

### NSW ORAC CASES DECIDED IN 2017

657	Little Shearwater	South Ballina Beach	August 6, 2016	Accepted
658	Salvin's Albatross	off Kiama	June 25, 2016	Accepted
659	Little Shearwater	Norah Head	June 7, 2016	Accepted
660	Pied Heron	Lake Cargelligo	November 8, 2016	Accepted
661	Little Curlew	near Ballina	November 12, 2016	Accepted
662	Little Curlew	Eastlakes Golf Course	December 9, 2016	Accepted
664	Red-backed Buttonquail	Ellenborough	December 12, 2016	Accepted
665	Kerguelen Petrel	Callala Bay	June 5, 2016	Accepted
666	Grey-backed Storm Petrel	off Kiama	July 24, 2016	Accepted
667	Red-necked Phalarope	Lord Howe Island	January 19, 2017	Accepted
668	Red-backed Buttonquail	Dilkoon	January 19, 2017	Accepted
669	Pied Heron	Lake Coolah	December 29, 2016	Accepted
670	Red-footed Booby	off Forster	March 12, 2017	Accepted
671	Light-mantled Albatross	North Head, Sydney	March 19, 2017	Accepted
672	Pied Heron	Condobolin	February 21, 2017	Accepted
673	Oriental Pratincole	Hexham Swamp	September 22, 2017	Accepted
674	Little Shearwater	Lennox Head	June 12, 2017	Accepted
675	Scarlet-chested Parrot	south of Broken Hill	October 24, 2010	Accepted
676	Oriental Plover	Hexham Swamp	September 22, 2017	Accepted

### OVERVIEW

NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (NSW ORAC) reviewed a total of 19 cases in calendar year 2017 all of which were accepted. Probably the highlight of the records reviewed in 2017 was the first breeding record of Pied Heron in NSW to come before the committee with an adult and four juveniles seen in late February and early March at Wallaroi Creek 16km SSE of Condobolin. There have been credible reports of breeding Pied Heron in the Macquarie Marshes in 2001 and 2011 but this is the first record assessed by the committee and is a very significant event. There were two other late 2016/early 2017 Pied Heron records accepted in western NSW in 2017

and this was a reflection of the major rainfall event experienced in the region in late 2016 which made conditions ideal for waterbird dispersion.

Also of significance was the Oriental Pratincole seen at Hexham Swamp in late February 2017 which was the first mainland NSW record for eleven years since a bird was recorded near South West Rocks in February 2006 (NSW ORAC Case 412)

## CASE SUMMARIES

**Case 657:** Three beach cast specimens of Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis* were collected at South Ballina Beach, one each on August 6, 7 and 8, 2016 after a period of heavy rain and strong winds. The written description and photographs showed that these were birds of the nominate race from Lord Howe Island and the committee voted unanimously to accept the record. This is the third confirmed record for NSW since the species was added to the Review List in 2011. Steve McBride

**Case 658:** An adult Salvin's Albatross *Thalassarche salvini* was seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Kiama on June 25, 2016. Adult Salvin's Albatross are rarely reported in NSW waters and this one provided close views down to 5 metres allowing excellent diagnostic photographs to be obtained. The authors did an excellent job of highlighting the key identifying features of this bird and the committee voted unanimously to accept the record. It is the third confirmed sighting in NSW since the species was added to the Review List and the first since October 8, 2011. Graham Barwell, Brook Whyllie and Lindsay Smith

**Case 659:** A beach cast specimen of Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis* was collected at Jenny Dixon Beach, Norah Head on June 7, 2016. No submission for this report was made and the committee decided to assess it on the basis of the three photographs that were taken. The committee voted by majority to accept this record with one member feeling that the images did not satisfactorily eliminate the possibility of Subantarctic Shearwater. This is the fourth confirmed record for NSW since the species was added to the Review List in 2011. Alison Sigley

