

NSW ORAC CASES DECIDED IN 2025

856	South Polar Skua	off Terrigal	March 23, 2024	Accepted
857E	Little Ringed Plover	Flat Rock, Ballina	July 29, 2024	Accepted
858E	Blue Petrel	off Port Stephens	July 7, 2024	Accepted
876E	Grey-backed Storm Petrel	off Kiama	October 26, 2024	Accepted
877	Bridled Tern	off Kiama	December 21, 2024	Accepted
879	Oriental Pratincole	Richmond Lowlands	December 26, 1987	Accepted
880	South Polar Skua	Lake Macquarie	March 28, 2020	Not Accepted
881	Bridled Tern	Port Macquarie	January 18, 2025	Accepted
882	Great Frigatebird	Lennox Head	January 16, 2025	Accepted
883	South Polar Skua	off Sydney	November 16, 2024	Accepted
884E	Southern Fulmar	off Sydney	June 15, 2024	Accepted
885	Bulwer's Petrel	off Evans Head	February 8, 2025	Accepted
887	Torresian Imperial Pigeon	SE of Grafton	January 20, 2025	Not Accepted
888	White-bellied Storm Petrel	off Yamba	February 22, 2025	Accepted
889E	B-b Paradise Kingfisher	Rosebery	December 28, 2024	Not Accepted
890E	Mottled Petrel	Tweed Canyons	November 24, 2024	Accepted
891	Great Frigatebird	Evans Head	March 9, 2025	Accepted
892E	Great Frigatebird	Fingal Headland	March 10, 2025	Accepted
897	Mottled Petrel	off Terrigal	November 15, 2024	Accepted
898E	Roseate Tern	Flat Rock, Ballina	April 22, 2025	Accepted
899	Soft-plumaged Petrel	off Port Macquarie	June 21, 2025	Accepted
900	Grey-headed Albatross	Booderee NP	June 4, 2025	Accepted
901	Squatter Pigeon	Tenterfield	August 2, 2025	Accepted
902	White Wagtail	Terrigal Haven	April 22, 2025	Accepted
903	Salvin's Albatross	off Sydney	August 31, 2025	Accepted

OVERVIEW

NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (NSW ORAC) reviewed a total of 25 cases in calendar year 2024 with 22 cases being accepted and three cases not being accepted. This represents an above-average year of activity for the committee and this level of activity is no doubt affected by the decision to review sightings reported on eBird and other social media platforms without any formal submission to NSW ORAC (there were eight such cases decided in 2025).

BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee (BARC) issued decisions on 12 cases pertaining to NSW all of which were accepted. There were two particularly notable decisions issued in 2025, the first relating to the discovery of a Northern Rockhopper Penguin at Broulee Beach on October 28, 2023 which became the first accepted record for NSW and only the sixth record for Australia. The other notable record was of a Green Sandpiper seen and photographed at Googong Dam near Yarrow on November 4, 2024 which became the first accepted record for NSW and only the second record for Australia.

NSW ORAC issued decisions on some noteworthy records in 2025. A Little Ringed Plover was photographed at Flat Rock, Ballina on July 29, 2024 and became the first accepted record of the species for NSW. An adult Squatter Pigeon was well seen and photographed near Mingoola Public School some 65kms west of Tenterfield on August 2, 2025 and became the second record to be accepted by NSW ORAC for NSW although there are two further credible records of the species in NSW that did not come before NSW ORAC. An adult White Wagtail of the subspecies *leucopsis* was well seen and photographed at Terrigal Haven on April 22, 2025 and became the third ever confirmed record for NSW. One of the most noteworthy cases to come before the committee in several years involved the discovery of a moribund Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher on a balcony in the Sydney suburb of Rosebery. There was no doubt as to the identification of the bird but, with the nearest occurrence of the species being more than 1000kms to the north, this would constitute an enormous known range extension and a majority of the committee voted against acceptance due to doubts about the bird's provenance.

After extensive consultation with eBird reviewers and within the ORAC committee in April 2024, NSW ORAC made the decision to review reportable species posted to eBird and on-line rarities forums in circumstances where no formal submission is made to ORAC and where the photographic images contained on the platform are adequate to clearly identify the species beyond doubt. The case numbers have the suffix "E" added to them and eight such cases were assessed by the committee in 2025.

CASE SUMMARIES

Case 856: An adult intermediate morph South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki* was well seen and photographed down to a range of 5 metres on a pelagic trip out of Terrigal on March 23, 2024. The excellent submission and photographs left no doubt as to the identification of a bird in heavy pre-basic moult which is typical of a bird that has finished breeding in the Antarctic and is on northward migration. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the

eighth record of South Polar Skua to come before NSW ORAC since pale and intermediate morph South Polar Skuas were removed from the BARC Review List in 2018. With there having been ten confirmed records prior to that date, this becomes the 18th confirmed record for NSW. Andrew Robinson and Dean Purcell

Case 857E: A Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* was well seen and photographed at Flat Rock, Ballina on July 29, 2024. The report was posted on eBird at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S189386415> and was assessed by NSW ORAC without a submission. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance based on the excellent diagnostic photographs and it becomes the first confirmed record of the species in NSW.

