

Bulletin of the BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

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CLUB ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman's message

Since 2003 and the publication of the *The birds of Morocco*, the BOC and the BOU have jointly published the Checklist series and other books (e.g. *The bird atlas of Uganda*). However, following a thorough review of its activities, the BOU has decided to withdraw from the publication of such titles with immediate effect. All BOU and joint BOU/BOC titles may of course still be purchased via the BOU website: www.bou.org.uk or from the BOU office, P.O. Box 417, Peterborough PE7 3FX, UK.

The BOC Committee remains of the view that Checklists fit naturally with the Club's aims and objectives, and make an important contribution to ornithological studies. Consequently, it is committed in principle to their continued publication and is now considering in detail the practicalities of undertaking this task as sole publisher, including discussion with the BOU and Dr David R. Wells, Checklist Commissioning Editor. The aim is to seek to resolve the many outstanding issues and to establish our intensions in time for the AGM in May. In the meantime any views and or comments would be gratefully received by David Wells or myself.

Chris Storey

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the British Ornithologists' Club will be held in the upstairs room at The Barley Mow, Horseferry Road, Westminster, London SW1P 2EE, at 5.30 pm on Tuesday 20 May 2014.

Agenda

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 21 May 2013 (see *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 133: 165–166, and the BOC website).
3. Receive and consider the Chairman's Review, the Trustees' Report and the Accounts for 2013 (these will be available in the room before the start of the meeting).
4. The Bulletin Editor's report—Mr G. M. Kirwan.
5. Election of Officers. The Committee proposes that:
 - i. Dr R. P. Prŷs-Jones be re-elected as *Hon. Secretary*
 - ii. Mr D. J. Montier be re-elected as *Hon. Treasurer*
 No other changes to the Committee are proposed as all other members are eligible to serve at least one more year in office.
6. Any other business, of which advance notice has been given.

Gerlof Fokko Mees (1926–2013)

Gerlof Mees, former bird curator at the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie (RMNH) at Leiden, Netherlands, was born into a well-off family in Bloemendaal, Netherlands. Both his parents had a keen interest in natural history, and Gerlof was stimulated to study birds by them and by his uncle Jan Verwey, founder of Dutch research into bird migration and ethology. After completing secondary school, he started to study biology in Leiden, but this was soon interrupted by a stay on Java (1946–49) as part of the Dutch forces in the Indonesian independence war. His scarce spare time was spent birdwatching, and problems identifying the local white-eyes *Zosterops* brought him into contact with George Junge, then bird curator at RMNH. Junge permitted Mees to study the white-eyes in his care, and Gerlof also learned the practical work of a museum department. Though he specialised in fish research (thought to be more likely to produce employment than birds), Gerlof visited Trinidad & Tobago when still a student and collected birds during an eight-month stay in 1953/54, reporting on these together with his mentor (Junge & Mees 1958). Between May 1955 and July 1957 he was an assistant at RMNH, working in both the bird and fish departments. He obtained his doctorate in 1956. His study on white-eyes resulted in a thesis on the Indo-Australian Zosteropidae (Mees 1957). However, fishes still held his interest and Mees was appointed a curator at the Western Australian Museum in Perth in 1958 mainly for his fame as an ichthyologist. There he continued

to work on Zosteropidae, but (with fishes) also on Australian larks and owls, and on the birds of the West Pilbara and Kimberley areas. He described several new taxa for Western Australia and, moreover, met his future wife, Veronica. After Junge's death in 1962 Gerlof was appointed bird curator at RMNH and the family moved to Leiden in 1963.

The rich Indonesian collections at RMNH now formed the main subject of Mees' work, resulting in very thorough publications on the birds of Bangka, the Moluccas, Misool, southern New Guinea and Java. Moreover, he made collecting trips to Nigeria, Guyana, Zimbabwe and (especially) Suriname, often with Veronica, while he also oversaw the acquisition of large bird collections for RMNH from Turkey, Mexico, Taiwan, Kenya, Tanzania and Flores, resulting in further major papers and several revisions and shorter notes. His distributional notes or reviews of Andaman sparrowhawks, Chinese Crested Tern *Sterna bernsteini*, Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*, Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* and Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* are meticulously detailed. His publication list numbers c.100 articles on birds, but his list of papers on fishes is also long.

