



YNU Rarities Committee

Terms of Reference and Constitution

Revised May 2016

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background & Function

The Yorkshire Naturalists' Union Rarities Committee (YNURC) is the successor to the YNU Reports Committee and was established as a panel in 1998 to manage records submitted for publication in the YNU's Rare & Scarce Bird Reports 1998-2004. Its function is to apply uniform adjudication standards to claims of records of rare bird species and sub-species in the present counties of East, North, South and West Yorkshire, (excluding that part of North Yorkshire covered by Cleveland)

1.2 Aims

1 - To maintain an accurate database of records of the occurrence of rare taxa in Yorkshire to enable the editors and writers of the Yorkshire Annual Bird Report to assess the current status of, and any changes in, the patterns of occurrence and distribution of these taxa in Yorkshire.

2 - To provide accurate and comprehensive information for the editors and writers of the Yorkshire Bird Report detailing records of rare taxa in Yorkshire.

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 make the decisions of the Committee available for publication on the YNU website.

To help achieve these aims Rarities Committee will 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.

2. COMPOSITION

2.1 Status and composition

2.1.1 Status

YNURC is a committee of the YNU Bird Section. The YNU Bird Section has the ultimate responsibility for the functioning of YNURC.

2.1.2 Composition

The main Committee comprises no more than ten Voting Members, including a Chairman and a Secretary unless they express a desire to be non-voting members.

2.2 Voting Members

2.2.1 Role of Voting Members

- To assess all records submitted to YNURC and circulated electronically in a timely manner
- To attend an AGM and any other meetings called by the Chairman as required to assess records
- To help on occasion to summarise identification criteria for taxa dealt with by YNURC
- To help on occasion to write species accounts in the Annual Bird Report

2.2.2 Qualification & Geographical Spread of Voting Members

The prime qualifications of candidates are:

- A widely acknowledged expertise in identification
- A proven reliability in the field
- A track record of high quality submissions of descriptions of scarce and rare birds to local clubs or societies, Bird Observatories, the YNURC or BBRC
- The capacity to handle the volume of work involved in assessing up to 200 records per year
- The capacity to work quickly and efficiently, and for using internet-based computer technology
- Regional credibility
- Experience of record assessment is desirable

Membership of the committee should try to provide a reasonable geographical spread across Yorkshire.

2.2.3 Selection of Voting Members

YNURC will nominate its own candidate to fill any vacancy but may periodically also invite nominations, with a closing date, through an announcement on the YNU website and via social media.

The YNURC members will vote in the event of an election. Candidates will provide a brief 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 Chairman will have a casting vote if required.

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 twenty. Upon reaching this duration the longest serving 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, YNURC can co-opt a suitably qualified person to fill the temporary vacancy. This could be one of the more recent retiring members. Such a temporary vacancy would not normally extend for more than one year.

Co-opted members have full voting rights.

2.3 Chairman

2.3.1 Role of Chairman

- To report to the Chairman of the Bird Section.
- To take responsibility for and delegate where appropriate, all non-Secretarial administration
- To take responsibility for and delegate where appropriate all official external dealings of YNURC.
- To act as the conduit for policy development and ideas.
- To administer the process of recruiting new Voting Members. All approaches to potential candidates must be made through the Chairman or following delegation by the Chairman
- To convene regular meetings and set the agenda
- To take members views into account when setting the agenda for YNURC's key decision meetings
- To ensure YNURC policy is applied and adhered to by the Committee

The Chairman will have the casting vote in matters of policy and procedure.

2.3.2 Qualification of Chairman

The Chairman should have:-

- served as a voting member for at least 3 years before they can be appointed as Chairman.
- up-to-date expertise in bird identification and record assessment.
- an ability to think and act in a strategic capacity.
- excellent organisational and communication skills.
- familiarity with IT, both in terms of daily usage and its potential for development.

2.3.3 Selection & Appointment of Chairman

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

Where there are more than two nominations for Chairman, 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 Chairman is to be replaced. In the event of a tie in votes, the standing Chairman will have the casting vote.

