

Rare Birds in Belgium in 2017

Report of the Belgian Rare Birds Committee

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Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*, Knokke – Zwin, 15 Oktober 2017 (Paul Pugh)

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Abstract – rare birds in Belgium in 2017

This report of the Belgian Rare Birds Committee (BRBC), dealing with 2017, concerns a total of 239 records of rare birds in Belgium, of 74 (sub)species and species pairs. The vast majority refers to 2017; a minority to previous years. 165 records have been accepted into category A, 1 into category D, 29 in category E and 44 records have been rejected. In 2017, no less than three new species were added to the Belgian list: Black-browed Albatross, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater and Long-tailed Shrike. An old record of Long-legged Buzzard from 2012 was accepted as the first for Belgium in retrospect. Also notable were the second record for American Golden Plover, the third record for Long-legged Buzzard, the fourth record for Slender-billed Gull and the fourth and fifth record for Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler. It was a record year for European Storm Petrel and Black-winged Kite, as well as the second best year for Griffon Vulture.

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 2017. It also contains records of earlier years that have not yet been published before. Some records from 2017 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 / www.observations.be or to submit their data directly through our website (<http://www.belgianrbc.be>).

Recent decisions and developments

Removal of six species from the list of homologation species as from January 1, 2018. The BRBC analyses the list of homologation species every year during its winter meeting. The most occurring homologation species are checked to see whether or not they still meet the threshold to be considered as a national rarity. See below for an explanation of these rules. For our latest analysis in February 2018, the period 2008-2017 was considered. The records of the following six species will not be considered anymore by the BRBC from January 1st 2018 onwards, but data of these species prior to this date are still strongly welcomed.

1. **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus*: A total of 55 accepted records (some including multiple birds) in the period 2008-2017, mirrors the rising numbers in many other European countries. It will be exciting to see how things will develop for this marshland bird. A future establishment as a breeding bird is not unlikely. A first pair with courtship behavior was already detected in Belgium in 2014.
2. **Griffon Vulture** *Gyps fulvus*: Few species have had such a dramatic change in status since the turn of the century as the Griffon Vulture. Hardly 5 accepted records in the 20th century were followed by dozens of records since 2001, including sizeable groups of up to 97 birds. This huge southern raptor is now a regular and more or less expected with annual occurrences during periods of warm weather and southerly winds in late spring and early summer.
3. **Iceland Gull** *Larus glaucooides*: The total of 42 accepted records in the period 2008-2017 is more than the total for all the years before since the first accepted record in 1914 (38). Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus* is traditionally believed to be the more common large white-winged gull in Belgium, but this no longer seems to be the case. A brief analysis of Glaucous Gull's records in the national database shows that it became a rarer species than its smaller counterpart in most years. Time will tell if Glaucous Gull will become a homologation species in the coming years.
4. **Siberian Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*: We made an exception for this subspecies: we only considered the last 5 years instead of the last 10 years for our assessment. This was due to an incomplete overview of older records and the fact that there is evidence, also from other northwest European countries that this species is scarce but of regular annual occurrence rather than a true rarity. Records from the last 5 years confirm this.
5. **Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus*: A surge in records in recent years has easily lifted Common Rosefinch out of the rarity list. Birds have turned up in the same areas for consecutive years and territorial behavior and paired birds have been observed on a number of occasions (although actual breeding has never been truly documented).
6. **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla*: Year records for this small boreal bunting are broken annually. Its disappearance of the homologation list has been predicted for a few years now.

Newly published statutes. The statutes of the BRBC have recently been published on our website www.belgianrbc.be. For reasons of transparency, we believe that it is important that this document is publicly available. The foremost objective of these statutes is to be a guideline for the BRBC-members during their work in the committee. Apart from that, it is also an important document for anyone interested in the working procedures of the BRBC and for birdwatchers who are interested in rare birds and who want to document a sighting. We aim to update the content of this document on a regular basis.

New taxonomic reference. The BRBC has made an important decision about the taxonomic rules followed by the committee. For many years, the BRBC and its predecessors have followed the rules of the AERC TAC (the taxonomic committee of the Association of European Records and Rarities Committees). The AERC TAC has not been very active in recent years and there are strong indications the committee will no longer play an active role in the future. From January 1, 2018, the BRBC will follow the taxonomic rules of the IOC World Bird List (Gill & Donsker 2018). This report still follows the AERC TAC rules, for the last time.

Changes in membership. The membership of the BRBC saw some recent changes. Some long-time members that were already present in the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking forerunners of the BRBC, have decided to step down: Peter Collaerts, Wouter Faveyts and Pierre Loly. We thank them for their dedication and hard work in the past years! Fresh blood was found in the persons of Stijn Baeten, Alain De Broyer and Kenny Hessel. We are confident that they are worthy successors, all having a very decent track record at finding and recording rare birds in Belgium. Their admission will definitely strengthen the committee and they will keep us on the track of further improvements that we started some years ago with the formation of an all-Belgian rarity committee. Another change within the structure of the BRBC has been the switch to a new president. Joris Elst has stepped down from this position and will remain as a member of the committee. Miguel Demeulemeester has taken up the task as president of the BRBC for the coming years.

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 / 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

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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 have assessed all records in this report, in alphabetical order: Stijn Baeten, Peter Collaerts, Miguel Demeulemeester, Joris Elst, Wouter Faveyts, Robin Gailly, Tom Goossens, Raphaël Lebrun, Pierre Loly, Laurent Raty and Frédéric Vanhove.

