

NSW ORAC CASES DECIDED IN 2018

677	Pied Heron	Macquarie Marshes	Jan – Feb, 2017	Accepted
678	Pied Heron	Lowbidgee Wetlands	Jan – Mar, 2017	Accepted
679	Little Curlew	Hexham Swamp	September 29, 2017	Accepted
680	Soft-plumaged Petrel	off Port Stephens	October 15, 2017	Accepted
681	Pale-vented Bush-hen	near Beechwood	November 21, 2017	Accepted
683	Salvin's Albatross	off Kiama	October 9, 2017	Not Accepted
684	Mottled Petrel	off Port Stephens	November 12, 2017	Accepted
685	Little Shearwater	off Port Stephens	November 12, 2017	Accepted
686	Common Gull-billed Tern	Shoalhaven Heads	November 4, 2017	Accepted
687	Common Gull-billed Tern	Stockton Sandspit	December 30, 2017	Accepted
688	Shining Flycatcher	Cobaki Broadwater	September 11, 2017	Accepted
689	Little Shearwater	Mistral Point	January 15, 2018	Not Accepted
690	Black-winged Petrel	off Crowdy Head	January 19, 2018	Accepted
691	Common Gull-billed Tern	Micalo Island, Yamba	February 14, 2018	Accepted
692	Southern Royal Albatross	off Port Macquarie	March 7, 2018	Accepted
693	Red-footed Booby	Port Macquarie	May 13, 2018	Accepted
694	Grey-headed Albatross	beachcast Terrigal	May 17, 2000	Accepted
695	Soft-plumaged Petrel	off Lord Howe Island	May 17, 2018	Accepted
696	Grey Falcon	Wyndham	May 20, 2018	Not Accepted
697	Grey-headed Albatross	off Kiama	May 26, 2018	Accepted
698	Grey-backed Storm Petrel	off Kiama	April 28, 2018	Accepted
699	Little Shearwater	beachcast Ulladulla	June 21, 2018	Not Accepted
700	Sooty Albatross	off Lord Howe Island	June 23, 2018	Accepted
701	Salvin's Albatross	off Lord Howe Island	June 23, 2018	Accepted
702	Grey-backed Storm Petrel	off Kiama	June 23, 2018	Accepted
703	Cook's Petrel	off Kiama	October 28, 2017	Accepted

704	Cook's Petrel	off Kiama	January 6, 2018	Accepted
705	Orange Chat	Tuggerah Salt Marsh	October 13, 2018	Accepted
706	Common Gull-billed Tern	Stockton Beach	August 10, 2018	Accepted

OVERVIEW

NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (NSW ORAC) reviewed a total of 29 cases in calendar year 2018, the highest number of cases to be reviewed in a calendar year since the inception of NSW ORAC in 1987. Of the 29 cases, 25 were accepted and 4 were not accepted by the committee. The highlights of the records reviewed in 2018 were Cases 677 and 678 which document multiple breeding records of Pied Heron in NSW. Case 677 details breeding records in P Block, Macquarie Marshes Nature Reserve in February 2011 and in January/February 2017. Case 678 details breeding records of Pied Herons at Steam Engine Swamp, North Redbank and Two Bridges Swamp, Yanga NP in early 2017. All of these records were painstakingly documented by Jennifer Spencer and they add significantly to our understanding of the status of this species in NSW.

The Pale-vented Bush-hen record is a significant southwards extension to the known range of the species in NSW although there are historical reports from Coffs Harbour and Grassy Head which have not been reviewed by NSW ORAC.

Of the many seabird records, the most notable was the sighting of a Sooty Albatross near Ball's Pyramid, Lord Howe Island – only the second record for NSW for this century, the previous one being a bird seen off Jervis Bay in July 2009.

