

## Rare Birds in Belgium in 2020

### Report of the Belgian Rare Birds Committee (BRBC)

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*1<sup>st</sup> calendar year White-throated Sparrow Zonotrichia albicollis. 13/10/2020. Knokke-Heist, Het Zwin (W). (Picture: Wim Debruyne)*

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## **Abstract – Rare Birds in Belgium in 2020**

This report by the Belgian Rare Birds Committee (BRBC) concerns a total of 162 records (208 birds) of 66 (sub)species and species pairs which have been reported in Belgium in 2020. Some additional records from previous years have also been included. 121 records have been accepted into category A, 12 into category E and 29 records have been rejected. In 2020, two new taxa were added to the Belgian list (category A) with the first records of Little Swift *Apus affinis* and of Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*. Also worth mentioning: the second record of Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*, Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope* and White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis*, and the fourth record of Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* and Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*. A record from 2018 of an Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* has been accepted as a first for Belgium. The first Western Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica* has been confirmed after the revision of the pictures taken in 1991. With these additions, the Belgian list stands at 460xxxxxx species following the IOC World Bird List taxonomy. Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* and Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus* are removed from the homologation list from 2021 onwards.

## **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 2020. It also contains records of earlier years that have not yet been published before. Some records from 2020 are still pending and are not dealt with in this 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* respectively.

## **Recent decisions and developments**

**Taxonomic reference.** From January 1<sup>st</sup> 2018, the BRBC follows the taxonomic rules of the IOC World Bird List (Gill, Donsker & Rasmussen, 2021). This decision has impacted the Belgian bird list whose details can be found on our website <http://www.belgianrbc.be>

## **What makes a rare bird species?**

A species is considered to be a national rarity: (1) if there has been an average of maximum three accepted records per year over the previous 10-year period, so a maximum of 30 accepted records in total for that period; or (2) if a species has not been recorded 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 as well on our website: <http://www.belgianrbc.be>

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

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 recordings and any other sources 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.

Although many observers responded positively to our targeted questions to document and submit cases, a proportion of the rare species observed in 2020 and earlier are not (yet) submitted. The BRBC is always prepared to assist. Observers can send a draft of their report by e-mail to Miguel Demeulemeester ([wheatear32@hotmail.com](mailto:wheatear32@hotmail.com)). Your draft will be reviewed and provided with the necessary comments after which the observer can submit a modified version.

## **BRBC statutes and members**

**Published statutes.** The statutes of the BRBC are published on our website [www.belgianrbc.be](http://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 want to document a sighting. We aim to update the content of this document on a regular basis.

**Changes in membership.** The team is composed by the same people as last year, with five Dutch-speaking members and five French-speaking members.

The following members have assessed all records in this report, in alphabetical order: Jan Baert, Stijn Baeten, Alain De Broyer, Miguel Demeulemeester, Robin Gailly, Kenny Hessel, Raphaël Lebrun, Joost Mertens, Laurent Raty and Frédéric Vanhove.

## **Acknowledgements**

The BRBC wishes to thank Natuurpunt Studie, Aves-Natagora, Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences and Zwin Natuur Park for various supports.

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.

## **Recent news and decisions**

### **Monitoring rare birds after a species is removed from the BRBC list**

The BRBC has recently decided to keep track of sightings for another 10 years once a taxon is removed from the national rarity list. The main aim is to have a better view of the species's long-term trend. This is in particular relevant for taxa whose numbers tend to fluctuate in between years. By conducting another 10 years monitoring, the BRBC avoids some taxa from moving on and off the national rarity list, leading to gaps in the database.

Figure 1 gives an overview of the decision pathway the BRBC follows. Currently, a rare bird taxon is removed from the national rarity list if (1) it holds more than 30 accepted records within a 10-years period and (2) there are accepted records in at least 8 out of 10 years. From 2021 onwards, such a taxon will be subject to the monitoring stage. Evaluation will be based upon a description, pictures, videos and/or sound-recordings. 5 years after the start, a first preliminary assessment is made. If (1) at least 30 'acceptable' records are registered, and if (2) acceptable records are distributed over all 5 years, the BRBC debates the removal of the taxon from the monitoring list. If however (1) less than 30 acceptable records are gathered throughout this 5 years follow-up, or if (2) 1 year out of these 5 years holds no acceptable record, the taxon remains on the monitoring list for another 5 years. 10 years after the removal from the national rarity list, a second assesment is made. If (1) the taxon is recorded acceptably at least 30 times within these 10 years and (2) acceptable records are made in at least 8 out of 10 years, the BRBC confirms the removal of the taxon from the monitoring list. If however, within this 10-years timespan (1) less than 30 records are accepted and (2) acceptable records are distributed in a maximum of 7 years, the taxon will re-enter the national rarity list. The entire BRBC reassesses all records from the 10 preceding years.

