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Vagrant and extra-limital bird records accepted by the Birds New Zealand Records Appraisal Committee 2015-2016

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Abstract We report Records Appraisal Committee (RAC) decisions regarding Unusual Bird Reports received between 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2016. Among the 113 submissions accepted by the RAC were the first New Zealand records of northern fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*), Herald petrel (*Pterodroma heraldica*), red-footed booby (*Sula sula*), laughing gull (*Larus atricilla*) and magpie-lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*), the first breeding records for Australian wood duck (*Chenonetta jubata*) and glossy ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*), and the second accepted records of shy mollymawk (*Thalassarche cauta cauta*), great shearwater (*Puffinus gravis*) and Cape gannet (*Morus capensis*). Other notable records included a pair of white-winged black terns (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) breeding in the Mackenzie basin, and the first record of pukeko (*Porphyrio melanotus*) from the Snares Islands. In addition, notable influxes of brown booby (*Sula leucogaster*) and great frigatebird (*Fregata minor*) occurred during 2015-16.

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INTRODUCTION

Birds New Zealand (Birds NZ) requires sightings of vagrant or extra-limital bird species, or species otherwise considered to be extinct, to be verified by the Records Appraisal Committee (RAC) before the records can be presented as accepted New Zealand records in the periodicals *Notornis* or *New Zealand Birds*, or in books and websites published by Birds NZ. Each Unusual Bird Report (UBR) received is

given a number whereby the first 4 digits represent the year the record was received and the last 2 digits the chronological sequence of receipt within that year. These reference numbers are given for each record below.

We here report RAC decisions made on UBRs received between 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2016, following on from the last report of the RAC (Miskelly *et al.* 2015). These included submissions based on sightings made up to 20 years ago, but submitted only during the current reporting period. Results of RAC decisions are posted on the Unusual

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Bird Report website (<http://rare.birds.org.nz/>) every 2 months. The website was launched in mid-2016, and provides a means for observers to determine whether a UBR has already been submitted for any vagrant bird seen or reported, and (within 2-4 months) to see the RAC decision on the UBR. This biennial report provides more detail about sightings than what is presented on the website, including providing context for the significance of each sighting.

The RAC convenor maintains a database of verified sightings of vagrant birds in New Zealand. Information from this database is presented below (sourced as "C.M. Miskelly, *unpubl.*") if it conflicts with or augments information from published sources. For significant sightings (*e.g.*, first or second sightings for the country), we encourage the observers who first found or identified the bird(s) to submit an article for publication in *Notornis*.

Nomenclature and taxonomic sequence follow Gill *et al.* (2010). Where images of birds reported here have been published on New Zealand Birds Online (NZBO, www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz, viewed 6 March 2017) this is mentioned in the text.

DECISIONS ON SUBMITTED SIGHTINGS

Accepted records of species vagrant to New Zealand

In addition to vagrant species, the following list also includes two species (long-tailed skua *Stercorarius longicaudus* and Arctic tern *Sterna paradisaea*) regarded as migrants through or to New Zealand seas, individuals of which rarely reach our coasts.

Plumed whistling duck (*Dendrocygna eytoni*)

Six at Kokatahi, inland from Hokitika, on 28 April 2015; photograph obtained via Isaac Conservation & Wildlife Trust, submitted by Andrew Crossland (UBR 2015/70). There are 14 previous records of flocks of up to 14 birds (Gill *et al.* 2010; Miskelly *et al.* 2013).

Chestnut-breasted shelduck (*Tadorna tadornoides*)

A male and a female at Peacock Springs Reserve, Christchurch, on 20 May 1996; Andrew Crossland (UBR 2015/78). Nine at Clark's Road, Lake Ellesmere, on 17 January 2007; Andrew Crossland, Niall Muga, Phil Crutchley and Alan Lacklands (UBR 2015/79). A male and a female at the Avon-Heathcote estuary on 16 November 2015; Philip Crutchley and Andrew Crossland (UBR 2015/75; image on NZBO). A male at Jarvis Rd, Lake Ellesmere, on 13 February 2016; Grahame Bell and Brian Darlow (UBR 2016/13). After a major influx in 1983-86, and few records in the 1990s (Heather 1987; Gill *et al.* 2010), chestnut-breasted shelducks were recorded mainly from Canterbury during 2000-07 (Miskelly *et al.* 2011, 2013, 2015). There was then a

gap of more than 7 years before sightings on the Kapiti coast and at Mangere (Miskelly *et al.* 2015) followed by the last 2 sightings reported here.

Australian wood duck (*Chenonetta jubata*)

Three males and a female at Maisey Rd, Tasman on 5 & 8 December 2014 and 19 January 2015; Philippa & John Foes-Lamb and Don Cooper (UBR 2015/04). A pair with 4 ducklings on a pond at Playhouse Cafe and Theatre, Tasman on 11 October 2015; Willie Cook, Don Cooper, Charmaine & Peter Field and Philippa & John Foes-Lamb (UBR 2015/62; image in Cook *et al.* 2016 and on NZBO). Two males and 5 females or immatures at the same site on 13 March 2016; David & Vicky Melville (UBR 2016/16; 2 images on NZBO). The 9 previous accepted records of Australian wood ducks from New Zealand were all of single birds (Gill *et al.* 2010; Miskelly *et al.* 2011, 2013). UBR 2015/62 was the first reported breeding of this species in New Zealand, and was followed soon after by a different pair with 5 ducklings at a pond nearby on 30 November 2015 (Cook *et al.* 2016).

