

NSW ORAC CASES DECIDED IN 2015

619	Peregrine Falcon	east of Griffith	March 18, 2010	Accepted
621	Grey-headed Albatross	off Sydney	July 10, 2010	Accepted
625	Soft-plumaged Petrel	off Eden	September 7, 2014	Accepted
626	Grey-headed Albatross	off Wollongong	September 22, 2012	Accepted
627	Little Curlew	Stockton Spit	September 21, 2014	Not Accepted
633	Little Curlew	Hexham Swamp	November 30, 2014	Accepted
634	Cook's Petrel	off Swansea	December 4, 2014	Accepted
635	Blue Petrel	off Wollongong	September 6, 2014	Accepted
636	Northern Royal Albatross	off Wollongong	September 6, 2014	Accepted
637	Long-toed Stint	Kooragang Dykes	November 22, 2014	Accepted
638	Great Frigatebird	Newcastle	January 7-8, 2015	Accepted
639	Grey-headed Albatross	Stockton Beach	June 13-15, 2014	Accepted
640	Southern Fulmar	Minnie Water	September 6, 2003	Accepted
641	Pink Robin	Llandilo	June 7, 2015	Accepted

OVERVIEW

NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (NSW ORAC) reviewed 14 submissions in calendar year 2015 of which 13 were accepted and one was not accepted. The record which was not accepted related to a possible Little Curlew at Stockton Sandspit in September 2014. Three of the eight committee members felt that, although the identification may have been correct, the brief description, lack of photographs and the observer's admission to being only 80 – 99% confident of the identification were reasons not to accept the sighting.

The NSW ORAC Review List was modified in 2015 with the removal of Raja Shelduck from the list and the decision to review reports of Cotton Pygmy Goose only in the event of reports further than 100km from the Queensland border. With some of the cases reviewed this year being historical records, the year itself was fairly quiet in terms of unusual sightings with only two submissions relating to sightings in this calendar year. The highlight of the records appraised in 2015 was undoubtedly the Blue Petrel seen on a pelagic trip off Wollongong in September 2014.

CASE SUMMARIES

Case 619: Although NSW ORAC has a Review List of species which require a submission to be made for review by the committee, there are occasions when a species which is not on the Review List is deemed worthy of a submission to ORAC. A very pale breasted Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* believed to be of the Siberian race *calidus* was seen and photographed at Barrenbox Swamp east of Griffith on March 10, 2010. Since this race has never been confirmed previously in Australia (although there have been unconfirmed reports from the Kimberley), the record was reviewed and accepted by NSW ORAC. An opinion was also sought from a leading Peregrine specialist in the USA, Bill Clark, who confirmed that this bird was indeed of the Siberian race *calidus*. David Webb and Keith Hutton.

Case 621: A stage 1 (juvenile or young immature) Grey-headed Albatross *Thalassarche chrysostoma* was seen and well photographed at the continental shelf break off Sydney on July 10, 2010. This submission is for a historical record (Grey-headed Albatross being added to the NSW ORAC Review List in 2013) and the authors have done an excellent job of analysing the key characteristics which differentiate these juvenile/immature birds from young Campbell and Black-browed Albatross. The committee voted unanimously to accept this record which becomes the 29th confirmed record for the state, although some previous sightings have not been subject to review. Nikolas Haass and Raja Stephenson

Case 625: A light morph Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis* was seen and photographed at the continental shelf break off Eden on September 7, 2014. The excellent photographs and comprehensive description left no doubt as to the identity of this bird. The committee voted unanimously to accept this record and it is the 11th confirmed record of this species off NSW. Jonathan Henshaw

Case 626: A juvenile/younger immature Grey-headed Albatross *Thalassarche chrysostoma* was seen and photographed off Wollongong on September 22, 2012. The authors of this submission did an excellent job of analysing the key differentials between this species and young Black-browed/Campbell Albatross and made a case that young GHA can have a paler bill with darker tip rather than only all dark bills as previously thought to be the case. The committee voted unanimously to accept this record and it is the 30th record of this species off NSW although some previous sightings have not been subject to review. Nikolas Haass and Raja Stephenson

Case 627: A bird thought to be a Little Curlew *Numenius minutus* was seen at Stockton Sandspit, Newcastle on September 21, 2014. This submission provided some difficulty for the committee in that the description was quite brief, there were no supporting photographs, the habitat is not usual for this species and the observer was only 80-99% confident of the identification. The committee voted reluctantly not to accept this report although a majority of members felt that the bird may well have been a Little Curlew.