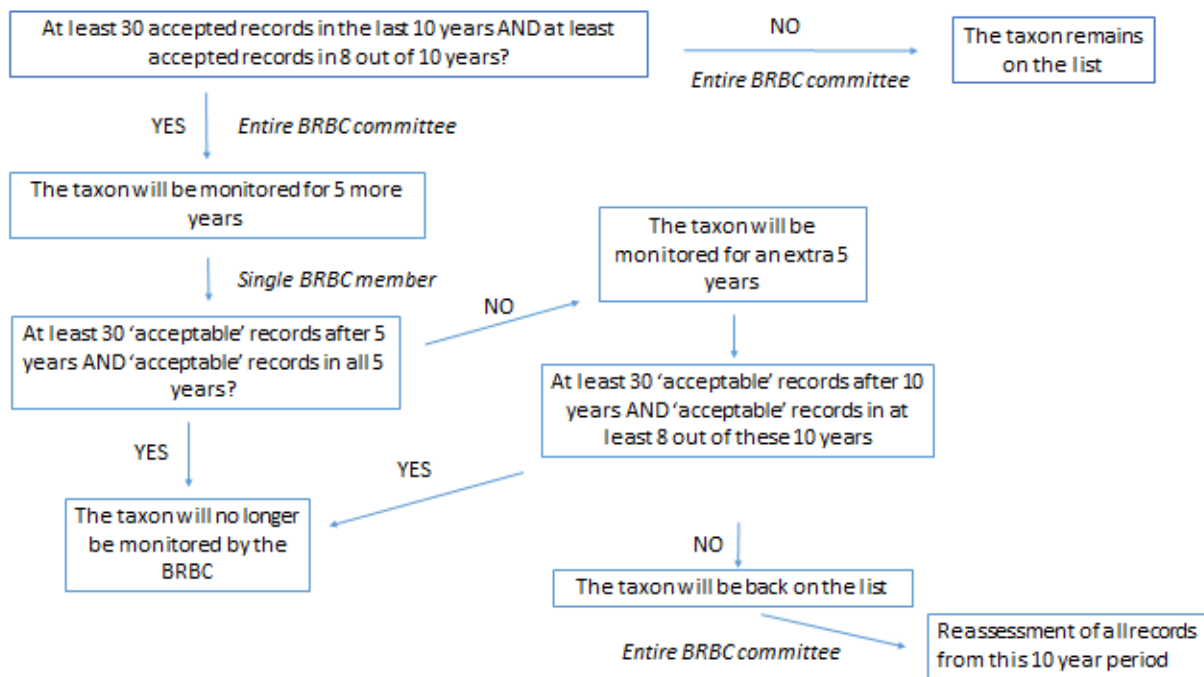


Figure 1: new way of monitoring rare birds by the BRBC

The BRBC has decided to start this monitoring from 2021 onwards. Since 1 January 2015, 21 rare bird taxa are no longer included in the national rarity list (see Faveyts *et al.* (2016); Faveyts *et al.* (2017); Faveyts *et al.* (2018); Baeten *et al.* (2019) and Vanhove *et al.* (2020)). Re-evaluation of these taxa is deemed appropriate and underway. Results of these assessments will be published in our yearly report.

#### DNA analysis and sound-recordings: When is a DNA analysis or a sound-recording required for taxon acceptance?

Based on current knowledge, some taxa cannot be safely identified by field observations or pictures alone. A DNA analysis or a sonogram of a call/song may be necessary to confirm the identification. The BRBC made an overview of such taxa (see the table below).

The protocol for taxa requiring a DNA analysis is the following: once a genetic sequence is submitted to GenBank, it will get a GenBank record number and a draft GenBank sequence record. It will take several months to process this sequence by GenBank before the results are released. After receiving the results, the BRBC will assess and publish the record.

The following table shows the taxa for which a DNA analysis or a sonogram is *required* "x" or *advised* "(x)". An asterisk \* next to the name of a taxon means that a revision is underway.

Species	DNA analysis required	CALL sonogram required	SONG sonogram required
Iberian Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>		(x)	x
Siberian Lesser Whitethroat <i>Curruca c. blythi/halimodendri</i>	x	(x)	
Hume's Whitethroat <i>Curruca althaea</i>	x	(x)	
Western Subalpine Warbler <i>Curruca iberiae</i> * 1CY/♀		x	
Moltoni's Warbler <i>Curruca subalpina</i> * 1CY/♀		(x)	
Eastern Subalpine Warbler <i>Curruca cantillans</i> * 1CY/♀		x	
Olive-backed Pipit <i>Anthus hodgsoni</i> - for flying birds only, unless there are good pictures		x	
Parrot Crossbill <i>Loxia pytyopsittacus</i> - for flying birds only, unless there are good pictures		x	

## 2020 in a nutshell

Highlights of 2020 can be summarized as:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* and Little Swift *Apus affinis*
- 2<sup>nd</sup> record of Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*, Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope* and White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis*
- 4<sup>th</sup> record of Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* and Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*
- 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> record of Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*
- 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> record of Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*
- 7<sup>th</sup> Dusky Thrush *Turdus eunomus*
- 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Helopsaltes certhiola*
- 9<sup>th</sup> Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciata*
- The best year ever for Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* (5 accepted records), Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* (13 accepted records), Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatu*s (20 accepted records) and Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus* (6 accepted records)
- 1<sup>st</sup> Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* seen in 2018
- 1<sup>st</sup> Western Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica* seen in 1991
- 1<sup>st</sup> Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* collected in 1958

## 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 2020.
- 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 if 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 (observer or discoverer) who submitted the record directly to the BRBC. For every ringed bird, the ringing number, the name of the ringing group and the name of the ringer are indicated,

i.e. when the information has reached the BRBC in time for publication. 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 for the record.

### Signs and abbreviations

Belgium has 10 provinces. The Brussels Capital Region is treated as a distinct 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 three figures in brackets:

1. Number of accepted individuals from 1800-1949;
2. Number of accepted individuals from 1950-2019;
3. Number of accepted individuals from 2020.

