

# Records Appraisal Committee annual report for 2023

Prepared for Birds New Zealand Council for consideration at the 2024 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. Paul was also co-opted to the committee to cover for Colin's absence while he was walking Te Araroa Trail during November and December (and continuing into early 2024). Biz Bell was acting convener while Colin was away.

## RAC processes

The online UBR reporting system continues to be the main source of UBRs received. This was migrated to the society's new website late in 2022, and has worked well since.

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 2023. Response letters were typically sent out 3-5 months after UBRs were received.

## UBRs assessed in 2023–24

A total of 135 UBRs was received in 2023, and assessed between March 2023 and February 2024. This is the largest number of submissions received by the committee in a single year, up from the previous high of 124 UBRs received in 2018. Of these 135 UBRs, 112 (83%) were accepted by the committee. The sole addition to the New Zealand list during 2023 was the Asiatic subspecies of gull-billed tern (which some authorities treat as a separate species from the Australian gull-billed tern that regularly reaches New Zealand). The committee also accepted the first live sighting of streaked shearwater.

## UBR database

The online database of Unusual Bird Reports was also moved to the society's new website in 2022 (with the URL <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/rare-birds/>). The database and the systems supporting it have worked well since this transition. 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 210 RAC decisions from 2021–22 was published in the June 2023 issue of *Notornis*:

Miskelly, C.M.; Crossland, A.C.; Saville, I.; Southey, I.; Tennyson, A.J.D.; Bell, E.A. 2023. Vagrant and extra-limital bird records accepted by the Birds New Zealand Records Appraisal Committee 2021–2022. *Notornis* 70: 60–73.

I thank Biz, Paul and my fellow committee members for their efficient support during 2023, and particularly for covering for my absence while I was away for a third of the reporting period.

Colin Miskelly, Convener