

## **Hunter Bird Observers Club Records Appraisal Committee Report for 2013**

Below is a list of cases assessed and decided by the Hunter Bird Observers Club (HBOC) Records Appraisal Committee (RAC) in 2013. A summary of each case is also provided, along with photographs of some species assessed.

### **List of Cases**

350	White-throated Honeyeater	Woko National Park	Sept 30, 2012	Not Accepted
354	Kelp Gull	Stockton Beach	Nov 19, 2012	Accepted
356	Little Bittern	near Tea Gardens	Nov 9, 2012	Accepted
357	Tahiti Petrel	off Newcastle Rocks	Jan 29, 2013	Accepted
358	Lesser Frigatebird	off Newcastle Rocks	Jan 30-Feb 3, 2013	Accepted
359	Black Noddy	off Newcastle Rocks	Jan 30-Feb 4, 2013	Accepted
360	White-tailed Tropicbird	off Merewether Hts	Jan 31, 2013	Accepted
361	Black Noddy	off Newcastle Rocks	late Feb, 2013	Accepted
362	Pacific Gull	Newcastle Baths	Dec 21, 2012	Accepted
363	Broad-billed Sandpiper	Stockton Sandspit	Dec 19 2012-Feb 2013	Accepted
364	Greater Sand Plover	Stockton Sandspit	Dec 19 2012-mid Jan 2013	Accepted
365	Pacific Gull	Newcastle Rock Platform	June 2, 2013	Accepted
367	Antarctic Prion	off Port Stephens	June 23, 2013	Accepted
368	Common Diving-Petrel	off Newcastle Rocks	June/July, 2013	Accepted
369	Pacific Gull	Broughton Island	June 13, 2013	Accepted
370	Australian Pratincole	Hexham Swamp	Aug 18, 2013	Accepted
371	Spotted Bowerbird	South of Abermain	May 31, 2013	Accepted
372	Australian Pratincole	Durridgere SCA	Oct 7, 2013	Not Accepted
373	Budgerigars	Various locations	April-Nov, 2013	Accepted
374	Black Honeyeater	Durridgere SCA	Oct 6, 2013	Accepted
375	Masked Booby	off Port Stephens	Nov 24, 2013	Accepted

## Case Summaries

Case 350: Two birds thought to be **White-throated Honeyeaters *Melithreptus albogularis*** were observed in Woko National Park on the 30th September 2012. The committee noted a number of concerns in their appraisals, such as the brevity of the description of the bird provided, insufficiently ruling out potential confusion species, along with the non-migratory movements of this species and the fact that Woko NP is well out of range for White-throated Honeyeaters. Despite other claims of them almost as far south as this in NSW, no reviewed records have yet been accepted for birds so far out of their normal range. The committee decided that, noting the above, and with a lack of other corroborating evidence, the record could not be accepted.

Case 354: A single **Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus*** was photographed loafing on Stockton Beach on the 19 November 2012. Images were circulated around the committee showing the salient features of the bird to identify it against other large *Larus* gulls.

Case 356: Two sightings of a **Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*** were made by one observer at the Great Aussie Bush Camp, Tea Gardens on 9 November 2011. The bird was seen within reeds and then in flight. Descriptions of the bird were thorough and leaving no doubt as to the identification of the bird, the record was accepted unanimously by the committee.

Case 357: A **Tahiti Petrel *Pseudobulweria rostrata*** was seen by two experienced observers on the 29 January 2013 following severe weather associated with ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald. This is the first land-based record of Tahiti Petrel to be accepted by the committee.

Case 358: This single case collectively dealt with the numerous reports of **Lesser Frigatebirds *Fregata ariel*** between the 30<sup>th</sup> January and the 3<sup>rd</sup> February from Newcastle to Port Stephens. These birds were seen following severe weather associated with ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald. A single formal submission was made for one particular sighting, along with several photographs submitted by various observers. It is difficult to tell how many individual birds were involved, but evidence suggests that at least 10 different birds were observed during this time.

Case 359: A **Black Noddy *Anous minutus*** was seen by several observers between Newcastle Baths and Nobby's Breakwall between the 30<sup>th</sup> January and 4<sup>th</sup> February 2013 following severe weather associated with ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald. It is possible that 2 individuals were present, though this could not be confirmed, despite that fact that one bird had an orange object attached to one of its legs.

Case 360: A single **White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*** was seen by a single observer from Merewether Heights on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013. The submission provided by the observer left no doubt as to the identity of the bird which was unanimously accepted by the committee.

Case 361: A **Black Noddy *Anous minutus*** was observed by several people in late February 2013, mostly from either the rock platform at Newcastle Baths or from Fort Drive (Nobby's). Given the gap in time with no reports it was judged that this bird was different to the bird(s) previously seen during severe weather associated with ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald.

Case 362: A **Pacific Gull *Larus pacificus*** was seen flying over Newcastle Baths carpark on the 21<sup>st</sup> December 2012. The submission clearly detailed the important features of the bird to distinguish it from other large *Larus* gulls, in particular Kelp Gull *L. dominicanus* and was accepted unanimously by the committee.

Case 363: A **Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*** was seen and photographed by many observers at Stockton Sandspit between the 19<sup>th</sup> December 2012 and early February 2013, with at least 2 birds being present during the latter period.

