

BBRC Constitution

British Birds Rarities Committee - Terms of Reference and Constitution

Constitution written and prepared by Nigel Hudson, published here 2015.

Revised and updated December 2020 by Paul French.

Introduction

1.1 Background and function

The British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) was formed in 1959 as the Rare Birds Committee under the aegis of the ornithological journal British Birds (BB). From 2000 it continues to operate under the auspices of British Birds as a committee of BB 2000 Ltd.

Its main function is to apply uniform adjudication standards to claims of records of rare bird species and subspecies in the United Kingdom (excluding Northern Ireland) and the Isle of Man. Records at sea are also considered (see Appendix I).

Note: Hereinafter references to 'Britain' mean the area as defined above

1.2 Aims

1. To maintain an accurate database of records of the occurrence of rare taxa in Britain to enable individuals or organisations to assess the current status of, and any changes in, the patterns of occurrence and distribution of these taxa in Britain.
2. To provide an accurate and comprehensive Annual Report detailing records of rare taxa in Britain.
3. To assess all records of rare taxa in an independent, open, rigorous and consistent manner, and to provide observers with feedback on the assessment process as appropriate.
4. To publish material arising from the Committee's work (e.g. details of interesting/difficult/controversial records and the outcome of reviews) and to provide information for the identification of rare taxa, to assist observers.

To help achieve these aims BBRC will strive to work closely with County Recorders, bird observatories, bird information services and observers to ensure that all records of rare taxa are submitted to this database.

1.2 Definitions

British Birds (BB): The journal of record in Britain, publishing the annual reports of the Rarities Committee.

BB 2000 Ltd: The holding company that owns and publishes British Birds

BBRC website: The website for all BBRC news and information www.bbrc.org.uk

BOURC: British Ornithologists' Union's Records Committee

BTO: British Trust for Ornithology

Recording Areas: The areas in the UK that have their own recorder and annual report, generally aligning to county boundaries. (See Appendix II). In this Constitution, the term County and County Recorder are used synonymously for Recording Area and the Recorder for that area.

Bird Observatory: The bird observatories within the Bird Observatories Council excluding those in Northern Ireland (see Appendix II).

Birding information services: Organisations that provide information on the British birding scene, especially those associated with rare birds.

Composition

2.1 Status and composition

2.1.1 Status

BBRC is a committee of BB 2000 Ltd, and BB 2000 Ltd has the ultimate responsibility for the functioning of BBRC, which must operate to the satisfaction of the directors of BB 2000 Ltd.

2.1.2 Composition

The main Committee comprises ten Voting Members, a Chair, a Vice-chair and a non-voting Secretary.

2.2 Voting Members

2.2.1 Role of voting members

1. To assess all records submitted to BBRC

2. To help write species accounts in the Annual Report
3. To help develop identification criteria for taxa dealt with by BBRC
4. To assist in the production of articles and publications arising from the Committee's work

2.2.2 Qualification and geographical spread of voting members

The prime qualifications of candidates are:

1. A widely acknowledged expertise in identification
2. A proven reliability in the field
3. A track record of high quality submissions of descriptions of scarce and rare birds to county records committees and the BBRC
4. Considerable experience of record assessment
5. The capacity to handle the considerable volume of work involved in assessing upwards of 500 records per year.
6. The capacity to work quickly and efficiently, and for using internet-based computer technology
7. Regional credibility

Membership of the committee should try to provide a reasonable geographical spread with members having a detailed knowledge of the following areas: Wales, Scotland, the Northern Isles, Northern England, the Midlands, Eastern England, the Southwest and the Southeast of England.

2.2.3 Selection of voting members

BBRC may nominate its own candidate to fill any vacancy but will also invite further nominations, with a closing date, through an announcement in British Birds and a press release sent to birding information services.

All candidates must be proposed, seconded and their proposal be received, with a letter of agreement from the candidate, by the closing date.

All candidates will be formally announced in British Birds. If there is more than one candidate, an election will take place.

In the event of an election each Recording Area has five votes and each Bird Observatory has two votes (see Appendix II). Candidates will provide a brief (one page) birding CV and this will be made available to all voters. Term of office usually starts on 1st August, but this is not mandatory.

The Chair is responsible for administering the election of Voting Members

2.2.4 Period of office of voting members

All Voting Members will be offered the opportunity to serve on the Committee for a minimum of eight years and a maximum of ten years. Upon reaching this duration the member will be expected to retire; however, in exceptional circumstances a retiring member may be co-opted to fill a temporary vacancy.

A retiring member shall not be considered for full re-election for at least three years following their retirement.

2.2.5 Co-opting voting members

In the event of a temporary incapacity or work overload of a Voting Member, BBRC can co-opt a suitably qualified person to fill the temporary vacancy. This could be one of the more recent retiring members, the Chair or the Vice Chair. Such a temporary vacancy would not normally extend for more than six months.

If a Voting Member resigns, BBRC may co-opt suitably qualified individuals on to the Committee as a temporary measure. The co-opted member will continue up to the next 1st August. The co-opted member may then stand for election to BBRC (subject to the 'three-year minimum gap', see Section 2.2.4)

The procedures above will normally mean co-opted members finish their period in less than one year. However, if any co-opted member is still in place after one year, then any continuation must be reviewed by consultation between the Chair, the Secretary and the Voting Members.

