



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

Records Appraisal Committee 2017 Report

Compiled by Mick Roderick

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Below is a list of cases assessed by the Hunter Bird Observers Club Records Appraisal Committee (RAC) in 2017 (or in some cases, early 2018). A summary of each case is provided, along with selected photographs. A summary of cases relevant to the Hunter Region assessed by the BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee (BARC) or the NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (ORAC) in 2017 is also provided on pages 12 & 15 respectively. In many ways 2017 was an exceptional year for records appraisal in the Hunter Region, driven by a combination of a distinct push of “western species” during the spring migration period, an unprecedented array of rare *Pterodroma* seabirds in October / November, as well as an unusually high number of reports of normally scarce species such as Oriental Cuckoos.

Front Cover Images: Left – Red-chested Button-quail, Hexham Swamp 28/12/2017 (Case 500; Mick Roderick).

Right – Little Button-quail, Durrigere Road 24/09/2017 (Case 477; Michael Kearns).

List of Accepted Cases

464	Greater Sand Plover	Farquhar Inlet (Old Bar)	17 th January 2017
465	Satin Flycatcher	Gloucester Tops	25 th January 2017
466	Satin Flycatcher	Hawks Nest	18 th January 2017
467	Oriental Cuckoo	Muswellbrook	10 th March 2017
468	Kermadec Petrel ¹	Forster pelagic	12 th March 2017
469	Oriental Cuckoo	Barrington Tops National Park	14 th / 16 th March 2017
470	Oriental Cuckoo	Ash Island	4 th April 2017
472	King Quail	Minimbah Sandplain	21 st May 2017
473	Oriental Cuckoo	Galgabba Point, Swansea	2 nd June 2017
474	Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove ¹	Boys Walk, Cooranbong	30 th January 2016
475	Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove ¹	Forster (dead bird)	19 th September 2016
476	Shy Albatross	Swansea pelagic	21 st July 2016
477	Little Button-quail	Durrigere Road, via Ulan	24 th September 2017
478	Crimson Chat	Durrigere Road, via Ulan	24 th September 2017
479	Black Honeyeater	Durrigere Road, via Ulan	24 th September 2017
480	Red-backed Kingfisher	Durrigere Road, via Ulan	26 th September 2017
481	Australian Pratincole	Hexham Swamp	26 th September 2017
483	Crimson Chat	Windy Homestead	30 th September 2017

484	Black Honeyeater	Windy Homestead	1 st October 2017
485	Black-bellied Storm-petrel	Port Stephens pelagic	6 th October 2017
486	King Quail	Richmond Vale Railway, Hexham Swamp	9 th October 2017
487	Black-bellied Storm-petrel	Port Stephens pelagic	15 th October 2017
488	Buller's Shearwater	Port Stephens pelagic	15 th October 2017
489	Black Petrel	Port Stephens pelagic	15 th October 2017
490	Forest Kingfisher	Tomago Wetlands	17 th October 2017
491	Kelp Gull	Stockton Beach	28 th October 2017
493	Ruff	Ash Island	1st November 2017
495	Black Petrel	Port Stephens pelagic	12 th November 2017
496	Forest Kingfisher	Tahlee	6th December 2017
497	Buller's Shearwater	Swansea pelagic	8th December 2017
498	Grey Currawong	Mount Coricudgy	10th December 2017
499	Greater Sand Plover	Farquhar Inlet (Old Bar)	11 th December 2017
500	Red-chested Button-quail	Hexham Swamp	28 th December 2017
501	Ruff	Stockton Sandspit	28 th December 2017
502	'Black-headed Pardalote'	Lower Manning	1 st November 2017
505	Oriental Cuckoo	Cattai Wetlands	21 st December 2017

Unconfirmed Reports

The following cases were assessed by the RAC during 2017 but were not accepted by the protocol majority proportion of committee members.

471	King Quail	Cape Hawke	29 th April 2017
492	Ruff	Cattai Bridge Wetlands	31 st October 2017
494	Little Bittern	Mambo Wetlands	22 nd Aug / 8 th Oct 2017

Case #482 (Orange Chat) was not assessed due to the observer having withdrawn the claimed sighting.

Notes: 1 - Kermadec Petrel and Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove were revised as Category 2 species following a decision made by the Records Appraisal Committee during July 2017. Kermadec Petrel was recorded once more during 2017 (off Port Stephens 6th October 2017) and there were numerous reports of Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove during the remainder of 2017.