Case 364: A **Greater Sand Plover *Limicola falcinellus*** was seen and photographed by many observers at Stockton Sandspit between the 19<sup>th</sup> December 2012 and mid-January 2013.

Case 365: A **Pacific Gull *Larus pacificus*** was seen and photographed by many observers between Newcastle Beach and Nobby's Beach on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June and for at least one day thereafter.

Case 367: An **Antarctic Prion *Pachyptila desolata*** was seen by several observers on the Port Stephens pelagic on 23 June 2013. The bird was seen at the continental shelf break and was seen in the presence of Fairy *P. turtur* and Slender-billed Prion(s) *P. belcheri*. Despite the fact that many observers saw and photographed the bird, the committee felt it prudent that an URF be submitted due to the difficulty in prion identification. The observer thoroughly distinguished the bird from the common Fairy Prions that were around the boat at the same time as well as the Slender-billed Prion(s) also present. Other potential confusion species such as Salvin's Prion *P. salvini* were also been eliminated. The committee voted unanimously to accept the record, although one member abstained from voting due to a lack of experience with prions and noting the difficulty in prion identification. This is only the 2<sup>nd</sup> accepted record of Antarctic Prion for the Hunter Region.

Case 368: This case dealt with the numerous sightings of **Common Diving Petrels *Pelecanoides urinatrix*** off the Newcastle foreshore (predominantly from Fort Drive, Nobby's) made during June/July 2013. The maximum count made was 103 birds from Fort Drive and several birds were beachcast on the Hunter coastline at the time. This coincided with an influx of Fairy Prions in inshore waters at the same time. Collectively, this represents only the 2<sup>nd</sup> record of this species in the Hunter Region.

Case 369: An adult **Pacific Gull *Larus pacificus*** was seen on Broughton Island on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2013. The observer briefly described the bird, noting the key differences that distinguish it from the main confusion species, Kelp Gull *L. dominicanus*. The committee voted unanimously to accept the record, although one member noted that more effort could have been made to rule out potential vagrant gulls that do not breed in Australia. This is the 8<sup>th</sup> confirmed record of Pacific Gull for the Hunter Region.

Case 370: An **Australian Pratincole *Stiltia Isabella*** was seen by one observer on the 18<sup>th</sup> August 2013 in a paddock to the north of the disused Richmond Vale Railway line that crosses Hexham Swamp. The submission included 2 photographs that, although not of a high quality, depicted the bird clearly as an Australian Pratincole. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> accepted record of this species for the Hunter Region.

Case 371: A **Spotted Bowerbird** *Chlamydera maculata* was seen in bushland south of Abermain (along Hebburn Road) on the 31<sup>st</sup> May 2013. The bird was seen by 2 observers and photographed. It was seen at the same time that the observers were watching a flock of Budgerigars as well as Swift Parrots in the area. This adds to the intriguing records of this species in the Cessnock area, with a very small population known to exist in the vicinity of North Rothbury.

Case 372: A bird considered to be an **Australian Pratincole** *Stiltia Isabella* was seen by a single observer during the October Long Weekend Camp at Durrigere State Conservation Area on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 2013. Committee members commented that the lack of detail generally in the submission, failure to include important features seen on Australian Pratincoles as well as the unusual habitat / behaviour displayed by the bird contributed to a non-accept verdict. Although two committee members commented that there were very few alternatives and that the observer may have seen a Pratincole, there was not sufficient information to accept the record on the information submitted.

Case 373: This case related to the many observations over a protracted period (from at least early April til mid-November) of **Budgerigars** *Melopsittacus undulatus* in the Hunter Region. Reports first came from Gundy and Martindale Valley (separately), with subsequent observations made as far east as Singleton, Luskintyre and Kurri Kurri (the latter of these being only 30km from the coast and where records have spanned 4 months). In almost every situation, these birds have been observed in flocks, with several of >100 birds reported. It is assumed that mobile flocks of these birds had moved coastward having bred in large numbers during ideal conditions inland that have changed dramatically to severe drought in some areas.

Case 374: A male **Black Honeyeater** *Sugomel niger* was seen by several observers at Durrigere State Conservation Area, north of Ulan on the 6 October 2013. The observation was made during the HBOC October Long Weekend Camp. The submission was made by the initial observer and the description of the bird left no doubt in the identification of the bird. The committee voted unanimously to accept and is the 4th confirmed record of Black Honeyeater for the Hunter Region.

Case 375: A sub-adult **Masked Booby** *Sula dactylatra* was seen and photographed by many observers on the Port Stephens pelagic on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2013. Of interest, a different but similar-aged bird was seen on the Wollongong pelagic the day before. The bird had a dark eye, suggesting that it was from either Lord Howe or Norfolk Islands and was of the subspecies *S. d. fullagari* (known as the 'Tasman Booby').

## Photographs



### Case 358

Lesser Frigatebird, Newcastle 1/01/2013

(Graeme O'Connor)

### Case 359

Black Noddy, Nobby's Breakwall 4/02/2013

(Richard Nicholas)



### Case 365

Pacific Gull (Silver Gull in foreground),  
Newcastle Beach 3/06/2013

(Richard Nicholas)



Case 367

Antarctic Prion (foreground; Fairy Prion in background) off Port Stephens 23/06/2013

(Mick Roderick)



Case 373

Budgerigars, Martindale 25/04/2013

(Mick Roderick)

Case 375

Masked Booby, off Port Stephens

24/11/2013

(Mick Roderick)

