

Records Appraisal Committee annual report for 2019

Prepared for Birds New Zealand Council for consideration at the 2020 AGM (if it occurs following the COVID-19 lockdown)

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. Paul Sagar is a co-opted member of the committee, and provides independent assessment of Unusual Bird Reports (UBRs) submitted by RAC members. This occurred 12 times in 2019.

RAC processes

The online UBR reporting system on the Birds New Zealand 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 2019. Response letters were typically sent out 3-5 months after UBRs were received.

UBRs assessed in 2019-20

A total of 95 UBRs was received in 2019, and these were assessed between March 2019 and February 2020. This was substantially fewer than the 123 UBRs received in 2018. There is no obvious reason for this decrease. Seventy-one (75%) of the 2019 UBRs were accepted by the committee. Two new species (collared petrel and rose-crowned fruit-dove) were added to the New Zealand list.

UBR database

An online database of Unusual Bird Reports (<http://rare.birds.org.nz/>) was launched in 2016. The database and the systems supporting it continue to work well. The 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. It includes hyperlinks to publications referring to individual UBRs, and to New Zealand Birds Online species pages.

*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 the 221 RAC decisions from 2017-18 was published in the September 2019 issue of *Notornis*:

Miskelly, C.M.; Crossland, A.C.; Saville, I.; Southey, I.; Tennyson, A.J.D.; Bell, E.A. 2019. Vagrant and extra-limital bird records accepted by the Birds New Zealand Records Appraisal Committee 2017–2018. *Notornis* 66: 150–163.

I thank Biz, Paul and my fellow committee members for their efficient support during 2019.

Colin Miskelly, Convener