Case 633: A group of six Little Curlew *Numenius minutus* were well seen and photographed at Hexham Swamp Nature Reserve on November 30 and December 1, 2014. The thorough description and the photographs left no doubt as to the identification and the committee voted unanimously to accept the record. It becomes the 49th confirmed record for NSW. Allan Richardson

Case 634: A Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookii* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip off Swansea on December 4, 2014. The excellent description and the diagnostic photographs clearly

eliminated the very similar Pycroft's Petrel and the committee voted unanimously to accept the record. This is the 13th confirmed record of Cook's Petrel in NSW. Mick Roderick

Case 635: A Blue Petrel *Halobaena caerulea* was well seen and photographed for more than 30 minutes on a pelagic trip out of Wollongong on September 6, 2014. Although the description was quite brief, the excellent photographs left no doubt as to the identity of this bird and the committee voted unanimously to accept the record. Although this is the 26th confirmed record for NSW, this species is much rarer than that figure would suggest since previous sightings have come in irruptions over short periods, the most notable being eleven records in 1998. Since then, there has been only one confirmed record, also off Wollongong, in June 2013. Joshua Bergmark

Case 636: An adult Northern Royal Albatross *Diomedea sanfordi* was well seen and photographed on the same pelagic trip out of Wollongong on September 6, 2014 that recorded the Blue Petrel (ORAC Case 635). The description and photographs left no doubt as to the identity of the bird and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. This is the 11th confirmed record to be accepted by NSW ORAC but there are almost certainly several other valid sightings of this species in NSW since the late 1960's. Joshua Bergmark

Case 637: A Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta* was seen and well photographed on the Kooragang Dykes opposite Stockton Sandspit, Newcastle on November 22, 2014. The description and excellent close range photographs clearly separated this bird from any possible confusion species such as Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and even from Least Sandpiper which has not been recorded in Australia. The committee voted unanimously to accept this record which becomes the 30th confirmed sighting in NSW and the 6th record in the last ten years. Dan Williams

Case 638: An adult female Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor* was seen and well photographed on a number of occasions around Newcastle Harbour down to Nobby's Lighthouse on January 7 and 8, 2015. The submission and diagnostic photographs show that this bird was an adult female Great Frigatebird either of the North Pacific form or the Indian Ocean form, both of which have pink orbital rings and pinkish bill. The committee voted unanimously to accept this record which becomes only the 4th confirmed record of this species in NSW although there are a number of published reports which occurred before the inception of NSW ORAC. Adam Fawcett, Ian Benson and Mick Roderick.

Case 639: Two beach washed juvenile Grey-headed Albatross *Thalassarche chrysostoma* were discovered on Stockton Beach on June 13, 2014 and June 15, 2014. The size and underwing pattern of these birds showed that they were either Black-browed, Campbell or Grey-headed Albatross and an examination of the bill plates showed that these birds were in fact Grey-headed Albatross. The bill plates of GHA show a distinct separation between the culminicorn and latericorn with the gap being covered by membranous naricorn material or 'skin' between the nostrils and the feathered face. The committee voted unanimously to accept this record and it is the 31st record of this species in NSW although some previous sightings have not been subject to review. Mick Roderick

Case 640: A beach washed Southern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialisoides* was discovered and photographed on the beach some 5km south of Minnie Water store on September 6, 2003. This historical record had not previously been reviewed and our thanks go to Mick Roderick for preparing a submission which allowed the committee to unanimously accept the record. There are now a total of 36 confirmed records of Southern Fulmar in NSW. Mick Roderick

Case 641: An adult female Pink Robin *Petroica rodinogaster* was captured in a mist net during a banding programme at Wianamatta Reserve, Llandilo on June 7, 2015. 'Brown' winter robins are notoriously difficult to identify in the field unless very well seen and photographed and NSW ORAC has not confirmed a record north of the Southern Highlands since 1987, although there have been unconfirmed sightings since that date. It was notable that this bird had been banded at the same site a year earlier as a juvenile. The photographs and morphometrics clearly showed this bird to be a Pink Robin and the committee voted unanimously to accept the record. It becomes only the second record north of the Southern Highlands to be accepted by NSW ORAC although there have been a small number of unconfirmed reports since the early 1970's. Jeff Hardy

UNCONFIRMED REPORTS

With an increasing number of reports of unusual or rare species being posted onto on-line and social media sites such as Facebook, NSW ORAC has become concerned that some of these reports do not receive the level of scrutiny required to verify them as confirmed records. It was agreed by the committee members that ORAC would attempt to gather more information from the authors of postings of rare or out-of-range species in the form of photographs and/or a submission. In the event of failure to obtain corroborating information, NSW ORAC would publish the report as an unconfirmed sighting to clarify that it had not undergone a review by the relevant rarities committee. There are five such reports which have come into this category in 2015.

A sighting of a Black-breasted Buttonquail was reported from Mallanganee National Park some 20km west of Casino on November 25, 2013. The observer was contacted and asked for more information about this sighting but no response was forthcoming. It therefore has to be considered an unconfirmed report.

A sighting of a frigatebird believed to be a Great Frigatebird was reported from Shelley Beach, Port Macquarie on January 14, 2015. Unfortunately, the observer did not have any optical aids available and was unable to confirm the field marks which would have separated this bird from other frigatebird species and it remains an unconfirmed report.

A sighting of a very pale Peregrine Falcon which may have been of the Siberian race *calidus* was reported from Barrenbox Swamp east of Griffith on February 18, 2015 by the same observers that had a confirmed record at the same location on March 10, 2010 (NSW ORAC Case 619). Unfortunately, this individual was not so well seen and was not photographed and it therefore remains an unconfirmed report.

A sighting of a possible White (Black-backed) Wagtail was reported from North Tuncurry on April 1, 2015. With no further information available, this sighting remains an unconfirmed report.

A possible Western Sandpiper was reported from Lake Woolumboola on December 17, 2015 but, with inconclusive photographic evidence, this remains an unconfirmed report.

Roger McGovern

Secretary NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee

January 10, 2016

