

Bulletin of the BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Vol. 134 No. 3

Published 1 September 2014

CLUB ANNOUNCEMENTS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the British Ornithologists' Club was held in the upstairs room at the Barley Mow, 104 Horseferry Road, Westminster, London SW1P 2EE, on Tuesday 20 May 2014 with Chris Storey in the Chair. Thirteen members were present.

1. **Apologies for absence** were received from David Fisher and Clive Mann.

2. **Minutes of AGM 2013.** The Minutes of the 2013 AGM held on 21 May 2013 which had been published (*Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 133:165–166 and the BOC website) were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3. **Chairman's Review, Bulletin Editor's Report, Trustees' Report and Accounts for 2013.** Copies of the document were available at the meeting. The Chairman began by thanking Helen Baker for all that she had done for the Club during her time in the Chair: it was considerable and the Club was much in her debt. He added that, with her usual generosity, Helen had agreed to help with the running of the website. The Chairman also thanked the Committee members, and Guy Kirwan, Eng-Li Green and Steve Dudley for all their support and work during the past year. He added that David Montier was retiring from his position of *Hon. Treasurer* and that Richard Malin, a new member of the Club recently co-opted onto the Committee, had agreed to put his name forward for election to that position. The forthcoming June Bulletin would include an announcement of a Special General Meeting on 23 September, prior to the evening meeting that day, at which the election of Richard Malin to the role of *Hon. Treasurer* would be proposed. The Chairman concluded by remarking that the Committee had begun to reappraise its activities. The Club faced a declining membership, a substantial reduction in numbers attending evening meetings and had assumed sole responsibility for the Checklist series following the BOU's unilateral decision to withdraw from joint publication of it and associated works, although BOU would continue to handle sales of existing joint works and future Checklists published by the Club. The Committee intended to ensure the BOC's funds were best used to further the Club's aims consistent with its charitable status and current realities, and that the Club was run in as effective and cost-efficient manner as possible.

The *Hon. Secretary* expressed regret at the disappointing audiences, averaging *c.*20, attending the four diverse and uniformly excellent evening meetings, held in February (Ascension Island birds), May (White-shouldered Ibis *Pseudibis davisoni* in Cambodia), September (Malagasy region birds) and November (avian land-use in Cyprus). Unless attendances improve in 2014, the Committee would need to consider discontinuing the long tradition of dinner meetings. By contrast, the joint one-day meeting, with the African Bird Club and the Natural History Museum, held at the NHM on Saturday 6 April, attracted an audience well in excess of 100, building on the success of previous joint ventures.

The four issues of the Bulletin for vol. 133 (2013) comprised 352 pages, a recent record, including 28 papers of broad geographical scope though with a continuing emphasis on the Neotropical region. Taxonomic issues continued to figure importantly, and two new subspecies were described, of Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* and Upper Magdalena Tapaculo *Scytalopus rodriguezii*. The interval between receipt and publication for accepted papers has continued to be reduced under the present *Hon. Editor* and now averages only a little over seven months, with the free inclusion of colour illustrations where justified clearly attractive to authors. With the withdrawal of the BOU from involvement in Checklist production, a meeting of an *ad hoc* Sub-committee of the Club took place in December to consider the future of Club involvement in Checklists and other Occasional Publications. This made recommendations for consideration by the Committee in 2014.

The *Hon. Treasurer* introduced the Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2013. He referred first to the Investments in the Balance Sheet, which showed an increase over the year of £33,514. Of that figure £32,328 was due to an increase in the market value of the unit trusts held in the Herbert Stevens Trust Fund, the balance being distributions reinvested. Members' subscriptions had declined by £460 and investment income by almost £1,000, mainly because a two-year fixed term deposit had matured early in the year and could only be replaced at a much lower rate. Bulletin costs had increased to £16,024, partially explained by there being more pages in 2013 than in 2012. A grant of £500 had been made to the Museum Curators' Conference to support a delegate from St Petersburg. With total income of £23,994 and expenditure of £30,147, there was a

deficit for the year of £6,153. However with total assets of £414,680, the Club remains in a healthy position. The *Hon. Treasurer* proposed and the Meeting accepted the adoption of the Report and Accounts.

4. Election of Officers. Robert Prŷs-Jones and David Montier were confirmed as continuing in office as *Hon. Secretary* and *Hon. Treasurer*, respectively. Note: subsequently it was noted that the resolution was redundant since under the Club's new rules their re-election in 2013 was for a term of four years, ending in 2017 unless terminated earlier.

