

### NSW ORAC CASES DECIDED IN 2020

728	Little Shearwater	Cape Solander	June 22, 2019	Not Accepted
732	Cook's Petrel	off Sydney	October 12, 2019	Accepted
733	Cook's Petrel	off Sydney	October 16, 2019	Accepted
734	Fairy Tern	Boat Harbour, Sydney	November 12, 2019	Accepted
735	Torresian Imperial Pigeon	Coff's Harbour	November 3, 2019	Accepted
736	Little Curlew	Oran Park, Camden	November 9, 2019	Accepted
737	Soft-plumaged Petrel	off Sydney	June 8, 2019	Accepted
738	Southern Royal Albatross	off Wollongong	May 27, 2006	Accepted
739	Blue Petrel	North Wollongong	July 5, 2019	Accepted
740	Black-winged Petrel	off Crowdy Head	November 17, 2019	Accepted
747	Bulwer's Petrel	off Point Danger	December 15, 2019	Accepted
748	Black-naped Tern	Sandon River	January 20, 2020	Accepted
749	Black-winged Petrel	off Kiama	December 28, 2019	Accepted
750	Black-naped Tern	South West Rocks	February 7, 2020	Accepted
751	Bulwer's Petrel	145NM e of Sydney	March 8, 2020	Accepted
752	Little Shearwater	Crowdy Head	February 28, 2020	Not Accepted
753	Roseate Tern	Farquhar Inlet	January 5, 2020	Accepted
754	Bulwer's Petrel	Camden Head	February 10, 2020	Accepted
755	Bulwer's Petrel	Mistral Point	January 29, 2020	Accepted
756	Mottled Petrel	off Kiama	January 26, 2019	Accepted
765	Swift Parrot	Lord Howe Island	May 23, 2020	Accepted
766	Cook's Petrel	Narrabeen Lagoon	December 24, 2019	Accepted
767	Cook's Petrel	Boat Harbour	February 16, 2020	Accepted
768	Bulwer's Petrel	Cronulla RSL Club	January 28, 2020	Accepted

## OVERVIEW

NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (NSW ORAC) reviewed a total of 23 cases in calendar year 2020 with 21 cases being accepted and two which were not accepted. The most notable event of the cases to come before the committee in 2019 was the remarkable influx of Bulwer's Petrels, a species not previously recorded in NSW. Between December 15, 2019 and March 8, 2020, there were five occurrences of Bulwer's Petrels, all of which were reviewed and accepted by the committee. Considering that NSW went into lockdown in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and pelagic boat trips ceased to operate from that date for several months, the full extent of the influx of Bulwer's Petrels at that time can only be a matter of conjecture.

The Blue Petrel off Wollongong (Case 739) was the first accepted record for NSW since September 2014 and the Black-naped Tern at Sandon River (Case 748) became the second confirmed record to come before NSW ORAC. With another sighting of a Black-naped Tern at South West Rocks (Case 750) less than three weeks later, some committee members questioned whether it may have been the same individual. The Roseate Tern seen at Farquhar Inlet (Case 753) was the first record for this species to come before NSW ORAC since April, 2000.

## CASE SUMMARIES

**Case 728:** A claimed Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis* was seen during a seawatch from Cape Solander on June 22, 2019. The bird was watched for approximately two minutes down to a minimum range of about 150 metres using binoculars but not telescopes. The bird was well seen and described in a very detailed fashion by the two observers. They demonstrated convincingly that the bird was in the Little Shearwater complex but, since the facial pattern could not be determined, Subantarctic Shearwater could not be eliminated as a possibility and the committee was unable to accept the sighting as a Little Shearwater. There have been a substantial number of sightings of birds in the Little Shearwater complex which have not been accepted for the same reason as this bird. There is an overwhelming probability that all of these birds were Little Shearwaters of the race *assimilis* which breeds on Lord Howe Island and, if this were the case, then Little Shearwater would not meet the criteria for remaining on the Review List. The committee decided therefore to remove Little Shearwater from the next revision of the Review List with the proviso that, if any individuals with dark faces are seen, they should be submitted to BARC for review.

