

The discovery of a dead Gray Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis* in the port of Genoa, a first record for Italy

ALESSANDRO GHIGGI

*corresponding author: aleghiggi88@gmail.com

Abstract

On November 23rd, 2023, a Gray Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis* was found dead inside the Genoa Pra' port terminal. This is the first record for Italy. The bird's condition suggests that death occurred approximately 20 days before it was found. On October 26th, another Gray Catbird was observed on Corvo Island (Azores) along with several other Nearctic species. The meteorological dynamics that affected this last arrival, which occurred on the back of a continuous conveyor belt of westerly winds on October 24th across the Atlantic and an intensifying low pressure by 25th, could be at the origin of this exceptional find. The possibilities that the bird may have reached Genoa on its own wings or by ship-assistance are discussed.

Keywords: Gray Catbird, Italy, Genoa, port terminal, first record, autumn, migration, weather

On November 23rd 2023, a lifeless body of a Gray Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis* (Fig. 1) was found within the Genoa Pra' terminal (WGS84 44°25'24.26"N 8°46'42.81"E). The condition of the specimen (entire body well-preserved and naturally dried) suggested that death had occurred approximately twenty days before discovery (E. Borgo, *pers. comm.*). The Gray Catbird belongs to the family Mimidae, breeding across North America, from southern Canada, eastern Oregon, central Arizona, and northeastern Tex-

as, extending to the central Gulf States. It winters in central and north-eastern America, from New England to Panama, and the Caribbean Islands (Cramp 1988, del Hoyo *et al.* 2005 in Haas 2017). This record represents the first record for Italy and the fourteenth for the Western Palearctic (Baccetti *et al.*, 2021, Fulco & Liuzzi, 2021a, 2021b; Haas, 2012, 2017; Hobbs 2019, 2025; birdforum.net) (see Tab. 1). This exceptional finding within one of the Mediterranean's largest commercial terminals could support the hy-



Figure 1. The specimen of Gray Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis* described in the text and preserved in the collections of the Giacomo Doria Natural History Museum of Genova, Italy, with the catalogue number MSNG 62558 (photo: E. Borgo).

pothesis of an assisted arrival via a cargo vessel. Hobbs (2019) reported a few cases that confirm this hypothesis; however, a spontaneous arrival cannot be excluded, since the discovery site in the Pra' area is located at the northernmost point of the western Mediterranean, a region that functions as an important *bottleneck* for numerous migratory bird species due to its valley morphology and proximity to the coastline (Andreotti *et al.*, 1987; Baghino, 2013; Baghino & Ghiggi, 2021, 2023).

During autumn 2023, Western Europe experienced an unprecedented influx of Nearctic species and individuals, particularly in September, when 99 individuals belonging to 27 species were recorded in Ireland and Great Britain (Lees *et al.*, 2024). This phenomenon was considered a consequence of Hurricane Lee (5th–18th September, 2023), which followed heavy rainfall over the northeastern United States and Canada and moved along an unusual trajectory (NOAA, 2023). Subsequently, as an extratropical storm, Lee crossed into Europe, carrying migratory birds that, while attempting to bypass the hurricane front and continue southward, were later diverted by warm, humid westerly winds that favoured their survival along the Irish and British coasts. During October, especially from the second half of the month, additional vagrant species were recorded, particularly in the Azores, France, and Germany (birdforum.net, 2023) and as far east as Romania, where the first and remarkable banding of an Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapilla* took

place on October 17th at Grindul Chituc (RO) (Daróczy & Milvus Group, 2023). In late October, the Azores experienced the last seasonal big Nearctic bird arrival (including a Gray Catbird on Corvo on October 26th), which occurred on the back of a continuous conveyor belt of westerly winds on October 24th across the Atlantic and an intensifying low pressure by 25th (Alfrey, 2023). The Gray Catbird here described could have been carried by these particular conditions on the Atlantic, reaching, through their own wings or after landing on a cargo ship, the northernmost point of the western Mediterranean Sea. Here, assuming the bird exhausts and without an adequate stop-over area, it could have died in the first days of November.

On November 28th 2023, the record was submitted to the Italian Bird Rarities Committee (COI), which validated but did not accept it, attributing a category 2A as a bird of dubious wild origin (Fulco & Luzzi, *in press*).

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Table 1. List of Gray Catbird reports validated by AERC rarities committees in the Western Palearctic.

Date	Country	Place	Authors (*in Haas, 2012; **in Hobbs 2025; ***birdguides.com)
28 th October 1840	Germany	Helgoland, Schleswig-Holstein	*(Gatke 1900)
2 nd May 1908	Germany	Leopoldshagen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	*(Heinroth 1908, Thiede 1966)
mid-October 1975	Channel Islands	St Brelade, Jersey	*(Long 1981ab; Roger Long in litt)
4 th November 1986	Ireland	Cape Clear Island, Cork	*(British Ornithologists' Union 1991a; Preston 1989; O'Sullivan & Smiddy 1987)
4 th November 1999	Canary Island	La Mareta, Tenerife	*(de Juana 2006; de Juana & Comité de Rarezas de la SEO 2004)
4 th -6 th October 2001	Britain (Wales)	South Stack, Anglesey	*(British Ornithologists' Union 2003; Croft 2001, 2004; Rogers & Rarities Committee 2002, 2005)
15-16 th December 2006	Belgium	Kallo, Oost-Vlaanderen	*(Symens & Spanoghe 2007; Vandegehuchte & BAHC 2008)
10 th October 2010	Azores	Lagoa Funda das Lajes, Flores	**(Robb <i>et al.</i> , 2022)
7 th October 2010	Azores	Ponta da Fajã, Flores	*(Gantlett, 2011)
12 th October 2010	Azores	Lagoa Funda, Flores	*(Gantlett, 2011)
18 th October 2011	Azores	Ponta da Fajã, Flores	*(Gantlett, 2012)
15 th -29 th October 2018	Britain (England)	Trevescan, Land's End, Cornwall	**(Holt <i>et al.</i> , 2019)
26 th October 2023	Azores	Corvo	*** (Peter Alfrey, 2023)

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