Australian white-eyed duck (*Aythya australis*)

A male at Palmer Road Pond, Foxton Beach, on 10 November 2013 (Alan Tennyson; UBR 2015/38; image on NZBO). A male at Blenheim waste water treatment plant on 12 April 2015; Russell Cannings and Lisa Jones (UBR 2015/20). Eight previous records accepted since 1973 (Miskelly *et al.* 2015).

Hoary-headed grebe (*Poliiocephalus poliocephalus*)

One at Lake Hakapoua/Big River, Fiordland, on 27 February 2013; Andy Grant, Terry Greene and Peter Dilks (UBR 2015/08). Hoary-headed grebes were widely reported in low numbers from the Snares Islands to Northland 1975-91; this is only the second record since then (Gill *et al.* 2010; Miskelly *et al.* 2013). Three birds were subsequently seen at Lake Elterwater, Marlborough, in August 2014 (Miskelly *et al.* 2015).

King penguin (*Aptenodytes patagonicus*)

One at Doughboy Bay, Stewart Island, on 5 March 2015 (Dave Timmerman-Vaughan; UBR 2015/19), was the fourth accepted record from Stewart Island (Fennell 1983 & 1984; Gill *et al.* 2010).

Macaroni penguin (*Eudyptes chrysolophus*)

One at Hoho Bay, Snares Islands, 25-28 March 2015 (Paul Sagar and Igor Debski; UBR 2015/27), was the fourth accepted record from the Snares Islands and the sixth from New Zealand (Miskelly *et al.* 2001, 2013).

Royal penguin (*Eudyptes schlegeli*)

One at Station Cove, Snares Islands, 23 March 2015 (Igor Debski and Paul Sagar; UBR 2015/26), died

26 March. Third accepted record from the Snares Islands (Miskelly *et al.* 2001).

Atlantic yellow-nosed mollymawk (*Thalassarche chlororhynchos*)

An adult off Kaikoura on 13 March 2016 (Richard Else, Gary Melville and Tracey McKeown; UBR 2016/24) was the first accepted record from near the New Zealand mainland, following 3 records from Middle Sister Island in the Chatham Islands (Robertson 1975; Imber 1994; Miskelly *et al.* 2006).

Indian Ocean yellow-nosed mollymawk (*Thalassarche carteri*)

An adult north-east of North Cape on 4 March 2013 (Tim Barnard and Steve Wood; UBR 2015/54) was the first accepted record of this species near the New Zealand mainland since 2002 (Medway 2002). A few pairs of this species breed on The Pyramid in the Chatham Islands (Miskelly *et al.* 2006).

Shy mollymawk (*Thalassarche cauta cauta*)

An adult in Palliser Bay, Cook Strait on 15 May 2016 (Geoff de Lisle and 18 Birds NZ members and associates; UBR 2016/37, image on NZBO), was the second accepted record of this Australian subspecies in New Zealand, and the first record of a live bird (Medway 2003).

Northern fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*)

A moulting dark morph bird photographed by Leon Berard at sea near the Snares Islands on 9 February 2014 was the first record of this Arctic species from New Zealand (UBR 2015/71; Fig. 1). Based on its relatively small head and slender bill, and bill colouration, this bird is considered to have been of the North Pacific subspecies *F. g. rodgersii* (Robert Flood, *pers. comm.* to CMM, 21 Dec 2015; advice accepted by RAC). The dark morph predominates at the more southerly colonies in the North Pacific (Fisher 1952).

Herald petrel (*Pterodroma heraldica*)

One seen and photographed by Steve Wood and Tim Barnard off the Meyer Islets, Kermadec Islands on 29 March 2016 was the first record of this tropical gadfly petrel from New Zealand (UBR 2016/20; Fig. 2, plus additional image on NZBO).

Great shearwater (*Puffinus gravis*)

One east of Otago Peninsula on 13 October 2008 (Russell Cannings and Jukka Jantunen; UBR 2015/22) was the second accepted New Zealand record and the first from near the New Zealand mainland. Six subsequent records have been accepted (Miskelly *et al.* 2011, 2013 & 2015).

Cape gannet (*Morus capensis*)

One at the Farewell Spit gannet colony on 17



Fig. 1. Northern fulmar near the Snares Islands, 9 February 2014. Photograph by Leon Berard.



Fig. 2. Herald petrel off the Meyer Islets, Kermadec Islands, 29 March 2016. Photograph by Steve Wood.

December 2015 and 8 January & 13 February 2016 (Willie Cook, Don Cooper, David Melville, Steve Wood and Rob Schuckard; UBRs 2016/02 & 17). Second record from New Zealand (Robertson & Stephenson 2005; Gill *et al.* 2010).

Red-footed booby (*Sula sula*)

At least 2 birds on and over Napier Islet, Kermadec Islands on 31 March and 2 April 2016 (Chris Collins, Tim Barnard and Steve Wood; UBR 2016/28). First record for New Zealand (Fig. 3, plus 2 additional images on NZBO).



Fig. 3. Red-footed booby near Napier Islet, Kermadec Islands, 31 March 2016. Photograph by Chris Collins.

