



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

Records Appraisal Committee 2019 Report

Compiled by Mick Roderick, November 2020



Hunter Bird Observers Club Records Appraisal Committee 2019 Report

Below is a list of cases assessed by the Hunter Bird Observers Club (HBOC) Records Appraisal Committee (RAC) in 2019. A summary of each case is provided, along with some photographs. A summary of cases relevant to the Hunter Region assessed by BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee (BARC) or the NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (ORAC) in 2019 is also provided. This report has been compiled by Mick Roderick.

Front Cover Image: South Polar Skua. NSW ORAC Case #723; new species for the Hunter Region (Liam Murphy)

List of Accepted Cases

527	Diamond Dove	Several locations, Upper Hunter	January to March 2019
528	White-tailed Tropicbird	Pelagic off Crowdy Head	20 th January 2019
529	Brown Booby	Nobbys/Stockton Breakwall	January-February 2019
530	White-tailed Tropicbird	Merewether Beach	3 rd February 2019
531	Red-tailed Tropicbird	Cessnock	5 th January 2019
532	Pied Honeyeater	Upper Hunter (Durrigere area)	February-March 2019
533	Black Honeyeater	Upper Hunter (Durrigere area)	February-March 2019
534	Common Gull-billed Tern	Stockton Sandspit	12 th March 2019
535	White-tailed Tropicbird	Pelagic off Crowdy Head	14 th April 2019
536	Kelp Gull	Nobbys/Stockton Breakwall	17 th April 2019
537	Red-backed Kingfisher	Warrah Bridge	21 st September 2019
538	Black Honeyeater	Medhurst Bridge / other Upper Hunter sites	October-November 2019
539	Crimson Chat	Various Upper Hunter sites	October-November 2019
540	Banded Stilt	Stockton Borehole Swamp	18 th October 2019
541	Ground Cuckoo-shrike	Durrigere Road	November-December 2019
542	Banded Stilt	Swan Pond, Ash Island	November-December 2019
543	Common Gull-billed Tern	Stockton Sandspit	27 th December 2019
544	Red-backed Kingfisher	Ringwood Road	27 th October 2019

Case Summaries

Case 527: A spate of **Diamond Dove *Geopelia cuneata*** records in January/February 2019 started when a bird was found along Ringwood Rd (just north of Goulburn River National Park) on the 7th January 2019, with a bird subsequently found along Roma Road (north of Merriwa) the following day. There were numerous reports of up to four birds from several locations centred on Ringwood Road and Durrigere Road until at least mid-February. **Mick Roderick, Dan Williams et al.**

Case 528: A **White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*** was photographed on a pelagic out of Crowdy Head on 20th January 2019. Also seen on the day were Cook's, Gould's and Tahiti Petrels (see ORAC Case #720 for the Cook's Petrel details). **Michael Kearns et al.**

Case 529: This case involved a well-documented male **Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*** that was first reported from Nobbys Breakwall on the 28th January 2019. The bird was found to be quite approachable as it rested mostly at the end of Stockton Breakwall, though was seen in Newcastle Harbour and short distances to sea. The bird was easily approached because it was carrying an injury in the form of the head of a fishing jig, with the hook embedded in the breast of the bird. It was observed by many people for a period of weeks until it was not seen again. **Steven Cox**

Case 530: This case referred to a beachcast juvenile **White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*** found along Merewether Beach on the 3rd Feb 2019. The detailed photographs left no doubt as to the identification of the bird. **Rachel Klyve**

Case 531: This case was also an injured tropicbird, this time an adult **Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda*** that was found alive in a backyard in Cessnock on 5th January 2019. The bird was taken into care but later died. **Joy Nicholls**

Case 532: This case related to an influx of **Pied Honeyeaters *Certhionyx variegatus*** in the Upper Hunter that occurred in February / March 2019. The first record was of a flock of 11 individuals found along Smedes Road on the 9th February. There were many subsequent reports of lesser numbers from the vicinity of Smedes Road/Durrigere Road over the next few weeks, sometimes in company with Black Honeyeaters (see below). The final report was of a male bird along Cliffdale Road on 4th March 2019. Of note, virtually every reported observation of Pied Honeyeater during this time required the observer to attract birds in using call-playback, though no birds were heard to vocalise. Also of interest, very few reports of birds feeding were made. **Michael Kearns, Mick Roderick et al**

Case 533: Probably related to the above influx of Pied Honeyeaters, there was also a noted influx of **Black Honeyeaters *Sugomel nigrum*** in 2019, though was far more extensive than the Pieds. Black Honeyeaters were first noted along Durrigere Road 15th February 2019 and thereafter several more autumn reports were received. Amongst the birds seen were juvenile birds. There were no winter reports, but subsequently many spring/summer reports came from Durrigere Road (and were seen here into early 2020). Most notable was a flock of 25 birds seen on the 3rd November 2019 near Murrumblin Creek, Durrigere Road; many birds were seen feeding on Yellow Box blossom. No breeding was detected, but must be considered a possibility (see also Case #538 below). **Allan Richardson, Steve Roderick, Michael Kearns et al.**