**Case 732:** A Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookii* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Sydney on October 12, 2019. The excellent photographs together with a good detailed description allowed the identification to be confirmed and the possibility of Pycroft's Petrel to be eliminated. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the 19<sup>th</sup> accepted record for NSW. Greg McLachlan and David Mitford

**Case 733:** A Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookii* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Sydney on October 16, 2019. Although the bird was in view for less than two minutes, the excellent

photographs together with a good detailed description allowed the identification to be confirmed and the possibility of Pycroft's Petrel to be eliminated. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the 20<sup>th</sup> accepted record for NSW. Corey Callaghan

**Case 734:** A Fairy Tern *Sternula nereis* was well seen and photographed on a rock shelf at Boat Harbour on November 12, 2019. The excellent description and diagnostic photographs left no doubt as to the identification and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. Some committee members considered that the black bill tip of this bird indicated that it was from the *ssp exsul* which breeds in New Caledonia whereas others believe that black-tipped birds can occur in the breeding populations in the south of the state. It becomes the third confirmed record to come before NSW ORAC but there have been several unreviewed reports of this species in Botany Bay in recent years. Chris Rehberg

**Case 735:** A Torresian Imperial Pigeon *Ducula spilorrhoe* was well seen and photographed at Coff's Harbour Cemetery adjacent to the botanical gardens on November 3, 2019. The diagnostic photograph clearly confirmed the identification and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. It becomes the 11<sup>th</sup> confirmed record for NSW and the first since NSW ORAC Case 656 which involved a bird seen at Palm Beach on June 10, 2016. Terry Evans

**Case 736:** Four Little Curlew *Numenius minutus* were discovered on a property at Oran Park on November 9, 2019 and continued there until at least November 12, 2019. The submission included some stunning photographs of the birds which left no doubt as to the identification. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the 53<sup>rd</sup> confirmed record of Little Curlew in NSW and the first since 2017. David Davidson

**Case 737:** A Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis* was seen briefly on a pelagic trip out of Sydney some 5NM ESE of Sydney Heads on June 8, 2019. Although the bird was not well seen, some diagnostic photographs were obtained which clearly confirmed the identification. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the 13<sup>th</sup> confirmed record for NSW. Greg McLachlan

**Case 738:** A Southern Royal Albatross *Diomedea epomophora* was captured and banded on a pelagic trip out of Wollongong on May 27, 2006. The bird was recorded as a Northern Royal Albatross at that time but Paul Walbridge, who was on that pelagic trip, was re-examining his photographs from the trip and realised that the bird was, in fact, a Southern Royal Albatross. In a meticulous analysis of field measurements and photographs, the identification was confirmed to the unanimous acceptance by the committee. This is the 5<sup>th</sup> record to be accepted by NSW ORAC but there are certainly several other valid sightings in NSW of this species in the past 50 years which have not undergone appraisal by the committee. Paul Walbridge

**Case 739:** A Blue Petrel *Halobaena caerulea* was found alive in the front garden of the Police Citizens Youth Club in North Wollongong on July 9, 2019. The bird was passed on to SOSSA but died shortly afterwards. A detailed description was provided along with several diagnostic photographs and the committee voted unanimously to accept the record. It becomes the 27<sup>th</sup> confirmed record for NSW and the first since a bird was seen off Wollongong in September 2014. Vincent Mourik and Lindsay Smith

**Case 740:** A Black-winged Petrel *Pterodroma nigripennis* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Crowdy Head on November 17, 2019. Although the description was quite brief, the excellent diagnostic photographs left no doubt as to the identification and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. This is the second case to come before NSW ORAC since the species was reinstated onto the Review List in January 2018. There have been only four reports of Black-winged Petrel off the NSW coast since 2000 and this is the first record to be accepted since January 2018, also off Crowdy Head. Jodi Webber

**Case 747:** A Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Southport on December 15, 2019. The bird was seen at 28 09.82S/154 00.48E just south of Point Danger and some 28NM from the coast and was therefore in NSW waters. A very thorough submission along with high quality diagnostic photographs left no doubt as to the identification and the committee accepted the record unanimously. Although Bulwer's Petrel has previously been recorded in Queensland waters, this was a first sighting for NSW and is a very significant event. It proved to be the start of an irruption of the species in NSW waters with four more accepted records occurring in the subsequent three months. Paul Walbridge

**Case 748:** A Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana* was seen at the mouth of the Sandon River, south of Broom's Head, on January 20, 2020. The bird was observed at a range of 50 – 70 metres for a period of 20 minutes and a series of good quality diagnostic photographs were obtained leaving no doubt as to the identification. The committee voted unanimously for acceptance and it becomes the first record of this species to be accepted by NSW ORAC. However, there have been other reports which have not come before the committee including one from Fingal Beach in February 1984, one from Lord Howe Island in April 1989, one from Jerusalem Creek in November/December 2010 and one on the Richmond River in Ballina in July 2015. Harry Hines

