

NSW ORAC CASES DECIDED IN 2024

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|------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------|
| 832 | Soft-plumaged Petrel | off Sydney | August 24, 2023 | Accepted |
| 833 | South Polar Skua | off Eden | October 30, 2022 | Accepted |
| 840 | Bridled Tern | Tweed Canyons | December 3, 2023 | Accepted |
| 841 | Black-winged Petrel | off South West Rocks | January 28, 2022 | Accepted |
| 843 | Barn Swallow | Bogangar | January 18, 2024 | Accepted |
| 844 | South Polar Skua | Brunswick Heads | January 30, 2024 | Accepted |
| 845 | Westland Petrel | Stockton Beach | January 21, 2024 | Accepted |
| 846 | Mottled Petrel | Wallabi Beach | January 7, 2024 | Accepted |
| 847 | Bulwer's Petrel | east of Tweed Heads | February 25, 2024 | Accepted |
| 848 | Red-footed Booby | offshore NSW | February 2024 | Accepted |
| 849E | Bridled Tern | Flat Rock, Ballina | December 5, 2010 | Accepted |
| 850E | Bridled Tern | Richmond River | February 3, 2016 | Accepted |
| 851E | Purple-crowned Lorikeet | Buronga | June 6, 2024 | Accepted |
| 852 | Southern Fulmar | Manly | July 5, 2024 | Accepted |
| 853 | Painted Finch | Paroo-Darling NP | April 8-16, 2024 | Accepted |
| 855 | Fairy Tern | The Entrance North | 2022/23 2023/24 | Accepted |

OVERVIEW

NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (NSW ORAC) reviewed a total of 16 cases in calendar year 2024 with all cases being accepted. This represents an average year of activity for the committee and, although there were some interesting records reviewed, there were no major rarities assessed during the year. BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee (BARC) accepted a record of Matsudaira's Storm Petrel seen on the Britannia Seamount on February 4, 2023 which became a first ever accepted record for the species in NSW.

The most noteworthy record reviewed by the ORAC committee in 2024 involved the discovery of two Painted Finches at Chinamans Waterhole, Paroo-Darling (Peery) National Park by four members of the Park's Bird Survey Team in April 2024. This is only the 6th confirmed record of the species in NSW and the first since 2008. A Barn Swallow was discovered at the same site at Bogangar where one was recorded in 2023 (NSW ORAC Case 823) and may well have been the same individual – however, unlike 2023 when the bird remained for three weeks, this bird was seen only for two days.

After extensive consultation with eBird reviewers and within the ORAC committee in April 2024, NSW ORAC made the decision to review reportable species posted to eBird in circumstances where no formal submission is made to ORAC and where the photographic images contained within the observer's eBird listing are adequate to clearly identify the species beyond doubt. It has become an increasingly common problem that clearly identified rarities have been posted on eBird (and other on-line sites) with no subsequent follow up of a submission to NSW ORAC resulting in a backlog of unassessed reports. By taking this pragmatic action, a number of clearly acceptable but unsubmitted reports will be assessed and confirmed by the committee. The case numbers will have the suffix "E" added to them and the first three such cases were assessed by the committee in 2024.

CASE SUMMARIES

Case 832: A Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis* was well seen and photographed on a fishing trip off Sydney on August 24, 2023. The bird was well seen at a range down to fifty metres and two high quality diagnostic photographs were included with the submission. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance of this record and it becomes the 15th confirmed record of Soft-plumaged Petrel in NSW and the first since a sighting off Port Stephens on September 13, 2020 (NSW ORAC Case 769). Meysam Makvandi

Case 833: An intermediate morph South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki* was well seen and photographed down to a range of 100 metres on a pelagic trip out of Eden on October 30, 2022. The excellent submission and photographs left no doubt as to the identification and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. This is the sixth record of South Polar Skua to come before NSW ORAC since pale and intermediate morph South Polar Skuas were removed from the BARC Review List in 2018. With there having been ten confirmed records prior to that date, this becomes the 16th confirmed record for NSW. Jodi Webber and Richard Webber

Case 840: An adult Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus* was seen down to a range of 15 metres on a pelagic trip to the Tweed Canyons on December 3, 2023. Although only one poor quality photographic image was obtained, the committee were confident that most of the field marks of Bridled Tern could be satisfactorily confirmed including the supercilium extending behind the eye, the extensive pale areas on the under primary coverts, brown upperwings and longish tail streamers. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and this sighting becomes the sixth confirmed record for NSW and the first since a sighting off Newcastle on January 30, 2013 (NSW ORAC Case 576). Jed Knight and Ruben Brinsmead