Case Summaries

Case 464: A **Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultii* was first photographed on sand flats at Farquhar Inlet on the 17th January 2017 with 2 birds seen and photographed subsequently on 20th January. **Liam Murphy & Ian Benson**

Case 465: Several **Satin Flycatchers** *Myiagra cyanoleuca* were seen and photographed at Gloucester Tops on the 25th January 2017. The observers raised the possibility of breeding in the area though this was not able to be confirmed. **Ian Benson & Craig Anderson**

Case 466: A male **Satin Flycatcher** *Myiagra cyanoleuca* was photographed about 2km north of Hawks Nest on Mungo Brush Road and submitted to Birdline NSW. **Kenneth John Sheather**

Case 467: A photograph of an injured **Oriental Cuckoo** *Cuculus saturatus* was posted on the Australian Bird Identification Facebook page on the 10th March 2017. The bird was found near Muswellbrook and although the identification of the bird was straight forward the fate of the bird was not subsequently known. **Raychle Peach**

Case 468: A dark morph **Kermadec Petrel** *Pterodroma neglecta* was seen and photographed at the continental shelf break on a pelagic trip out of Forster on the 12th March 2017 (this species has subsequently been classified as a Category 2 species in the Hunter). Two Red-footed Boobies were also seen and photographed on the same day (refer to ORAC cases assessed on [Page 13](#)). **Mick Roderick et al.**

Case 469: This case pertains to two individual **Oriental Cuckoos** *Cuculus saturatus* (a male and female) found in the Barrington Tops National Park on the 14th and 16th March 2017. Of the 4 Oriental Cuckoo cases assessed by the HBOC RAC in 2017, this was the only case where the birds were not photographed. However, the submission was very detailed and left no doubt as to the identity of the birds seen. **Adam Fawcett**

Case 470: Another **Oriental Cuckoo** *Cuculus saturatus* record; this one from the Scotts Point Trail, near the end of The Lane, Ash Island. The female 'hepatic morph' bird was seen and photographed by many observers over a period of a week or so. **Peter Weinstock**

Case 471: A **King Quail** *Synoicus chinensis* was claimed to have been at Cape Hawke on the 29th April 2017. The committee did not feel that the argument for the case was strong enough and noted that the observer was not 100% about the identification themselves, which was a fleeting glimpse of a bird on a roadside. Not accepted.

Case 472: A covey of up to 5 **King Quails** *Synoicus chinensis* was observed during the HBOC monthly outing to Minimbah Sandplain on the 21st May 2017. Several observers obtained brief views of the birds and some 'proof-shot' images were able to be taken. The birds were subsequently seen by other observers on later dates, with the highest count being of 7 birds. **Alan Stuart et al.**

Case 473: A female **Oriental Cuckoo** *Cuculus saturatus* was photographed at Galgabba Point (Swansea) on the 2nd June 2017. This is a very unseasonal record, though 2017 was to some extent

an 'exceptional year' for Oriental Cuckoos in the Hunter Region and elsewhere in NSW. **Mark Oliphant**

Case 474: A **Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove** *Ptilinopus regina* was photographed at Boys Walk, Cooranbong on the 30th January 2016 (the record was not brought forward until mid-2017). **Maurice Ashton**

Case 475: A dead **Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove** *Ptilinopus regina* was found at Forster on the 19th September 2016. **Peter Schofield**

Case 476: A **Shy Albatross** *Thalassarche cauta* was photographed on the Swansea pelagic, 21st July 2016. The bird was not identified as a Shy Albatross on the day and was only later confirmed from photographs more than 12 months after the trip was run. This is the much rarer of the two very similar "Shy-type" Albatrosses that occur in the Hunter Region. **Allan Richardson et al.**

Cases 477, 478 & 479: Each of these cases came from a single observers' visit to Durridgere Road (near Ulan) on the 24th September 2017 and heralded a remarkable influx of rare 'western species' into the Hunter Region. Case 477 was a **Little Button-quail** *Turnix velox* that was observed over a great length of time and eventually photographed by the patient observer (the first time this species has been photographed in the region). Whilst the observer was trying to obtain better views of the button-quail a male **Crimson Chat** *Epthianura tricolor* (Case 478) flew over the site and later on the same day a male **Black Honeyeater** *Sugomel niger* (Case 479) was seen coming down to drink at a waterhole. These were just the second record of Crimson Chat and third record of Little Button-quail for the Hunter Region. Several other observers were able subsequently to see additional Crimson Chats (e.g. two female birds 26/09/2017) and Black Honeyeaters (e.g. two male birds 02/10/2017) at the same site in the following week or so. **Michael Kearns**