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 accepted records for a particular species. In a few cases, a different character is given: ' / ' means that the species was not on the homologation list during one or several years; ' - ' means that the species was recorded during that period but that the exact number is still under consideration at the time of writing. The latter happens for species that have a considerable number of older records (before 1950).

## Systematic list

### 1. Category A records

**Pale-bellied Brent Goose** *Branta bernicla hrota* (0,255,44)

15 January - 7 February, Knokke-Heist (W), 44

14 December – 10 January 2021, Zeebrugge, Voorhaven - Westdam (W), 1 2cy+ (returning individual from last year).

**Lesser White-fronted Goose** *Anser erythropus* (1,168,1)

8 - 9 January, Kieldrecht, Nieuwe Arenbergpolder (O), 1 3cy+

With only 15 accepted records in the previous 10 years, Lesser White-fronted Geese of a putative wild origin remains a rare sighting in Belgium.

**Blue-winged Teal** *Spatula discors* (0,21,1)

19 April - 14 June, Gent, Bourgoyen (O) and later Kallo, Rietmoerassen (O), 1 m. ad. br.

This male stayed until 23 May in Gent where it attracted a lot of attention. On 30 May it was rediscovered at Kallo, where it was last seen on the 14 June.



Adult male Blue-winged Teal *Spatula discors*. 29/04/2020. Gent, Bourgoyen (O). (Picture: Herman Blockx)

**Green-winged Teal** *Anas carolinensis* (0,27,1)

16 - 29 March, Merelbeke, Paardenweide (O), 1 m.

**Ring-necked Duck** *Aythya collaris* (0,25,0)

4 - 22 March, Roly (N) / Cerfontaine (H) / Boneffe (N) / Eghezée (N), 1 m. ad.

Returning drake, first observed 7 March - 18 April 2010 at Basse-Sambre - Etang de Soye, Sambre (N) and Lac de Bambois (N), easily recognizable by a pale marking below one of its nostrils.

**Alpine Swift** *Tachymarptis melba* (2,39,3)

22 April, Leuze-en-Hainaut (H), 1

13 July, Marloie, rue des fleurs (Lx), 1 (M. van Leeuwen)

12 October, Schaerbeek, Friche Josaphat (Br) and Ophain-Bois-Seigneur-Isaac (BW), 1 1cy+

With 3 accepted records, 2020 was the best year since 2010, which holds 4 accepted records. Best year was 1993 however, when no less than 6 records got accepted.

**Pallid Swift** *Apus pallidus* (0,11,5)

25 October, De Haan, Duinen (W), 2 1cy+

26 October, Bredene, Spanjaardduin (W), 1

26 October, Zeebrugge, Smienteweiden (W), 1 1cy

14 November, Paelsteenpanne-De Haan, De Haan (W), 1 1cy (P. Quevy)

The best year ever for this species, even more so taking into account all records that were rejected but were likely Pallid Swifts as well. Since 2004, 15 birds were accepted, with only one record dating back before 2000. Records of Pallid Swift are clearly on the rise in Belgium, something that is also noted in the Netherlands (Groenendijk & van der Laan, 2020). It seems that the arrival of warm sectors of low-pressure systems in late autumn is a good predictor for the arrival of Pallid Swifts in North-Western Europe (Holt et al, 2019; Larsson, 2018).



*Pallid Swift Apus pallidus*. 26/10/2020. Bredene, Spanjaardduin (W). (Picture: Joachim Pintens)

**Little Swift** *Apus affinis* (0,0,1)

26 October, Blankenberge (W), 1 1cy

A new species for Belgium. A paper about this record is published (Baeten *et al.*, 2021).

**Oriental Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia orientalis* (0,1,0)

ADDENDUM

3 January - 12 March 2018, Gierle (A), 1 2cy

This record remained hidden for a long time until it was picked-up by a BRBC-member and re-identified as the first Oriental Turtle Dove for Belgium. With only 2 pictures available, it could not be identified to subspecies level. Oriental Turtle Dove is clearly on the rise in Western Europe with for example 11 accepted records in the Netherlands up to 2020, with the first record dating back from 2009 (de Vries & Ebels, 2020).





*Second calendar year Oriental Turtle Dove Streptopelia orientalis. 03/03/2018. Gierle (A). (Picture: Staf Wolput)*

**Baillon's Crake** *Zapornia pusilla* (4,40,1)

11 August, Eindhout, Trichelbroek (A), 1 1cy trapped (H. Berghmans)



*First calendar year Baillon's Crake Zapornia pusilla. 11/08/2020. Eindhout, Trichelbroek (A). (Picture: Paul Helsen)*

**Little Crake** *Zapornia parva* (4,44,1)

17 September - 6 October, Lier, Beneden Netevallei - Anderstad (A), 1 1cy

With already the 4<sup>th</sup> record of Little Crake in this location, Lier – Anderstad is definitely a good spot for this rare and secretive species.

**Eurasian Stone-curlew** *Burhinus oedichnemus* (9,92, / )

ADDENDUM

4 May 2019, Oudenburg, De Zwaanhoek (W), 1

This species is not assessed anymore since the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2020.

**Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* (0,9,0)

29 - 30 October, Doel, Doelpolder Noord (O), 1 ad. (returning individual)

**Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Calidris falcinellus* (3,30,1)

8 - 9 May, Oudenburg, Weiden Pompje, later in Klemskerke, Weiden (W), 1

With 26 birds, May is clearly the best month to get in touch with this species. Furthermore, the species has also been recorded in July (3 records), August (4 records) and September (1 record).

**Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* (0,46,1)

15 May, Doel, Prosperpolder Noord (O), 1 2cy+

**Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus* (0,131,7)

13 August, Kalmthout, Grenspark Kalmthoutse Heide - Stappersven (A), 1 1cy

16 August, Retie, Kattesteertvijver (A), 1 1cy

29 - 31 August, Oudenburg (W), 1 1cy

29 September - 9 October, Nieuwpoort, Ijzermonding (W), 1 1cy

9 October, Ettelgem, Roksem Put (W), 1 1cy

9 October, Wintam, Noordelijk Eiland (A), 1 1cy

17 - 18 October, Woumen, Spaarbekken (W), 1 1cy

One of the best years, equaling 1976 and 1981. So far, 2010 was the best year with 8 accepted birds.

**Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* (0,9,2)

10 - 13 July, Gent, Bourgoyen - De afgraving (O), 1 2cy+

23 October, Kieldrecht, Drijdyck (O), 1 1cy

Again, two new records for this species. Since 2015, 7 birds appeared in Belgium. Before that, the last accepted record dated back from 1998.

**Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica* (19,153,3)

23 April, Knokke-Heist, Het Zwin - Zwinvlakte (W), 1 2cy+

1 - 22 June, Knokke-Heist, Het Zwin - Zwinuitbreiding (W), 1 2cy+

6 September, Harchies, Marais (H), 1 2cy+

ADDENDUM

17 May 2019, Heist, Oostdam - Sterneneiland (W), 1 3cy+

**Roseate Tern** *Sterna dougallii* (0,35,1)

10 July - 5 August, Zeebrugge, Voorhaven – Oostdam (W) and Knokke-Heist, Het Zwin - Zwinuitbreiding (W), 1 3cy+

When large groups of terns are nesting at the Sterneneiland, Zeebrugge (W), this is one to the look for. Only seen for a single day at Zeebrugge, it was rediscovered a few weeks later in the evening at the newly created tidal area adjacent to Het Zwin (W). It could however not be refound the day after. A week later, it reappeared again at the inaccessible Sterneneiland.

**Pygmy Cormorant** *Microcarbo pygmaeus* (0,5,0)

CORRIGENDUM

The Zedelgem (W) record of 27-28 April 2019 has been merged with the Auderghem (Br), Mechelen (A), Lier (A) and Wintam (A) records, bringing the total of Pygmy Cormorant for Belgium down to 5 (*contra* Vanhove *et al.*, 2019).

**Black Guillemot** *Cephus grylle* (1,14,1)

23 - 25 November, Oostende, Westerstaketsel (W), 1 1cy (P. Keirsebilck)

The first twitchable bird in 19 years was warmly welcomed by younger birders. Untwitchable records included fly-bys in 2005, 2008 and 2011.



*First calendar year Black Guillemot Cepphus grylle. 23/11/2020. Oostende, Westerstaketsel (W). (Picture: Julien Hainaut)*

**European Storm Petrel** *Hydrobates pelagicus* (5,103,2)

26 September, Mariakerke (W), 1

18 December, Oostende, Havengebied (W), 1 1cy

ADDENDUM

20 December 2019, Noordzee, Zee te Nieuwpoort (W), 1

**Cory's Shearwater** *Calonectris borealis* (0,2,0)

ADDENDUM

25 - 26 October 2018, Wenduine/Oostende/De Panne (W), 1

This bird, initially discovered on 25 October along the Dutch coast near Den Haag (the Netherlands), flew south following the coastline where it was subsequently seen southwards all the way down to Westkapelle (the Netherlands). When the news broke out that the bird had passed Westkapelle, Belgian birders started posting at good vantage points along the Belgian coast. At around 16h40, the bird was rediscovered at a great distance at Wenduine (W), Belgium, after which it slowly moved southwards. Eventually, it was picked up in Oostende (W), just before the night. The next morning, one birder had a hunch to position himself in De Panne (W) and was rewarded with a 30 minute sighting close to the beach during which he photographed and videoed the bird. Following the split of Cory's Shearwater and Scopoli's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* by IOC, a prolonged discussion regarding the ID took place within the committee. The best pictures and movies of this bird were however made in the Netherlands, hence the BRBC decided to reach out to the CDNA for further details. The CDNA kindly provided the BRBC with several opinions from seabird experts. One of these experts made a minute analysis based on a vast number of pictures and video footages after which he concluded that the bird was definitely a Cory's Shearwater. The BRBC decided to follow this conclusion and accepted the bird as the second for Belgium. The bird is also accepted by the CDNA. The first record for Belgium dates back from 6 February 1982, at Zuienkerke (W).

**Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus* (0,5,2)

5 May, Buissonville (N), 1 2cy

21 May, Lichtervelde (W), 1 2cy+

Last accepted records date back from 2011 (two records of two different birds).

**Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus* (0,27,13)

26 April, Tienen, Bezinkingsputten (VB), 1 2cy+  
17 - 20 May, Houthulst/Houtem (W), 1 2cy  
19 May, Sainte-Marie-Chevigny (Lx), 1 2cy+  
22 May, Nismes, La Roche Trouée (N), 1 2cy+  
23 May, Torgny (Lx), 1 2cy+  
30 May, Oedelem (W), 1 (P. Van Hauwaert)  
2 June, Aulnois (H), 1 2cy  
3 June, Maaseik (L), 1 2cy+ (E. Opdenacker)  
28 June, Amel (Lg), 1 2cy+  
6 July, Solre-sur-Sambre (H), 1 2cy  
28 July - 23 August, Baasrode, Vlassenbroekse Polder en Schorren (O), 1  
29 August, Sint-Joris-Weert (VB), 1 1cy+  
30 August, Zonhoven, Platwijers (L), 1  
ADDENDUM  
25 May 2019, Dendermonde (O), 1 2cy+

A record year pulverizing the number recorded in 2012, the previous best year, with 5 accepted birds. Booted Eagle is on the rise since the beginning of the millennium with 32 birds accepted from 2010 onwards. May and June are clearly the best months with 17 and 9 records respectively. Furthermore, the species has been recorded in April (5 records), July (3 records), August (5 records) and October (1 record). With 30 accepted records between 2011 and 2020, Booted Eagle is removed from the homologation list from 1 January 2021 onwards.

**Steppe Eagle** *Aquila nipalensis* (0,3,1)

21 May, Westouter and Brugge (W), 1 2cy

First seen on active migration over Westouter (W) at around 16h23 after which a single observer picked up the bird passing Brugge (W). The same evening, the bird was rediscovered passing over Middelburg, Zeeland (the Netherlands) after which it decided to roost in Goes, Zeeland (the Netherlands). The bird is also accepted by the CDNA.

**Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* (0,0,2)

12 April, Heule (W) en Kalken (O), 1 5cy (B. Augustijns & B. De Keersmaecker)  
19 May, Heverlee (VB), 1 2cy or 3cy

The first Eastern Imperial Eagle for Belgium passed a single observer over Heule (W) after which it was picked up by a few lucky birders when passing Kalken (O). Only a month later, the second bird for Belgium migrated over Heverlee (VB). The identification of the second bird generated a lot of debates within the BRBC after which it was decided to reach out to two raptor specialists. Both specialists agreed that it was an Eastern Imperial Eagle but didn't agree about the age. Hence, the BRBC decided to label it as a 2<sup>nd</sup> or a 3<sup>rd</sup> calendar year.



*Fifth calendar year Eastern Imperial Eagle Aquila heliaca. 12/04/2020. Heule (W). (Picture: Bart Augustijns)*

**Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos* (9,6,2)

18 March, Braine-le-Château - La Housta (BW), 1 2cy (S. d'Hoop)

20 - 22 July, Elsenborn, Camp Militaire (Lg), 1 2cy+



*Second calendar year Golden Eagle Aquila chrysaetos. 18/03/2020. Braine-le-Château - La Housta (BW). (Picture: Sacha d'Hoop)*

**Bonelli's Eagle** *Aquila fasciata* (1,7,1)

17 April, Loppem and Ichtegem (W), 1 2cy

**Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus* (0,3,1)

16 August, Oudenaarde (O), 1 ad.

**Lesser Grey Shrike** *Lanius minor* (1,13,1)

4 June, Farciennes (H), 1 m. ad. br.

**Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator* (0,170,2)

10 June, Zuienkerke, Polders Schoeringebrug (W), 1 m. 2cy+

10 June, Lichtaart/Kasterlee, Kleine Netevallei - Goor (A), 1 m. 2cy+

**Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix* ( / ,2011-2019: 20,3)

18 February - 4 March, Knokke-Heist, Het Zwin - Kleyne Vlakte (W), 1

27 February, Oostende, Havengebied (W), 1 2cy+

31 December - 5 March 2021, Ichtegem (W), 1 1cy+

ADDENDUM

21 April 2019, De Haan, Lindenhof (W), 1

**Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla* (8,36,1)

6 May, Zeebrugge, Voorhaven - Westdam (W), 1 2cy+

ADDENDUM

5 May 2019, Zeebrugge - Voorhaven - Westdam (W), 1 2cy+

**Eurasian Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* (0,4,4)

7 November, De Panne, Vissersdorp (W), 1 1cy+ (N. Goulem)

8 - 9 November, Bredene en Oostende (W), 1 1cy

8 November, Zuienkerke, Noordelijke akkers (W), 1

22 - 30 November, Gent, Bourgoyen-Ossenmeersen (O), later Gent, Sint-Denijs-Westrem (O), 1 1cy

A remarkable influx reached Belgium, doubling the number of records. The 5<sup>th</sup> record involved a bird actively migrating south over a migration watch point. The 6<sup>th</sup> was first seen at Breskens, Zeeland (the Netherlands) after which it was picked up along the Belgian coast near Bredene (W). The bird decided to spend the night on a balcony of an apartment building near the Spuikom, Oostende (W) where it could be successfully twitched. This bird is also accepted by the CDNA. Remarkably, on the very same day as the Bredene bird, another individual passed a few birders who were looking at a foraging Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus* in Zuienkerke (W). Another bird was shortly observed over the Bourgoyen-Ossenmeersen (O) on 22 November and was rediscovered five days later, on 27 November, about 4 km to the south, remaining there until the 30 November.

**Hume's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus humei* (0,14,1)

26 - 28 November, Heist, De Sashul (W), 1 1cy+

**Radde's Warbler** *Phylloscopus schwarzi* (0,31,2)

3 October, Brecht, Groot Schietveld (A), 1 (P. Symens)

7 October, Wetteren, Industriezone (O), 1 1cy trapped

The second Radde's Warbler for the ringer on the same spot in little more than 2 years!

**Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* (0,65,20)

6 February - 7 April, Kieldrecht, Nieuwe Arenbergpolder (O), 1 2cy+

9 October, Soumagne (Lg), 1 trapped (N. Depresseux)

12 October, Saive, Rue du Grand Moulin (Lg), 1 trapped (E. Vankherkoven)

14 - 15 October, Zeebrugge, Industriezone Filipsdok (W), 1 1cy+

28 - 30 October, Knokke-Heist, Vuurtorenweiden (W), 1 1cy+

3 - 5 November, Zeebrugge, Voorhaven - Oostdam - Strook Parking (W), 1

4 November, Berlingen, trektelpost Oetersloven (L), 1 (L. Bollingh)

9 November, Knokke-Heist, Zwinbosjes (W), 1 1cy

9 November, Heist, Strand (W), 1 1cy+

11 November, Zeebrugge, Voorhaven - Oostdam (W), 1 1cy+

13 November - 29 December, Bredene (W), 1 1cy

14 - 23 November, Heist, De Sashul (W), 1 1cy+

15 - 23 November, Heist, De Sashul (W), 1 1cy+

17 - 27 November, Heist, De Sashul (W), 1 1cy+

20 - 22 November, Heist, De Sashul (W), 1 1cy+  
21 - 22 November, Duinbergen, Joseph Stübbepark (W), 1 1cy+  
21 - 22 November, Heist, Bosje (W), 2 1cy+  
25 November - 13 December, Kieldrecht, Nieuwe Arenbergpolder (O), 1 1cy+  
8 December, Knokke-Heist, Het Zwin (W), 1 1cy+  
CORRIGENDUM  
23 - 24 October 2019, Zeebrugge, Voorhaven - Westdam (W), 1 ex. (*contra* 23 October 2019).

With 48 accepted records for the period 2011-2020 Dusky Warbler will be removed from the rarity list by 1 January 2021 onwards. 2020 was a record year with 20 accepted records. From 20 to 22 November, 4 different Dusky Warblers were present at the very same spot near Heist (W). One of these birds was ringed in Denmark on 12 October 2020.

**Iberian Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus ibericus* (0,21,1)  
3 May - 16 June, Nassogne (Lx), 1 m. 2cy+

**Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola* (0,42,2)  
25 August, Antwerpen, De Kuifeend (A), 1 1cy trapped  
3 September, Tongeren (L), 1 1cy trapped

**Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** *Helopsaltes certhiola* (0,7,2)  
28 - 29 September, Zeebrugge, Voorhaven - Westdam (W), 1 1cy  
4 - 5 October, Zeebrugge, Vuurtorenbosje (W), 1 1cy

With the first field observation dating back from only last year, 2020 surprised everyone with not one but two new field sightings of this notorious skulky species. The first bird was tailless and stayed in a restricted part of the harbour of Zeebrugge (W). Luckily, the second bird has been observed by the broader audience. Remarkably, this last spot was only 150 meters away of last year's first field sighting!



*First calendar year Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler Helopsaltes certhiola. 5/10/2020. Zeebrugge, Vuurtorenbosje (W). (Picture: Johan Buckens)*

**River Warbler** *Locustella fluviatilis* (0,35,1)  
24 - 29 May, Hautrage, Prés de Grand Rieu (H), 1 m. 2cy+

**Lanceolated Warbler** *Locustella lanceolata* (0,6,0)  
ADDENDUM

15 September 1958, Lichtschip Noord Hinder, Continental Shelf, North 51,65833 East 2,5667, 1 f. 1cy  
Aboard ship off Vlissingen, Zeeland, found dead (Smit & Voous, 1959)). Removed from the Dutch list because  
collected in the Belgian Continental Shelf. 1cy female found dead, skin in collection of Naturalis Biodiversity  
Center, Leiden Zuid-Holland, photographed.

**Subalpine Warbler Complex** *Curruca cantillans* (x,x,x)

In 2020, a paper by Zuccon *et al.* was published, focusing on differences in both mitochondrial and nuclear DNA of the Subalpine Warbler complex, concluding to a split into three species: Moltoni's Warbler *Curruca subalpina*, Western Subalpine Warbler *Curruca iberiae* and Eastern Subalpine Warbler *Curruca cantillans*. Moltoni's Warbler, breeding in Sardinia, Corsica, the Balearic Islands and northern-central Italy was found to diverge genetically from both Eastern and Western Subalpine Warblers, as well as phenotypically. Western Subalpine Warbler, breeding in France, Iberia and North-Africa is now considered monotypic, while Eastern Subalpine Warbler has two subspecies (ssp. *cantillans*, breeding in southern Italy and ssp. *albistriata* breeding in the Balkans, Greece and Turkey. Moltoni's Warbler was already split by IOC in 2009, following Brambilla *et al.* (2008) while in 2020, IOC also adopted the split of Eastern and Western Subalpine Warbler suggested by Zuccon (Gill *et al.*, 2020). Apart from genetic differences, morphological differences are described between all three species (Svensson, 2013; Corso *et al.*, 2021). Some of the newly described features, such as the pattern on the penultimate tail feather are very useful, but mismatches do (rarely) occur (Illa *et al.*, 2019). Stoddart & Hudson (2021) presented the line followed by the British rarity committee (BBRC), which the BRBC decided to follow. For acceptance of a male in spring, at least two of the following criteria should be met: (1) description of the underpart coloration, (2) tail pattern and (3) call (sound-recording strongly recommended). Females and all autumn birds only can get accepted when the tail pattern is described and the call sound-recorded.

A major review of all Belgian records of Subalpine Warblers is currently underway. Results will be published in the next report.