Case 841: A Black-winged Petrel *Pterodroma nigripennis* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of South West Rocks on January 23, 2022. The bird was well seen and photographed down to a range of 50 metres and the photographs, detailed description and elimination of confusion species left no doubt as to the identification. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the sixth case to come before NSW ORAC since the species was reinstated onto the Review List in 2018. With increasing numbers of Black-winged Petrel being reported off the NSW coast, the species has now been removed from the Review List. Robert Hynson and Liam Murphy

Case 843: A Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* was well seen and photographed at the Woolworth's undercover parking at Hastings Road, Bogangar on January 18, 2024. The bird was subsequently seen by other observers until it was last reported on January 20, 2024. The submission and diagnostic photograph left no doubt as to the identification and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. It becomes only the third record of Barn Swallow to be accepted by NSW ORAC with the previous record being from the same location a year earlier – there is speculation that it could be the same individual. Prior to the establishment of NSW ORAC, there were two well documented records of the species, the first at McGraths Hill STW in November 1981 and the other at Mullumbimby in December 1982 and this sighting therefore becomes the 5th confirmed record for NSW. Ruben Brinsmead

Case 844: An intermediate morph South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki* was discovered beachcast on South Golden Beach north of Brunswick Heads on January 30, 2024. Several photographs were taken of the carcass and, although the submission contained no descriptive analysis, the committee were satisfied that the photographs clearly showed the bird to be an intermediate morph South Polar Skua possibly a juvenile bird. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the seventh record of South Polar Skua to come before NSW ORAC since pale and intermediate morph South Polar Skuas were removed from the BARC Review List in 2018. With there having been ten confirmed records prior to that date, this becomes the 17th confirmed record for NSW. Rick Fitzgerald

Case 845: A beachcast Westland Petrel *Procellaria westlandica* was discovered on Stockton Beach on January 21, 2024. The bird was referred to Taronga Zoo for specialist care but died shortly afterwards. The three photographs contained in the submission clearly showed the relevant identification features which eliminated the potential confusion species, Black Petrel and White-chinned Petrel. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance of this record which is the first to come before NSW ORAC since the species was removed from the BARC Review List in March 2024. This becomes the 18th record of Westland Petrel for NSW and it is very interesting to note that ten of the previous records involved beachcast birds, all of them in the months of December and January. Mick Roderick

Case 846: A beachcast Mottled Petrel *Pterodroma inexpectata* was discovered and photographed at the southern end of Wallabi Beach on January 7, 2024. The bird was taken into care but subsequently died as it had a fractured right shoulder. The diagnostic photographs left no doubt as to the identification of this bird and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. It becomes the 26th confirmed record of Mottled Petrel in NSW and the first since the acceptance of a bird seen off Kiama on January 2, 2021 (NSW ORAC Case 826). Linda Taylor-Burton

Case 847: A Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* was well seen, videoed and photographed while at sea approximately 193NM east of Pottsville on February 25, 2024. The detailed description provided, together with the excellent photographs and video footage of the distinctive flight style left no doubt as to the identification and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. It becomes the 7th confirmed record for NSW and the first since a sighting off South West Rocks on March 27, 2022 (NSW ORAC Case 811). Stephen Menzie and Gavin Bieber

Case 848: Three separate observations of Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* were made during a WINGS tour off the NSW coast on February 13, 2024 (two sightings) and February 25, 2024 (one sighting).

The diagnostic photographs, the very thorough and detailed descriptions together with the elimination of confusion species left no doubt as to the identification of these birds and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. This became the 17th confirmed record of Red-footed Booby in NSW and the first since a sighting off Sydney on March 12, 2022 (NSW ORAC Case 809). Due to the increasing number of sightings in NSW, Red-footed Booby has been removed from the NSW ORAC Review List. Stephen Menzie and Gavin Bieber

Case 849E: A Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus* was seen and photographed at Flat Rock, Ballina on December 5, 2010. This report which was posted on eBird but not submitted to NSW ORAC becomes the first case to be reviewed without a submission following on from NSW ORAC's recent decision to review eBird and other electronic postings where good documentary evidence is included with the posting. The committee were unanimous in the view that the bird was indeed a Bridled Tern and it becomes the 7th confirmed record for NSW and the first to be reviewed since a bird was reported on a trip to the Tweed Canyons in December 2023 (NSW ORAC Case 840). Steve McBride

Case 850E: A Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus* was seen and photographed at the Richmond River South Wall on February 3, 2016. This report was posted on eBird but not submitted to NSW ORAC and the committee reviewed the sighting based on the photographs included in the eBird posting. The committee were unanimous in the view that the bird was indeed a Bridled Tern and it becomes the 8th confirmed record for NSW. Scott Rolph