Case 858E: A Blue Petrel *Halobaena caerulea* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Port Stephens on July 7, 2024. The report was posted on eBird at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S185777989> and was assessed by NSW ORAC without a submission. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance based on the excellent diagnostic photographs and it becomes the 28th confirmed record for NSW and the first since a moribund bird was found in North Wollongong in July 2019 (NSW ORAC Case 739).

Case 876E: A Grey-backed Storm Petrel *Garrodia nereis* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Kiama on October 26, 2024. The report was posted on eBird at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S200563994> and was assessed by NSW ORAC without a submission. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance based on the excellent diagnostic photographs and it becomes the 16th confirmed record for NSW.

Case 877: An adult Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Kiama on December 21, 2024. All the diagnostic features which distinguish Bridled Tern from Sooty Tern could be seen in the photographs and the fact that the bird was sitting on a buoy is also diagnostic as Sooty Terns do not settle on floating objects. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and this sighting becomes the ninth confirmed record for NSW and the first to be accepted since a bird on the Richmond River South Wall in February 2016 (NSW ORAC Case 850E). James Bennett

Case 879: This historical sighting relates to six Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivorum* well seen at Bakers Lagoon, Richmond on December 26, 1987 with the birds remaining at the site until early February 1988. Although the birds were not photographed, the transcripts from the observer's field notes provide compelling evidence as to the identification. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it is believed to be the 18th confirmed record for NSW, although there have been only eight cases to come before NSW ORAC. David James

Case 880: This report relates to the claimed sighting of a South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki* which was seen and photographed down to a range of 40 metres from Redhead Beach, Lake Macquarie on March 28, 2020. The images provided with the submission were of very poor quality and the colour tones in the images appear to be desaturated making judgement of colour tones very difficult. Although this bird could have been a South Polar Skua, the field marks evident from the images and description were not, of themselves, adequate to identify this bird with certainty. All but one committee member found that it was not possible to accept this bird as a South Polar Skua and

the committee voted by majority not to accept the report but thanked the observer for an interesting submission.

Case 881: An adult Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus* was well seen and photographed on a land-based seawatch from Tacking Point Lighthouse, Port Macquarie on January 18, 2025. All the diagnostic features which distinguish Bridled Tern from Sooty Tern could be seen in the high quality photographs and the identification was backed up with an excellent description. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and this sighting becomes the tenth confirmed record for NSW. James Andrews

Case 882: Two adult female Great Frigatebirds *Fregata minor* were seen and photographed from the Coast road at Lennox Head on January 16, 2025. NSW ORAC committee member David James whois noted for his knowledge of frigatebird identification wrote the following in his appraisal of the case:

These are both adult female Great Frigatebirds. The black head and clean demarcation of black and white on the underparts indicate adult females. Features supporting Great are:

- The white ventral patch is saddle-shaped with a broad rounded black point intruding forward from the vent.
- No axillary spurs.
- Dusky grey throat (no black pointed bib).
- No white hind-collar.
- Diagonal demarcation line on the neck between the black upperparts and white underparts (which is a result of the pale throat and the absence of a white hind collar).

These birds are from the local South Pacific subspecies '*palmerstoni*', owing to the blue-grey orbital ring and bill. Adult females of all other subspecies have a red orbital ring.

The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and this sighting becomes the 9th record of Great Frigatebird to be accepted by NSW ORAC although there are a number of other records which occurred before the inception of NSW ORAC or were not submitted for appraisal. David Flumm

Case 883: An intermediate morph South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki* was well seen and photographed down to a range of 10metres on a pelagic trip out of Sydney on November 16, 2024. The excellent submission and photographs show a first cycle bird moulting to second cycle and probably about 10 months old. The fine white shaft streaks on the scapulars, light build compared to Brown Skua, grey plumage tones and short legs not reaching the tail tip are all diagnostic of South Polar Skua. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the ninth record of South Polar Skua to come before NSW ORAC since pale and intermediate morph South Polar Skuas were removed from the BARC Review List in 2018. With there having been ten confirmed records prior to that date, this becomes the 19th confirmed record for NSW. Greg McLachlan and Robert Hynson

Case 884E: A Southern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialisoides* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Sydney on June 15, 2024. The report was posted on eBird at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S200563994> and was assessed by NSW ORAC without a submission. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance based on the excellent diagnostic photographs and it becomes the 11th confirmed record of Southern Fulmar to be accepted by NSW

ORAC although there are a number of well substantiated sightings that have not come before the committee.

