

The First Record of Common House-Martin (*Delichon urbicum*) for British Columbia.

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Introduction and Distribution

The Common House-Martin (*Delichon urbicum*) is a small passerine found in the Old World from Europe and Asia. There are 2 subspecies and most size differences between north and southern populations are clinal (Turner and Rose 1989). In Europe, the nominate subspecies (*D. u. urbicum*) is found breeding from Great Britain, to Russia, also in North Africa and across the Mediterranean Sea to Turkey and Israel and further east to central Asia (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). This subspecies of the Common House-Martin winters throughout west and southeast Africa (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). In Far East Asia, the subspecies (*D. u. lagopodum*) of Common-House Martin is a widespread breeding species from the Yenisei to North-east China, North-east Russia, Yakutia, Chukotka, north Koryakia coast and possibly in Kamchatka (Brazil 2009). The Common House-Martin is a rare migrant in Japan and Korea (Brazil 2009). This subspecies does winter in small numbers in South Eastern China, but the bulk of the population winters in Southeast Asia (Brazil 2009). In North America, the Common House-Martin is an accidental to casual vagrant (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). In Alaska, there is one specimen record of the Common House-Martin which belongs to the Asian subspecies (*D. u. lagopodum*), which is assumed to be the rest of the observations in Alaska, and this species is classified as casual with scattered records from Nome, St. Paul Island, Gambell, Buldir Island, St. Matthew Island, and the Colville River (West 2008). There is one record for Eastern North America from St.-Pierre Island, off Newfoundland and Labrador, likely the nominate subspecies (*D. u. urbicum*) from May 26-31, 1989 (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The Common House-Martin is an accidental species in British Columbia with only a one recent Spring record from the Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). There are no records for Washington State (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2014), Oregon (OFO 2012), or California (Hamilton *et al.* 2007).

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the Common House-Martin is covered in some North American field guides. The best coverage is found in a European or East Asian field guide that shows more in depth information on this species. The Common House-Martin is a small species measuring 13-14 cm in length, with a wingspan of 26-29 cm, and weighing 15-23 grams (Brazil 2009). This makes this species very similar in size to a Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*) which measures 14 cm, with a wingspan 33 cm, and weighs 13.5 grams (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). In appearance the Common House-Martin somewhat resembles the larger Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*) which measures 15 cm in length, with a wingspan of 37 cm, and weighs 20 grams (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). It also somewhat resembles a slightly larger Violet-green Swallow (*Tachycineta thalassina*) which measures 13 cm in length, with a

wingspan of 34 cm, and weighs 14 grams (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). There is a remote possibility that any House-Martin encountered in British Columbia could be the slightly smaller, but similar Asian House-Martin (*Delichon dasypus*) which has not been recorded in North America, but measures 13 cm, with a weight of 18 grams and this species has dark underwings and a less forked tail (Brazil 2009). The following description describes the Asian subspecies of Common House-Martin (*D. u. lagopodum*) which is the most likely form to occur along the west coast.

Common House-Martins are very clean black and white, typically larger, longer tailed with deeper fork, and more glossy underparts than Asian House-Martin (Brazil 2009). More sharply defined black cap does not extend to the cheeks or the chin (Brazil 2009).

Adult birds have steel blue-black upperparts, often glossy, strong contrast with large extensive white rump, uppertail coverts and lower back (Brazil 2009, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The underparts, from the chin to the vent, is very clean, bright white (Brazil 2009, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The undersides of the wings are whitish-gray and contrast with the darker upperwing (Brazil 2009).

Juvenile birds are dusker, more closely resembling Asian House-Martin (Brazil 2009). Wings are broader based and shorter than Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), underwing-coverts whitish-gray (Brazil 2009). The tail is short and deeply forked, much more deeply forked than with Asian House-Martin, and the undertail coverts are white (Brazil 2009).

The calls of the Common House-Martin are steady twittering “*juriri juriri*”, and a stronger “*prrit*” or “*brit*” (Jonsson 1992, Brazil 2009).

Occurrence and Documentation

The Common House-Martin is a recent addition to the British Columbia avifauna list. On April 27, 2015, Peter Hamel found an adult male bird in full breeding plumage flying low over the Hecate Strait Golf Course near Masset (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). The bird was well observed in the company of Tree Swallows. The bird stayed long enough for his wife, Margo Hearne, to also see and confirm Peter’s dazzling discovery (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). The bird was last seen flying west along the coastline at 11:45am in a large gale (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). Amazingly 2 hours later, Martin Williams, saw the same bird flying around the lodge where they were working at Langara Island (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). This species likely came across the North Pacific on one of the many huge fast moving Low Pressure Systems that had been occurring during the previous 2 week period (M. Meredith Pers. Comm.). It is possible that this bird was moving north from wintering somewhere in the New World and had come into North America the previous fall. It

is impossible to know for sure, but it is interesting that a few days later on May 5, 2015, British Columbia's first Gray Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) was found by Peter Hamel and Margo Hearne and photographed at Kilkun Bay at Sandspit (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). The timing of the date for the Common House-Martin fits well with when the species is moving in Europe and Asia with birds arriving in both regions in April (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). It is also important for observers to think about looking for this species in the fall when the species migrates south for the winter during the months of September and October (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The Common House-Martin is a long distance migrant that has a vagrancy pattern developing in Alaska, it is therefore very likely that this species will turn up again in British Columbia in the future. Observers need to carefully check through migrating swallow flocks and in know vagrant traps where passerines congregate. Given the nature of this species, it is most likely to be found along the coast of the province, but could also turn up somewhere in the interior.

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