**Case 660:** A Pied Heron *Egretta picata* was seen and photographed on Lachlan Valley Way north of Murrin Bridge on November 8, 2016. The region had received above average rainfall over the preceding few weeks making conditions ideal for the dispersion of waterbirds over a wide area. This was the first of several reports of Pied Herons in NSW in late 2016 and early 2017. The committee accepted the record unanimously and it becomes the sixth confirmed record for NSW and the first since 2011. Ashwin Rudder and Shoshana Rapley

**Case 661:** A Little Curlew *Numenius minutus* was discovered at Teven Road Swamp, Ballina on November 12, 2016. The description and excellent photographs left no doubt as to the identity of the bird and the committee voted unanimously to accept the record. It becomes the fiftieth confirmed record for Little Curlew in NSW and the first since November 30, 2014. Hans Wohlmuth

**Case 662:** A Little Curlew *Numenius minutus* was discovered at Eastlakes Golf Course, Sydney on December 9, 2016. The description and diagnostic photographs left no doubt as to the identity of

the bird and the committee voted unanimously to accept the record. It becomes the fifty first confirmed record for Little Curlew in NSW. Jesse Gibson

**Case 664:** An adult male Red-backed Buttonquail *Turnix maculosus* was seen briefly in a suburban garden in Ellenborough on December 12, 2016. This case was a very difficult one for the committee in that the sighting was brief, the description was not detailed and no photographs were obtained. The first round of voting resulted in five votes for acceptance and three votes against acceptance on the basis that there was not enough evidence to be certain of the identity. Under the rules of ORAC, the case went to a second round of voting and, after an exchange of views between the members, the committee voted unanimously to accept the record. It is the first confirmed record in NSW since February 2014. Dwaine Laxdal

**Case 665:** A Kerguelen Petrel *Pterodroma brevirostris* was found alive in the backyard of a house in Callala Bay near Jervis Bay on June 5, 2016 after being blown ashore in a large storm. The description and photographs in the submission clearly showed the key identification features of Kerguelen Petrel and the committee voted unanimously to accept the record. There are about twelve reports for this species in NSW in the period from 1954 to 1985, prior to the formation of NSW ORAC, but this is the first record of Kerguelen Petrel in NSW to be accepted by ORAC. Brook Whyllie

**Case 666:** A Grey-backed Storm Petrel *Garrodia nereis* was well observed and photographed on a pelagic trip off Kiama on July 24, 2016. The excellent photographs included in the submission left no doubt as to the identification of the bird and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. This is the thirteenth confirmed record of Grey-backed Storm Petrel in NSW although it should be noted that NSW ORAC only reviews sightings reported north of Ulladulla. Brook Whyllie

**Case 667:** An adult Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* was seen some 3.5NM north of Ball's Pyramid, Lord Howe Island on November 29, 2016. The photographs in the submission showed the key identification features and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. It is only the fourth confirmed record for NSW and the first record for Lord Howe Island. Jack Shick

**Case 668:** An adult female Red-backed Buttonquail *Turnix maculosus* was seen at Dilkoon, 29.5km north of Grafton on January 19, 2017. Although no description was provided by the observer, his excellent photographs were totally diagnostic and the record was accepted unanimously by the committee. The committee noted that it is interesting that all reports of this species in NSW have been in the months from November to February and it is not clear whether this is due to migratory/dispersive behaviour or due to heightened activity of the species at this time of the year. Jeff Keyes

**Case 669:** A Pied Heron *Egretta picata* was seen and photographed at the northern end of Lake Coolah on the Narrandera/Barellan road on December 29, 2016. The region had received above average rainfall over the preceding few weeks making conditions ideal for the dispersion of waterbirds over a wide area and this was one of several reports of the species during this period. The photographs left no doubt as to the identification and the committee voted unanimously for acceptance and it becomes the seventh confirmed record for NSW. Max O'Sullivan

**Case 670:** Two Red-footed Boobies *Sula sula*, one a 3<sup>rd</sup> year pale morph bird and the other a darker 2<sup>nd</sup> year bird, were seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Forster on March 12, 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