**Dartford Warbler** *Curruca undata* (0,12,2)

10 October, Zeebrugge, Voorhaven - Westdam (W), 1 1cy

2 December - 26 January 2021, Middelkerke, Puidebroeken (W), 1 (B. Beyen)



First calendar year Dartford Warbler *Curruca undata*. 10/10/2020. Zeebrugge, Voorhaven – Westdam (W).  
(Picture: Hans Matheve)

**Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria* (2,13,0)

28 November – 16 February 2021, Dinant (N), 1 2cy+

A returning individual, first seen in December 2019.



**Rosy Starling** *Pastor roseus* (17,48,6)

29 May - 3 June, Heist and Hoeke (W), 1 2cy+  
1 - 5 August, Assenede, Polders Noord (O), 1 m. 2cy+  
7 September, Harelbeke, De Gavers (W), 1 1cy  
1 October, Strée (Lg), 1 1cy  
2 October, Oostende, Voorhaven (W), 1 1cy  
17 October, Westende, Sint-Laureinsduinen (W), 1 1cy

A record year with 6 different birds.

**Dusky Thrush** *Turdus eunomus* (3,3,1)

1 January - 31 March, Arendonk, Landschap De Liereman (A), 1 m. 2cy+

**Thrush Nightingale** *Luscinia luscinia* (0,41,2)

7 August, Smuid (Lx), 1 1cy trapped  
3 September, Willebroek, Broek Denaeyer (A), 1 1cy trapped

**Siberian Rubythroat** *Calliope calliope* (0,1,1)

12 October, Knokke-Heist, Het Zwin (W), 1 f. 1cy trapped

The second for Belgium after the discovery of a dead bird brought in by a cat, at Hailot (N) on 4 December 2019.



First calendar year female Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope*. 12/10/2020. Knokke-Heist, Het Zwin (W).  
(Picture: Wouter Faveyts)

**Red-flanked Bluetail** *Tarsiger cyanurus* (0,9,1)

11 - 12 October, Uitkerke (W), 1 m. 1cy

**Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva* (0,110,4)

29 September - 6 October, Zeebrugge, Visserskruis (W), 1 f. 2cy+  
29 September, Knokke-Heist, Het Zwin (W), 1 1cy  
8 October, Zeebrugge, Bosje Marinebasis (W), 1 1cy  
29 - 30 October, Zeebrugge, Station Dorp (W), 1 m. 2cy+

**Siberian Stonechat** *Saxicola maurus* (x,x,1)

28 September, Zeebrugge, Voorhaven - Westdam (W), 1 m. 1cy

Following the split of Siberian Stonechat into Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus* and Stejneger's Stonechat *Saxicola stejnegeri* by IOC in 2018, a revision of all previous records is underway. Hence, the exact number of records prior to 2020 is not mentioned. Results will be published in our next report.

**Western Black-eared Wheatear** *Oenanthe hispanica* (0,1,0)

CORRIGENDUM

14 July - 10 August 1991, Bastogne (Lx), 1 m. (R. Detaille, J.-M. Daulne)

After re-examination of the pictures, the bird has been identified as the first Western Black-eared Wheatear for Belgium. At the time, the bird was not identified down to the subspecies level, being identified as a Black-eared Wheatear *sensu lato*.

**Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* (0,16,2)

26 April, Oudenburg, Weiden Pompje (W), 1 m. 2cy

9 May, Damme, Weiden Pijpeweg (W), 1 m. 2cy+

CORRIGENDUM

The number of Citrine Wagtail seen in Belgium and mentioned in the 2016 report should be (0,13,3) and not (0,14,3) (*contra* Faveyts *et al.* 2017).

**Blyth's Pipit** *Anthus godlewskii* (0,8,1)

25 March - 6 April, Drongen (O), 1

**Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni* (0,20,3)

13 October, Tienen, Bezinkingsputten (VB), 1 1cy+

17 - 27 October, Zeebrugge, De Fonteintjes (W), 1 1cy

19 October, Zandvliet, B.A.S.F. (A), 1 1cy+



First calendar year Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*. 22/10/2020. Zeebrugge, De Fonteintjes (W). (Picture: Victor Claes)

**Arctic Redpoll** *Acanthis hornemanni* (0,35,0)

CORRIGENDUM

4 December 2018, Oosthoven (A), 1 trapped (J. Leppens), not 24 December 2018 (*contra* Baeten *et al.* 2018).

**Cirl Bunting** *Emberiza cirlus* (-,51,1)

21 April, Zedelgem, Vloethemveld (W), 1 m. ad. br.

**Rustic Bunting** *Emberiza rustica* (3,14,1)

9 December - 16 January 2021, Antwerpen, Landschap Scheldepolders (A), 1 m. 1cy+ trapped

**Yellow-breasted Bunting** *Emberiza aureola* (1,5,0)

ADDENDUM

11 September 1963, Lichtschip Noord Hinder, Continental Shelf, North 51,65833 East 2,5667, 1 f. 1cy West of Vlissingen, in the night of 10 to 11 September 1963, find (ZMA collection). Removed from the Dutch list because collected in the Belgian Continental Shelf. 1cy female found dead, skin in collection or in Naturalis Biodiversity Center, Leiden ZH.

**White-throated Sparrow** *Zonotrichia albicollis* (0,1,1)

12 - 13 October, Knokke-Heist, Het Zwin (W), 1 1cy trapped

The second for Belgium, caught one hour after the second Siberian Rubythroat for Belgium was ringed at the same spot by the same ringer! The next day, the bird still lingered around at the site of the release, offering birders the opportunity to see it.