CASE SUMMARIES

Case 677: This case details the sighting of adult and juvenile Pied Herons *Egretta picata* on P Block, Macquarie Marshes Nature Reserve, 100km north of Warren and 30km west of Quambone on January 17, 2017 and February 14, 2017. On the first occasion, 27 Pied Herons (18 adults and 9 juveniles) were recorded and, on the second occasion, 7 Pied Herons (4 adults and 3 juveniles) were recorded indicating a highly significant breeding event for this species in NSW. The submission also provides details of a breeding event at the same location involving the sighting of 10 adult Pied Herons and six active nests on February 14, 2011. There has been only one other documented breeding record for this species in NSW, also in February/March 2017, near Condobolin (NSW ORAC Case 672). Jennifer Spencer

Case 678: This case details several sightings of adult, juvenile and fledgling Pied Herons *Egretta picata* at Steam Engine Swamp, North Redbank 20km north of Balranald and at Two Bridges Swamp, Yanga National Park 30km north of Balranald. These sightings are summarised as follows:

- At Steam Engine Swamp on January 31, 2017, 2 adult birds, 1 juvenile foraging and 4 fledglings in a nest were observed and, on March 3, 2017, the same observers at the same location recorded 2 adult birds.

- At Two Bridges Swamp on January 5, 2017, one adult Pied Heron which was thought to be attending a nest but not confirmed was recorded.

The observer lists additional historical sightings of Pied Herons at Yanga National Park during 2016-17 wetland surveys and at Two Bridges Swamp on December 12, 2016, January 30, 2017 and February 14, 2017. Further historical records of sightings at Two Bridges Swamp in February 2011 and Murrundi Swamp, North Redbank in February 2011 were also detailed.

The committee voted unanimously to accept all of the sightings described and photographed in Cases 677 and 678 and commended Jennifer for taking the time to prepare these very detailed submissions. Jennifer Spencer

Case 679: Three Little Curlews *Numenius minutus* were seen at Hexham Swamp on September 29, 2017. The description and diagnostic photographs left no doubt as to the identity of the birds and the committee voted unanimously to accept the record. It becomes the fifty second confirmed record for Little Curlew in NSW. Alex Berryman and Mick Roderick

Case 680: A Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis* was well observed and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Port Stephens on October 15, 2017. The bird remained around the boat for about 5 or 10 minutes and the description and good quality photographs allowed the committee to vote unanimously to accept the record. It becomes the 12th confirmed record for Soft-plumaged Petrel in NSW and the first since a sighting off Eden in September 2014. Mick Roderick and Alex Berryman

Case 681: A Pale-vented Bush-hen *Amaurornis moluccana* was heard calling and subsequently seen and photographed on a property at Lower Pappinbarra from November 21, 2017 until at least January 10, 2018. Although this species is not on the NSW ORAC Review List, the location of the sighting is some 300kms south of its known distribution and the committee decided that such an important report should be appraised. The sound recordings and the subsequent photographs obtained left no doubt as to the identification and the committee voted unanimously to accept the record. Ian Kerr

Case 683: A claimed Salvin's Albatross *Thalassarche salvini* was seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Kiama on October 9, 2017. Several committee members pointed out that this bird was in fact a recently fledged Shy (White-capped) Albatross *Thalassarche cauta steadi* which regularly occur off the east coast of Australia after leaving their New Zealand breeding grounds in July/August where misidentification sometimes occurs due to the dark grey head of the juvenile bird. Features which showed this bird to be a White-capped Albatross included the white underwing extending into the outer primaries, the neat leading black edge to the underwing, and the whitening of the face due to feather wear and bleaching. The committee therefore voted not to accept this report.

Case 684: A total of twelve Mottled Petrels *Pterodroma inexpectata* were sighted and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Port Stephens on November 12, 2017 and, the following day, a further seven birds were seen on a follow up trip at the same location. In keeping with historic multiple Mottled Petrel sightings on migration that have been reviewed by the committee, these sightings have been treated as a single case. The high quality photographs and detailed description left no doubt as to the identification of these birds and the committee voted unanimously for acceptance. These sightings constitute the 21st confirmed record of Mottled Petrel in NSW and the first since multiple sightings off Eden in October 2011. Mick Roderick