2017 in a nutshell

Highlights of 2017 can be summarized as:

- No less than three new species were added to the Belgian list in 2017: Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophrys*, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus* and Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*.
- Second record of American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*.
- Fourth record for Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*.
- Fourth and fifth record for Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola*.
- Sixth record and first ever flock (six birds) of Greenland White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons flavirostris*.
- The third record in three years of Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, a remarkable series after an absence since 1988.
- 2017 was a record year for European Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*, Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*, Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* and Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*.
- With four more accepted records in this report, 2016 becomes the record year for Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*.
- It was the second best year for Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*, a species that has been removed from the list of homologation species from 1 January 2018 onwards.
- Three further records of Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium passerinum* on the recently (2012) discovered breeding grounds in eastern Belgium.
- An influx of Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus* resulted in the third best year on record.
- First winter record of Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*, of the eastern subspecies *albistriata*.
- The fourth record of a singing Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*; all records of singing birds are from the last four years.
- First record of Citril Finch *Serinus citrinella* since 2001.

Use of the systematic list in this report

Taxonomy and species names

For many years the BRBC has followed 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. Taxonomy and names in this report are still according to the AERC TAC. As stated above, the BRBC will follow the IOC World Bird List.

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 2017.
- 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 (ringer, observer or discoverer) who submitted the record directly to the BRBC. In case of a record that has been retrieved from the www.waarnemingen.be / 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 11th 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 1950-2016;
3. Number of individuals from 2017.

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).

Systematic list

1. Accepted records

Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* (1,164,2)

18 - 19 February, Damme (W), 1 ad.

7 November - 17 January 2018, Doelpolder Noord, Doel (O), 1 2cy+

Greenland White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons flavirostris* (0,5,6)

19 November – 28 December, Lanaken (L), 6

Only the sixth record for Belgium. The largest (and first) group ever. The birds were also seen across the border in The Netherlands.

Pale-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla hrota* (7,241,13)

26 January - 19 February, Strand Duinbergen, Knokke-Heist (W), 12

28 October, De Panne (W), 1 ad. migrating

After almost four years of absence, Pale-bellied Brent Geese were present again in Belgium in early 2017, no less than 12 birds together.

Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis* (1,91,2)

23 November – 10 December, Uitkerke (W), 1 1cy

27 December – 14 January 2018, De Blankaart, Woumen (W), 1 1cy

Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis* (0,28,1)

1 - 4 May, Het Zwin - Kleyne Vlakte, Knokke (W), 1 m. (J. Giglot)

Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris* (0,0,1)

16 July, at sea in Belgian territorial waters, 1 immature (S. Dunstan)

A new species for Belgium. The bird was photographed from a ferry, about 16 kilometers off the coast. A previous record of an albatross, seen from the coast at Zeebrugge (W) on 16 December 1980, could not be identified to species level, so this record adds a new species to the Belgian list. The species is a real rarity on a European scale. Its true status may even be overestimated as it is possible that a number of European records of this very long-lived species could belong to a small number of wide ranging individuals. Nevertheless, records of young birds, like the one from Belgium show that new birds do reach European waters. Black-browed Albatross is known from several neighbouring countries, such as Great Britain (32 records up to 2016, Holt *et al.* 2017) and France (17 records up to 2014, webreference 1). Since 2014 an adult bird is annually reported in the eastern North Sea and adjacent waters, mainly in Germany and Denmark. Records of this highly pelagic species in the North Sea are extremely rare, and it could be easily assumed that the Belgian bird was the same bird that made a stroll into the southern North Sea, but the age difference shows it to be a different bird.

European Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* (5,86,14)

6 October, Nieuwpoort (W), 1 1cy
6 October, Sint-Idesbald (W), 1
6 October, Oostende (W), 1
6 October, Noordzeekust (W), 1
6 October, Middelkerke (W), 2
6 October, De Panne (W), 2
8 October, Oostende (W), 1
8 October, Nieuwpoort (W), 1
29 October, De Panne (W), 1
29 October, Nieuwpoort (W), 3

A record year. The previous best year was 1985, with 11 accepted birds. No less than eight birds were noted on 6 October, at various sites along the coast. Double counts were avoided.



European Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*, Nieuwpoort, 29 oktober 2017
(Filip De Ruwe)

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* (4,50,3)

15 May, Bierbeek, Vallei van den Mollendaalbeek (VB), 1 ad. br.
19 May, Kruikeke (O), 1 ad. br.
28 May - 13 July, Zoutleeuw, Het Vinne (VB), 1 ad.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* (72,89,8)

17 - 28 April, Doelpolder Noord, Doel (O), 2
2 July, Décanteurs, Frasnes-lez-Anvaing, (H), 1
23 - 27 August, Het Zwin, Knokke-Heist (W), 2
25 August - 15 September, Marais d'Harchies, Harchies, (H), 1
3 - 15 September, Oude Maas, Stokkem (L), 1
24 November, Bassins Ardennes Logistics, Lahérie (Lx), 1 1cy

As of January 1, 2018, this species is no longer considered by the BRBC. September, October and November are definitely the best months to encounter this species, with respectively 12, 12 and 11 records. Nonetheless, Glossy Ibis can be found in every month, with February (1 record) and December (3 records) being the least likely. Best provinces are Oost-Vlaanderen (23 records) and West-Vlaanderen (20 records). So far, Glossy Ibis has not yet been recorded in the province of Namur or in the Brussels Capital Region.

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus* (0,23,5)

20 September 2015, Etang de l'Illé, Etalle (Lx), 1 ad.
9 April, Destelbergen (O), 1

21 July, Groot Schietveld, Brecht (A), 1 2cy+
15 October, Kruikebeke (O), 1 (W. Delodder)

29 October, Groot Schietveld, Brecht (A), 1
3 - 28 November, Plateau des Hautes-Fagnes, Sourbrodt (Lg), 1 3cy+
After the record of five birds in 2016, another new record is already set this year. This adds further evidence to the rising fortunes of this enigmatic little raptor in Belgium and northwestern Europe. If this evolution continues, it is likely that this species will disappear from the homology list in the future. It may even become a breeding bird at some point in the future. The French population has reached over 200 breeding pairs (Lawicki & van den Berg 2017) and erratic pairs can breed well north of the core distribution in southwestern France. In 2017, a pair even bred successfully only 15 kilometers from the Belgian border in the French department Nord (webreference 2)! Observers of Black-winged Kites in Belgium better keep this in mind if Black-winged Kites would stay in an area for a prolonged period.

Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* (3,406,174)

20 May, La Roche Trouée, Nîmes (N), 27
28 May, Büllingen (Lg), 96
10 June, Linkhout (L), 2
11 - 12 June, Merelbeke (O), 40
21 - 22 June, Lo-Reninge (W), 9 2cy+

The second best year ever for Belgium, with a total not too far from the very high record of 211 birds in 2007. Griffon Vulture is no longer a homology species from 1 January 2018. Twenty years ago this huge raptor was still a major rarity. In the 20th century there were hardly five accepted records, and only one of these records was of a (small) flock (7 birds, 19 May 1997). A briefly staging flock of 15 birds in June 2002 was the first encounter with Griffon Vultures for many observers. The real breakthrough came in 2007, when a big invasion totaling 211 birds occurred. Since 2002, 2004 and 2005 were the only years in which no records were accepted. Griffon Vultures have become an annual occurrence, often in flocks, sometimes sizeable ones. Their occurrence can even be somewhat predicted when a prolonged spell of warm air and consistent winds from the south occur at the end of May or in June. The vast majority of records (97%) comes from those two months. June is by far the best month for Griffon Vulture in Belgium, with 67% of all birds. May comes second with 30%. A single record from October completes the picture. The biggest flocks numbered 97 birds on 17 June 2007 and 96 birds on 28 May 2017. Records come from all Belgian provinces. Several big flocks were seen in more than one province, so it is difficult to determine what provinces have the highest amount of records. These huge wide-ranging birds of prey can clearly show up anywhere.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* (0,2,1)

1 December 2012, Hodister (Lx), 1
15 May, Rutten (L), 1 2cy

The record from 2012 becomes the first for Belgium. It concerned a bird that was photographed as an alleged Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*. 2017 yielded already the third record, an indication of the increasing occurrence of this species in western Europe.

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina* (3,6,1)

15 October, Nassogne (Lx), 1

Spotted eagles are notoriously difficult to identify with certainty, due to difficulties because of fairly regular hybridization between Lesser Spotted Eagle and Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*. Luckily, the 2017 bird was sufficiently well photographed by the alert observer and could be pinned down as a Lesser Spotted Eagle.



Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*, Nassogne, 15 October 2017
(Didier Vieuxtemps)

Spotted eagle spec *Aquila clanga* / *pomarina* (0,1,0)

26 October 2015, Bocholt (L), 1

Booted Eagle *Aquila pennata* (0,21,2)

30 April, Kortrijk (W), 1 ad.

4 June, Het Vinne, Zoutleeuw (VB), 1

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* (9,6,1)

18 June, Elsenborn (Lg), 1 2cy

With only six records after 1950, the species remains a major rarity in Belgium. Surprisingly however, three of these records are from the last three years. It is assumed that the records in Vierves-sur-Viroin on 17 May 2015 and Vielsalm on 3 September 2016 constitute the same bird lingering around in southeastern Belgium (Faveyts *et al.* 2017). The age of the Elsenborn bird in 2017 however hints there might be more than one bird exploring the southern part of Belgium. The Elsenborn Golden Eagle was discovered by birders who tried to pick up a group of Griffon Vultures with one Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus* that was present nearby just across the border in Germany. They did not succeed but had a nice consolation price.

Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla* (4,29,1)

25 August - 3 September, Weiden Damse Vaart West, Damme (W), 1 ad. m.

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus* (9,77,5)

2 March, Peer (L), 1

8 April, De Moeren, Veurne (W), 1

22 - 24 May, Sint-Jan-In-Eremo (O), 1 2cy+

30 June, Prosperpolder Noord, Doel (O), 1 2cy+
15 - 19 August, Clermont (N), 1 1cy

Third best year after 2006 and 2007. If the increasing trend for records of Eurasian Stone-Curlew continues this species could be taken off the list of rare species in the not so distant future. Eurasian Stone-Curlews in Belgium are most likely from nearby British and French breeding populations, which are stable or increasing. The breeding population of Great Britain has increased strongly in the last 25 years and numbered 335-402 pairs in 2015 (Holling *et al.* 2017). Birds from this population are assumed to take a more eastern migration route to their breeding areas in spring and are thus more likely to occur in Belgium at that time of the year. Colour-ringed British birds have been recorded in Belgium and The Netherlands (Wernham *et al.* 2002). The strong French population holds no less than 19.000-28.000 pairs and occurs within 100 kilometer of the Belgian border. It showed a moderate increase in the periode 1990-2012 and was stable in the period 2000-2012 (Barnagaud & Caupenne 2015).

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* (0,6,1)

28 July, Uitkerkse Polder, Uitkerke (W), 1 ad. br.
10 October – 23 November, Doel/Kieldrecht (O), 1

The bird from 28 July at Uitkerke was not identified as the ninth Pacific Golden Plover for Belgium in the field. It was photographed as a European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, and it was ID-ed online from the picture. The second bird is the returning individual that has been observed in this area in every autumn and/or winter since 2013. It thus returned for its fifth consecutive year.

American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* (0,1,1)

6 September, Achterhaven, Zeebrugge (W), 1 ad.

Only the second record for our country and the first adult. Discovered by a keen birder, the bird appeared to be rather elusive and could only be twitched by a handful of birders. American Golden Plover remains extremely rare in Belgium, even though the Netherlands holds 52 records by the end of 2017 (webreference 3).



