

Cheshire and Wirral Rarity Subcommittee

Guidelines for Assessing Records Descriptions updated 2021

The rapid change in bird recording onto social media platforms and the use of online systems as both individual and now County lists and databases has resulted in a marked reduction of submissions to the County database.

Thus, the historical review of written descriptions is now restricted to a very small proportion of the county rare and scarce bird sightings. Sighting records almost always now include photographic evidence and multi observer sightings are accepted without submission to the rarity panel, and details e.g., finder etc will be maintained on a spreadsheet and published on the work in progress on the CAWOS web site.

For single observer sightings (even with photographic evidence) then a description is required including the following: A description should describe the circumstances of the record, including dates, observer's names, optics, light conditions and distance from bird. It should include key features of the species claimed. Supporting plumage, jizz and vocal details, together with sketches and/or photographs should be included. Experience of the claimed and similar species should also be indicated. Where possible the standard rarity form should be used.

While the experience and reliability of the observer is a factor in evaluating a record, the description needs to be of a standard where someone who does not know the observer would consider that it is far more likely that the claim is correct than that it is not. The level of certainty will depend upon factors such as the rarity status in the county, or any complexities of identification of the species claimed.

Records based solely/mainly on identification by call or song should be supported with a description and preferably a recording of the call or song. Ideally, the bird should have been heard more than once and also, ideally, should have been seen at least well enough to eliminate anything else that may have been making the sound heard. Other details should include the number of times the call was heard, the previous experience the observer has had of the species and all possible confusion species, a full description of the call to include a description of the call notes (including length) and recording however brief if at all possible, and if the bird is seen, a description of the "jizz" of the bird e.g.: size, shape, mode of flight etc.

The increased use of "Nocmig" recordings may identify a night flying rarity. In this case details of the recording should be submitted for external evaluation where necessary. GPS tagged and tracked birds, that pass through the county, will be accepted whether seen by birdwatchers or not.

On submitted descriptions, acceptance, or otherwise of records is based upon the votes of the sub-committee members. Members can vote to pend a record if they have questions about the description, require more information or would value a discussion with their fellow sub-committee members. The process for evaluating the record will be on the basis of votes cast to either accept, or deemed not proven or pend for further discussion.

For records submitted by a sub-committee member, the secretary, in consultation with the County Recorder and other members, will decide how to resolve them, which may simply be via a vote by the other sub-committee members.

Sub-committee members' comments about reasons for acceptance or not proven/rejection should be filed with the description by the secretary. The reasons for non-acceptance of records should be fed back to the observers who submitted the record in a timely fashion. The results of the sub committee's decisions will be published (accepted or not proven records) on the CAWOS website. There is also an option to publish in the "CAWOS Bird News" comment or interesting descriptions to facilitate good practice on specific records.

External resources should be used by the team where there is sufficient need to confirm an identification should the subcommittee deem it necessary This includes using "the Sound Approach to Birding" resource where calls would confirm an identification as well as Nationally regarded experts for specific species groups, e.g. Gulls, Redpolls Etc. The County Recorder will be responsible for interfacing on these records. The results from external opinion would then be circulated to the subcommittee for comment and acceptance.