Case 480: This case represents multiple observations at various locations of **Red-backed Kingfishers** *Todiramphus pyrropygius*. The first birds were found near the intersection of Durridgere and Ulan Roads on the 26th September 2017. In the ensuing week or so, birds were found at 3 discreet locations along Durridgere Road and at least 5 locations on Ulan Road. Elsewhere in the Region birds were found at Windy Homestead (HBOC camp), Bureen Bridge (the same site as the only previous record of Red-backed Kingfisher, from October 2002) and near Yarrawa. A bird was still present at Bureen as late as the 29th October 2017. **Jeff Jones, Mick Roderick and several other observers**

Case 481: Concurrently with the discovery of Red-backed Kingfishers on Durridgere Road and Oriental Plovers on Hexham Swamp (refer to page 15 for NSW ORAC case summaries) on the 26th September 2017, an **Australian Pratincole** *Stiltia isabella* was found and photographed, also on Hexham Swamp. Furthermore, two Australian Pratincoles were found along the Old Richmond Vale Railway Line on the 29th September 2017 (concurrently with 3 Little Curlews; refer to NSW ORAC summaries). **Leslie Wilson, Alwyn Simple et al.**

Cases 483 & 484: Both of these cases were from observations made at Windy Homestead on the October long weekend HBOC Camp. A male **Crimson Chat** *Epthianura tricolor* (Case 483) was found and photographed on the 30th September 2017. At least three **Black Honeyeaters** *Sugomel niger*

(Case 484) were located and photographed on the 1st October 2017. These cases were assessed separately to #478 and #479 respectively (see above) as they were the only additional records of both species to the Durrigere Road birds. **Eula McKane and George Voss**

Case 485: Three **Black-bellied Storm-petrels** *Fregetta tropica* were photographed on the Port Stephens pelagic, 6th October 2017. **Mick Roderick et al.**

Case 486: A **King Quail** *Synoicus chinensis* was observed along the Old Richmond Vale Railway Line, Hexham Swamp on the 9th October 2017. This report followed an earlier claim of a bird a few days earlier, as well as another sighting of a “probable King Quail” at around the same time. It should be noted that there were other subsequent reports of King Quails heard, seen and photographed at Hexham Swamp during the remainder of 2017. **Alex Berryman**

Cases 487, 488 & 489: Each of these cases relate to sightings made on the Port Stephens pelagic, 15th October 2017. Up to 8 **Black-bellied Storm-petrels** *Fregetta tropica* (Case 487) a singles of **Buller’s Shearwater** *Ardenna bulleri* (Case 488) and **Black Petrel** *Procellaria parkinsoni* (Case 489) were photographed on this pelagic trip. **Mick Roderick et al.**

Case 490: An adult female **Forest Kingfisher** *Todiramphus macleayii* was found during a routine survey of Tomago Wetlands on the 17th October 2017 and was subsequently seen on the following couple of days. **Michael Paver, Ann Lindsey et al.**

Case 491: A **Kelp Gull** *Larus dominicanus* photographed along Stockton Beach was first reported to a Facebook identification page on the 28th October 2017, seen thereafter by a small number of other observers on that day only. **Ian Benson et al.**

Case 492: A **Ruff** *Calidris pugnax* was claimed to have been seen at the Cattai Bridge wetlands on the 31st October 2017. The committee voted against acceptance (including a proxy assessment that was sought under the guidelines of the committee when a decision could not be made amongst standing members) mainly based on the lack of detail in the description of the bird. Not accepted.

Case 493: A **Ruff** *Calidris pugnax* was photographed at Swan Pond on Ash Island on 1st November 2017. Prior to that a bird consistent with a Ruff was seen briefly at the same location during the estuary wader surveys (21st October). Subsequently, another bird consistent with a Ruff was observed there during the November wader surveys (18th November) but was unable to be confirmed. It seems reasonable to conclude that there was a Ruff present on Ash Island between at least 21st October and 18th November 2017. **Rod Warnock**

Case 494: Two reports of an **Australian Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus dubius* were made from Mambo Wetlands, on the 22nd August and the 8th October 2017. The committee felt that the observer did not see the bird well enough to rule out other possibilities and relied too heavily on the vocalisations made by the bird(s). They also noted that as the observer was not 100% confident in the identification it would be difficult to accept with the information provided. Not accepted.