Co-opted members have full voting rights at the AGM.

2.2.6 Voting members on selected reviews

On occasions, large scale reviews of records may be required (see also 5.5.2). This may involve single-species' reviews due to new identification criteria, or taxonomic changes that require an overhaul of previous records. The workload involved in such reviews may necessitate a different panel of Voting Members to those on the Committee. Such a panel will include as many current Voting Members as is possible, but will also endeavour to include recognised experts, as well as experienced ex-Voting Members. Such panels will have full voting rights on their review, and their decisions will be published in the Annual Report and form part of the official BBRC statistics. Members of these review panels who are not current BBRC Voting Members will not have any voting rights at the AGM. Membership of these review panels shall be agreed between the Chair and serving Voting Members, either at AGM or via electronic means.

2.3 Chair

2.3.1 Role of Chair

1. To report to BB 2000 Ltd
2. To oversee the process of judging records of rare birds submitted to BBRC
3. To take responsibility for and delegate where appropriate, all non-Secretarial administration.
4. To monitor the performance of the BBRC Secretary and alert the Board if the Secretary's performance has dropped and therefore payment of the stipend should be reconsidered
5. To send feedback to observers of all Non-Proven records
6. To keep track of and respond, where appropriate to questions on social media, within reasonable expectations
7. To take responsibility for and delegate, where appropriate all official external dealings of BBRC, including foreign consultancy
8. To act as the conduit for policy development and ideas. All proposals relating to operating policy should be directed through the Chair who, in turn, is obliged to raise these at the AGM
9. To administer the process of recruiting new Voting Members. All approaches to potential candidates must be made through the Chair or following delegation by the Chair
10. To convene the AGM and set the agenda
11. To take members' views into account when setting the agenda for BBRC's key decision meetings
12. To ensure BBRC policy is applied and adhered to by the Committee
13. To act as the BBRC representative on BOURC
14. To liaise with BB 2000 Ltd
15. The Chair will have the casting vote in matters of policy and procedure, which are usually discussed at the AGM.

2.3.2 Qualification of chair

The Chair should have:

1. Served as a Voting Member for at least three years before they can be appointed as Chair
2. Up-to-date expertise in bird identification and record assessment

3. An ability to think and act in a strategic capacity
4. Excellent organisational and communication skills
5. Familiarity with IT, both in terms of daily usage and its potential for development

2.3.3 Selection and appointment of chair

On or before reaching their retirement year (see Section 2.3.4) the current Chair will consult with Voting Members to select a new Chair.

If no agreement can be reached, or if a Chair has not been re-appointed at an AGM (see Section 3.1) then any Voting Member or Members can put forward nominations (which must include a proposer and a seconder) for a new Chair to the directors of BB 2000 Ltd. The board of BB 2000 Ltd will then inform the current Chair and Secretary of the nomination(s).

Where a valid nomination has been received the Chair of the directors of BB 2000 Ltd is required to find out whether the current Chair of BBRC wishes to continue to stand. If so, a straight vote of the ten Voting Members will be taken by secret ballot at the earliest convenient date, and a simple majority is required for the Chair to be changed.

The Secretary or acting Secretary will act as returning officer. Votes can be submitted electronically or by post to the Secretary.

Where there are more than two nominations for Chair, each Voting Member will be able to vote for a first and a second candidate. A second round of voting will take place between the two candidates with highest scores in the first round, and again a simple majority is required if the standing Chair is to be replaced. In the event of a tie in votes, the standing Chair will have the casting vote.

The selected Chair will then be subject to approval by, and formally appointed by, the board of BB 2000 Ltd.

2.3.4 Period of office of chair

The Chair is reappointed annually by the Voting Members at the AGM. The maximum term of office is ten years.

2.3.5 Appointing a vice-chair

The Chair can appoint a Vice-chair, following consultation and agreement with Voting Members. The role will normally be taken by an ex-BBRC Voting Member,

If the Chair temporarily cannot carry out their duties (for example through work/holiday commitments or ill-health) then the Vice-chair can take over the role of Chair, if delegated to do so by the Chair.

The Vice-chair may also help the Chair and the Committee, especially in roles associated with developing and writing identification criteria for poorly known taxa, correspondence about individual records, policy development and correspondence with individual observers.

The Vice-chair is reappointed annually by the Voting Members at the AGM. There is no maximum term of office.

2.3.6 Temporary chair

If a Chair resigns or cannot discharge their responsibilities, then if there is a Vice-chair (see Section 2.3.5) they will take over the role until the next AGM. If no Vice-chair exists, or if the Vice-chair has declined being a replacement Chair, then any Voting Member can be nominated by the Chair, or in the absence of a Chair's nomination by the Voting Members, to take over the role of Chair until the next AGM.

This arrangement cannot persist beyond the next AGM when a formal replacement will be appointed.