Brown booby (*Sula leucogaster*)

An adult off Robertson Island, Bay of Islands on 21 December 2014 (George & Julia Watola; UBR 2015/10). An immature dead on Te Puru beach, north of Thames, on 6 January 2016 (John Longden; UBR 2016/03). At least 3 (2 adults, 1 immature) around L'Esperance Rock, Kermadec Islands, on 28 March 2016 (Tim Barnard, Chris Collins, Steve Wood, Phil Hammond and Bob Atkinson; UBR 2016/32). An immature on Gannet Island, west of Aotea Harbour, on 18 April 2016 (Russell Cannings, Ian Saville, Brent Stephenson, Tim Barnard, Phil Hammond, Logan Milichich, Matthias Dehling and Grahame Brind; UBR 2016/22). Three immature birds at the Muriwai gannet colony on 13 May 2016 (Bartek Wypych; UBR 2016/36, image on NZBO).

This species probably reaches New Zealand every year (Gill *et al.* 2010). However, the only previous accepted record of more than a single bird was 2 birds in the Manukau Harbour in August 1985 (Fennell 1986).

Great frigatebird (*Fregata minor*)

At least 8 birds (3 adult males, 3 adult females, 2 immatures) on and over Meyer Islets and Raoul Island, Kermadec Islands, 30 March to 2 April 2016 (Tim Barnard, Steve Wood, Phil Hammond, Chris Collins and Bob Atkinson; UBR 2016/31). In addition to at least 15 records of single birds from the New Zealand mainland (C.M. Miskelly, *unpubl.*), at least 2 were regularly seen over Raoul Island during December 2008 to February 2009 (Miskelly *et al.* 2011).

Little egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

One at Willow/Jury Island, Lake Wairarapa, on 20 June 2014; Nikki McArthur and Steve Playle (UBR 2015/47); 1 at Avon-Heathcote estuary,

Christchurch, on 3 March 2015; David Melville (UBR 2015/15); 1 on the eastern shore of Lake Wairarapa (near Oporua Spillway) on 1 July 2015; Nikki McArthur (UBR 2015/46); 1 at Ambury farm shellbanks, Manukau Harbour, on 2 July 2015; Mike Graham (UBR 2015/50); 1 at Lake Omanu, Foxton, on 20 August 2016; Paul & Jane Gibson, Dianne Parker, Duncan Watson, Dallas Bishop and Geoff de Lisle (UBR 2016/48). Up to 5 little egrets are present in New Zealand most years, though typically few are reported to the RAC (Miskelly *et al.* 2013).

Glossy ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)

Two at Little Waihi, near Maketu, on 16 November 2014 (Tim Barnard; UBR 2015/53) & 15 November 2015 (Tim & Loretta Barnard, Erik Forsyth and Neil Robertson; UBR 2016/30). Incubating bird plus 2 other birds at Lake Ki-Wainono, South Canterbury, on 1 January 2015; Mary Thompson, Peter Schweigman and Sue Galloway (UBR 2015/18). First breeding record for New Zealand (Thompson 2015).

Black kite (*Milvus migrans*)

One by SH1 north of Meremere on 11 November 2016 (Russell Cannings; UBR 2016/53). There are 7 previous records (Gill *et al.* 2010; Miskelly *et al.* 2011 & 2013), including one in the same vicinity 2000-03 (Medway 2003a) that may have been the same bird as UBR 2016/53.

Japanese snipe (*Gallinago hardwickii*)

One at Pegasus wetland, North Canterbury, on 28 March 2015; Beverley Alexander and Robin Young (UBR 2015/32). There are 20 previous accepted records from New Zealand, with the most recent being from Hamilton in 2005-06 (Scofield 2006; C.M. Miskelly, *unpubl.*).

Great knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*)

One at Miranda on 31 January 2015; Russell Cannings (UBR 2015/12). This is the 20th accepted record from New Zealand (Miskelly *et al.* 2015).

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)

One at Ashley River estuary, North Canterbury, on 4 December 2014; Jill Hanna (UBR 2015/01). One or two sanderlings reach New Zealand most years (Saunders 2015), though few of these are reported to the RAC.

Broad-billed sandpiper (*Limicola falcinellus*)

One at Kidds Shellbanks, Manukau Harbour, on 26 December 2015; David Lawrie, Tony Habraken, Phil Hammond, Paul Goldophin and Russell Canning (UBR 2015/77, 13 images on NZBO). This is the 22nd accepted record from New Zealand, with the most recent being on the Manukau Harbour in 2004 (Medway 2004; C.M. Miskelly, *unpubl.*).

Asiatic dowitcher (*Limnodromus semipalmatus*)

One at Motueka sandspit, Tasman Bay, on 25 & 26 December 2016; Steve Wood and David Melville (UBR 2016/59). Sixth accepted record, and first since 2002 (Medway 2003; Miskelly *et al.* 2013).

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)

One at Ocean Mail, Chatham Island, on 18 February 2015; Adrian Riegen (UBR 2015/13). Sixth accepted record from Chatham Islands (Miskelly *et al.* 2006).

Little whimbrel (*Numenius minutus*)

One at Miranda stilt ponds on 10 January 2016; David Melville and 15 others from Miranda Wader Course (UBR 2016/04). This is the 16th accepted record (Miskelly *et al.* 2015), but several recent reports have not been submitted to the RAC. This often cryptic species is possibly an annual visitor to New Zealand (Gill *et al.* 2010).