Case 885: A Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* was well seen, videoed and photographed while at sea east of Evans Head on February 8, 2025. The photographs and video were posted on eBird and the NSW Rare Bird Alert FB page and are totally diagnostic of Bulwer's Petrel. One committee member provided a detailed analysis of the state of the plumage and moult and concluded that it is likely that the bird originated from the Polynesian population rather than from the western North Pacific. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the 8th confirmed record for NSW. Jacob Crisp and Justin Crisp

Case 887: This report details the sighting of a claimed Torresian Imperial Pigeon *Ducula spilorrhoa* at Pillar Valley, south east of Grafton on January 20, 2025. The bird was seen in flight at a range of 60-70 metres and no photographic images were obtained. This was a difficult case to assess in that the observer is an experienced field naturalist and it is very possible that the bird was indeed a Torresian Imperial Pigeon. However, the brief and somewhat distant flight views did not allow the observer to note key identification features and all but one committee member felt that there was insufficient evidence to accept the record. The committee therefore voted on a majority basis for non-acceptance.

Case 888: A White-bellied Storm Petrel *Fregetta grallaria* was well seen and photographed at close range on a pelagic trip at the continental shelf east of Yamba on February 22, 2025. Although the submission contained very little discussion of the identification features, the photographs clearly showed all the points of difference to rule out confusion species, in particular, Black-bellied Storm Petrel. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance of this record and it becomes the second case to come before NSW ORAC since the species was removed from the BARC Review List in early 2023. Overall, it becomes the 14th record accepted for NSW apart from sightings from Lord Howe Island. Jacob Crisp

Case 889B: This intriguing report was posted on Facebook Bird Identification Group, Facebook NSW Rare Bird Alert and Birdline NSW and was assessed by NSW ORAC without receipt of a submission. A Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher *Tanysiptera sylvia* was discovered in poor condition on a balcony in the Sydney suburb of Rosebery and subsequently died in care overnight. In light of the fact that this species had never been recorded within 1000kms of Rosebery and would be a first record for NSW, the committee was asked to consider both the identification and the provenance of the bird. The committee voted unanimously in favour of the identification of the bird as being a Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher. However, the consideration of provenance proved far more difficult since the actual provenance of the bird will never be known or proven. Three members of the committee voted in favour of this being a naturally free-flying bird which had ventured off course or overshot during migration with two of those members providing extensive well-reasoned discussions as to why this may have been a naturally occurring bird. The remainder of the committee voted for non-acceptance based on the discovery site being very close to Sydney Airport and the Botany Container Terminal, the discovery date being very late in terms of the species' normal migration pattern and on the fact that acceptance of the record would constitute an enormous extension of the species known range which would require a high level of confidence in accepting natural provenance. The

committee therefore voted by majority against accepting this record with the vote coming down to each member's personal opinion with regard to the possible provenance.

Case 890E: A Mottled Petrel *Pterodroma inexpectata* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip to the Tweed Canyons on November 24, 2024. The report was posted on eBird at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S203417904> and was assessed by NSW ORAC without a submission. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance based on the excellent diagnostic photographs and it becomes the 27th confirmed record for NSW and the first since a bird was found beachcast at Wallabi Beach on January 7, 2024 (NSW ORAC Case 846)

Case 891: Two Great Frigatebirds *Fregata minor*, an adult male and an adult female were seen and photographed at the Razorback Lookout, Evans Head on March 9, 2025. Although the images are not of the best quality, they showed the key diagnostic features of Great Frigatebird well enough to satisfy the committee as to the identification. The committee voted by majority to accept this record with one dissenting member not being completely convinced due to the quality of the images. This sighting becomes the 10th record of Great Frigatebird to be accepted by NSW ORAC although there are a number of other records which occurred before the inception of NSW ORAC or were not submitted to NSW ORAC for appraisal. Jacob Crisp and Abbie McPherson

Case 892E: A juvenile Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor* was briefly seen and photographed from Fingal Headland on March 10, 2025. The report was posted on eBird at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S21763800000002> and was assessed by NSW ORAC without a submission. Although the images are not of the best quality, they show the key diagnostic features of a juvenile Great Frigatebird well enough to satisfy the committee as to the identification. The committee voted by majority to accept this record with one dissenting member not being completely convinced due to the quality of the images. This sighting becomes the 11th record of Great Frigatebird to be accepted by NSW ORAC although there are a number of other records which occurred before the inception of NSW ORAC or were not submitted to NSW ORAC for appraisal.