2.4 Secretary

2.4.1 Role of secretary

1. To receive and circulate submissions of records
2. To collate results of voting
3. To ensure the safe archiving of all submitted documentation and Voting Members comments
4. To liaise with observers and County Recorders where necessary for further information
5. To coordinate re-circulations and record reviews
6. To deal with correspondence as required
7. To liaise with the Chair as appropriate
8. To provide information for the website as appropriate
9. To announce significant developments in relation to the Secretarial role, in consultation with the Chair
10. To provide statistics and data for the annual report, and co-ordinate its production in conjunction with the Editor of British Birds

Note: The Secretary is a non-voting position on all record assessments, and cannot be a Voting Member of the Committee.

2.4.2 Qualification of secretary

The Secretary should have:

1. Experience with IT systems, including working knowledge of databases
2. An ability to manage large volumes of data from a variety of sources to pre-determined timescales
3. Excellent written communication skills
4. Excellent organizational skills
5. An ability to think and work strategically
6. The ability to liaise with other members of the Committee, County Recorders and observers
7. Experience of data collection, preferably relating to bird records
8. A knowledge of rare birds and the BBRC

2.4.3 Selection and appointment of secretary

The Chair will select the Secretary on behalf of the Committee; this appointment will be subject to approval by, and formally appointed by, the board of BB 2000 Ltd. The Secretary will be required to sign a contract provided by the board of BB 2000 Ltd.

An annual appraisal will be held, conducted by the Chair and a representative of the board of BB 2000 Ltd.

2.4.4 Period of office of secretary

On appointment, the Secretary will work initially for 12 months during which period the appointment may be terminated by either party giving one month's notice. Thereafter, if the appointment is confirmed, it will be subject to termination by either party giving at least six months written notice.

The Secretary is reappointed annually by the Voting Members at the AGM. There is no maximum term of office.

2.5 Other roles

2.5.1 Support provided to the committee

Other non-voting positions provide support to the Committee and will often be performed by former members of the Committee. Positions such as Archivist, Museum Consultant, Genetics Consultant and Media Officer would be typical of the activities required. The definition of any such role will be determined by the Chair and Secretary, and appointments will be made by the Chair in consultation with Voting Members.

2.5.2 Work for outside organisations

A small group of experienced members of the Committee may be selected to help the Chair and Secretary with matters outside the general remit of BBRC. This work may include the assessment of rarities from other countries at the request of either the rarities committee of the relevant country or the Association of European Rarities Committees (AERC).

Meetings

3.1 The Annual General Meeting (AGM)

3.1.1 Frequency

The full Committee meets at least once a year, normally in the spring. This may either be a traditional meeting or an online meeting.

3.1.2 Introduction and matters covered

Administrative and policy matters are the main topics to be discussed at the AGM. The AGM will have the following standing items:

1. Re-appointment of Chair, Secretary and Vice-chair
2. Re-appointment of any other roles such as Archivist, Genetics Consultant etc. (see Section 2.5.1)
3. Financial report from the Chair
4. Secretary's report
5. Proposals for changes to the Constitution

In addition, time will be allocated to discussing policy matters related to:

1. Record handling and assessment
2. Observers
3. Adding or removing a taxon from being a BBRC Rarity (see Section 4.1.1 & 4.1.2)
4. Species and subspecies considered to be difficult to identify (see Section 4.2.3 & Appendix IV)
5. Other business as may be determined by the Chair

Note: Identification matters for a species/subspecies and related topics may be covered either at the AGM or at a separate meeting, normally held in the summer (see Section 3.2.1).

3.1.3 Those attending

Attendance at the AGM is limited to:

1. Chair (voting)
2. Secretary (voting)
3. Vice-chair (voting)
4. Ten voting members (voting)
5. Those in support roles (see Section 2.5.1) if appropriate and by invitation from the Chair (non-voting)
6. Any member who has retired within the last three months (non-voting)
7. Any member elected but waiting to take up appointment within the next three months (non-voting)
8. The editor of British Birds and/or a representative from the editorial board of British Birds or board of BB 2000 Ltd (non-voting)
9. Chair [or chair elect] of BOURC and/or representatives from the BOURC or TSC (non-voting)

In exceptional circumstances, and where there is a clearly defined and specific reason, additional non-voting attendees may attend by invitation of the Chair.

3.1.4 Voting procedures

Quorum at this meeting requires at least six of the persons entitled to vote. Decisions will usually be reached by consensus at this meeting but, where voting is necessary, a majority of two-thirds of those voting will be required for any change in the Constitution.

The Chair has the casting vote.

3.1.5 Additional Sessions on identification issues

BBRC may choose to have additional sessions at the AGM for discussion of specific identification issues.

A wider attendance at these additional sessions may include ex-members or experts in specific areas.

Attendance is by invitation of the Chair.

3.2 Other Meetings and Decisions

3.2.1 Identification meetings

In addition to the AGM, BBRC may have additional meetings at other times of the year. Although usually associated with identification issues, they are not limited to that area. However, if policy or business components are included then they have to be approved by the Chair. Any votes taken at these meetings should follow the voting rules in Section 3.1.4.

3.2.2 Electronic 'meetings'

If minor non-constitutional changes are to be introduced, such as new methods to be adopted in the handling or voting on records, then they can be discussed and voted on using electronic procedures. These will be administered by the Secretary.

