden and was brought to a bird rehabilitation center. This Long-legged Buzzard showed features of the North African race *cirtensis*: darker head which looks big, warm and overall rusty tinge. The location where it was found and its state strongly point to a captive origin. The bird had no leg ring which could mean that it has been brought into Belgium illegally.

#### **Thick-billed Murre** *Uria lomvia*

13 May 2014, Haven, Antwerpen (A), 1 ad. br.

A Thick-billed Murre was found on a boat in the Antwerp harbour. More information was requested but it could not be confirmed if the bird had entered the boat on its own within the Belgian waters. Thus the bird can not be accepted to the A-list and is put to category E. The bird was quickly rehabilitated in a bird rescue center, and was released at the coast in Raversijde (W) on 16 May.

#### **Cirl Bunting** *Emberiza cirlus*

27 July, Herseaux (H), 1 ad. m.

An unusual date for this species, at an unlikely location (urban area), and on top of that the bird appeared to be wearing a leg ring indicative of a captive origin, although this was not very well visible in the blurry pictures.

### **5. Rejected records**

Unless stated otherwise, the records in this list are considered to be insufficiently documented to be acceptable.

**Lesser White-fronted Goose** *Anser erythropus*: 20 September 2016, Gent, Bourgoyen (O), 1. **Black Brant** *Branta bernicla nigricans*: 19 October, De Panne. Flying by in flock of migrating Black-bellied Brants *Branta bernicla bernicla*. **American Wigeon** *Anas americana*: 16 - 17 February, Sint-Pieters-Put, Brugge (W), 1 m. ad. **Ring-necked Duck** *Aythya collaris* x **Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula*: 16 March, Frasnes (H), 1. **Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus*: 20 November 2016, Beernem (W), 1. **Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Aquila pomarina*: 9 April 2006, De Maten, Genk (L), 1. The same bird was allegedly also seen in Budel, The Netherlands, later on the same date, but apparently has not been accepted by the Dutch rarities committee CDNA either; 12 May, Rollegem (W), 1. **Booted Eagle** *Aquila pennata*: 12 September 2014, Roosdaal (VB), 1; 14 October, Lommel, 1. **Steppe Buzzard** *Buteo buteo vulpinus*: 16 September – 7 October: 1. **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media*. 20 April, Hingene (A), 1. **Pallid Swift** *Apus pallidus*: 2 January 2016, Lier, Beneden Netevallei (A), 1. **Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*: 16 November, Oud-Heverlee (VB). **Red-rumped Swallow** *Cecropis daurica*: 20 September, Vorst (Br), 1. **Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni*: 12 November 2016, Kooigem (W), 1. **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola*: 1 September 2016, Houthulst (W), 1. **Subalpine Warbler** *Sylvia cantillans*: 15 May 2016, Neerharen (L), 1 male adult breeding. **Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva*: 10 October 2016, Koolkerke (W), 1. **Eye-browed Thrush** *Turdus obscurus*: 29 October 2016, Tollembeek (VB), 1. Pictures show Redwing *Turdus iliacus*. **Siberian Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*: 17 February, Wintam (A), 1; 23 October 2016, Rotem, Bichterweerd (L), 1; 17 November 2016, Neerpelt, Het Hageven (L), 1; 29 November 2016, Nieuwpoort, Ideeëntuin (W), 1. **White-headed Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus caudatus*: 9 February 2015, Evergem (O), 1; 10 February 2015, Huise (O), 2; 16 February 2015, Heldergerm (O), 2; 24 February 2015, Kalmthout (A), 1; 30 September 2015, Provinciaal Domein, Eeklo (O), 1; 23 October 2015, De Fonteintjes, Zeebrugge (W), 1; 24 October 2015, Vierkensbroek, Averbode (VB), 1; 26 October 2015, Ukkel (Br), 1; 31 October 2015, Hermalle-sous-Huy (Lg), 1; 8 November 2015, Elsenborn (Lg), 5; 11 November 2015, Beernem (W), 1; 11 November 2015, Het Aardgat, Tienen (VB), 5; 11 November 2015, Tongeren (L), 3; 14 November 2015, Thommen (Lg), 3; 15 November 2015, Wilrijk (A), 1; 23 December 2015, Olen (A), 2; 24 December 2015, Rijkevorsel (A), 1; 30 December 2015, Willebroek (A), 1; 1 January 2016, Sint-Martens-Bodegem (VB), 1; 2 January 2016, Vosselaar (A), 1; 2 January 2016, Loupoigne (BW), 6; 7 January 2016, Lille (A), 1; 10 January - 18 February 2016, Beauvechain (BW), 1; 12 January 2016, Hoogstraten (A), 1; 13 January 2016, Gesves (N), 6; 13 January 2016, Harelbeke (W), 1; 18 - 19 January 2016, Viesville (H), 10; 20 January 2016, Eeklo, Provinciaal Domein (O), 1; 21 January 2016, Herselt (A), 1; 23 January - 19 March 2016, Auderghem (RB), 1, 23 January 2016, Lauw (L), 1; 31