Wandering tattler (*Tringa incana*)

One at Ohiwa estuary, Bay of Plenty, on 28 September 2014; Tim Barnard and Loretta Garrett (UBR 2015/52). Two at Spirits Bay, Far North, on 9 April 2015; Raewyn Adams and Yolande Knight (UBR 2015/30). Probably an annual visitor to New Zealand (Gill *et al.* 2010).

Common greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)

One at Miranda stilt ponds on 22 November 2014; Gillian Vaughan and 14 others from Miranda Wader Course (UBR 2015/05). Formerly a regular vagrant to New Zealand, there have been just 7 greenshanks sightings accepted since 2002 (Miskelly *et al.* 2015).

Terek sandpiper (*Tringa cinerea*)

One at Little Waihi estuary, Bay of Plenty, on 14 December 2003; Tim Barnard (UBR 2016/12). One at Catlins River estuary, Otago, on 16 November 2014; Richard Schofield (UBR 2015/44). Formerly a regular vagrant to New Zealand, there have been just 5 Terek sandpiper sightings accepted since 2000 (Medway 2001; Miskelly *et al.* 2015).

Grey phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicaria*)

One off Tolaga Bay on 2 May 2004; Tim Barnard, Ian Saville, Brent Stephenson, Ian Southey, Steve Wood, John & Dorothy Geale and Bert Lee (UBR 2015/56). This becomes the ninth of 11 accepted records (Miskelly *et al.* 2013).

Wilson's phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*)

One at Ahuriri estuary, Napier, on 22 November 2016; Ian Smith (UBR 2016/56, 17 images on NZBO). Fourth New Zealand record, and first since 2004 (Schofield 2005).

Grey plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

One at Porangahau estuary, southern Hawke's Bay

on 1 October 2016; Russell Cannings (UBR 2016/54). Grey plovers were reported annually from 2001 to 2005; this is the third record since then (Miskelly *et al.* 2013 & 2015).

Greater sand plover (*Charadrius leschenaultii*)

One at Waitahanui Stream mouth, Otamarakau, Bay of Plenty, on 19 January 2016; Tim & Loretta Barnard (UBR 2016/11, image on NZBO). This species is considered an annual visitor to New Zealand (Gill *et al.* 2010).

Oriental dotterel (*Charadrius veredus*)

One at Ohiwa estuary, Bay of Plenty, on 16 January 2016; Tim & Loretta Barnard (UBR 2016/08, 9 images on NZBO). The 19th record from New Zealand, and the second since 2000 (Medway 2001a; Miskelly *et al.* 2015).

Long-tailed skua (*Stercorarius longicaudus*)

One in Queen Charlotte Sound, south of Blumine Island on 28 March 2016; Johannes Fischer and Arjan Dwarshuis (UBR 2016/19). Long-tailed skuas are scarce annual migrants to New Zealand, with more than 26 accepted records (Miskelly *et al.* 2015).

Laughing gull (*Larus atricilla*)

A second winter bird at Waiotahi River estuary, Bay of Plenty, on 23 December 2016 was the first recorded from New Zealand; David Riddell and Annette Taylor (UBR 2016/58, Fig. 4, plus 19 additional images on NZBO).

Gull-billed tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*)

One at Bell Island, Waimea Inlet, Tasman, on 4 January 2016; David Melville, Willie Cook and Paul Fisher (UBR 2016/01). One at Ataahua Point, NE shoreline of Lake Ellesmere, on 25 June 2016; Andrew Crossland (UBR 2016/38). A major influx of gull-billed terns throughout New Zealand began in



Fig. 4. Laughing gull at Waiotahi River estuary, Bay of Plenty, 23 December 2016. Photograph by David Riddell.



Fig. 5. Magpie-lark at Gorge River, South Westland, 29 April 2008. Photograph by Robert Long.

winter 2011, with flocks of up to 16 birds (Miskelly *et al.* 2013). South Island sightings continued into 2013 & 2014, with 6 records (including one of 4 birds; Miskelly *et al.* 2015), but there have been fewer sightings since then.

White-winged black tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*)

A pair bred on the Tasman River, near Mt Cook airfield, between 30 December 2014 and 24 January 2015 (Philip Guilford and Aalbert Rebergen; UBR 2015/07); the 4 eggs were incubated by a pair of birds for at least 30 days before being taken by a predator in late January. This is the fourth breeding record for New Zealand (Stead 1927; Pierce 1974; Miskelly *et al.* 2015). Other sightings included up to 4 birds (including 3 in breeding plumage) at Maketu estuary and Kaituna Lagoon, Bay of Plenty, between 5 December 2014 and 28 April 2015 (Tim Barnard, Julian Fitter, Loretta Garrett and Ian Southey; UBR 2015/43, image on NZBO); 1 at Tomahawk Lagoon, Dunedin, 13-24 December 2014 (Andrew Austin and Bruce McKinlay; UBR 2015/03); 1 at Ruataniwha wetland, Twizel, 25-29 January 2015 (Aalbert Rebergen; UBR 2015/11); 1 at Tauherenikau River delta, Lake Wairarapa, on 12 February 2015 (Nikki McArthur, Hugh Robertson and Mike Urlich; UBR 2015/48); 1 in breeding plumage at Tauranga Harbour on 26 April 2015 (Shane McPherson, Tammy Caine, Linda McPherson and Nigel McPherson; UBR 2015/24); and 1 at Boulder Bank wetlands, Nelson sewage ponds on 8 & 9 June 2015 (Amber Calman; UBR 2015/37, 2 images on NZBO) and 12 December 2015 (Craig Martin; UBR 2015/74, 4 images on NZBO).