Case 534: A Common Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* was photographed at Stockton Sandspit on 12th March 2019, with subsequent reports made on the following few days. **Ted Elks**

Case 535: Another **White-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon lepturus* was photographed on a pelagic out of Crowdy Head on 14th April 2019. **Michael Kearns et al.**

Case 536: This case referred to an immature **Kelp Gull** *Larus dominicanus* photographed at Stockton and Nobbys on the 17th and 18th April 2019. **Jeff Jones**

Case 537: A **Red-backed Kingfisher** *Todiramphus pyrrhopygius* was photographed at Warrah Ridge (Liverpool Plains) 21st September 2019 and was subsequently seen by other observers a few days later. **Michael Kearns**

Case 538: A female **Black Honeyeater** *Sugomel nigrum* was photographed at Medhurst Bridge on the 11th October 2019, being the first spring record of the 'second wave' of Black Honeyeaters referred to in Case 533 above. Aside from birds in the broader Durridgere area in spring, there were also birds seen elsewhere in the Hunter Valley (e.g. Merriwa River Valley 26th November 2019). **Darren Earnshaw, Mick Roderick et al**

Case 539: A male **Crimson Chat** *Epthianura tricolor* was found foraging on the ground at Fossickers Campground, Ringwood Road, Goulburn River National Park on the 17th October. There were no subsequent reports until birds were seen along Smedes Road 3rd November, followed by more reports in the Durridgere/Smedes Road region through November. **Neil Fraser, Michael Kearns et al**

Case 540: A juvenile **Banded Stilt** *Cladorhynchus leucocephalus* was photographed at Stockton Borehole Swamp (near Teralba, Lake Macquarie) 18th October 2019 and was subsequently seen by many observers. This was the first Banded Stilt reported in the Hunter Region since the departure of a long-staying bird in the Hunter Estuary in January 2013. **Caius Christoe**

Case 541: Three **Ground Cuckoo-shrikes** *Coracina maxima* were found along Durridgere Road on the 15th November 2019 and were subsequently seen by many observers (continuing into early 2020). The three birds were comprised of a pair of adults and a juvenile bird. A nest-like structure was also found in a tree they were frequenting and breeding in the area must be considered a possibility. **Grant Brosie**

Case 542: Two adult **Banded Stilts** *Cladorhynchus leucocephalus* (hence distinct from Case 540 above) were photographed on Swan Pond, (Ash Island) on the 28th November 2019, again being seen by many other observers and into early 2020. **Michael Kearns**

Case 543: A Common Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* was photographed at Stockton Sandspit on 27th December 2019, with many subsequent reports made into early 2020 (when it was at times the only Gull-billed Tern species present). **Ann Lindsey**

Case 544: A **Red-backed Kingfisher** *Todiramphus pyrrhopygius* was seen perched on a fencepost along Ringwood Road (north of Goulburn River National Park) during the 2019 Twitchathon, on the 27th October. This individual was not reported after this observation. **Grant Brosie and Nick Livanos**

Photographs

Case 527

Diamond Dove, Ringwood Road 7th January 2019 (Mick Roderick)



Case 529

Brown Booby, Nobbys Breakwall 28th January 2019 (Steven Cox)



Case 532

Pied Honeyeater, Durrigere Road 15th February 2019 (Allan Richardson)



Case 539 Crimson Chat, Smedes Road 3rd November 2019 (Michael Kearns)



Case 536

Kelp Gull, Stockton 18th April 2019 (Bruce Watts)



Case 541

Ground Cuckoo-shrikes, Durrigere Road, 25th November 2019 (Alwyn Simple)



Hunter Region Cases assessed by the BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee (BARC) in 2019

Two cases relevant to the Hunter Region were assessed by the BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee (BARC) during 2019. In both cases the birds being assessed were seen just outside the Hunter Region (by <1km) but have been included here due to the proximity to the Hunter Region boundary.