American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, Zeebrugge – Achterhaven, 6 September 2017
(Hilbran Verstraete)

Great Snipe *Gallinago media* (0,43,3)

10 May, Klemskerke (W), 1 2cy+
22 - 23 May, De Westhoek, De Panne (W), 1 2cy+

22 - 28 May, De Blankaart, Woumen (W), 1 2cy+

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* (0,5,3)

11 - 14 May, Kalkense Meersen, Kalken (O), 1 2cy

15 May, Het Vinne, Zoutleeuw (VB), 1 2cy

16 - 17 May, Doelpolder Noord, Doel (O), 1

The 6th to 8th record for our country. Although it could be easily assumed that these three records account for the same bird, as dates do not overlap, an analysis of all photographs revealed it as being three different birds! The previous record dated back to 2015, but before that record, there was a gap of 17 years with not a single sighting of this species. With five records between the 8th and the 25th of May, the middle of May is clearly the best time to connect with Lesser Yellowlegs in Belgium.



**Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*, Zoutleeuw – Het Vinne, 15 May 2017
(Erwin Hoebrechts)**

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* (0,121,4)

17 September, De Fonteintjes, Zeebrugge (W), 1 1cy

19 September, Het Zwin, Knokke-Heist (W), 1 1cy

20 - 22 September, Achterhaven - Hoge Noen, Zeebrugge (W), 1 1cy

23 - 27 September, Put van Vlissegem, Vlissegem (W), 1 1cy

A remarkable share of records from the coast in the second half of September. It could not be fully ruled out that some of these records concerned the same bird, but in the end the BRBC decided to treat them all as separate records. There were also higher than usual numbers of Red-necked Phalaropes in the Netherlands around this time, so there seems to have been some small influx.

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* (0,3,1)

26 - 27 April, Doelpolder Noord, Doel (O), 1 ad. br., wearing French colour ring

Only the third record and the second one in April. The first record constituted a pair in May 2006. The Doel bird is the first away from the coastal reserve Het Zwin, West-Vlaanderen province. The bird was ringed with a green colour ring, proving it to be ringed as a chick in 2014, near Toulon in Provence, southern France.

Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides* (2,74,7)

22 January 1995, Houbenhof, Kessenich (L), 1 2cy (J. Jansen)

30 January - 5 March, Kraenepoel, Aalter (O), 1 2cy

12 March, Spanjaardduinen, Bredene (W), 1 3cy

11 April, Puurs (A), 1 2cy
17 - 18 April, Neder-Over-Heembeek (RB), 1 4cy
22 April, Zomergem (O), 1 3cy
1 - 3 May, IJzermonding, Nieuwpoort (W), 1 2cy
28 October - 5 November, Angreau (H), 1 4cy

As of January 1, 2018, this species is no longer considered by the BRBC. Up to 2000 there were only 28 accepted records of Iceland Gull in Belgium. Nowadays it is becoming the commoner of the two large white-winged gulls. Best months are January (21 records), often after northwestern storms, and April (18 records), when gulls are migrating northwards. With 41 records, West-Vlaanderen turns up, not surprisingly, as the hotspot for the species, with Oost-Vlaanderen (11 records) being second and Hainaut (8 records) taking a creditable third place. So far, Iceland Gull has never been recorded in the provinces of Namur and Luxembourg.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* (19,133,5)

30 April, Zwinbosjes, Knokke (W), 2 ad.
2 May, De Fonteintjes, Zeebrugge (W), 2
5 May, Achterhaven - Hoge Noen, Zeebrugge (W), 1 ad.

Eurasian Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium passerinum* (2,3,3)

7 March - 19 October, undisclosed locations (Lg), 3

In 2012, this miniature owl was discovered as a new breeding species for Belgium, with two singing males and at least one and probably two females in undisclosed areas in the east of the country (Sorbi 2013). In 2014, two breeding pairs were found in different areas, one breeding with succes (Jacob *et al.* 2015). In 2015, one breeding pair (nesting succesfully) and at least three other singing males were reported, in various areas well separated areas (Jacob *et al.* 2016). To avoid disturbance, the locations of breeding sites are withheld. This is understandable, but on the other hand it makes it difficult for the BRBC to keep track of records of Eurasian Pygmy Owl. The occurrence of several birds per year, also again in 2017, in several locations at quite some distance from each other makes it tempting to speculate how rare this species really is in the woodlands of eastern Belgium. It is likely that the threshold of at least three records per year could be easily reached. In that case the species could be removed from the homologation list. It is however important that records should be documented to the BRBC in order for them to be accepted. Only accepted records can be used to assess the rarity threshold.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* (0,9,1)

15 October, Duinbossen Wenduine tot De Haan, De Haan (W), 1 1cy+

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus* (0,0,1)

2 July, Groot Schietveld, Brecht (A), 1 2cy+

Although July is generally perceived as being a relative quiet month for birding in Belgium, July 2017 hosted 2 new species to the Belgian list, with the Blue-cheeked Bee-eater being the first one. The bird was discovered in an area that hosted three Short-toed Eagles *Circaetus gallicus* at that time. An article about this record has been published (Symens & Ducastel 2018).



Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus*, Brecht – Groot Schietveld, 2 July 2017
(Erik Ducastel)

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* (8,34,1)

15 October, Koebeekvallei, Torhout (W), 1

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* (0,53,5)

18 - 19 April, Grand Large, Nimy (H), 1

28 April, Givry (H), 1

28 April, Virelles (H), 1

30 April, De Fonteintjes, Zeebrugge (W), 1

1 May, Doelpolder Noord, Doel (O), 1

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* (0,14,3)

25 October 2016, De Haan (W), 1 1cy, trapped (P. Schepens)

27 October, Achterhaven, Zeebrugge (W), 1 1cy+

28 October, Oesterputbrug, Boekhoute(O), 1

30 October, Voorhaven, Zeebrugge (W), 1 1cy+

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* (0,37,2)