Arctic tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

One at Thornton Beach, Bay of Plenty, on 2 February

2011; Tim Barnard and Loretta Garrett (UBR 2015/55, image on NZBO); 1 at Aramoana Mole, Otago, on 23 April 2015; Jason Wilder (UBR 2015/23, 3 images on NZBO); 1 at Little Waihi estuary, Bay of Plenty, on 24 May 2015; Tim Barnard (UBR 2015/42, image on NZBO); 1 at Taramaire Stream mouth, Miranda, on 24 & 25 April 2016; Ian Southey and 13 others from Miranda Wader Course (UBR 2016/25); 1 in breeding plumage at Plimmerton, Porirua, on 21 May 2016; Imogen Warren (UBR 2016/27, 3 images on NZBO). The Arctic tern is considered a passage migrant to New Zealand (Miskelly *et al.* 2008; Gill *et al.* 2010), with most birds apparently passing offshore.

Crested tern (*Sterna bergii*)

One at Waipu estuary, Northland, on 11 December 2014 (George Watola and Pat Miller; UBR 2015/09) was the same bird as first reported on 25 March 2014 (UBR 2014/24 in Miskelly *et al.* 2015; 4 images on NZBO). One at Maketu estuary, Bay of Plenty, on 29 March 2015; Tim Barnard (UBR 2015/41). There are 12 previous accepted records (Miskelly *et al.* 2013).

Oriental cuckoo (*Cuculus optatus*)

One at Blackwater Stream outlet, Lake Poteriteri, Fiordland on 12 January 2015; Stephen Macdonald (UBR 2015/06, image on NZBO). There are about 34 previous records from New Zealand (Miskelly *et al.* 2013; C.M. Miskelly, *unpubl.*).

White-throated needletail (*Hirundapus caudacutus*)

One at Halfmoon Bay, Stewart Island, on 27 November 2015; Brendan Klick and Sophia Ng (UBR 2015/73, image on NZBO); 2 on Tiritiri Matangi Island on 17 November 2016; Martin Sanders and Ian Higgins (UBR 2016/55, 4 images on NZBO). A frequent vagrant to New Zealand (Gill *et al.* 2010).

Black-faced cuckoo-shrike (*Coracina novaehollandiae*)

One near Marton on 19 July 2015; Philson Sherriff (UBR 2015/59). There are 20 previous accepted records (Miskelly *et al.* 2015; C.M. Miskelly, *unpubl.*).

Magpie-lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*)

An adult male photographed at the mouth of Gorge River, South Westland, on 29 April 2008 was the first recorded from New Zealand; Robert Long (via Colin Miskelly) (UBR 2015/17, Fig. 5).

Australian tree martin (*Petrochelidon nigricans*)

Two birds on North East Island, Snares Islands, 11-19 December 2014, and again on 23-28 March 2015; Paul Sagar and Igor Debski (UBR 2015/28). Fourth record from Snares Islands, all of which have been 2 birds (Miskelly *et al.* 2001); first accepted New Zealand record since 2004 (Scofield 2008).

Accepted extra-limital records of New Zealand breeding species

Brown teal (*Anas chlorotis*)

A male at Korokoro Dam, Belmont Regional Park, Lower Hutt, on 4 July 2015 (Nikki McArthur; UBR 2015/45) is likely to have come from Zealandia/Karori Sanctuary about 14 km away.

New Zealand dabchick (*Poliiocephalus rufopectus*)

Three juveniles accompanying an adult at Blind River irrigation dam, Seddon, 6-15 March 2015 are likely to have been locally reared (Murray Brown, Scott Hammond and Brian Bell; UBR2015/33). One on a dune lake at Wharariki Beach, south-west of Cape Farewell, on 6 April 2015; Russell Cannings and Lisa Jones (UBR 2015/21); 2 at Boulder Bank wetlands, Nelson sewage ponds on 9 June 2015; Amber Calman (UBR 2015/36). A pair that bred near Takaka in 2012 was the only other recent South Island breeding record (Petyt 2013).

Australasian little grebe (*Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*)

One at Mangere ponds, Manukau Harbour, on 16 June 2015 (Mike Graham and Bernard Michaux; UBR 2015/39), and 2 there on 1 July 2015 (Mike Graham; UBR 2015/49). This rare breeding species is now mainly recorded from Northland (Miskelly *et al.* 2015).

Fiordland crested penguin (*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*)

One at Whariwharangi Beach and Mutton Cove, Abel Tasman National Park, on 2 February 2014; Glenn Stevens (UBR 2015/69). One at Glenduan Beach, Nelson, on 7 October 2015; Keira Handley, Emma Pegg and Maeve Handley (UBR 2015/63). Possibly the same bird at Te Pukatea Bay, Abel Tasman National Park, on 14 October 2015; Steve Franklin and Til Melis (UBR 2015/65). These are the first records for the Nelson region received by the RAC, but stragglers have previously been reported at numerous sites around the South Island (Gill *et al.* 2010).

Erect-crested penguin (*Eudyptes sclateri*)

One moulting on Mangere Island, Chatham Islands, on 16 February 2015; Adrian Riegen, Tansy Bliss and Sara Larcombe (UBR 2015/14). There are at least 31 previous records from the Chatham Islands (Miskelly *et al.* 2006).