1050	New Zealand Storm Petrel (type)	Off Crowdy Head	13 th January 2019
1077	Rosy Starling	Gwandalan	12 th August 2019
1108	Pycroft's Petrel*	Broughton Island	25 th /26 th October 2019

* assessed during 2020 but included here for the sake of completeness

BARC Case 1050: This case concerned the sighting of a striped storm petrel considered by the submitter to be a **New Zealand Storm Petrel *Fregetta maoriana*** at sea off Crowdy Head on 13th January 2019. Although six members of the committee voted to accept the record as a New Zealand Storm Petrel, the remainder felt that there was insufficient knowledge of the plumage variations of the undescribed taxon usually referred to as 'New Caledonian Storm Petrel' to totally rule out this taxon as a possibility. Consequently, the committee agreed to accept the record as either a New Zealand Storm Petrel or a 'New Caledonian Storm Petrel' until more information comes to hand at which time this sighting can be reviewed again. This is the 7th such record to be accepted by BARC with all sightings being from the east coast. **Ashley Carlson**

BARC Case 1077: This case concerned the sighting of a **Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus*** at Gwandalan on 12th August 2019 with subsequent searches failing to rediscover the bird. The submission relies on a series of photographs which clearly depict a Rosy Starling, with the pink and black plumage characters being diagnostic and unique. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and discounted the possibility that it was an escapee given that this species is not kept as a cage bird in Australia. This becomes the 5th record for Australia and the only previous NSW record was from Coffs Harbour on December 4–6, 2006. (BARC Case 520) **Sharon Boyter**



BARC Case 1050

New Zealand-type Storm-petrel off Crowdy Head, 13th January 2019 (Nick Thompson)

BARC Case 1108: This case concerned the remarkable record of a **Pycroft's Petrel *Pterodroma pycrofti*** found within an artificial nest box that had been installed on the summit of Pinkatop Mountain (Broughton Island) for Gould's Petrels *P. leucoptera*. In fact, the nest box contained two birds; one was a Gould's Petrel and the other the Pycroft's Petrel outlined in the BARC submission. Measurements were taken along with a series of photographs, confirming the identity of the bird as a Pycroft's Petrel based on biometrics and plumage characters. Members of BARC voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. This is the first record of Pycroft's Petrel to be accepted by BARC and is the first confirmed record for Australia in recent times. Paradoxically, this record takes the species off the "Extinct" category on the Australian bird list (per BirdLife Australia Working List V3), based on the fact that it formerly bred on Norfolk Island but became extinct there c.1800 (and there are subfossil records from Lord Howe Island).
Alan Stuart and Tom Clarke



BARC Case 1108

Pycroft's Petrel on Broughton Island, 25th October 2019, alongside the Gould's Petrel that was sharing the same nest box below (both photos, Alan Stuart)



Hunter Region Cases assessed by the NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (ORAC) in 2019

The following cases for birds seen within the Hunter Region were assessed by the NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (ORAC) during 2019. It should be noted that a Red-footed Booby photographed inside Port Stephens on 24th April 2019 had been submitted to ORAC for review not long before the compilation of this report.

718	Grey-headed Albatross	Off Port Stephens	22 nd June 2008
720	Cook's Petrel	Off Crowdy Head	20 th January 2019
723	South Polar Skua	Off Forster	4 th April 2019
740	Black-winged Petrel	Off Crowdy Head	17 th November 2019

ORAC Case 718: An ORAC committee member sighted photographs of a juvenile **Grey-headed Albatross** *Thalassarche chrystostoma* taken about 2km off Port Stephens on the 22nd June 2008 and asked the photographer to make a submission of the sighting. The three photographs clearly showed the characteristics of a juvenile Grey-headed Albatross including the extensive dark hood, bill structure and colour, and the typical bull-necked appearance. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the 34th known record for the species in NSW but, with it being removed from the NSW ORAC Review List for a number of years, it is difficult to be certain of the exact number of valid records. **Leanne Maffesoni**

ORAC Case 720: A **Cook's Petrel** *Pterodroma cookii* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Crowdy Head on 20th January 2019. The excellent photographs together with a brief description allowed the identification to be confirmed and the possibility of Pycroft's Petrel *P. pycrofti** to be eliminated. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the 18th accepted record for NSW. **Liam Murphy**

ORAC Case 723: A **South Polar Skua** *Stercorarius maccormicki* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Forster on 4th April 2019. The bird was well seen down to a range of 5 metres and the excellent diagnostic photographs left no doubt as to the identification although two committee members felt that the bird was a pale or pale/intermediate morph. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it is the second submission of South Polar Skua to come before NSW ORAC since pale and intermediate morph birds were removed from the BARC Review List and added to the NSW ORAC Review List in 2018. It becomes the 12th confirmed record for NSW. **Mick Roderick**

ORAC Case 740: A **Black-winged Petrel** *Pterodroma nigripennis* was seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Crowdy Head on 17th November 2019. The committee accepted this record unanimously and thanks Jodi for taking the time to prepare the submission complete with diagnostic photographs. This is the second case to come before NSW ORAC since Black-winged Petrel was reinstated on the Review List in January 2018. There have been only five reports of this species off the NSW coast since 2000 and the last record to be accepted by NSW ORAC was also off Crowdy Head in January 2018 (NSW ORAC Case 690). **Jodi Osgood**



ORAC Case 720

Cook's Petrel
off Crowdy
Head, 20th
January 2019
(Nick
Thompson)

ORAC Case 723

South Polar Skua, off Forster 4th April 2019 (Liam Murphy)