January - 7 February 2016, Genk, De Maten (L), 1; 5 - 7 February 2016, Tourinnes-La-Grosse (BW), 4; 6 February 2016, Lichtaart (A), 1; 6 February 2016, Merksplas (A), 1; 7 February 2016, Vieux-Genappe (BW), 1; 11 February 2016, Eeklo, Provinciaal Domein (O), 1; 12 February 2016, Hoepertingen (L), 7; 13 February 2016, Dilsen-Stokkem (L), 1; 13 February 2016, Rummen (VB), 1; 14 February 2016, Wilrijk (A), 1; 15 February 2016, Zonhoven (L), 1; 17 February 2016, Gors-Opleeuw (L), 1; 20 February 2016, Gent (O), 1; 21 February 2016, Outrelouxhe (Lg), 1; 27 February 2016, Wavreille (N), 1; 28 February 2016, Berchem (A), 1; 4 - 9 March 2016, Maaseik (L), 1; 6 March 2016, Zonnebeke (W), 1; 6 - 12 March 2016, Overpelt (L), 1; 14 March 2016, Ursel (O), 1; 16 March 2016, Lippelo (VB), 1; 17 March, Herselt (A), 1; 18 March 2016, Kruibeke (O), 1; 7 October 2016, Heist, De Sashul (W), 1. **Alpine Chough** *Pyrrhocorax graculus*: 1 June 2012, Willebroek (A). **Rustic Bunting** *Emberiza rustica*: 21 October 2015, Sint-Denijs (W). An analysis of the sound record of the calling bird by Magnus Robb revealed it to be a Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* with an aberrant call. **Pine Bunting** *Emberiza leucocephalos*: 7 May 2016 - 23 May 2016, Rochefort (Lx), 1 f. A much debated individual, seen by many observers. The BRBC has decided to take a cautious stand on female bunting with features of Pine Bunting, given the difficulties with identification of this taxon and its distinction from Yellowhammer (Hellquist 2016, Gerald Driessens *in litt.*). It is well known that hybridization between both species occurs on a large scale and across a considerable part in the central Palearctic (Byers *et al.* 1995, Panov *et al.* 2003). The fact that this bird stayed well into the breeding season at one particular spot and that it was seen mating with a male Yellowhammer on 16 May were elements that were not supportive of an acceptable record for this species. There are no known records of territorial Pine Buntings west of the Ural mountains, the westernmost regular haunt for the species in the Palearctic (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997, Mitchell 2017). **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla*: 16 November, Sint-Lenaarts (A), 1.



**Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*, Doel, 28 October 2016 (Sam Meul)**

### **Contact BRBC**

Website, for forms and all information: <http://www.belgianrbc.be/>

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