Taxa considered by BBRC

4.1 Introduction

In broad terms the BBRC assess the sightings of rare bird taxa (species or subspecies) in Britain.

Each year the AGM will review the levels of occurrence for those taxa currently assessed by the Committee, and those taxa NOT currently assessed by the Committee but which may be close to being considered 'rare'. Data used will come from the BBRC's own archive of records, and also from information published by birding information services, and in particular the Scarce Migrants report published in British Birds.

Any changes will be announced in British Birds and via birding information services. They normally will come into effect on January 1st of the following year, but can be back-dated to the start of the current year.

4.1.1 Definition of a BBRC rarity

The starting point for defining a national rarity is either 100 or fewer individuals in the most recent ten-year period, or ten or fewer individuals in at least seven of the last ten years. Any taxon that meets, or is close to, either of these criteria, will then be considered for inclusion as a BBRC rarity.

The Committee will also consider other factors such as population trends, distribution changes and identification issues.

4.1.2 Removal of a BBRC rarity

All taxa currently assessed by BBRC will also be looked at, to check they remain rare. The starting point for removing a national rarity is either more than 100 individuals in the last ten years, or more than ten individuals in at least seven of the last ten years. Any taxon that meets, or is close to, either of these criteria, will then be considered for removal.

The Committee will also consider other factors such as population trends, distribution changes and identification issues.

Once a taxon has been dropped as a BBRC rarity it would not normally be reinstated, even if the criteria of Section 4.1.1 are met, until ten years have passed.

4.1.3 Helping counties

When a species/taxon is no longer considered rare, then assessment of those records will normally be undertaken at a County level. If a County Rarity Committee feels it does not have sufficient expertise to assess a difficult taxon, or maybe a specific record, then BBRC will provide advice on such records, if asked.

4.2 Taxa considered by BBRC

4.2.1 Introduction and species considered

BBRC follow "The British List" as published by the BOURC, and as amended by subsequent Reports published by BOURC.

As well as species given in the British List the Committee accepts submissions for some indeterminate groups of species and subspecies (see Section 4.2.3 & Appendix IV).

A full list of the taxa considered by the Committee is published on the BBRC website.

In addition, any species or subspecies not currently on the British List would be considered by BBRC. This would therefore, if accepted by both BBRC and BOURC, become a First for Britain and as such should meet the requirements detailed in Appendix III. The submitter should give detailed reasons why they think the record was the species/subspecies claimed, explaining the identification features used. They should also give reasons why the record is not likely to be categorised as an escape, and can therefore be added to the British List by BOURC.

4.2.2 Subspecies considered

Note that a subspecies can be considered rare even if the full species is not considered rare. With such subspecies, field or in the hand identification of a vagrant individual has to be considered possible with a high degree of confidence.

Furthermore, the BBRC encourages identification to a subspecies level for species that are a BBRC rarity in their own right.

4.2.3 Indeterminate Species/ Subspecies pairs or groups

In a few cases, the Committee considers and publishes indeterminate records of pairs or groups of rare species or subspecies, which are considered particularly difficult to separate under present knowledge, or where the identification criteria may not be always possible to see in the field (see Appendix IV).

These indeterminate pairs and groups are reviewed at the AGM.

Note that where identification criteria for subspecies are clearly established and which are usually possible to assess in the field, then Indeterminate records will not be published and will be considered Not Proven.

4.2.4 Hybrids and intergrades

The Committee will publish records of individuals that are considered to be a hybrid between at least one parent species that is on the BBRC list of considered taxa. These will have their own entry in the report and form their own statistics. The Committee will also consider publication of individuals that show intergrade features between two rare subspecies, although intergrades where just one parent is on the BBRC list of rare taxa will not be assessed or published.

The assessment of records

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 The Assessment Cycle

Submissions come in to the BBRC at all times of year, with some arriving within days of the sighting whilst others may be well over a year before the finder/observer records the details and forwards them to their County Recorder or direct to the BBRC. Therefore, although there is a broad annual cycle that covers receipt of submission, assessment by the BBRC and then publication in the Annual Report it is not always possible for a sighting in one year to be published in the next Annual Report.

However, in broad terms the assessment of records for a year commences late summer of the following year, following completion of the previous year's report, though a few records of special importance (such as claims of new species for Britain) may be circulated earlier. Autumn records are mostly circulated during November to January. Late submissions and re-circulations are circulated as they arise. Records received after March of the following year are less likely to be dealt with in time for inclusion in the next Annual Report.

5.1.2 Approximate time to complete an assessment

With the latest electronic methods of both submittal and assessment by BBRC, a record should be assessed within 3-4 months of its receipt, depending on the current work load which varies considerably throughout the year. However, records involving contentious matters requiring extensive enquiries, reference to other authorities etc., may take a year or more to be processed.

5.2 Submission of Records

5.2.1 Introduction

Finders and identifiers of rare birds are encouraged to submit records as soon as possible after the observation. We prefer a submission to come from the finder, but will also accept submissions from identifiers where the original finder did not identify the bird. If neither the finder nor identifier send in a description then we will accept submissions from other observers: we suggest a period of six months after the sighting should be allowed before this is done.