**Case 671:** A Light-mantled Albatross *Phoebastria palpebrata* was seen on a land-based sea watch at North Head, Sydney on March 19, 2017. The report of vagrant seabirds from shore is always a source of some difficulty for assessment by the committee due to the distances involved, the lack of photographs and the problems of assessing size and fine plumage details. A majority of the committee felt that the description addressed most of the key characteristics of a Light-mantled Albatross and voted to accept the record with one dissenting vote. It becomes the twenty third confirmed record for NSW and the first since March 2014. Michael Ronan

**Case 672:** An adult and four juvenile Pied Herons *Egretta picata* were well seen and photographed on an oxbow lagoon adjacent to Wallaroi Creek 16km SSE of Condobolin on February 21 and 26, and on March 5, 2017. The region had received above average rainfall over the preceding weeks making conditions ideal for the dispersion of waterbirds over a wide area. With the four juvenile birds seen to be fed by the adult, the committee considered that this was adequate evidence of breeding at the site and it therefore became the first breeding record for the species to come before NSW ORAC and, as such, is a very significant record. There have been very credible breeding reports for Pied Heron previously in NSW notably in the Wilgara area of Macquarie Marshes in 2001 and in P block of Macquarie Marshes, 30km west of Quambone, in 2011 although these reports were not reviewed by NSW ORAC. The committee voted unanimously to accept this record and it becomes the eighth confirmed record in NSW to be accepted by NSW ORAC. Warren Chad

**Case 673:** An Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* was seen at Hexham Swamp on February 21, 2017 and it remained until at least February 25, 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. Alan Stuart

**Case 674:** A beach cast specimen of Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis* was collected at Seven Mile Beach, Lennox Head on June 12, 2017. The lack of any dark feathering below the eye eliminated the unlikely possibility of Subantarctic Shearwater and the committee unanimously accepted the record as a Little Shearwater probably the nominate race from Lord Howe Island. This is the fifth confirmed record for NSW since the species was added to the Review List in 2011. Nicholas Priest

**Case 675:** An adult male and three juvenile Scarlet-chested Parrots *Neophema splendida* were seen on a private property some 150km south of Broken Hill on October 24, 2010. Several diagnostic photographs were included in the submission and the committee voted unanimously to accept the record. It becomes the eighth confirmed record for NSW and only the third since the beginning of this century. Brook Whyllie

**Case 676:** Up to as many as ten Oriental Plovers *Charadrius veredus* were seen on the Pipeline Track at Hexham Swamp on September 22, 2017 remaining until at least October 2, 2017. The excellent description and diagnostic photographs left no doubt as to the identity of these birds and the

committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. This is the thirty fifth confirmed record for NSW and the species will be removed from the NSW ORAC Review List in 2018 based on the frequency of sightings. Ian Benson

### **UNCONFIRMED REPORTS**

With an increasing number of reports of unusual or rare species being posted onto on-line and social media sites, NSW ORAC is 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 NSW 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 eight such reports which have come into this category that have been published on ebird checklists in 2017, and they are listed below.

Mottled Petrel reported c. 100km NNW of Lord Howe Island on October 21, 2017

Red-backed Buttonquail reported from Wonga Wetlands, Albury on November 16, 2017

Bourke's Parrot reported from Wongareena Creek, Bourke on March 30, 2017

Bourke's Parrot reported from Toorale NP, Bourke on August 7, 2017

Bourke's Parrot reported from Wapweelah Station, Bourke on April 24, 2017

Bourke's Parrot reported from Sturt NP on June 11, 2017

Bourke's Parrot reported from Tibooburra on October 3, 2017

Bourke's Parrot reported from Sturt NP on December 30, 2017

The six reports of Bourke's Parrots are of great interest since there has been only one submission of a Bourke's Parrot sighting to NSW ORAC since its inception in 1987, and that submission (NSW ORAC Case 43 in 1991) was not accepted. In Volume 2 of the Atlas of the Birds of NSW and the ACT, it states that the species is "generally uncommon in NSW and most often observed in the Mallee & Acacia Woodland and Arid regions". It would be of great benefit to our knowledge of the status of this species in NSW to receive documentation from the authors of the above ebird reports.

Roger McGovern

Secretary NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee

January 23, 2018