

Records Appraisal Committee annual report for 2014

Prepared for OSNZ Council for consideration at the 2015 AGM

RAC membership

Current membership is

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

Elizabeth (Biz) Bell is the RAC Secretary, and continues to provide superb administrative support to the panel and submitters.

Brian Bell was co-opted to the panel to provide an additional independent assessment of Unusual Bird Reports (UBRs) submitted by RAC members. This occurred 23 times in 2014.

The RAC terms of reference state that members should serve no more than three times three consecutive years on the committee (i.e. nine consecutive years) other than in 'exceptional circumstances'. The terms of reference also seek to achieve staggered turnover of the committee. The current committee has been stable since late 2010. In an attempt to facilitate turnover, a request for nominations for new members was made in September 2014, via *Birds New Zealand* magazine and the web-forum BirdingNZ.net. No nominations were received. Council's advice is sought regarding whether to continue seeking new members, or to amend the terms of reference to remove or extend this limit on length of service.

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 panel every 2 months, and they then have 2 months to provide comment. All panel members reliably kept within deadlines during 2014. Response letters were typically sent out 3-5 months after UBRs were received.

UBRs assessed in 2014

A total of 82 UBRs was assessed in 2014. Sixty-six (80%) of these UBRs were accepted by the committee. Two new species were added to the New Zealand list: buff-breasted sandpiper and dusky woodswallow.

Two historical records were assessed during the year – the 1947 Clevedon crane (to determine whether it should be accepted as being a brolga), and the 1983 Gisborne black falcon. The RAC terms of reference require a majority of 4 or more of the 5 members in order to overturn an historical decision. The 'unidentified crane' decision was upheld, and so neither brolga nor sarus crane is yet recognised as occurring in New Zealand. The black falcon record was considered no longer acceptable, thereby removing black falcon from the New Zealand list.

Publication of RAC decisions

A draft paper reporting on 154 RAC decisions from 2013-14 has been prepared for publication in *Notornis*:

Miskelly, C.M.; Crossland, A.C.; Sagar, P.M.; Saville, I.; Tennyson, A.J.D.; Bell, E.A.
In prep. Vagrant and extra-limital bird records accepted by the Birds New Zealand Records Appraisal Committee 2013-2014.

At the time of writing (24 April 2015) I am waiting on some data on Australian wetland bird counts from a colleague in New South Wales before sending the ms to committee members for comment.

I thank Biz, Brian and my fellow panel members for their efficient support during 2014.

Colin Miskelly, Convener