Case 685: A Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis* was seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Port Stephens on November 12, 2017. The combination of small size, completely white underwings, rapid flight, white saddlebags, white undertail coverts and pale face extending well above the eye confirmed the identification. The lack of any dark feathering below the eye eliminated the unlikely possibility of Subantarctic Shearwater and the committee unanimously accepted the record. This is the sixth confirmed record for NSW since the species was added to the NSW ORAC Review List in 2011. Mick Roderick and Alex Berryman

Case 686: A Common Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica affinis* was seen and photographed at Shoalhaven Heads on November 4, 2017. Although this taxon is treated as a subspecies by the IOC, Birdlife taxonomy treats it as a distinct species and it was added to the NSW ORAC Review List in January 2018 due to the possibility of IOC giving it species status in the future. The description and photographs clearly demonstrated the diagnostic features of Common Gull-billed Tern and the committee accepted the record unanimously. It becomes the first record to be confirmed by NSW ORAC since being added to the Review List, although there was an unconfirmed report of this taxon in NSW about 20 years ago. Demetrios Bertzeletos

Case 687: A Common Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica affinis* was seen and photographed at Stockton Sandspit on December 30, 2017. Although this taxon is treated as a subspecies by the IOC, Birdlife taxonomy treats it as a distinct species and it was added to the NSW ORAC Review List in January 2018 due to the possibility of IOC giving it species status in the future. The description and photographs clearly demonstrated the diagnostic features of Common Gull-billed Tern and the committee accepted the record unanimously. It becomes the 2nd record to be confirmed by NSW ORAC since being added to the Review List. Ann Lindsey

Case 688: A pair of Shining Flycatchers *Miagra alecto* were seen and photographed on Cobaki Broadwater, Tweed Heads on September 11, 2017. The birds well seen by experienced observers and the photographs confirmed the identification. The committee voted unanimously to accept this sighting which becomes the 4th confirmed record in NSW, all from the Cobaki Broadwater. Kathy Wilk

Case 689: A claimed Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis* was seen during a land based seawatch at Mistral Point, Maroubra on January 15, 2018. The submission illustrated the difficulty of assessing seabird sightings from shore when the bird is at some distance, in this case 500 to 1000 meters range, and only very poor quality photographs can be obtained. The description provided relied heavily on the pale underwing as a diagnostic feature and several members felt that this was insufficient evidence for acceptance. Despite the experience of the observers, the committee voted not to accept this report.

Case 690: A Black-winged Petrel *Pterodroma nigripennis* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip off Crowdy Head on January 19, 2018. The high quality photographs and detailed description left no doubt as to the identification of this bird and the committee voted unanimously for acceptance. This is the first confirmed record of Black-winged Petrel since the species was reinstated to the NSW ORAC Review list in January 2018 and is the fourth reported sighting off the NSW coast since 2000. Mick Roderick

Case 691: Two Common Gull-billed Terns *Gelochelidon nilotica affinis* were well seen and photographed at Micalo Island near Yamba on February 14, 2018. Although this taxon is treated as a subspecies by the IOC, Birdlife taxonomy treats it as a distinct species and it was added to the NSW ORAC Review List in January 2018 due to the possibility of IOC giving it species status in the future. The description and photographs clearly demonstrated the diagnostic features of Common Gull-billed Tern and the committee accepted the record unanimously. It becomes the 3rd record to be confirmed by NSW ORAC since being added to the Review List. Greg Clancy

Case 692: An adult Southern Royal Albatross *Diomedea epomophora* was seen from a cruise liner about 20km off Port Macquarie on March 7, 2018. No photographs were taken but the experienced observers made a good case for identification based primarily on the distinctive upperwing pattern. Although one member of the committee felt that this was insufficient evidence, the remainder voted in favour and the record was accepted by majority. It becomes the 4th confirmed record to be accepted by NSW ORAC but there are probably other valid sightings of this species to have been reported in NSW since 1969. George Madani

Case 693: An immature Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* was seen and photographed from shore at Tacking Point, Port Macquarie on May 13, 2018 during a major feeding event involving large numbers of dolphins, gannets, terns, gulls and shearwaters. With the bird approaching to within 150 metres, excellent photographs were obtained clearly showing the bird to be an immature Red-footed Booby. The committee accepted the record unanimously and it becomes the 14th confirmed record for NSW. Liam Murphy