Note that BBRC do NOT accept submissions where the bird is not named to a species or taxa, and we do not help with the identification process of species already on the British List. However, for certain taxa where identification criteria are still being developed, we may Hold the record until such time identification can be made. (5.2.3 below)

5.2.2 Submission Forms and procedures

It greatly helps the Committee if records are submitted using a BBRC form (available from www.bbrc.org.uk or via the Secretary), or using the on-line procedure "Submit a Sighting" on the web-site. Using our standard BBRC form, or the standard on-line procedure, ensures that the Committee knows all the circumstances of the sighting.

If photographs, videos or sound recordings are available these will be invaluable to assist the assessment task, and should be submitted in their original format, and at their highest quality level. Sketches (no matter how poor artistically) are often more precise than words and can also prove very valuable. We also encourage the submission of scanned copies of original field notes. It greatly assists the Committee if supporting documentation, such as photographs and scans of field notes, are submitted as separate documents and not embedded in the report form.

Note that a selection of sketches and photographs taken from submissions is published in our Annual Report (see Section 6.1).

If the bird has been trapped, then the BTO ringing form, complete with biometrics and the ring number, should be sent direct to BBRC with a copy to BTO Ringing Unit, in accordance with the procedure described in Ringers' Manual (2001) 101-103 and Ringers' Bulletins 11(1), 12(4) and 12(6).

For known difficult species and subspecies (see Appendix IV) any feathers or faecal samples can also be sent, so they can be analysed for DNA. In such cases ringers should always abide by BTO codes of practice. It would be appreciated if anyone wishing to send samples contacts the Secretary or Chair in the first instance, and they will advise on how to post it and where to send it.

5.2.3 Held records

Where a potential new taxon for the British List is found or suspected then it may be that the criteria for field identification are not fully known. We encourage the submission of such records but may well Hold them until identification is possible. These Held records will be published in an Appendix of the Annual Report.

5.2.4 Liaison with county recorders

Records should be sent to the Secretary, preferably via the appropriate County or Regional Recorder. The Secretary will provide acknowledgement of receipt by e-mail, giving the details of the record as it will appear in our Annual Report. Observers and Recorders are asked to notify the Secretary as soon as possible of any errors or amendments that are required to these details.

Those submissions made via the on-line procedure will have an acknowledgement automatically sent to the submitter with a copy sent to the appropriate County Recorder.

The appointment of one member of each County or regional records committee to liaise with the BBRC is recommended to improve communications. A full list of the County Recorders who act as primary liaison with the Committee appears on the BBRC website.

5.2.5 Confidentiality

As stated immediately above all submissions are acknowledged to the appropriate County Recorder(s). This acknowledgement gives the facts about the submission (such as species, location, dates, etc.) but does not include any descriptive material. However, if a Recorder then asks for the full submission we will forward it to them UNLESS the submitter has specifically stated, at the time of submitting, that they do not want the descriptive material shared with the County organisation and/or Recorder involved.

Apart from sharing data with the County Recorder as stated immediately above, we also send any information on potential or actual breeding to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. Otherwise all information received by BBRC is treated as confidential.

If there is good reason for confidentiality over the site and/or observers' names, this should be stated when the record is submitted. This information will then not be published in the Annual Report or in other documents published by BBRC.

5.3 Assessment procedure

5.3.1 Introduction

Records are circulated in two different ways; known as Motorway and Full circulation.

Motorway: Records for species which have occurred more than 100 times since 1950, or for those occurring between ten and 100 times and which include a good photograph, are considered by a group of five members of the Committee. The Committee is geographically split roughly into five North and five South members and these are informally called the North and South Motorway teams. Recording areas are also split North to South (roughly following a line from the Mersey to the Humber) with North records going to the northern team, and South to southern team.

Note: Any Voting Member can ask that a Motorway vote is changed to a Full Circulation.

Full Circulation: All other records, and all re-circulations go to all ten Voting Members.

5.3.2 Voting method

All submissions are loaded onto a private internet forum which only BBRC members can access. Along with the submission, a voting page is created which summarises the record and allows Voting Members to record their vote, along with any comments or extra information they wish to show other members.

Members can vote Accept or Not Proven. A member may comment on a record, but not vote, if they are awaiting the input of voters with more experience or knowledge of the species, subspecies, geographical area or other factors pertinent to the assessment process. However, they must make a decision as soon as these comments and votes are available. If the early voters did not accept the record, but the later voters do, they should inform all Voting Members, the Secretary and the Chair to ensure that earlier voters are encouraged to revisit their decision. The same applies when a member has put in an important piece of information that may influence the voting of earlier voters.

If further information is required before a member can vote (e.g. further information on the record, the species, an observer reference, or an expert opinion), they must identify this in the comments or discussion section and notify the Secretary. The Secretary should then determine how this information should be obtained, in consultation with the Chair if necessary. The record can either be retained in circulation if it is perceived that the information can be obtained relatively quickly, or it can be pended if the information will take longer to establish. A lead individual for collecting the information will be agreed, along with an achievable timetable, so that this information can be relayed back to observers or Records following any specific enquiries regarding the record.