**Case 749:** A Black-winged Petrel *Pterodroma nigripennis* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Kiama on December 28, 2019. The thorough description and diagnostic photographs left no doubt as to the identification and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. This is the third case to come before the committee since the species was reinstated onto the Review List in January 2018 and the fifth report since 2000. Graham Barwell

**Case 750:** A Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana* was seen on a small beach at the end of a breakwater at Laggery Point, Arakoon, South West Rocks on February 7, 2020. The bird was seen down to a range of 30 metres and some good high quality photographs were obtained which left no doubt as to the identification. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the second record of this species to be accepted by NSW ORAC. With the first record occurring at Broom's Head only 18 days earlier (NSW ORAC Case 748) there is speculation that a single individual may have been involved. Ian Bradshaw

**Case 751:** A Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* was sighted on a pelagic voyage in the Tasman Sea approximately 145NM from the coast and at a position due east of Cronulla on March 8, 2020. The description provided clearly describes the characteristics of Bulwer's Petrel and eliminates confusion with Jouanin's Petrel or any of the dark storm petrels. Although the photographs supplied are not of a high quality, they clearly show the bird to be a Bulwer's Petrel based on size, long narrow crooked wings, long graduated tail, slender bill and pale carpal bar. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the second confirmed record for NSW. Steve Howell

**Case 752:** This case involved the claimed sighting of two Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis* during a seawatch from Crowdy Head on February 28, 2020. This was a difficult case for the committee to assess and, although the birds may well have been Little Shearwaters, four members voted for non acceptance. These members were concerned that a strong enough case had not been made to support the identification, as the species is notoriously difficult to identify from land based sea watches – the minimum range in this case being 200 metres. With no Fluttering or Hutton’s Shearwaters being recorded at the time, the statement that the wingspan was 2/3 of a Wedge-tailed Shearwater wingspan could indicate that that the size was a better match for Fluttering or Hutton’s Shearwater. The underwing pattern is a crucial element in the identification of Little Shearwater and this feature was not addressed in the submission. Although Subantarctic Shearwater is extremely unlikely to occur off the NSW coast, the submission did not satisfactorily eliminate this possibility.

**Case 753:** A Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii gracilis* was seen and photographed at Farquhar Inlet, Old Bar on January 5, 2020 and was subsequently seen by many other observers until January 9, 2020. The detailed submission and superb photographs left no doubt that this was a Roseate Tern of the Australian breeding population *ssp gracilis*. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes only the 3<sup>rd</sup> record of this species to be accepted by NSW ORAC and the first since April 2, 2000 (NSW ORAC Case 312). It should be noted that there were three well documented records of Roseate Tern in the period 1973 – 1980 prior to the formation of NSW ORAC and so this becomes the 6<sup>th</sup> confirmed record for NSW. Liam Murphy

**Case 754:** A Bulwer’s Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* which came ashore at Camden Head on February 10, 2020 was taken into care overnight by Peter West and released the next morning at Point Perpendicular. A video was taken of the bird at the time of release showing it flying strongly out to sea. The description provided together with measurements and photographs provided convincing evidence that this was indeed a Bulwer’s Petrel and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. It was interesting to note that this bird did not show an obvious carpal bar as it flew away upon release unlike the individuals involved in Cases 747 and 751. It becomes the 3<sup>rd</sup> accepted record for the species in NSW. Peter West

**Case 755:** A Bulwer’s Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* was seen on a shore-based seawatch at Mistral Point, Maroubra by Simon Gorta, Robert Griffin and David Mitford on January 29, 2020. Unlike the other Bulwer’s Petrel reports in NSW during this period, this report did not include any photographs and that fact, together with the minimum range at which the bird was observed (800 metres), made this a more difficult case for the committee to assess. However, the extremely detailed analysis of structure, size and flight pattern convinced all but one of the committee that the bird was indeed a Bulwer’s Petrel. The dissenting member expressed doubt about the size comparison with Jouanin’s Petrel at that range, the fact that no carpal bar could be seen by the observers, and whether the flight patterns of Bulwer’s and Jouanin’s Petrel can be as readily separated as claimed by the observers. The committee voted by majority in favour of acceptance and it becomes the 4<sup>th</sup> record of this species to be accepted by NSW ORAC. Simon Gorta