Mees' luxury work room at RMNH, surrounded by shelves with 3,000 bird books and complete series of >200 bird journals with a central desk covered by long rows of bird skins, jars with fishes, and piles of reprints and manuscripts made a lasting impression on most visitors, especially as Gerlof often seemed disturbed when one dared to enter his room. However, visitors with serious interests were always pleasantly provided with books and articles, and given free access to the collections, though they perhaps would still feel themselves rather uneasy because Gerlof often would debate the failure of the political system in the Netherlands at the same time. It was wonderful to see Mees find his way among the 50,000 mounted birds and 200,000 skins and clutches to pick out a special item, especially as large parts of the collections were not yet databased. Within the museum staff he was admired because of his deep knowledge on the history of the collections and of nomenclatorial questions, but some people felt ambiguous towards him. For instance, though fluent in at least four languages, as an employee of a Dutch museum Mees often insisted in writing in his native language when publishing in RMNH journals, using a rather old-fashioned style. As a result, editors of journals, being some of his fellow curators, had to translate his lengthy manuscripts into English, during which small errors frequently crept in. Mees tended to blame his colleagues for this, although his own proof-reading could have prevented the mistakes. Also, he still worked periodically on fishes, even though these had a curator of their own.

Mees retired in 1991 to Western Australia with Veronica, where their children had already settled. Until his death, he maintained a deep interest in ornithology, and despite living in the outback he published several papers and notes, in part with help of friends in Leiden who sent him literature. The change from the research institute RMNH into the public museum with research facilities Naturalis Biodiversity Center and its move within Leiden was followed by him with much interest. In his last years, failing eyesight largely hindered further research, much to his regret. He died peacefully on 31 March 2013. He will be remembered for *Monarcha sacerdotum* Mees, 1973, from Flores, and in *Caprimulgus meesi* Sangster & Rozendaal, 2004.

Main publications of Gerlof F. Mees

1946. Courtship feeding of Willow-Warbler. *Brit. Birds* 39: 280.
1957. A systematic review of the Indo-Australian Zosteropidae (pt. 1). Ph.D. thesis. Univ. of Leiden.
1958. The avifauna of Trinidad and Tobago. *Zoöl. Verhand.* 37: 1–172 (with G. C. A. Junge).
1961. A systematic review of the Indo-Australian Zosteropidae (pt. II). *Zoöl. Verhand.* 50: 1–168.
1961. An annotated catalogue of a collection of bird skins from West Pilbara, Western Australia. *J. Roy. Soc. West. Austral.* 44: 97–143.
1964. A revision of the Australian owls (Strigidae and Tytonidae). *Zoöl. Verhand.* 65: 1–62.
1965. The avifauna of Misool. *Nova Guinea, Zool.* 31: 139–203.
1969. A systematic review of the Indo-Australian Zosteropidae (pt. III). *Zoöl. Verhand.* 102: 1–390.
1970. On some birds from southern Mexico. *Zoöl. Meded.* 44: 237–245.
1970. Birds of the Inyanga National Park, Rhodesia. *Zoöl. Verhand.* 109: 3–74.
1970. Notes on some birds from the island of Formosa (Taiwan). *Zoöl. Meded.* 44: 287–304.
1971. Systematic and faunistic remarks on birds from Borneo and Java, with new records. *Zoöl. Meded.* 45: 225–244.
1972. Die Vögel der Insel Gebe. *Zoöl. Meded.* 46: 69–89.
1974. Additions to the fauna of Suriname. *Zoöl. Meded.* 48: 55–67.
1975. Identiteit en status van *Sterna bernsteini* Schlegel. *Ardea* 63: 78–86.
1977. Geographical variation of *Caprimulgus macrurus* Horsfield (Aves, Caprimulgidae). *Zoöl. Verhand.* 155: 1–47.

1977. The subspecies of *Chlidonias hybridus* (Pallas), their breeding distribution and migration (Aves, Laridae, Sterninae). *Zoöl. Verhand.* 107: 1–64.
1979. Die Nachweise von *Cuculus canorus* L. im Indo-Australischen Raum. *Mitt. Zool. Mus. Berlin* 55, *Suppl. Ann. Orn.* 3: 127–134.
1979. Verspreiding en getalssterkte van de Witwangstern, *Chlidonias hybridus* (Pallas), in Europa en Noord-Afrika. *Zoöl. Bijdragen* 26: 3–63.
1980. The sparrow-hawks (*Accipiter*) of the Andaman Islands. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 77: 371–412.
1982. Bird records from the Moluccas. *Zoöl. Meded.* 56: 91–111.
1982. Birds from the lowlands of southern New Guinea (Merauke and Koembe). *Zoöl. Verhand.* 191: 1–188.
1986. A list of the birds recorded from Bangka Island, Indonesia. *Zoöl. Verhand.* 232: 3–176.
1991. Bemerkungen über *Acrocephalus caffer* (Sparman) in der Tahiti-Gruppe (Aves, Sylviidae). *Proc. K. Ned. Akad. Wet., Ser. C* 94: 243–256.
1994. *The birds of Surinam*. Second edn. Vaco, Paramaribo. [Thoroughly updated version of Haverschmidt's original work of 1968.]
1996. Geographical variation in birds of Java. *Publ. Nuttall Orn. Cl.* 26: 1–119.
2006. The avifauna of Flores. *Zoöl. Meded.* 80(3): 1–261.

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