Case 694: A beachcast, banded Grey-headed Albatross *Thalassarche chrysostoma* was recovered on Walker's Beach, Terrigal on May 17, 2000. Subsequent enquiries revealed that the bird had been banded as a nestling at Bull Rock, Campbell Island, New Zealand on April 25, 1971 making it the second oldest Grey-headed Albatross recovery on record at 29 years and 22 days. This record came to the attention of NSW ORAC courtesy of David Drynan, Senior Project Officer at the Australian Bird & Bat Banding Scheme in Canberra. It is the 32nd known record of this species in NSW although there may be some previous sightings which were not subject to review. David Drynan

Case 695: A Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis* was well observed and photographed some 6NM north of Lord Howe Island on May 17, 2018. The bird remained around the boat for about 15 minutes and the good quality photographs allowed the committee to vote unanimously to accept the record. It becomes the 13th confirmed record for Soft-plumaged Petrel in NSW and the first record from Lord Howe Island to come before NSW ORAC. Jack Shick

Case 696: A claimed Grey Falcon *Falco hypoleucos* was seen on three occasions between early April and mid May 2018 on a property in the Jones Creek Valley, Wyndham about 25kms northwest of Eden. Although this species is not on the NSW ORAC Review List, there have been no authenticated

records of Grey Falcon in far south coastal NSW and the committee decided to review the sighting. Unfortunately, the submission contained very little detail of field marks that would have been diagnostic of Grey Falcon and there were no photographs of the bird. There were therefore insufficient grounds to accept this sighting and the committee voted unanimously in favour of non acceptance.

Case 697: A juvenile Grey-headed Albatross *Thalassarche chrysostoma* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip off Kiama on May 26, 2018. The high quality submission covering all diagnostic features along with excellent photographs left no doubt as to the identification of this bird and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. It is the 33rd known record of this species in NSW but, with the species removed from the Review List for a number of years, it is difficult to be certain of the exact number of valid records. Graham Barwell, Brook Whyllie and Lindsay Smith

Case 698: A Grey-backed Storm Petrel *Garrodia nereis* was well observed and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Kiama on April 28, 2018. The bird remained around the boat for about 10 minutes and the description and good quality photographs allowed the committee to vote unanimously to accept the record. It becomes the 14th confirmed record for Grey-backed Storm Petrel in NSW although it should be noted that the committee is now only reviewing reports from locations north of Ulladulla. Jodi Webber

Case 699: A claimed beach cast specimen of Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis* was found and photographed at Racecourse Beach, Ulladulla on June 21, 2018. The remains of the bird had been so heavily scavenged that only the wings survived and the submission relied heavily on the wing size and colour to support the claimed identification. Some members felt that this evidence was enough for acceptance but several others pointed out that Subantarctic Shearwater could not be eliminated in the absence of a head and that even a prion species could not be completely ruled out. The committee voted by majority not to accept this report but at the same time acknowledging that Little Shearwater was the most likely identification.

Case 700: A Sooty Albatross *Phoebastria fusca* was well observed and photographed some 3NM north east of Ball's Pyramid, Lord Howe Island on June 23, 2018. The bird remained around the boat for about 30 minutes and the excellent photographs supplied with the submission allowed the committee to vote unanimously to accept what is believed to be a first record for Lord Howe Island. It becomes the 19th confirmed record for Sooty Albatross in NSW and only the second record this century. Jack Shick

Case 701: An adult Salvin's Albatross *Thalassarche salvini* was well observed and photographed some 3NM north east of Ball's Pyramid, Lord Howe Island on June 23, 2018. The bird remained around the boat for about 40 minutes and the excellent photographs supplied with the submission allowed the committee to vote unanimously to accept what is believed to be a first record for Lord Howe Island. It becomes the 5th confirmed record for Salvin's Albatross in NSW. Jack Shick

