

Records Appraisal Committee annual report for 2024

Prepared for Birds New Zealand Council for consideration at the 2025 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.

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 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 2024. Response letters were typically sent out 3-5 months after UBRs were received.

UBRs assessed in 2024–25

A total of 113 UBRs was received in 2024, and assessed between March 2024 and February 2025. This is substantially fewer than the record 135 UBRs received in 2023. Of these 113 UBRs, 85 (75%) were accepted by the committee. Two species were added to the New Zealand list during 2024: Horfield's bronze-cuckoo and MacGillivray's prion.

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 248 RAC decisions from 2023–24 will be prepared for publication in *Notornis* during 2025.

I thank Biz, Paul and my fellow committee members for their efficient support during 2024.

Colin Miskelly, Convener