**Case 756:** A Mottled Petrel *Pterodroma inexpectata* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Kiama on January 26, 2019. The detailed and thorough description together with excellent diagnostic photographs left no doubt as to the identification and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. This is the 23<sup>rd</sup> confirmed record of Mottled Petrel in NSW and several

committee members commented that January is an unusual date for Mottled Petrel in NSW waters.  
Brook Whyllie and Graham Barwell

**Case 765:** A Swift Parrot *Lathamus didcolor* was found visiting a chicken pen to feed on Lord Howe Island from May 23 until May 26, 2020. The bird was captured, transported to Taronga Zoo for rehabilitation and later released into the wild on the NSW mainland. Although Swift Parrot is not on the NSW ORAC Review List, the committee felt that this record was worthy of documenting due to the very long flight distances involved in this individual reaching Lord Howe Island whether directly from Tasmania or via the NSW coast. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes only the second record from Lord Howe Island, the first being in September 1968. Hank Bower, Simon Pahor, Cameron Kirkpatrick and Jessica Owens

**Case 766:** This remarkable report involves the discovery of the carcass of a recently dead Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookii* at Pipeclay Point, Narrabeen Lagoon, some 1.65kms from the nearest ocean shoreline, on December 24, 2019. The left wing of the specimen was severely damaged and there were puncture wounds to the body. The observer hypothesised that the bird may have been captured at sea by a White-bellied Sea Eagle, dropped by the eagle at Pipeclay Point and then subsequently chewed by a predatory animal. The specimen was extensively photographed and measured, and the plumage details and morphometrics clearly showed it to be a Cook's Petrel. The committee voted unanimously for acceptance and it becomes the 6<sup>th</sup> record to be accepted by NSW ORAC since it was added to the NSW ORAC Review List in July 2018 and the overall 21<sup>st</sup> accepted record for the state. Vincent Mourik

**Case 767:** A Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookii* was found alive but waterlogged and weakened in the water at the north east end of Cronulla Beach on February 16, 2020. The bird was taken into care but died the next day. The specimen was extensively photographed and measured, and the plumage details and morphometrics clearly showed it to be a Cook's Petrel. The committee voted unanimously for acceptance and it becomes the 7<sup>th</sup> record to be accepted by NSW ORAC since it was added to the NSW ORAC Review List in July 2018 and the overall 22<sup>nd</sup> accepted record for the state. Vincent Mourik

**Case 768:** A Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* which was discovered alive on the balcony of Cronulla RSL Club on January 28, 2020, was taken into care for two weeks by SOSSA and was then flown to Darwin where it was released at sea on February 14, 2020. The description provided, together with the photographs and morphometrics, clearly showed the bird to be a Bulwer's Petrel and convincingly ruled out the possibility of Jouanin's Petrel or any of the dark storm petrels. It is interesting to note that that the bird did not show a distinct carpal bar, a feature shared with some of the other Bulwer's Petrels recorded in NSW during this period. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the 5<sup>th</sup> record of this species to be accepted by NSW ORAC. Lindsay Smith, Vincent Mourik and Graham Barwell

## 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 species on the

NSW ORAC Review List 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 eight such reports which have been published on eBird, Eremaea and/or Facebook sites in 2018, and they are listed below.

Black-winged Petrel was reported from Cabbage Tree Island on December 9, 2020

Cook's Petrel was reported from the Sydney pelagic trip on November 8, 2020

Southern Fulmar was reported from Magic Point, Maroubra on June 8, 2020

Southern Fulmar was reported from Magic Point, Maroubra on June 11, 2020

Great Frigatebird was reported from Kingscliff on December 7, 2020

South Polar Skua was reported from Wattamolla, Royal NP on August 16, 2020

Roseate Tern was reported from Flat Rock, Ballina on December 21, 2020

South Island Oystercatcher was reported from Anna Bay on November 13, 2020

South Island Oystercatcher was reported from Woy Woy on November 22 and 29, 2020

Purple-crowned Lorikeet was reported from Gundagai on October 25, 2020

Purple-crowned Lorikeet was reported from Tocumwal on September 19, 2020

Pink Robin was reported from Katoomba on August 20, 2020

Roger McGovern

Secretary NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee

January 12, 2021