5.3.3 Voting accept or not proven

Except in the case of records that can be Held (see Section 5.2.3) all voting members (five or ten according to Motorway or Full circulation procedure) must eventually vote in one of two ways: Accept or Not Proven.

At an individual level, an Accept vote implies a very high (though not always total) confidence in the mind of the voter that the record was as claimed. Voters try to apply their individual judgement and level of confidence when making their decision. This is usually a subjective judgement and will be influenced by many factors, including the quality of views, the light conditions, the apparent care with which the bird has been observed, the species involved, the experience of the observer and many other factors. Consistency with previous decisions will also be considered and is very important to ensure the long-term value of the BBRC database. Confidence may not be absolutely total, but needs to be very high for an Accept vote to be given.

At an individual level, a Not Proven vote means that the voter has less than the very high level of confidence required for an Accept vote. This means that a Voting Member can feel that the record was probably as claimed, but that it simply does not meet the personal level of confidence they apply. It explicitly does NOT imply that the voter believes the observer to be either incompetent or dishonest in any way, but in many cases just that there is a risk of a genuine error having occurred because not quite enough evidence could be assimilated by the observer(s) in the time available. Experienced and highly competent observers will often submit records on much lower levels of evidence than less experienced observers, but these are sometimes not accepted because the confidence felt by the observer in the field may not be matched by the detached assessment of the voters.

5.4 The voting decision

5.4.1 Finalising the votes

A record (Motorway or Full circulation) is accepted on first circulation if all members vote in its favour. If one or two members have voted Not Proven, the Secretary will ask all those who voted to re-visit the record and confirm or modify their votes, to see if unanimity can be reached.

If the voting is still not unanimous but there is a strong majority in favour of acceptance (typically four out of five for Motorway circulations and eight or nine on Full circulations) then the Secretary will start a recirculation which always goes to all members.

On completion all submissions, member's voting comments and all relevant correspondence are retained permanently on file whether or not the record is accepted. All comments and the votes of individual members are strictly confidential.

5.4.2 Recirculation procedure

Prior to a recirculation the Secretary will ask the Chair to review the record and voting. If appropriate the Chair may prepare a synopsis of the record and voting comments. Acknowledged experts on the species or subspecies concerned, could also be asked for advice. The Chair can also give their own opinion on the acceptability of the record.

Once this synopsis is complete, the record starts a recirculation, with previous notes, comments and the Chair's synopsis all being presented.

On completion of this recirculation a record is accepted if nine or ten members vote for acceptance. All other outcomes are Not Proven.

5.4.3 Advising the outcome

All decisions are published in the BBRC Annual Report in British Birds and it should be noted that this is the official record. However accepted decisions are also broadcast by social media (such as Twitter) at the time the decision is completed, although this does not contain the full details (such as all dates, observer names, whether photographed, etc.). These details are only given in the official Annual Report in British Birds.

The reasons for Not Proven decisions will be communicated by the Chair directly to the observer and will not be published elsewhere.

It should be noted that a Not Proven outcome rarely implies that a record is not as claimed, but just that the evidence presented falls short of being enough to ensure members are confident that the record was as claimed (see Section 5.3.3). Also, as can be seen in Section 5.4.2 a Not Proven outcome can occur, even where a majority of members accept the record, though this is uncommon.

5.5 Reconsideration of earlier records

5.5.1 Reviewing an individual record

If there is new evidence the Committee will reconsider any record on request. Such requests are usually from the observer or the County Recorder, but occasionally they are the result of third party input. In all cases some fundamental requirements have to be met before such records can be re-circulated, and these are given in Appendix V.

All requests will be considered by the Secretary and Chair to ascertain their validity, and we will then confirm whether the review will go ahead. It should be noted that reviews may well require considerable input from the county committees and/ or observers involved.

If a review is initiated by a County Recorder we expect that the County Committee will have contacted the original observer(s) to advise them that a review is being asked for.

These reviews will always be to all ten Voting Members. Overturning a previously accepted and published record is regarded as a serious matter and requires at least six Not Proven votes.

5.5.2 Reviewing species

Occasionally new research, particularly that which pertains to identification, is published which could affect the validity of historical records. In such cases the BBRC will initiate a review of the species, either of all records, or only of those records which are affected by the new research (see Appendix V). Note that such reviews can either be looking at Accepted records to see if they are still acceptable, and/or at Not Proven records to see if they may now be acceptable.

When such a review is undertaken, an announcement will be made by BBRC to birding information services, to alert County Recorders that some records may now be under review.

5.6 Withdrawal of accepted records (or of a record In circulation)

Any observer has the right to withdraw a submitted record, at any time, by communicating this wish to the Secretary of BBRC. The observer is under no obligation to explain why, although such explanations would be welcomed. The Secretary should endeavour to ascertain whether or not there was any question of the record having not been properly assessed at the time.

In the case of a record in which more than one observer was involved, care must be taken to ensure that the withdrawal is supported by all parties involved. If only the one observer wishes to withdraw, further investigation may be necessary by the Secretary. If the matter cannot be readily resolved, BBRC will publish that the withdrawer no longer supports the record and BBRC reserves the right to re-assess the record. If the Committee determines that the record remains acceptable, a suitable comment would be published in the Annual Report.