Case 897: A Mottled Petrel *Pterodroma inexpectata* was well seen on a pelagic trip out of Terrigal on November 15, 2024. Only one blurred image of the bird was obtained but it contained enough detail to satisfy the committee that the bird was indeed a Mottled Petrel even though no written description was provided in the submission. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the 28th confirmed record for NSW. Andrew Robinson, Guy Dutson and Andrew Walker

Case 898E: A non-breeding adult Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* was well seen and photographed at Flat Rock, Ballina on April 22, 2025. Three photographs were posted on Facebook and the report was assessed by NSW ORAC without a submission. All but one of the committee members felt that the key identification features were clearly shown and voted in favour of acceptance. The dissenting member felt that some of the features displayed by the bird were more diagnostic of White-fronted Tern than Roseate Tern. The committee voted by majority in favour of acceptance and it becomes the fifth record of the species to be accepted by NSW ORAC. However, there were three well documented records of the species in the period 1973-1980 prior to the formation of NSW ORAC and so this becomes the 8th confirmed record for NSW.

Case 899: A Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Port Macquarie on June 21, 2025. The bird was well seen down to a range of 10metres and several high quality diagnostic photographs were obtained. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance of this record and it becomes the 16th confirmed record of Soft-plumaged Petrel for NSW and the first since a sighting off Sydney on August 24, 2023 (NSW ORAC Case 832).
James Bennett

Case 900: This report details the discovery of a beach washed Grey-headed Albatross *Thalassarche chrysostoma* at Bherwerre Beach, Booderee NP on July 4, 2025. The photographs clearly show all the characteristics of a first cycle Grey-headed Albatross including the dark underwing, uniform grey head and a dark bill with slight yellowish edging on the under edge and part of the top edge. One member pointed out that the membranous naricorn shown in the photographs does not occur on Black-browed Albatross the most likely confusion species. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the about the 35th confirmed record for NSW since, with species removed from the Review List for a number of years, it is difficult to certain of the exact number of valid records. Martin Schulz

Case 901: An adult Squatter Pigeon *Geophaps scripta scripta* was well seen and photographed near Mingoola Public School some 65kms west of Tenterfield on August 2, 2025 and was resighted the following day by at least three more observers. The submission included three high quality photographs which left no doubt as to the identification of the bird and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. There have been very few records of the species in NSW and this one is only the second to be accepted by NSW ORAC with the previous record being a bird seen north of Ashford on May 13, 2006 (NSW ORAC Case 417).However, there are two other credible records of the species which did not come before NSW ORAC, one from Yetman in September 2001 and the other from just south of Texas in August 2019, making this record the fourth confirmed record for NSW. Hans Wohlmuth

Case 902: An adult White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* subspecies *leucopsis* in fresh alternate plumage was well seen and photographed at Terrigal Haven on April 22, 2025. The following morning, four observers relocated the bird and it was watched and photographed over a period of about eight minutes. The submission did not contain a detailed description but the high quality images contained in the submission left no doubt as to the identification. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes only the third confirmed record for NSW and the first since a bird seen at Newry Bar on December 4, 2013 (BARC Case 818/NSW ORAC Case 632) Amanda Ward-Collins, Andy Robinson, Guy Dutson and Dean Purcell

Case 903: A juvenile Salvin's Albatross *Thalassarche salvini* was well seen and photographed down to a range of 10 metres on a pelagic trip out of Sydney on August 31, 2025. The high quality images obtained clearly showed all of the critical identification features which distinguish this taxon from the similar juvenile White-capped Albatross which arrive in NSW waters from their New Zealand breeding grounds at this time of the year. In his assessment, David James summarised these features as follows:

- Extensive bleeding of the dark underwing margin at the leading edge of the outerwing owing to a mix of black and white in several rows of the lesser primary coverts (a broad fan of black on the primary coverts).

- Extensively grey hood with the hind and side of the neck darker than the head.
- Absence of pale cheeks, so the hindneck is concolorous with the back rather than the head.
- Faint grey smudge in the centre of the rump, which is shared with *eremita* but never *cauta* or *steadi* (D.W. Eades, pers. com.).
- Narrow smudgy grey tips to the lesser and median secondary coverts of the underwing.
- Narrow pale subterminal bands accentuating the black tips of each mandible.
- Quite an extensive amount of grey wash extending from the hood onto the flanks under the front of the wing.

The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the fifth record to be accepted by NSW ORAC since the species was added to the Review List. Emily Jenkins

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. NSW ORAC does now review some electronic reports without a formal submission but, normally, only when diagnostic photographic evidence is available. There is just one unconfirmed report which has been published on eBird, Eremaea and/or Facebook sites in 2025, and it is shown below.

Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross was reported from offshore Sydney on August 17, 2025

Roger McGovern

Secretary NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee

January 27, 2026