Case 702: An adult Grey-backed Storm Petrel *Garrodia nereis* was well observed and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Kiama on April 28, 2018. The bird remained around the boat for about 3 minutes and the submission complete with weather map, tracking map, and careful elimination of other storm petrel species allowed the committee to vote unanimously to accept the record. It

becomes the 15th confirmed record for Grey-backed Storm Petrel in NSW although it should be noted that the committee is now only reviewing reports from locations north of Ulladulla. Graham Barwell, Brook Whyllie and Lindsay Smith

Case 703: A Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookii* was well observed and photographed on a pelagic trip off Kiama on October 28, 2017. The high quality photographs allowed the submitter to rule out all confusion species including the very similar Pycroft's Petrel thereby allowing the committee to vote unanimously in favour of acceptance. This is the first submission of a Cook's Petrel to NSW ORAC since the species was removed from the BARC Review List and added to the NSW ORAC Review List on July 17, 2018. BARC have accepted two records off Port Stephens in 2016 and 2017 (BARC Cases 965 and 984) and this sighting becomes the 16th accepted record for NSW. Graham Barwell

Case 704: A Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookii* was well observed and photographed on a pelagic trip off Kiama on January 6, 2018. The high quality photographs allowed the submitter to rule out all confusion species including the very similar Pycroft's Petrel thereby allowing the committee to vote unanimously in favour of acceptance. This is the second submission of a Cook's Petrel to NSW ORAC since the species was removed from the BARC Review List and added to the NSW ORAC Review List on July 17, 2018 and it becomes the 17th accepted record for NSW. Graham Barwell

Case 705: A female Orange Chat *Epthianura aurifrons* was seen and photographed at the Tuggerah Bay Saltmarsh, Tuggerah from October 8, 2018 until it was last seen on October 13, 2018. Although this species is not on the NSW ORAC Review List, it was considered that such an unusual coastal record as this was worth assessing. Many observers saw the bird during its stay in Tuggerah and the photographs allowed the committee to unanimously accept the record. Graham Nelson

Case 706: A Common Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica affinis* was seen and photographed at Stockton Beach, north of Newcastle on August 10, 2018. Although this taxon is treated as a subspecies by the IOC, Birdlife taxonomy treats it as a distinct species and it was added to the NSW ORAC Review List in January 2018 due to the possibility of IOC giving it species status in the future. The description and photographs clearly demonstrated the diagnostic features of Common Gull-billed Tern and the committee accepted the record unanimously. It becomes the 4th record to be confirmed by NSW ORAC since being added to the Review List in January 2018. Ann Lindsey

UNCONFIRMED REPORTS

With an increasing number of reports of unusual or rare species being posted onto on-line and social media sites, NSW ORAC is concerned that some of these reports do not receive the level of scrutiny required to verify them as confirmed records. It was agreed by the committee members that NSW ORAC would attempt to gather more information from the authors of postings of rare or out-of-range species in the form of photographs and/or a submission. If, at the time of publishing this year-end summary, there were reports for which submissions had not been made to NSW ORAC or BARC for species on their Review Lists, NSW ORAC would publish the report as an unconfirmed sighting to clarify that it had not yet undergone a review by the relevant rarities committee. There are nine such reports which have been published on eBird, Eremaea and/or Facebook sites in 2018, and they are listed below.

Elegant Parrot was reported at Fowlers Gap on April 14, 2018

South Polar Skua was reported offshore from South West Rocks on August 30, 2018

Little Shearwater was reported at Mistral Point, Maroubra on January 3, 2018

Red-backed Buttonquail was reported at Kingscliff on October 1, 2018

South Polar Skua was reported from Mistral Point, Maroubra on October 6, 2018

Red-backed Buttonquail was reported from Somersby West on November 24, 2018

Buff-breasted Sandpiper was reported from Jerseyville on November 25, 2018 (BARC submission required)

Little Stint was reported from Farquhar Inlet, Old Bar on December 1, 2018

Letter-winged Kite was reported from Swamp Road, Kiama Downs on February 3, 2018. Although this species is not on the NSW ORAC Review list, this report is far out of the species' normal range and would need acceptance by NSW ORAC to verify it as a record.

Roger McGovern

Secretary NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee

January 26, 2019