White-naped petrel (*Pterodroma cervicalis*)

One in the inner Hauraki Gulf, west of Coromandel town, on 22 March 2015; Steve Branca and Gillian Horne (UBR 2015/16). This Kermadec Islands breeding species is now a regular visitor to northern New Zealand waters in low numbers in January-

March (Miskelly *et al.* 2013, 2015).

Soft-plumaged petrel (*Pterodroma mollis*)

One about 30 nautical miles west of Kawhia Harbour on 18 April 2016; Russell Cannings and 7 others (UBR 2016/23, image on NZBO). One about 30 nautical miles east of Napier on 6 June 2016; Russell Cannings and 6 others (UBR 2016/34, 3 images on NZBO). The fourth and fifth accepted records north of Cook Strait.

Red-tailed tropicbird (*Phaethon rubricauda*)

One off North Cape on 2 April 2007 (Tim Barnard and Steve Wood; UBR 2015/57). There are about 30 accepted New Zealand records away from the Kermadec Islands (Gill *et al.* 2010).

New Zealand king shag (*Leucocarbo carunculatus*)

An adult on Adele Island, Tasman Bay, on 1 January 2015 (Stewart Robertson via Peter Gaze; UBR 2015/40) was the first record of this restricted-range species west of the Marlborough Sounds.

Banded rail (*Gallirallus philippensis*)

An adult photographed at Opaki, Masterton, on 12 December 2016 (Michelle & Ivor Allmand; UBR 2016/57) was an unusual record for the southern North Island.

Pukeko (*Porphyrio melanotus*)

One at Station Point, Snares Islands, on 10 April 2016 (Paul Sagar; UBR 2016/29) was the first record for the Snares Islands.

Shore plover (*Thinornis novaeseelandiae*)

Two adults at Blackpool Beach, Huruhi Bay, Waiheke Island, on 4 December 2015 (Sacha Paddy; UBR 2015/72) were colour-banded birds from a release site on Motutapu Island 10 km away.

Subantarctic skua (*Catharacta antarctica*)

One at Kaiaua, Firth of Thames, on 1 June 2016; Grahame Brind and Paul Godolphin (UBR 2016/50).

White tern (*Gygis alba*)

One near the Three Kings Islands on 1 April 2007 (Tim Barnard and Ian Saville; UBR 2015/58). About 14 previous New Zealand records away from the Kermadec Islands are listed in Gill *et al.* (2010).

Kaka (*Nestor meridionalis*)

One at Awakiki Bush Scenic Reserve, Owaka, Otago, on 20 September 2015 (Richard & Annie Schofield; UBR 2015/61) was about 140 km from likely source populations.

Laughing kookaburra (*Dacelo novaeguineae*)

One at Bucklands Beach, Auckland, on 13 November 2014 (Grahame & Catherine Brind and

Maria Currell; UBR 2015/67) and one at East Tamaki Heights, Auckland, on 22 October 2015 (Simon & Morag Fordham; UBR 2015/66). In New Zealand, kookaburras are mainly reported north of the Waitemata and Manukau Harbours.

Accepted records of species likely to have escaped from captivity or otherwise not considered to be natural vagrants

Red-vented bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*)

One shot near Te Puke, Bay of Plenty, on 10 May 2016; reported by Pat & Don West (UBR 2016/35; Te Papa specimen OR.30098).

Accepted records of species from other territories in the Pacific

Spur-winged plover (*Vanellus miles*)

One on Niue Island on 20 October 2009 (Lloyd Esler; UBR 2016/46) was apparently the first record of a spur-winged plover from Niue. Dick Watling (*pers. comm.* to CMM, 17 October 2016) reported a subsequent sighting of a bird at Avatele village 20-22 September 2011.

Records held in suspense

There were 2 UBRs submitted for which the RAC was unable to reach a decision. A tern photographed at Kaitorete Spit, Canterbury, on 28 November 2015 (UBR 2015/76) was possibly an Antarctic tern (*Sterna vittata*), a species not yet confirmed to occur north of Stewart Island. UBR 2016/21 (submitted as 'prehistoric bird', Taihape, 1 January 2005) was unidentifiable.

Records not accepted

Some of the following records may have been genuine, but were insufficiently documented to be accepted by the Records Appraisal Committee. At least 10 were considered to be misidentifications.

Chestnut-breasted shelduck (*Tadorna tadornoides*)

One reported from Timaru Botanic Gardens on 25 October 2015 (UBR 2015/68) was identified from a photograph as a male paradise shelduck (*Tadorna variegata*).

Chestnut teal (*Anas castanea*)

One reported from Otaki oxidation ponds, Kapiti Coast, on 27 January 2016 (UBR 2016/10).

Brown teal (*Anas chlorotis*)

One reported from Boggy Pond, near Lake Wairarapa, on 15 April 2015 (UBR 2015/29).

Australasian little grebe (*Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*)

Up to 4 birds at Pharazyn Reserve, Waikanae, on

10 May 2013 & 5 April 2014 (UBR 2015/34) were considered more likely to have been juvenile New Zealand dabchicks.

Shy mollymawk (*Thalassarche cauta cauta*)

One or two birds photographed at sea south of the Snares Islands on 27 January & 14 February 2014 (UBR 2016/40).

Providence petrel (*Pterodroma solandri*)

One photographed near L'Esperance Rock, Kermadec Islands, on 29 March 2016 (UBR 2016/44).

