

Records Appraisal Committee annual report for 2020

Prepared for Birds New Zealand Council for consideration at the 2021 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. 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 18 times in 2020.

RAC processes

The online UBR reporting system continues to be the main source of UBRs received. There have been problems with the reporting form as the society's website was migrated between servers and service providers. This has yet to be resolved, and may have resulted in some UBRs not being received, as well as photographs not being attached to submitted UBRs despite the best efforts of submitters.

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 2020. Response letters were typically sent out 3-5 months after UBRs were received.

UBRs assessed in 2020

A total of 116 UBRs was received in 2020, and assessed between March 2020 and February 2021. This is the second largest number of submissions received by the committee in a single year. Ninety-eight (84%) of these UBRs were accepted by the committee. No new species 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 Convener, 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 210 RAC decisions from 2019-20 is in preparation.

I thank Biz, Paul and my fellow committee members for their efficient support during 2020.

Colin Miskelly, Convener