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

2.3.4 Period of office of Chairman

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

2.3.5 Appointing a Vice-chairman

The Chairman can appoint a Vice-chairman, following consultation and agreement with Voting Members. The role will be taken by a YNURC Voting Member,

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

The Vice-chairman may also help the Chairman and the Committee, especially in roles associated with correspondence about individual records, and/ or correspondence with individual observers.

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

2.3.6 Temporary Chairman

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

- To receive and circulate submissions of records
- To collate results of voting
- To ensure the safe archiving of all submitted documentation and voting members comments
- To liaise with observers and county recorders where necessary for further information
- To coordinate re-circulations and record reviews
- To deal with correspondence as required
- To liaise with the Chair as appropriate
- To provide information for the website as appropriate

2.4.2 Qualification of Secretary

The Secretary should have:-

- experience with IT systems, including working knowledge of databases.
- an ability to manage large volumes of data from a variety of sources to pre-determined timescales.
- excellent written communication skills.
- excellent organizational skills.
- an ability to think and work strategically.
- the ability to liaise with other members of the committee, County Recorders and observers.
- experience of data collection, preferably relating to bird records.
- a knowledge of rare birds and the YNURC.

2.4.3 Selection & Appointment of Secretary

The Chairman will select the Secretary on behalf of the Committee; this appointment will be subject to approval by, and formally appointed by the Chairman of the Bird Section.

2.4.4 Period of office of Secretary

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

3. MEETINGS

3.1 The Annual General Meeting- AGM

3.1.1 Frequency

The full Committee meets at least once a year, normally in late spring.

3.1.2 Introduction & Matters Covered

The AGM will have the following standing items:

- re-appointment of Chairman, Secretary and Vice-chairman
- Secretary's report
- proposals for changes to the Constitution

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

- record handling & assessment
- observers
- adding or removing a taxa from being a YNURC Rarity
- species & sub-species considered to be difficult to identify
- other business as may be determined by the Chairman

3.1.3 Those Attending

Attendance at the AGM is limited to:

- Chairman (voting)
- Secretary (voting)
- 8 Voting Members (voting) including the Vice-chairman
- The editor of the Annual Bird Report (non-voting) if not included above

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

Where any of the officers express a wish not to have a vote, an additional Voting Member can be appointed.

3.1.4 Voting procedures at the AGM

Quorum at this meeting requires at least 6 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 Chairman has the casting vote.

3.2 Other Meetings and Decisions

3.2.1 Identification Meetings

In addition to the AGM, YNURC 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 Chairman. 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.

4. TAXA CONSIDERED BY YNURC

4.1 Introduction

In broad terms the YNURC assess the sightings of rare bird taxa (species or sub-species) in Yorkshire. These will include all records considered by BBRC.

Each year at the AGM we will review the levels of occurrence for those taxa currently assessed by the Committee but not by BBRC, and those taxa NOT currently assessed by the Committee but which may be close to being considered 'rare'. Data used will come from the YNURC'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 on the YNU website. 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 YNURC Rarity

The starting point for defining a Yorkshire 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 YNURC rarity.

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

4.1.2 Removal of a YNURC Rarity

All taxa currently assessed by YNURC will also be looked at, to check they remain rare. The starting point for removing a Yorkshire 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 YNURC rarity it would not normally be reinstated, even if the criteria of Section 4.1.1 are met, until 10 years have passed.

4.1.3 Helping Local Societies/Observatories

When a species/taxon is no longer considered rare, then assessment of those records will normally be undertaken at local level. If a local society or observatory feels they do not have sufficient expertise to assess a difficult taxon, or maybe a specific record, then YNURC will provide advice on such records, if asked. The

YNURC may decide to assess records that are close to the criteria for assessment where there are no local societies to perform that function. The decision to do so would be taken at the AGM.

4.2 Taxa considered by YNURC

4.2.1 Introduction & Species considered

YNURC 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 we accept submissions for some indeterminate groups of species & sub-species.