Case 495: At least two **Black Petrels** *Procellaria parkinsoni* were seen and photographed on the Port Stephens pelagic, 12th November 2017. Also seen on this day were numerous Mottled Petrels, a Cook's Petrel and a Little Shearwater – refer to Page 15). **Mick Roderick et al.**

Case 496: A **Forest Kingfisher** *Todiramphus macleayii* was reported at Tahlee (on the northern shore of Port Stephens) between the 6th December 2017 up until the 30th January 2018. The bird was observed and was heard vocalising on several occasions during this period. **Stuart Fleming**

Case 497: A **Buller's Shearwater** *Ardenna bulleri* was seen and photographed on the Swansea pelagic, 8th December 2017. **Mick Roderick et al.**

Case 498: Several **Grey Currawongs** *Strepera versicolor* were seen (with some photographed) in and around the Mount Coricudgy area on the 10th December 2017. Of note was the fact that juvenile birds were present; further evidence that this species is likely to breed in this remote part of the Region. **Michael Kearns**

Case 499: Up to four **Greater Sand Plovers** *Charadrius leschenaultii* were seen by numerous observers over the summer of 2017/2018 (whilst visiting the Aleutian Terns present at the time).

Case 500: A **Red-chested Button-quail** *Turnix pyrrhotorax* was observed and photographed feeding along the Pipeline Track on Hexham Swamp early on the morning of 28th December 2017. The bird was also seen at the same location by an intrepid observer at around 10pm that evening, but was not seen thereafter. As with the Little Button-quail seen at Durrigere Road (Case 477), this was the first time a Red-chested Button-quail had been photographed in the region. **Mick Roderick**

Case 501: A **Ruff** *Calidris pugnax* was photographed at Stockton Sandspit on the morning of 28th December 2017 and was subsequently seen by other observers over the following weeks (though the bird was not faithful to the site). **Dick Jenkin**

Case 502: This case relates to observations of at least two **Striated Pardalote** *Pardalotus striatus* exhibiting features of the subspecies '**Black-headed Pardalote**' *P.s.melanocephalus*. Three observers made the observations near Old Bar and Tea Gardens during spring 2017. Given some of the plumage features noted, birds initially were identified in the field as Black-headed Pardalotes, though subsequent examination of photographs suggested they were hybrids between *P.s.melanocephalus* and another subspecies of Striated Pardalote. Expert opinion was sought on the matter and the committee accepted both records as hybrid birds, though there was no resolution if the hybridisation had occurred with 'Eastern Striated Pardalote' *P.s.ornatus* or 'Western Striated Pardalote' *P.s.substriatus*, though the observers and committee members did note that *ornatus* was the most likely given the location of the birds. **Alan Stuart, Lois Wooding and Alan Rogers**

Case 505: An **Oriental Cuckoo** *Cuculus saturatus* was photographed at Cattai Wetlands 21st December 2017, though it did not come to the committee's attention until well into 2018 when it was posted for discussion on Facebook. **Paul Lynch**

Note: Cases 503 and 504 will be assessed during 2018

Photographs

Case 468

Kermadec
Petrel, off
Forster
12/03/2017

(Mick
Roderick)



Case 470

Oriental
Cuckoo, Ash
Island
6/04/2017

(Mick
Roderick)

Case 476

Shy Albatross, off
Swansea 21/07/2016

(Allan Richardson)



Case 480

Red-backed
Kingfisher,
Durrigere
Road
27/09/2017

(Allan
Richardson)

Case 483

Crimson Chat,
Windy
Homestead,
30/09/2017

(George Voss)



Case 484

Black
Honeyeaters,
Windy
Homestead,
30/09/2017

(George Voss)

Case 487

Black-bellied
Storm-petrel, off
Port Stephens
6/10/2017

(Mick Roderick)



Case 491

Kelp Gull,
Stockton
Beach
(Worimi CL)
28/10/2017

(Ian Benson)

Case 498

Grey Currawong, Mount Coricudgy
10/12/2017

(Michael Kearns)



Case 501

Ruff, Stockton Sandspit, 28/12/2017

(Dick Jenkin)

Hunter Region Cases assessed by BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee (BARC) for 2017

One case relevant to the Hunter Region was assessed by the BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee (BARC) during 2017, being for a Cook's Petrel seen and photographed off Port Stephens 27th November 2016. Two other submissions made to BARC for birds seen during 2017 (Cook's Petrel off Port Stephens 12th November 2017 and Ringed Plover on Stockton Beach [Worimi Conservation Lands] 25th August 2017) were assessed in early 2018 and have been included here for the sake of completeness. Many thanks to BARC Chair, Tony Palliser for this information.