5.7 Records of species new to Britain

Records of species or subspecies new to Britain have to meet a higher level of documentation than for records of species/subspecies already on the British List. These more stringent criteria are set out in Appendix II.

If accepted by BBRC, the submission will then be sent to BOURC, where they are subsequently retained on file. The BOURC considers formal admission of species to the British List (or upgrading from one category to another). Publication of such records is subject to acceptance by both committees. If the BOURC accepts the identification, it then decides whether the species should be added to the British List and, if so, in which category. Species occurring in an apparently wild state are admitted to category A, even those which have been ship-assisted as long as there is no evidence that they have been otherwise assisted by man (e.g. fed or been temporarily captive). Where there is reasonable doubt that the species has ever occurred in a wild state or where the record relates to a tide-line corpse, the species is admitted to category D. If captive origin is highly probable, the species is placed in Category E.

The BOURC also considers the transfer of species from category D to A or E (or vice versa) as and when fresh evidence warrants such a review. All records of Category D species are forwarded to BOURC for their files as requested, following assessment of identification by BBRC. BOURC subsequently retain these records on file. Full details of species categories and other items relating to the BOURC can be found via the BOURC website <http://www.bou.org.uk/index.htm>.

5.8 Rarities of possibly captive origin

The Committee publishes all accepted records of rare species in categories A and D and some records of birds of special relevance or interest in category E, or where the identification was proven but the origin is considered suspect. The possibility of captive origin may be assessed by a vote: if six or more members consider that a particular rare bird has probably or certainly escaped from captivity, it is not included in the main list or the species totals, but is nevertheless always mentioned in the appendices of the report and, if appropriate, will include a species comment.

Publications and archive

6.1 Annual report

Accepted and Not Proven records are published in the Committee's annual "Report on Rare Birds in Great Britain" in *British Birds*. This report is usually published in October following the year under review. Publication of all rarity records in one journal greatly facilitates analyses of their occurrences in the region covered.

For every accepted record details are given that include county and location, full dates, number of birds and their age/sex if known, observer names and the information that was available (such as photo or DNA analysis). For each taxa, statistics are given for both historical (pre-1950) and BBRC-era (post 1950) records, along with a short comment on the current trend of occurrences for that taxa. Also, each year a more detailed 'species comment' is given for about 50 taxa.

6.2 Rarities Committee news and announcements

A second publication 'Rarities Committee news and announcements' appears regularly in British Birds and covers general matters relating to the Committee's work, much of which stem from discussions at its AGM (see Section 3.1) The Committee, via the Chair and Secretary, also issues press releases and announcements to birding information services, about its work.

6.3 Published notes on first for Britain

Full details of first records of species for Britain are published in British Birds. Observers are asked to prepare suitable notes for publication, but in the rare cases where these are not forthcoming, a Committee member or British Birds editorial board member may prepare one from the submitted details. Such notes provide a valuable identification reference for species whose field characters may be little known.

6.4 From the Rarities Committee files

Having a central repository of rarity descriptions and their assessment, including opinions on difficult records, can be an asset when looking at identification issues. An important offshoot of the Committee's work is the promotion and publication of notes and papers to clarify these areas. Some may take the form of an analysis of a species' characteristics whilst others may be about an individual record. Some particularly good descriptions of especially rare or hard-to-identify species may be published as a standard to which others may aspire.

All publications are under the title "From the Rarities Committee Files" and acknowledge the Committee's sponsorship.

6.5 The BBRC archive

6.5.1 Location

The paper archive of submitted descriptions has now been entirely digitised and is contained in Microsoft Excel format. This is retained by the Secretary and Chair.

6.5.2 Use of records

Descriptions of rarities in the Committee's files are available to any bona-fide researcher or organisation. Requests for their use should be sent to the Secretary with a brief outline of the purpose, objectives and expected outputs from the use of the descriptions. The Chair and Secretary will consider all requests on their individual merits. The Committee reserves the right to levy a charge for the use of descriptions in certain cases.

Other matters

7.1 Improvements to the constitution (public involvement with the Committee)

The Committee is fully conscious it must command the continuing confidence of the birding community including County Recorders, or it would not be able to function. BBRC has no automatic or legal expectation that birders submit records to them. The Committee can only perform its task of record assessment and keeping of the national record with the goodwill and co-operation of the majority of birders in the Country. Confidence in the Committee's fairness and efficiency is essential.

Any suggested improvements in its operation are always welcome and should be sent to the Secretary. These will be considered by the Chair and Secretary, in consultation with the other members of the Committee; changes to the Constitution will only be made in consultation with the board of BB 2000 Ltd.

7.2 BBRC is not a 'Court of Law'

The BBRC tries to achieve a high degree of accuracy in the assessment of records. However, the assessment process and onus of proof for acceptance does place an emphasis on ensuring Accepted records are as claimed, whilst Not Proven records can still possibly be as claimed; hence the use of the term 'Not Proven'. We do not claim to be a 'Court of Law' and fully respect that some observers will disagree with some of our decisions.

7.3 Requests regarding non-BBRC rarities

We will not enter into correspondence with observers regarding decisions made by County Rarity Committees on local rarities.