A full list of the taxa considered by the committee is published on the YNURC website.

In addition any species or sub-species not currently on the British List would be considered by YNURC prior to and concurrent with submission to BBRC.

4.2.2 Sub-species considered

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

Furthermore the YNURC encourages identification to a sub-species level for species that are a YNURC rarity in their own right.

4.2.3 Indeterminate Species/ Sub-species pairs or groups

In a few cases, the Committee considers and publishes indeterminate records of pairs or groups of rare species or sub-species, 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 sub-species are clearly established and which are usually possible to see in the field, then Indeterminate records will not be published and will be considered Not Proven.

5. THE ASSESSMENT OF RECORDS

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 The Assessment Cycle

Submissions come in to the YNURC 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 YNURC. Therefore there is a broad annual cycle that covers receipt of submission, assessment by the YNURC and then publication in the Annual Bird Report, it is not always possible for a sighting to be published in the next Annual Bird Report.

5.1.2 Approximate time to complete an Assessment

With the latest electronic methods of both submittal and assessment by YNURC, 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 longer to be processed.

5.2 Submission of Records

5.2.1 Introduction

Finders & 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 6 months after the sighting should be allowed before this is done.

Note that YNURC do NOT accept submissions where the bird is not named to a species or taxa.

5.2.2 Submission Forms & procedures

It greatly helps the Committee if records are submitted using a YNURC form, available from <http://www.ynu.org.uk/birds/descriptions> or from the Secretary.

We welcome the electronic submission of photographs, with the provision that some detail is supplied about location and the name of the finder, where known.

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.

If the bird has been trapped then the BTO ringing form, complete with biometrics and the ring number, should be sent direct to YNURC 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).

5.2.3 Liaison with County Recorders

Records should be sent to the Secretary, preferably via the appropriate County Recorder, and will be acknowledged by the Secretary on receipt by email.

5.2.5 Confidentiality

As stated immediately above all submissions are acknowledged to the appropriate County Recorder.

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 YNURC 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 Bird Report or in other documents published by YNURC.

5.3 Assessment Procedure

5.3.1 Voting method

All submissions are loaded onto a private internet forum which only YNURC 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, sub-species, 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 Chairman 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 Chairman 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 should be agreed, along with an achievable timetable, so that this information can be relayed back to observers or recorders following any specific enquiries regarding the record.

5.3.2 Voting Accept or Not Proven

All voting members 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 YNURC 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 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 8 or 9) 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 Chairman to review the record and voting. If appropriate the Chairman may prepare a synopsis of the record and voting comments. Acknowledged experts on the species or sub-species concerned, could also be asked for advice. The Chairman 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 Chairman's synopsis all being presented.

On completion of this recirculation a record is accepted if 9 or 10 members vote for acceptance. All other outcomes are Not Proven.

5.4.3 Advising the outcome

All decisions are published on the YNU website and accepted records will be published in the YNU's Annual Bird Report and it should be noted that this is the official record. However, accepted decisions may also broadcast by social media (such as Twitter) at the time the decision is completed.

The reasons for Not Proven decisions will be communicated by the Secretary directly to the observer via the County Recorder 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.

All requests will be considered by the Secretary and Chairman to ascertain their validity, and we will then confirm whether the review will go ahead.

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

5.6 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 Annual Bird Report and, if appropriate, will include a species comment.

6. ARCHIVE

6.1 The YNURC Archive

6.1.1 Location

The central repository of paper rarity records is maintained at NEY Records Centre in York. The archive of electronic records is retained by the Secretary and Chairman.

6.1.2 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 Chairman 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.

7. 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 or it would not be able to function. YNURC has no automatic or legal expectation that birders submit records to them. We can only perform our task of record assessment and keeping of the county record with the goodwill and co-operation of the majority of birders in the county. 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 Chairman and Secretary, in consultation with the other members of the Committee. Changes to the Constitution will only be made in consultation with the Bird Section of the YNU.

The YNURC try 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.