BARC Case 965: A Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookii* was seen on a pelagic trip approximately 24 nautical miles southeast of Port Stephens, NSW on the 27th November 2016. The combination of size, bill shape, plumage, head colour and underwing were all seen well and are supported by photographs. The pale grey tones above, short-tailed jizz, the reduced extent of grey on the neck-sides strongly suggests Cook's Petrel. There have been many unsubstantiated reports from eastern Australia and Cook's Petrel remains a very rare bird. Notwithstanding that this record was only the 8th to be accepted by BARC it has now been removed from the BARC review list (June 2018) and future claims from the Hunter will be subject to review by the NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (ORAC). **Mick Roderick**



BARC Case 965

Cook's Petrel off
Port Stephens,
27th November
2016 (Jodi
Osgood)

BARC Case 984: A **Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookii*** was seen on a pelagic trip 25 nautical miles south-east of Port Stephens, NSW on the 12th November 2017. The combination of size, bill shape, plumage, head colour and underwing were all described and was supported by photographs. Ratio measurements were obtained from the photographs to help eliminate the similar Pycroft's Petrel *P. pycrofti*. This record was the 9th to be accepted by BARC and as mentioned earlier it has been removed from the BARC review list, with all NSW claims to be assessed by ORAC from hereon. **Alex Berryman & Mick Roderick**

BARC Case 984

Cook's Petrel off Port Stephens, 12th November 2017 (Alex Berryman)



BARC Case 985: A **Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*** was found standing in a swale behind sand dunes near the Lavis Lane entry point to Stockton Beach (Worimi Conservation Lands), NSW on the 25th August 2017. The bird was seen in association with Double-banded Plover *C. bicinctus* and the submission was supported by photographs taken on the day of the (only) observation. The submission carefully ruled out all other possibilities including the very similar Semipalmated Plover *C. semipalmatus*. This is the 5th confirmed record for Australia and the first for NSW to be accepted by BARC (there are old records of a single bird recorded four times in 1967 on Kooragang Island).



BARC Case 985

Ringed Plover, Stockton Beach 25th August 2017 (Ann Lindsey)

BARC Case 1002: This case related to the enigmatic discovery of **Aleutian Terns *Onychoprion aleuticus*** at Farquhar Inlet, near Old Bar, NSW on the 4th December 2016. The following year on the 11th December 2017 four birds were rediscovered at the same locality and between then and the 8th April 2018 there were regular reports of up to 18 birds (with the maximum number of birds photographed together being 16 individuals). The birds were seen and photographed by many.

The initial identification in 2016 was made through the use of expert opinion. The rediscovery the following season provided many opportunities for close scrutiny thus corroborating the find and to document the transition from non-breeding to breeding plumage. These constitute the first confirmed records for Australia and the Southern Hemisphere, though geolocator studies by Audubon Alaska may have recorded an individual off the Queensland coast in the past (M. Goldstein pers. comm.).



BARC Case 1002

Aleutian Tern at
Farquhar Inlet, 11th
December 2017 [left]
and 8th April 2018
[below]

(Liam Murphy)



Hunter Region Cases assessed by the NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (ORAC) for 2017

The following cases for submissions made to the NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (ORAC) were assessed during 2017 and early 2018. All submissions were for birds observed in the Hunter Region during 2017. Many thanks to NSW ORAC Secretary, Roger McGovern for this information.

ORAC Case 670: Two **Red-footed Boobies** *Sula sula*, one a 3rd year pale morph bird and the other a darker 2nd year bird, were seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Forster on 12th March 2017. The birds circled the boat down to a range of 5 metres allowing excellent diagnostic photographs to be taken. The committee accepted the record unanimously and it becomes the thirteenth confirmed record of Red-footed Booby in NSW with most of those records occurring between January and March. **Mick Roderick**



ORAC Case 670

Red-footed Booby off Forster, 12th
March 2017 (Allan Richardson)

ORAC Case 673: An **Oriental Pratincole** *Glareola maldivarum* was seen at Hexham Swamp on 21st February 2017 and it remained until at least 25th February 2017 being seen by more than 100 observers during that period. The high quality description with excellent diagnostic photographs left no doubt as to the identification and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. There have been only five previous records of Oriental Pratincole to be accepted by NSW ORAC with the most recent being an individual on Lord Howe Island in January 2012. *This is a new species for the Hunter Region list.* **Alan Stuart**