Reef heron (*Egretta sacra*)

One reported from Rangatira Island, Chatham Islands, on 20 September 2016 (UBR 2016/47) was identified from photographs as a juvenile white-faced heron (*E. novaehollandiae*).

Yellow-billed spoonbill (*Platalea flavipes*)

Two nests containing chicks on a sea stack at Nugget Point, Otago, on 22 February 2016 (UBR 2016/14) were considered likely to have been of royal spoonbills (*P. regia*).

Black kite (*Milvus migrans*)

Two birds at Aramoana, Otago, on 17 October 2015 (UBR 2015/64) were considered likely to have been swamp harriers (*Circus approximans*).

Black falcon (*Falco subniger*)

One reported along SH63, Wairau Valley, on 6 February 2013 (UBR 2015/35).

Great knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*)

One seen at Manawatu estuary by at least 6 experienced observers 5-15 October 2006 (UBR 2016/18) was unable to be accepted as no description or photograph was provided.

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)

One reported at Miranda limeworks on 9 December 2009 (UBR 2016/51).

American golden plover (*Pluvialis dominicus*)

One reported at Manawatu estuary on 31 December 2015 (UBR 2016/07) was considered more likely to have been a Pacific golden plover (*P. fulva*).

White-winged black tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*)

A reported sighting at Waikanae River estuary on 21 January 2015 (UBR 2015/60) was accompanied by a low-resolution image that may show a black tern (*C. niger*), a species not otherwise recorded from New Zealand.

Common tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

One reported at Foxton Beach on 6 March 2016 (UBR 2016/45).

Red-crowned parakeet (*Cyanoramphus novaeseelandiae*)

One reported at Waimahaka, near Invercargill, on 16 January 2016 (UBR 2016/05).

Fan-tailed cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*)

One reported on the Wainuiomata coast, Wellington, on 4 October 2016 (UBR 2016/49).

Little owl (*Athene noctua*)

One reported heard at Silverstream, Upper Hutt, on 1 May 2016 (UBR 2016/26) was considered more likely to have been a morepork (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*).

North Island kokako (*Callaeas wilsoni*)

Two reported as seen at Lowry Bay, Wellington, on 11 November 2016 (UBR 2016/52) were considered to have been California quail (*Callipepla californica*).

South Island kokako (*Callaeas cinerea*)

One reported at Fenella Hut, Cobb Valley, on 23 December 2015 (UBR 2016/06). One reported as seen between The Glen and Cable Bay, Nelson, on 25 February 2016 (UBR 2016/15) was considered more likely to have been a turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*).

Stitchbird (*Notiomystis cincta*)

Two reported at Castlecliff, Wanganui, on 9 June 2016 (UBR 2016/33) were considered to have been bellbirds (*Anthornis melanura*).

Fairy martin (*Petrochelidon ariel*)

One reported along SH31, western Waikato, on 7 July 2016 (UBR 2016/42).

Australian tree martin (*Petrochelidon nigricans*)

One reported at Hector, North Westland, on 9 April 2015 (UBR 2015/31).

Records of species not requiring RAC verification

Two red-legged partridges (*Alectoris rufa*) were reported near Cambridge on 20 September 2015 (UBR 2016/09); a great crested grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) was on Kaikorai estuary, Otago, on 13 June 2007 (UBR 2016/41); a white heron (*Ardea modesta*) was near Coatesville, North Auckland, on 13 July 2013 (UBR 2013/55); a hybrid black stilt (*Himantopus novaeseelandiae*) x pied stilt (*H. himantopus*) was at Miranda on 9 July 2016 (UBR 2016/43); a black-tailed godwit (*Limosa limosa*) was at Maketu estuary, Bay of Plenty, on 6 September 2014 (UBR 2015/51); a Hudsonian godwit (*L. haemastica*) was at the Avon-Heathcote estuary, Christchurch, on 27 June 2016 (UBR 2016/39), and another at Little Waihi, Bay of Plenty, on 16 October 2016 (UBR 2016/60); a grey-tailed tattler (*Tringa brevipes*) was at the Ashley estuary, North Canterbury, on 7 January 2015 (UBR 2015/02), and an unidentifiable tattler (*Tringa* sp.)

was at Ambury Regional Park shellbanks, Manukau Harbour, on 26 April 2015 (UBR 2015/25).

DISCUSSION

Between January 2015 and December 2016, the Records Appraisal Committee received 139 Unusual Bird Reports. Excluding 8 reports of 'non-reportable' species, 105 of 131 submitted UBRs were accepted (80%). This compares with an acceptance rate of 85% for 375 submissions during April 2008 to December 2014 (Miskelly *et al.* 2011, 2013 & 2015). The number of UBRs received during 2015-16 (5.8 month⁻¹) was slightly below the 6.4 month⁻¹ received during 2013-14 (Miskelly *et al.* 2015).

The most notable records assessed during 2015-16 were the addition of 5 further species to the New Zealand list (2 of which had been seen earlier than the reporting period, in 2008 and early 2014), and acceptance of 2 new breeding records.

The most unexpected new species was the northern fulmar photographed east of the Snares Islands in February 2014. The North Pacific form of northern fulmar breeds at numerous sites in eastern Siberia, the Aleutian Islands and the Alaskan Peninsula. Outside the May-September northern summer breeding season, the at-sea distribution extends to Japan and Baja California south to about 34° N, exceptionally to 22° N off Mexico (Howell 2012). This is apparently the first record from the Southern Hemisphere.