## 2. Category E records

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

22 January - 17 April, Ten Aard (A), 2

15 - 23 February, Lahérie, Bassins Ardennes Logistics (Lx), 1

18 March, Rupelmonde, Polder (O), 1

19 April, Helchteren (L), 1

21 October, Temse (O), 1

14 - 17 November, Huldenberg, Doode Bemde (VB), 1

ADDENDUM

9 - 16 August 2019, Esneux (Lg), 1

13 August 2019, Kieldrecht, Putten West (O), 1

8 September - 5 October 2019, Vervoz, Etangs (Lg), 1

**Baikal Teal** *Sibirionetta formosa*

8 November - 21 January 2021, Huldenberg, Doode Bemde (VB), 1 m.

A difficult nut to crack, but the absence of rings was not properly described considering the distance the bird resided.

**Blue-winged Teal** *Spatula discors*

9 - 11 April, Rotem, Bichterweerd (L), 1 m. 2cy+

The absence of rings was not mentioned nor photographed.

**Bufflehead** *Bucephala albeola*

23 - 24 May, Kessenich, Dal van de Grensmaas (L), 1 m. 2cy+

**Greater Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus roseus*

10 - 11 June, Kieldrecht, Putten West (O), 1

**Great White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus*

7 September, Arendonk (A), 1 2cy+

**Bearded Vulture** *Gypaetus barbatus*

18 - 19 June, Brugge/Drongen (O), 1 2cy.

Apart from a short stop in Belgium, the bird was seen in Northern France, the Netherlands and the Channel Islands during May-June before it crossed the channel and lingered around in Great Britain for about 4 months. DNA analysis pointed out the bird originated from a French territory in the Bargy Massif (Haute-Savoie) and was wild born. But as the mother of this bird was born in captivity, even if the father was a wild-hatched bird (Phipps *et al.*, 2021), the bird did not originate from a sustainable reintroduced population, nor a wild one.

**American Kestrel** *Falco sparverius*

ADDENDUM

16 July - 26 October 2019, Heverlee (VB), 1

## 5. Rejected records

**Pale-bellied Brent Goose** *Branta bernicla hrota*

1 December, Nieuwpoort, Polder van Nieuwendamme (W), 1

**Taiga Bean Goose** *Anser fabalis*

10 May - 17 July, Dilsen-Stokkem, Maasweerden (L), 1

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

25 February - 02 March, Mol (A), 1

13 - 16 April, Mechelen (A), 1 2cy+

**American Wigeon** *Mareca americana*

11 October, Merken, IJzervallei - IJzerbroeken (W), 1 m. ec.

**Alpine Swift** *Tachymarptis melba*

7 October, Oostkamp, Centrum (W), 1

ADDENDUM

17 April 2019, Ebly (Lx), 1

22 April 2019, Roeselare (W), 1

**Pallid Swift** *Apus pallidus*

14 October, Mariakerke (W), 1

25 October, Knokke-Heist, Het Zwin (W), 1

27 October, Blankenberge, Harendijke (W), 1

30 October, Torgny (Lx), 1

21 December, Oostende (W), 1

**Baillon's Crake** *Zapornia pusilla*

2 September 2020, Lummen, Schulensbroek (L), 1

**Eurasian Stone-curlew** *Burhinus oedicnemus*

ADDENDUM

12 September 2019, Wielsbeke, Oude Leie (W), 1

**Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius*

CORRIGENDUM

16 November 2013, Hensies, Canal Pommeroeul-Condé (H), 1 1cy

This record was re-assessed and proved to be an adult moulting Common Sandpiper.

**Greater Yellowlegs** *Tringa melanoleuca*

27 August, Nieuwpoort, IJzermonding (W), 1

**Baltic Gull** *Larus fuscus fuscus*

6 October, Nieuwpoort, IJzermonding (W), 1 ad.

**Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica*  
6 May, De Panne and Raversijde (W), 2

**Roseate Tern** *Sterna dougallii*  
6 May, De Panne, Vissersdorp (W), 1

**Black Guillemot** *Cephus grylle*  
13 January, Noordzee, Zee te Oostende (51.4892, 2.6624) (W), 1

**Booted Eagle** *Hieraetus pennatus*  
6 May, De Panne, Vissersdorp (W), 1  
12 May, Zemst (VB), 1  
16 May, Bernissart (H), 1  
21 May, Torhout, Maagdenveld (W), 1  
20 June, Frasnes (N), 1

**Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix*  
9 October, Uitkerke (W), 1  
ADDENDUM  
2 June 2019, Steenokkerzeel (VB), 1

**Azure Tit** *Cyanistes cyanus*  
ADDENDUM  
28 August 2019, Roly (N), 1 ad.

**Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla*  
21 September, Hoegaarden (VB), 1 1cy+

**Iberian Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus ibericus*  
12 April - 29 June, Rekem, Vallei van de Zijpbeek (L), 1  
21 May, Oostkerke (W), 1  
09 June, Wevelgem, Leiebos (W), 1

**Icelandic Redwing** *Turdus iliacus coburni*  
ADDENDUM  
23 November 2019, Leuven (VB), 1

**Red-spotted Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica svecica*  
7 June, Brecht, Groot Schietveld (A), 1 m.

**Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni*  
3 October, Nieuwpoort, IJzermonding (W), 1

## Contact BRBC

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

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