Case 851E: A number of Purple-crowned Lorikeets *Parvipsitta porphyrocephala* were seen and photographed at Buronga on June 6, 2024. This report was posted on eBird but not submitted to NSW ORAC and the committee reviewed the sighting based on the photographs included in the eBird posting. The committee were unanimous in the view that the birds were indeed Purple-crowned Lorikeets and voted in favour of acceptance of this record. It becomes the seventeenth confirmed record of Purple-crowned Lorikeet for NSW with the most recent accepted record involving a bird reported at Oaklands, 60km north of Corowa on June 9, 2012 (NSW ORAC Case 555). However, there have been multiple sightings of the species in areas close to the Murray River which have not been reviewed by NSW ORAC and the ORAC Review List has added the geographic modifier "except for sightings within 30km of the Victorian border". Michael Todd

Case 852: A Southern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialoides* was sighted during a seawatch at Shelly Beach Car Park, Manly on July 5, 2024. The bird was seen in good light at 3.15pm at a range of about 1 kilometre and remained in sight for about 2 minutes. Although no photographs could be obtained, the observer provided an excellent description of the bird's plumage, structure, size and behaviour. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the 10th record to be accepted by NSW ORAC although there are a number of well substantiated historical sightings that have not come before the committee. It should be noted that there were four other reports of Southern Fulmar in Sydney waters during the second half of June 2024 but, to date, no submissions have been forthcoming for these reported birds. Mike Kilburn

Case 853: A male and a female Painted Finch *Emblema pictum* were discovered at Chinamans Waterhole, Paroo-Darling (Peery) National Park by four members of the Paroo-Darling National Park Bird Survey Team – the male was first seen on April 8, 2024, the female was first sighted on April 10, 2024 and the two birds continued to be observed until April 16, 2024. The observations were

detailed meticulously in the submission and the very high quality photographic images left no doubt as to identification. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance of this record and thanks the observers for taking the time to prepare such a thorough and compelling submission. This becomes the 6th confirmed record of Painted Finch in NSW with the most recent case accepted by NSW ORAC involving a breeding pair of birds near Jerilderie from August 29, 2008 until at least September 14, 2008. (NSW ORAC Case 464) Annette Cam, Dr Graham Cam, Anthony Willis and Judith Willis

Case 815: This submission documents the occurrence of Fairy Terns *Sternula nereis* at the known Little Tern breeding colony at Karagi Point on the northern side of The Entrance Channel during the 2022/23 and 2023/24 breeding seasons. In 2022/23, there were two nesting pairs of Fairy Terns but both clutches were predated by Silver Gulls. In 2023/24, three or four Fairy Terns were detected during the peak nesting period in early December but they are believed to have paired with Little Terns and several hybrid chicks were observed – it is suspected that these chicks did not fledge but were lost to Nankeen Kestrel predation. The committee accepted this record unanimously and it becomes only the fifth record of Fairy Tern to be accepted by NSW ORAC. However, since the geographical proviso of ‘except for records south of Sydney’ was amended to ‘except for records south of Sydney Harbour’ there have been a number of reports of the species from Botany Bay. Andrew Robinson

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 species on the NSW ORAC Review List in the form of photographs and/or a submission. If, at the time of publishing this year-end summary, there were reports for which submissions had not been made to NSW ORAC or BARC for species on their Review Lists, NSW ORAC would publish the report as an unconfirmed sighting to clarify that it had not yet undergone a review by the relevant rarities committee. NSW ORAC does now review some electronic reports without a formal submission but, normally, only when diagnostic photographic evidence is available. There are fifteen unconfirmed reports which have been published on eBird, Eremaea and/or Facebook sites in 2024, and they are listed below.

Band-rumped Storm Petrel was reported from the Britannia Guyots on March 25, 2023, March 26, 2023, November 25, 2023 and November 26, 2023

New Zealand Storm Petrel was reported off Terrigal on November 22, 2024

Southern Fulmar was reported from offshore Sydney on June 15, 2024

Southern Fulmar was reported from North Head, Sydney on June 16, 2024

Southern Fulmar was reported from Mistral Point, Maroubra on June 17, 2024

Southern Fulmar was reported from North Head, Sydney on June 18, 2024

Westland Petrel was reported off Eden on April 28, 2024

Green Sandpiper was reported from Palerang on November 4, 2024

South Island Oystercatcher was reported from Shark Bay, Woody Head on August 21, 2024

Roseate Tern was reported from Flat Rock, Ballina on April 16, 2024

South Polar Skua was reported off Sydney on November 16, 2024

Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher was reported from Rosebery, Sydney on December 28, 2024

Roger McGovern

Secretary NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee

January 17, 2025