Herald petrels and red-footed boobies breed at multiple sites in the south-west Pacific, including in northern Queensland (*e.g.*, Raine Island) and Tonga. The nearest known breeding site for both species is only 780 km north-east of Raoul Island, at 'Āta, the southernmost island in the Tongan group (Rinke 1991).

Laughing gulls breed on the Atlantic coast of North America, in the Caribbean, coastal Venezuela and the Pacific coast of Mexico (Riddell & Taylor 2017). Northern populations are migratory, with individuals recorded as vagrants in Europe and on at least 10 occasions in Australia (Riddell & Taylor 2017). There are also records from Samoa, American Samoa, Pitcairn and French Polynesia (Muse *et al.* 1980; Wragg 1994; Hake *et al.* 1998; Vanderwaerf *et al.* 2004), and so the species has long been expected to occur in New Zealand.

The magpie-lark is a common bird in south-eastern Australia (other than Tasmania), plus there is an introduced population on Lord Howe I (Higgins *et al.* 2006). There is a mix of resident and migratory populations, with many birds moving to the New South Wales coast in winter (Higgins *et al.* 2006). Movements peak in March-April, matching the timing of the bird observed in South Westland in late April.

The acceptance of sightings of northern fulmar, Herald petrel, red-footed booby, laughing gull and magpie-lark brings the number of bird species recorded naturally from New Zealand since 1800 to 352 (Miskelly *et al.* 2008, 2013 & 2015; Gill *et al.* 2010). Of these, 15 are considered extinct. In addition, 36 introduced species are currently considered established in the wild in New Zealand, making the current avifauna 373 species (including 26 migrant species and 138 vagrant species).

Three notable breeding records of vagrant species were accepted during 2015-16, comprising the first New Zealand breeding records for Australian wood duck and glossy ibis, and the fourth record for white-winged black tern.

Australian wood ducks bred at least twice at the same site near Mapua in 2015 (Cook *et al.* 2016), with numerous subsequent sightings of flocks up to 14 birds reported in the area up to February 2017 (BirdingNZ.net viewed 15 February 2017). If these birds establish, they could potentially fill a niche vacant since the extinction of the congeneric Finsch's duck (*Chenonetta finschi*) c. 400-500 years ago (Tennyson & Martinson 2007).

The glossy ibis is the most widespread ibis species in the world (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). While scarce and declining over much of Europe and Asia, it has expanded its breeding range over the last 150 years, including to the United States c.1880, Israel in 1969, eastern Canada in 1986, and Mexico in 1988 (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992), and a pair built a nest in England in 2014 (Holling *et al.* 2016). Within Australia, it breeds predominantly in New South Wales, Victoria, southern Queensland and South Australia (Marchant & Higgins 1990). Further to the January 2015 breeding in South Canterbury reported here, glossy ibises bred successfully at Wairau Lagoons, Blenheim during December 2015 - January 2016 (Anonymous 2016).

The white-winged black terns that bred on the Tasman River in December 2014 followed only 2 years after the third recorded breeding attempt in New Zealand, on the Upper Acheron River in Marlborough (Miskelly *et al.* 2015). Neither breeding attempt was successful.

Of the 44 vagrant species accepted by the RAC in 2015-16, 17 species (39%) were holarctic breeding migrants (12 Eurasian, 1 North American, 4 either), 13 species (29.5%) breed in Australia, and 3 species were tropical (6.8%). Two species (brown booby and crested tern) may have arrived from either Australia or the tropical Pacific. A further two species were subantarctic (king penguin and macaroni penguin), and two were from the South Atlantic (Atlantic yellow-nosed mollymawk and great shearwater). Single species arrived from Macquarie I (royal penguin), the southern Indian Ocean (Indian Ocean yellow-nosed mollymawk), South Africa (Cape

gannet), North Pacific (northern fulmar) and North or Central America (laughing gull). This continues the pattern of holarctic migratory species, followed by Australian species, being the main sources of vagrant bird records in New Zealand (Miskelly *et al.* 2011, 2013, 2015).

Notable influxes of 2 tropical seabird species occurred during 2015-16. Brown boobies were seen in unprecedented numbers, including 3 together at L'Esperance Rock, Kermadec Islands, in late March, and 3 at Muriwai in May 2016, and there were at least 8 great frigatebirds around Raoul Island and the Herald Islets, Kermadec Islands, in March-April 2016. Other vagrant species from the tropical Pacific were also detected at the Kermadec Islands during the same time period, most notably New Zealand's first Herald petrel and red-footed boobies.

These sightings occurred towards the end of the very strong 2014-16 El Niño event, which peaked during November 2015 to January 2016, and had dissipated by May 2016 (2014-16 El Niño event, Wikipedia, viewed 16 February 2017). Associated with this, a tongue of anomalously warm surface water extended south towards northern New Zealand from late January 2016, becoming most intense between late March and mid-May, then gradually dissipating during the remainder of 2016 (<http://www.ospo.noaa.gov/Products/ocean/sst/anomaly/2016.html>, viewed 16 February 2017). Super-imposed on these warm sea conditions, severe Tropical Cyclone Winston caused exceptionally strong north to north-easterly winds over islands north of New Zealand for nearly 4 weeks between 7 February and 3 March 2016 (Cyclone Winston, Wikipedia, viewed 16 February 2017), and is likely to have driven many seabirds south of their normal ranges.

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