Appendices

Appendix I: Definition of Sea Areas covered

British waters used for recording of at-sea records in relation to the British List. The solid lines mark the boundaries of the areas considered by BOURC for the purposes of the British List. The line follows the 200-mile (320-km) UK Fishery Limits (except for around Northern Ireland) and corresponding limits around Ireland. The sea areas are also shown, their boundaries indicated by dotted lines. (Modified, with permission, from British Birds.); corrected Ibis 149: 653

Appendix II: Recording areas and bird observatories

Recording areas

For a full definition, see the article 'Recording Areas of Great Britain' by D. K. Ballance & A. J. Smith (BB 101: 364-375). The recognised recording areas are:

Cornwall, Isles of Scilly, Devon, Somerset, Avon, Wiltshire, Dorset, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Sussex, Kent, Surrey, Essex, Hertfordshire, Greater London, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, West Midlands, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire & Rutland, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Cheshire & Wirral, Lancashire & North Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Yorkshire, Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland, Cumbria

Gwent, Glamorgan, Breconshire, Radnorshire, Montgomeryshire, Meirionnydd, Caernarfonshire, Anglesey, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion

Isle of Man

Shetland, Fair Isle, Orkney, Outer Hebrides, Caithness, Highland, Moray & Nairn, North-east Scotland, Angus & Dundee, Perth & Kinross, Fife, Isle of May, Upper Forth, Argyll, Clyde Islands, Clyde, Ayrshire, Lothian, Borders, Dumfries & Galloway

At sea

Each Recording Area (except 'At Sea') has five votes in elections for Voting Members

Bird observatories

Bird observatories have to be members of the Bird Observatories Council. Those from Northern Ireland are excluded. The recognised bird observatories are:

Barsdey, Calf of Man, Dungeness, Fair Isle, Filey, Flamborough, Gibraltar Point, Hilbre, Holme, Isle of May, Landguard, North Ronaldsay, Portland, Sandwich Bay, Skokholm, Spurn, Walney

Each Bird Observatory (unless also a Recording Area) has two votes in elections for Voting Members

Appendix III: Guidelines for Acceptance of a First for Britain

In the case of a claimed 'First for Britain':

Ideally the bird should be seen by a number of independent people and have supporting photographs or videos

The Committee expects detailed independent notes from at least two of the main observers as well as photographs

For submissions without a photograph:

The Committee expects independent sets of notes from all the major observers [preferably with sketches] and sight of their field notes

The Committee will be wary of accepting a first when the observers do not have extensive experience of both the species claimed and confusion species

The overall experience of the observers becomes a major factor in the assessment of the record even when The Committee is dealing with obvious species

The past track record of the observer becomes a major factor in the assessment of the record

For records where there is only a single observer [or a very closely attached group of observers; e.g. a birder and a relatively non-birding companion:

Then, even when supported by a photograph, the previous track record of the observer **MUST** be taken into account

Then, even when supported by a photograph, the Committee should have sight of original field notes

Then, in at least one photograph, the Committee should be able to see some recognisable feature of the landscape

In any sequence of photographs the Committee should have evidence that they were taken in a continuous sequence

Appendix IV: Species & sub-species pairs and groups

Canada/Cackling Goose *Branta canadensis/hutchinsii*

Western/Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris mauri/pusilla* (winter plumage only)

White-bellied/Black-bellied Storm-petrel *Fregetta grallaria/tropica*

Band-rumped/Monteiro's/Cape Verde Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro/monteiroi/jabejabe*

Zino's/Fea's/Desertas Petrel *Pterodroma madeira/feae/deserta*

Fea's/Desertas Petrel *Pterodroma feae/deserta*

Audubon's/Barolo/Boyd's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri/baroli/boydi*

Ascension/Magnificent/Great Frigatebird *Fregata aquila/magnificens/minor*

Daurian/Turkestan Shrike *Lanius isabellinus/phoenicuroides*

Western/Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli/orientalis*

Sakhalin Leaf/Pale-legged Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus borealoides/tenellipes*

Booted/Sykes's Warbler *Iduna caligata/rama*

Western/Eastern Orphean Warbler *Curruca hortensis/crassirostris*

Moltoni's/Western Subalpine/Eastern Subalpine Warbler *Curruca subalpina/iberiae/cantillans*

Siberian/Stejneger's Stonechat *Saxicola maurus/stejnegeri*

Pied/Western Black-eared/Eastern Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka/hispanica/melanoleuca*

Western Black-eared/Eastern Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica/melanoleuca*

Black-headed/Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala/bruniceps*

Appendix V: Reviews of individual records and series of records

Requirements for reviewing an individual record

We would not reconsider a record unless there is new information which may affect the original decision.

We would not consider 'retrospective information'. This includes drawings done several weeks/months after the original sighting, or citing the observer's subsequent experience of the species

We would not reconsider a record at the suggestion of a third party if they refuse to put information on paper or insist on anonymity. The identity of third parties will be treated confidentially.

Reasons for review of a series of records

These are usually brought about because:

New knowledge about identification criteria for a species or confusion species has been published

New knowledge about an observer has come to light and a review of that persons' records may be required.

There has been a change in the occurrence pattern of a species which throws doubt on earlier records