10 May, Pepingen (VB), 1 2cy, trapped, ring number 15287301 (E. Vanhassel)

10 - 11 September, Voorhaven - Oostdam, Zeebrugge (W), 1

With only three field observations out of 39 records, this species would be definitely passing through unnoticed if it was not for the ringers that find them in mistnets. Not surprisingly however, since nightingales *Luscinia sp* can be very difficult to connect with when not singing, especially in autumn. For the Zeebrugge bird, it took almost two hours before the discoverers were sure they were dealing with a Thrush Nightingale, stressing both identification and observation challenges this species poses. The ringed bird in Pepingen only constituted the second spring record, with the first one, a singing male at Kessenich (L) from the 13th to the 21st of May 2006. The latter was the only singing bird in Belgium so far.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* (0,5,3)

8 - 12 October, Voorhaven - Westdam, Zeebrugge (W), 1 f. 1cy

21 November - 14 March 2018, De Panne (W), 1 f. 1cy

6 - 16 December, Voorhaven - Westdam, Zeebrugge (W), 1 m. 1cy

With only five records up to 2016, this species remains a true rarity. A big surprise that three Desert Wheatears turned up in the autumn and early winter of 2017. All three birds fit nicely within the arrival pattern for the species in western Europe. The De Panne bird was only the first one to be discovered in November. Five out of eight records come from October. The pattern of occurrence in Belgium is rather different compared to the pattern of occurrence in our northern neighbours, the Netherlands. There, the best month by far is November, with 20 records, while only 11 birds recorded in October (webreference 4).



Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*, Zeebrugge, 8 December 2017
(Johan Buckens)

Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola* (0,3,2)

20 September, Sint-Anna (O), 1 1cy, trapped

4 October, Harzé (Lg), 1 1cy, trapped

The previous record of this Siberian passerine already dated from 1999, and now there were two records in two weeks. No wonder that both birds were trapped by ringers. Being a locustella, this species is a notorious skulker.



Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola*, Hamme, 20 September 2017
(Marc Hebbelinck)

River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis* (0,31,1)

30 May - 3 June Vlassenbroekse Polder en Schorren, Baasrode, (O), 1 m. 2cy+

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* (0,30,6)

21 August 2016, Hamme (O), 1 1cy, trapped

11 September 2016, Station de Baguage, Nodebais (BW), 1 1cy, trapped, ring number: 14712296 (V. Bulteau)

13 September 2016, Lebbeke (O), 1 1cy, trapped, ring number: 14880757

22 September 2016, Lebbeke (O), 1 trapped, ring number: 14882432

14 August, Houthulst (W), 1 1cy, trapped, ring number: 15192034 (M. Demeulemeester)

1 September, Genk (L), 1 ad., trapped, ring number: 14710422

2 September, Houthulst (W), 1 ad. trapped, ring number: 15195641 (M. Demeulemeester)

27 September, Kalmthout, Grenspark (A), 1 1cy, trapped, ring number: 15209604

29 September, Tongeren, Tongeren (L), 1 ad., ring number: 15074036 (E. Colson)

17 October, Kalmthout, Grenspark De Zoom (A), 1 1cy, trapped, ring number: 15210219

With the four extra records published here, 2016 was good for a record of eight ringed birds! 2017 was nearly as good, with six accepted records so far. Other records are still being assessed. The species is becoming more common, with 22 records from 2013 onwards. This is not (yet) the case for field observations. There has been only one field sighting so far, in October 2015. If the pace goes on like this, it might not seem unlikely that Blyth's Reed Warbler will not be revised anymore by the committee, even though there is only one field observation in the pocket.

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* (0,21,1)

6 - 10 December, Havenvlakte, Kieldrecht (O), 1 1cy, subspecies *albistriata*

Seeing a Subalpine Warbler in the snow in a harbour area is one of the last things you would expect in Belgium.

A review of all the data recorded in Belgium is underway, to match the new IOC taxonomy.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* (0,17,1)

4 - 27 June, Elsenborn (Lg), 1 m. 2cy+

Yet another singing bird in spring. Also, the most prolonged stay ever of a Greenish Warbler in Belgium. The first ten records from 1987 until 2010 were all autumn birds. Since 2013, there has been a remarkable series of four singing birds in spring and early summer. Three of these were in the east of Belgium, where large areas of woodland contrast with low numbers of active birders. It makes you wonder if singing Greenish Warblers are an annual occurrence in the eastern woods. Perhaps even breeding would not be inconceivable in the future.

Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi* (0,28,1)

13 October, Kalmthout (A), 1 trapped, ring number 15209891

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* (0,50,2)

5 November 2011, Polders Noord, Assenede (O), 1 1cy+, trapped

6 - 18 March, Cassenbroek, Rijmenam (A), 1

27 December - 18 February 2018, Schipgatduinen, Oostduinkerke (W), 1 1cy+

Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli* (0,45,2)

2 - 7 June, Marais, Chantemelle (Lx), 1 m. 2cy+

26 - 27 August, Oostdam, Zeebrugge (W), 1



Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli*, Zeebrugge, 26 August 2017
(Johan Buckens)

Siberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita tristis* (-,23 in the period 2012-2016,6)

26 October, Décanteurs, Frasnes-lez-Anvaing (H), 1 trapped

31 October, Park 58, Duinbergen (W), 1 1cy

5 November, Wechelderzande (A), 1

14 November, Blokkersdijk, Antwerpen (A), 1 1cy+

15 November - 26 December, Kuststrook, Heist (W), 1 1cy

19 November, Houthulst (W), 1, 1cy, trapped

Siberian Chiffchaff has been removed from the list of homologation species from 1 January 2018 onwards. Our previous report (Faveyts *et al.* 2017) mentioned that an assessment of the status of this subspecies in Belgium was based on accepted records in 2012-2016, a five year period, contrary the usual ten year period that we use to assess whether or not a (sub)species still belongs on the list of homologation species. 27 records involving 28

birds were accepted for 2012-2016. Siberian Chiffchaff is clearly above the rarity threshold of three accepted records on average per year. It can be considered as a very scarce but regular migrant and wintering bird. This taxon is also no longer on the rarities list in most neighbouring countries like The Netherlands, Great Britain and France. In 2012-2017, records of Siberian Chiffchaff were accepted for almost every month from September to April, but the vast majority is from October (38%) and November (34%). The majority of records are from the westernmost province of West-Flanders, mostly along the North Sea coast. The true number of records could be higher. There were regular claims that could not be accepted due insufficient or even lacking documentation.

Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus* (0,12,2)

14 - 15 April 2014, Lac de la Gileppe, Trou Malbrouck, Membach, (Lg), 1 m. ad.

23 April - 5 June, Knokke-Heist, Het Zwin (W), 1 m.

5 - 26 May, Testelt, Kerkendijk-Melkbroek (VB), 1 m.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* (0,106,1)

19 - 23 October, Harendijke, Blankenberge (W), 1 1cy

White-headed long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus caudatus* (-,-,2)

18 - 19 February, Verloren Kost, Torhout (W), 1

19 March - 30 April, Bree (L), 1

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

31 December 2015 - 10 January 2016, Carrière de Chanxhe, Chanxhe (Lg), 1 (R. Gailly)

Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach* (0,0,1)

15 - 17 October, Het Zwin, Knokke-Heist (W), 1 1cy, trapped

The third new species for Belgium in 2017. This one was perhaps the least expected. With only a handful of records in Europe, this species is a true rarity on a European scale. The bird was trapped the 15th and then released closeby the ringing site in a publicly accessible area. There it stayed for the rest of the day. The next morning the Long-tailed Shrike was only briefly seen, and soon disappeared. It was then refound in the afternoon at about one kilometer from its original location where it remained for the rest of its stay. It was of course seen by many.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* (-,165,1)

9 - 10 June, Het Hageven, Neerpelt (L), 1 f. 2cy

Hooded Crow *Corvus corone cornix* (-, 2011-2016: 12, 3)

20 January - 5 March, Gistel (W), 1 ad.

9 April, De Panne (W), 1

9 December - 8 March 2018, La Louvière (H), 1 1cy+

Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus* (17,48,1)

16 - 22 September, Bredene (W), 1 1cy (D. Bosman)

Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni* (0,29,2)

1 December, Berendrecht (A), 1 f. 1cy, trapped, ring number 15072727 (G. Goris)

5 December, Nieuwpoort (W), 1 1cy, trapped, ring number 15307278

With a good influx of Common Redpolls *Carduelis flammea* in autumn, it was not unexpected that some of these arctic beauties would follow in their footsteps. The first records since 2008. In Belgium, Arctic Redpolls are mostly trapped by ringers. With only six field records, the species remains high on many birders wish lists. The last twitchable dates back to 1995, so it's about time to get a new field sighting!

Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus* (0,174,60)

7 October, Voorhaven - Oostdam, Zeebrugge (W), 1

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

13 October, Hussevelde, Kalken (O), 3

13 October, Landschap De Liereman, Brakeleer (A), 5

14 October, Paelsteenpanne, De Haan (W), 7
20 October, Groot Schietveld, Brecht (A), 2
1 November - 5 January 2018, Klein Schietveld, Brasschaat/Kalmthout (A), 18
3 November - 14 January 2018, Grenspark De Zoom, Kalmthout (A), 17
5 – 24 November, Vliegenveld, Oostmalle/Zoersel (A), 6

Only four years after the previous large influx of Parrot Crossbill in 2013, another hit Belgium in 2017. It lasted into 2018. Nine records totalling 60 birds were deemed acceptable this time. This ranks this influx as the third largest on record, after 83 birds in 1990-1991 and 82 birds in 2013-2014. There were more records, but due to identification challenges it was decided that not all these records were acceptable. Nonetheless it seems likely that the figure of 60 birds must have been a mere minimum of the true number of bird that may have been involved in this influx. At Grenspark De Zoom in Kalmthout, at least one succesful breeding was reported in the spring of 2018 (webreference 4). This has not been formally accepted by the BRBC yet. More on this in the coming report for 2018.

Citril Finch *Serinus citrinella* (2,11,1)

19 October, Onze-Lieve-Vrouw-Waver (A), 1 2cy+

A well photographed bird seen by one observer in a flock of 15-20 Eurasian Siskins *Spinus spinus*. Despite searches the bird could not be relocated. The first record since 2001 and only the third this century. The bird was seen on only one date, at an expected time of the year and with a good carrier species, so there is no reason to doubt the wild origin of this bird. October is by far the best month for Citril Finch in Belgium, with eight out of 14 records. November comes second with three accepted records. Together these two months represent almost 80% of all records. It constitutes a first record for Antwerp province in the north of the country. The majority of records (10 out of 14, more than 70%) are situated in the three southeasternmost provinces of Liège, Namur and Luxembourg. Most Belgian records are of birds that were trapped by ringers. Birders are thin on the ground in those provinces and there is lots of woodland habitat. It is tempting to speculate that this specialist finch from the mountains of southwestern Europe could be not so rare as the scarcity of records shows. This goes especially for the highest areas in eastern Belgium where some other species from southern and central European low mountain ranges have a toehold breeding population. The closest breeding population in the Vosges in northeastern France is less than 200 kilometer from the Belgian border.

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus* (0,75,6)

23 May, Puttenplas, Kieldrecht (O), 1 m. 2cy+

25 May, Schor, Bazel (O), 1 m. 3cy+

27 May, De Fonteintjes, Zeebrugge (W), 3

29 May, Prosperpolder, Kieldrecht (O), 1 m. 2cy

As of January 1, 2018, this species is no longer considered by the BRBC. May (21 records) and June (37 records) are by far the best months to connect with this species in Belgium. Although in the neighbouring countries an autumn Rosefinch is not an unusual sighting, autumn records remain rare in Belgium with only 11 records, spread over August (four records), September (four records) and October (three records). Only three of these records have been done after 2000, which underlines the rarity of an autumn sighting of Rosefinch in Belgium. West-Vlaanderen (23 records), Oost-Vlaanderen (16 records) and Antwerpen (16 records) take the lion's share in records.

Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos* (1,22,2)

21 - 25 October 2016, Voorhaven - Westdam, Zeebrugge (W), 1 f.

5 February - 4 March, Westouter (W), 2 (m. and f.)

With a major influx in autumn 2016 in western Europe, Belgium got its fair share in it, resulting in three records (four individuals). With only six records after 2000, the species remains very rare in Belgium. Records are evenly distributed over the different decennia from 1960 onwards, with 3 – 7 records every decennium. The Zeebrugge bird was the first field observation but was found in an area with very limited access to the public. Luckily the Widoorie and the Westouter birds made the public happy with their prolonged stay.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia* (1,23,0)

12 April 2014, Poupehan (Lx), 1 m. ad.

March and April are by far the best months for this southern bunting that breeds within 200 kilometer of the Belgian border in France. All but one bird have been recorded in the three southeasternmost provinces of

Liège, Namur and Luxembourg, where comparatively few birders are active. Quite a few were trapped by ringers. It makes you wonder if Rock Bunting is a more regular guest than recorded.

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* (0,80,6)

26 November 2016 - 19 March, Hermalle-sous-Argenteau (Lg), 1 ad.

3 January - 15 February, Pulle (A), 1

19 January - 19 February, Schulensbroek, Schulen (L), 1

19 September, De Kuifeend, Antwerpen (A), 1 1cy, trapped, ring number 15287301

9 October, Tienen (VB), 1 1cy+

13 October, Beneden Netevallei, Lier (A), 1

14 October, Paelsteenpanne, De Haan (W), 1 1cy+

The continuing rise of records of Little Bunting has resulted in its removal from the list of homologation species from 1 January 2018. Since the first two records in October 1966, the number of records has increased every decade. The increase clearly accelerated in the 21 century, with 35 accepted records since 2010 alone. The best months by far are September and especially October, with 17% and 41% of records. Little Buntings show up in other months from November to April. Most records are thus of autumn migrants, but the species can also overwinter and there is a faint hint of some spring passage. The majority of records stems from the north of the country, with the provinces West-Vlaanderen and Antwerpen as forerunners. A few southern provinces still lack records, but this is probably an observers bias. It is clear that Little Buntings can show up anywhere. There are several records of two birds together and one time even of three birds together.

2. Category D records

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*

CORRIGENDUM

The bird from Harchies has been observed on Sept 13th contra October 7th 2016.

3. Category E records

Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*

6 - 12 November, Balen (A), 1

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*

24 September, Zoutekreek, Zandvoorde (W), 1 (same bird as Holland bird, accepted in cat E)

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

9 May, Lac de l'Eau d'Heure, Cerfontaine (N), 3

11 - 15 September, Laakdal (A), 1

Two of the birds in the group of three at Lac de l'Eau d'Heure, Cerfontaine had a ring. One ring could be read, showing the bird came from the well known flamingo colony at the Zwillbrocker Venn in Germany. This colony was established in 1982 and it consists of Greater Flamingos and Chilean Flamingos *Phoenicopterus chilensis* (respectively 2-3 pairs and 5-8 pairs in 2005-2009), with also American Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber* having occurred and bred with a Greater Flamingo. The first species to become established was Chilean Flamingo, and these were later joined by Greater Flamingos. The Chilean Flamingos can be assumed to be of captive origin, and the same goes for the American Flamingo. The Greater Flamingos could theoretically stem from wild European populations, but they are also generally considered to be of captive origin. The birds have bred in the Zwillbrocker Venn for many years, and several tens of young have fledged. These birds habitually winter in The Netherlands (Gedeon *et al.* 2014). The September bird was an unringed juvenile that behaved rather tame. The BRBC takes a very strict position at records of Greater Flamingo: the wild origin of a record must be proven by a scientific mark such as a leg ring or another tracking device. There is a good chance that wild records are dismissed this way because wild Flamingos are known to travel over great distances, but the committee is of the opinion that the situation with the birds from the German colony is too unsure.

Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus*

15 - 18 January, Lotenhulle (O), 1

7 February, Uitkerkse Polder, Uitkerke (W), 1 3cy, male, colour-ringed left white ring '6'/right blue ring; bird from Swedish reintroduction project

27 February - 19 April, Vervoz (Lg), 1

23 July - 2 October, Visé (Lg), 1

The bird in Uitkerke on 7 February originated from the Swedish Lesser Whitefronted Goose Project. According to this project, this male bird was bred in captivity and the parents are wild-caught Lesser White-fronted Geese from the Russian tundra. It was released in Arjeplogsfjällen, Swedish Lapland, on 8 July 2016, in its second calendar year. It has been reported one time after release, near Umeå in northern Sweden.

Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*

3 June 2014 - 22 December 2016, Putten West, Kieldrecht (O), 1

25 January - 26 December, Sint-Elloopolder, Wachtebeke (O), 1

28 March - 20 April, Bas-Warneton (H), 1

12 June - 14 January 2018, Doelpolder Noord, Doel (O), 1

16 - 17 December, Doelpolder Noord, Doel, (O), 1

Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis*

18 March, Marais d'Harchies, Harchies (H), 1

3 - 23 April, Groot Broek, Sint-Agatha-Rode (VB), 1

25 - 30 April, Kievitvijver, Retie (A), 1

1 - 5 September, Het Blak, Beerse (A), 1

28 September, Uitkerke (W), 1

5 October - 4 January 2018, Gentbrugse Meersen, Gentbrugge (O), 1

14 October - 26 November, Bourgoyen - Ossemeersen, Gent (O), 1

20 October, Sint-Amands (A), 1

Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis*

12 October - 25 November, Angleur (Lg), 1 m.

Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus*

19 - 20 January, Kleiput Pontestraat, Marke (W), 1 f.

