

Records Appraisal Committee annual report for 2016

Prepared for Birds New Zealand Council for consideration at the 2017 AGM

RAC membership

Current membership is

- Colin Miskelly (Convener)
- Andrew Crossland
- Ian Saville
- Ian Southey
- Alan Tennyson

Elizabeth (Biz) Bell is the RAC Secretary, and continues to provide timely and efficient administrative support to the committee and submitters.

The RAC respectfully acknowledges the passing of long-serving committee member Brian Bell in October 2016. Since stepping aside from the full committee in 2010, Brian served as a co-opted member of the committee, to provide independent assessment of Unusual Bird Reports (UBRs) submitted by RAC members. This occurred four times in 2016.

Paul Sagar has subsequently taken on this independent RAC advisor role, after serving on the RAC (and preceding Rare Birds Committee) since 1983. I thank Paul for his valuable service to the committee and the society over more than three decades, and look forward to working with him in his new role.

Ian Southey accepted an invitation to join the RAC in late October. Ian brings particular expertise in the identification of vagrant gulls, terns and waders based on close to four decades of active membership of the society based in South Auckland and Otago.

RAC processes

The online UBR reporting system on the OSNZ website is working well, and is the main source of UBRs received.

Receipt of UBRs is acknowledged promptly by the Secretary. Batches of UBRs are sent to the committee members every 2 months, and they then have 2 months to provide comment. All RAC members reliably kept within deadlines during 2016. Response letters were typically sent out 3-5 months after UBRs were received.

UBRs assessed in 2016

A total of 60 UBRs was received in 2016, and assessed between March 2016 and February 2017. Forty-two (70%) of these UBRs were accepted by the committee. Three new species were added to the New Zealand list: Herald petrel, red-footed booby and laughing gull.

UBR database

An online database of Unusual Bird Reports was launched at the June 2016 New Zealand Birds Conference in Napier (see: <http://rare.birds.org.nz/>).

This database provides almost immediate feedback on UBR submissions and decisions*, as well as a searchable database of all submissions and decisions dating

back to the 1960s. This includes hyperlinks to publications referring to individual UBRs, and to New Zealand Birds Online species pages.

The database, and the systems supporting it, appear to be working well.

*Updates to the database are made manually by the RAC Secretary or Convenor, and so there is typically a delay of a few days between a submission being received or decision being made, and this change appearing on the database. With decisions, this delay is deliberate, to allow time for submitters to receive their personal decision letters before the information is made public.

Publication of RAC decisions

A paper reporting on 139 RAC decisions from 2015-16 has been submitted to *Notornis*:

Miskelly, C.M.; Crossland, A.C.; Sagar, P.M.; Saville, I.; Tennyson, A.J.D.; Bell, E.A.
Submitted. Vagrant and extra-limital bird records accepted by the Birds New Zealand Records Appraisal Committee 2015-2016.

I thank Biz, Paul and my fellow committee members for their efficient support during 2016.

Colin Miskelly, Convener