ORAC Case 673

Oriental Pratincole, Hexham
Swamp, 24th February 2017 (Steve
Aveling Rowe)

ORAC Case 676: Up to ten **Oriental Plovers** *Charadrius veredus* were first observed along the Old Pipeline Track at Hexham Swamp on the 26th September 2017. Birds were present until at least the 2nd October 2017. The description along with the diagnostic photographs left no doubt in the minds of the committee as to the identity of this bird – Caspian Plover, the only real confusion species, was clearly eliminated. This was the 35th confirmed sighting in NSW and in accordance with NSW ORAC rules (and threshold for frequency of reports) this species has now been removed from the Review List. **Ian Benson**



ORAC Case 676

Oriental Plover, Hexham Swamp, 29th September 2017 (Alwyn Simple)

ORAC Case 679: Three **Little Curlews** *Numenius minutus* were seen and photographed along the disused rail corridor for the Richmond Vale Railway line (northern edge of Hexham Swamp) on the 29th September 2017. The description and diagnostic photographs left no doubt as to the identity of these birds. This is the 52nd confirmed record of Little Curlew in NSW and the first confirmed record since 9th December 2016. **Alex Berryman & Mick Roderick**

ORAC Case 679

Little Curlews, Hexham Swamp, 29th September 2017 (Alex Berryman)



ORAC Case 680: A **Soft-plumaged Petrel** *Pterodroma mollis* was seen on a pelagic trip out of Port Stephens on the 15th October 2017. The bird was well observed by all on board over a period of between five and ten minutes and the excellent photographs and description leave no doubt as to the bird's identity. This is the 12th confirmed record for NSW and the first since a sighting off Eden on September 7, 2014 (NSW ORAC Case 625). *This is a new species for the Hunter Region list.* **Mick Roderick & Alex Berryman**



ORAC Case 680

Soft-plumaged Petrel off Port Stephens,
15th October 2017 (Mark Simpson)

ORAC Case 684: Up to twelve **Mottled Petrels** *Pterodroma inexpectata* were seen on a Port Stephens pelagic trip on the 12th November 2017 with up to seven individuals being seen the following day by keen observers that chartered a boat at short notice (treated as a single case). The high quality of the photographs together with the excellent and detailed description left no doubt at all as to the identification of these birds. These sightings constitute the 21st confirmed record of Mottled Petrel in NSW and the first since multiple sightings off Eden in October 2011 (NSW ORAC Case 546). *This is a new species for the Hunter Region list.* **Mick Roderick**

ORAC Case 684

Mottled Petrel off Port Stephens, 12th November 2017 (Alex Berryman)



ORAC Case 685: A Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis* was seen by 4 or 5 observers on a pelagic trip out of Port Stephens on the 12th November 2017. Although the sighting was very brief some photographs were obtained which confirmed the identification beyond doubt. This is only the sixth confirmed record for NSW since the species was added to the NSW ORAC Review List in 2011, although there are many reports of sightings and beach cast specimens dating back to 1942. It is also just the second report of an at-sea bird since a record of a bird seen off Sydney in July 2012. This is the third record for the Hunter Region, being just the second confirmed at-sea sighting and also the first time one has been photographed. **Mick Roderick & Alex Berryman**

ORAC Case 685

Little Shearwater off Port Stephens,
12th November 2017 (Michael Kearns)



ORAC Case 687: A Common Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* was first found (by Michael Kearns) at Stockton Sandspit on the 29th December 2017 (though the submission related to a sighting dated the following day). The bird was present and seen by many observers until the second week of February. The description and photograph clearly demonstrated the diagnostic features of a Common Gull-billed Tern including smaller size, bill profile and smaller dark ear patch. The bird was considered most likely to be of the race *G. n. affinis*. This is only the second record to be accepted by NSW ORAC coming only one month after the previous record from Shoalhaven Heads (NSW ORAC Case 686). It is a new species for the



Hunter Region list, though it is noted that a sighting was made on the 22nd February 1991 when the Australian *G. macrotarsa* and Common Gull-billed Terns were lumped as the one species (D. James pers. comm.). **Ann Lindsey**

ORAC Case 687

Common Gull-billed Tern, Stockton Sandspit, 12th January 2018 (Mick Roderick)