17 October - 16 January 2018, Bree (L), 1

White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*

16 April - 14 May, Groot Rietveld, Kallo (O), 1 f.

7 - 14 May, Rebaix (H), 1 f.

Thick-billed Murre *Uria lomvia*

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

The bird was discovered in a container on board of a ship in the Antwerp harbour. It was taken into care at a bird rehabilitation center. The BRBC could not find any information about where and when the Thick-billed Murre had entered the ship. As there is no certainty that the bird came on board within Belgian waters, it is accepted into category E.

Azure Tit *Cyanistes cyanus*

31 October - 3 November, Gravière, Hermalle-sous-Argenteau, 1, with ring indicating captive origin (Lg)

November, De Moeren (W) and 24 November – 17 February 2018, IJzermondig, Nieuwpoort (W), 1, same bird at both locations

1 December, Tessenderlo (L), 1 m. ad., trapped

A remarkable run on records of this eastern European species. There are no earlier Belgian records. There was no sign of an influx of Azure Tits in northeastern European countries where this species has turned up as a vagrant before. Like many other species, this beautiful whitish tit is kept in captivity. Everything considered, these three records clearly belong in category E. It is worrying that no less than three birds showed up a little more than a month, at three widely separated locations in Belgium. Only one of these was wearing a captive origin ring. The two other birds without a ring were highly likely trapped in the natural breeding range of Azure Tit and the illegally transported into Belgium. Knowing that fraude is not unusual among certain bird keepers, it is not unlikely that the same goes for the first bird that was wearing a ring indicating a captive origin: this ring

may have been used to mislead authorities into believing the bird was bred in captivity. The second bird, in West-Vlaanderen province, was caught at an unknown date in November and transferred to a bird rehabilitation center because it was (rightly) highly suspected of being of captive origin. Curiously, the bird got a ring and was released into the wild at the coast where it remained for a few months.

4. 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*: 22 - 29 January, Rijkevorsel (A), 1; 4 - 7 March, Merelbeke (O), 1; 2 September - 1 October, Hollogne-Sur-Geer, Décanteurs (Lg), 1. **Steppe Buzzard** *Buteo buteo vulpinus*: 13 January, Terrils de Belle-Vue et de Bernalmont, Liège (Lg), 1 ad. **Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Aquila pomarina*: 9 April 2006, De Maten, Genk (L), 1. **Booted Eagle** *Aquila pennata*: 29 May, Zandvliet (A), 1. **Bonelli's Eagle** *Aquila fasciata*: 11 March, Décanteurs, Hollogne-Sur-Geer (Lg), 1 2cy. **Little Crane** *Porzana parva*: 2 April, Décanteurs, Hollogne-Sur-Geer (Lg), 1 f. **Little Bustard** *Tetrax tetrax*: 17 June, Haasrode (VB), 1 ad. **Black Guillemot** *Cephus grylle*: 26 November 1912, Knokke (W), 1. An old specimen from a well-known bird collector (Jules Desideratus De Blicck, record per Justin Jansen). Not accepted because the bird was in breeding plumage, which is unlikely for a record from November. Hence, there are doubts about the provenance of this record. **Eurasian Scops Owl** *Otus scops*: 1 November 1929, Stembert (Lg), 1. An old specimen from a well-known bird collector (Jules Desideratus De Blicck, record per Justin Jansen). Not accepted because of the unusual date, which casts doubts about the provenance of this record. Other records from this collection also had a shadow of doubt over them, so a cautious approach is taken for records from this collection. **Black-headed Wagtail** *Motacilla flava feldegg*: 8 May, Doelpolder Noord, Doel (O), 1. **Eastern Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla plexa/tschutschensis*: 5 September 2016, Beerse (A), 1 juv. A greyish juvenile Yellow Wagtail, but on an early date for Eastern Yellow Wagtail and without crucial information about its call. **Blyth's Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum*: 14 September 2014, Zele (O), 1 ad. ; 7 September 2016, Bezinkingsputten, Tienen (VB), 1 1cy. **Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus*: 2 - 3 November, Waasmunster (O), 1. **Siberian Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*: 23 April, Willebroek, Biezenweiden (A), 1. **Iberian Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus ibericus*: 27 March, Hobokense Polder, Hoboken (A), 1; 27 March - 11 July, Saint-Josse-ten-Noode (Br), 1; 1 April - 16 June, Fagne Massa, Tenneville (Lx), 1; 17 April, Koksijde (W), 1; 28 June, Hobokense Polder, Hoboken (A), 1. **Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva*: 20 September 2016, Nieuwpoort (W), 1 1cy. **White-headed Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus caudatus*: 15 January, Lustin (N), 1; 1 February, Bevere (O), 1. 19 February, Aartselaar (A), 1; 4 - 5 March, Vieuxville (Lx), 1; 7 March, Verloren Kost, Torhout (W), 1; 31 March, Brasschaat (A), 1; 2 April, Antwerpen (A), 1; 8 April, Ovifat (Lg), 1; 23 December, Essen - Wildert (A), 1; 26 December, Woluwé-Saint-Pierre (Br), 1; 27 December, Tesselt (VB), 1. **Arctic Redpoll** *Carduelis hornemanni*: 24 November, Sint-Denijs-Westrem (O), 1. **Parrot Crossbill** *Loxia pytyopsittacus*: 10 January, Bertrix (Lx), 2; 27 October, Huise (O), 1; 31 October, De Panne (W), 1 m.; 3 November, Zandhoven (A), 1. **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla*: 21 April, Kluizendok, Gent (O), 1; 7 October, Groot Schietveld, Brecht (A), 1; 17 October, Zandvliet (A), 1; 21 October, Kooigem (W), 1.

Contact BRBC

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

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