5. Any Other Business. There was none.

The 977th meeting of the Club was held on Tuesday 20 May 2014 in the upstairs room of the Barley Mow, 104 Horseferry Road, Westminster, London SW1P 2EE. Twenty members and eight non-members were present. Members attending were: Miss H. BAKER, Mr K. BETTON, Cdr. M. B. CASEMENT, RN, Mr S. CHAPMAN, Mr R. CHARLES, Prof. R. CHEKE, Mr K. HERON JONES, Mr G. M. KIRWAN (*Speaker*), Mr R. LANGLEY, Mr R. MALIN, Mr D. MONTIER, Mr R. PRICE, Dr R. PRŶS-JONES, Mr A. RANDALL, Mr N. REDMAN, Dr P. RUDGE, Mr P. SELLAR, Mr S. A. H. STATHAM, Mr C. W. R. STOREY (*Chairman*) and Mr M. WALTON.

Non-members attending were: Mrs J. HERON JONES, Mr K. HYATT, Mrs J. McDONALD, Mrs M. MONTIER, Mr A. PEAL, Mrs H. PRICE, Mr W. PRICE and Mr A. SIMMONS.

Guy Kirwan spoke on *Cuban birds at home and abroad, in the field and museum*. His talk commenced with brief résumés of Cuban geography, climate, peoples and life. Thereafter, he went on to discuss the development of ornithology in Cuba, starting with three important figures from the 19th century: Felipe Poey y Aloy, the so-called 'father of Cuban natural history', commemorated in a museum named for him and a journal *Poeyana*; Juan Lembeye Lartaud, a Frenchman, remembered in the scientific name of the Cuban Gnatcatcher *Poliophtila lembeyei*; and, of course, the German, Johannes (Juan) Gundlach, whose staggering contributions to Cuban natural history, but especially ornithology, are immortalised in the names, both scientific and vernacular, of numerous taxa. Between 1900 and the 1960s, Cuban ornithology remained vibrant, with important contributions from visiting and resident ornithologists, including from the Americans Thomas Barbour, Charles Ramsden and James Bond, but also from many Cubans, with those of José Hernández Bauzá, Joaquín Fernández de la Vara, Gastón Villalba, Stephen Bruner and Abelardo Moreno y Bonilla being especially outstanding. Modern-day Cuba presents many challenges to ornithological research, not least because of the embargo, and was particularly problematic during the so-called 'Special Period' following the collapse of the Soviet Union and of Russian financial support of the Castro regime. Nevertheless, the last couple of decades have witnessed considerable work on waterbirds, especially from the team of ornithologists based at La Havana University, and on taxonomy, avian palaeontology and ecology from staff at the National Museum of Natural History in Havana, while personnel from the Instituto de Ecología y Sistemática, also in Havana, have pursued a wide range of research interests.

Guy's talk then turned to the habitats and birds of Cuba, with special emphasis on the endemics, of which 27 taxa are currently recognised by one or more authority at species level; given Cuba's much larger size this is perhaps surprisingly fewer than either for Jamaica or Hispaniola. Many of these endemics are treated as threatened by IUCN / BirdLife International. More remarkably, at least seven and possibly nine genera are currently considered endemic to the country, namely *Cyanolimnas* (Zapata Rail *C. ceveiai*), *Starnoenas* (Blue-headed Quail-Dove *S. cyanocephala*), *Margarobyas* (Bare-legged Owl *M. lawrencii*), *Xiphidiopicus* (Cuban Green Woodpecker *X. percussus*), *Ferminia* (Zapata Wren *F. ceveiai*), *Teretistris* (Yellow-headed Warbler *T. fernandinae* and Oriente Warbler *T. fornsi*) and *Torreornis* (Zapata Sparrow *T. inexpectata*), with *Priotelus* (sometimes restricted to Cuban Trogon *P. temnurus*) and *Ptiloxena* (Cuban Blackbird *P. atrovioleacea*) potentially also confined to archipelago. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that genetic work, to better establish relationships between these taxa and perceived closest relatives, is much needed for virtually all of these birds.

Finally, Guy outlined the field and (especially) museum work being undertaken by his co-authors and himself in preparing a new, detailed checklist to Cuban birds (to be published by BOC), as well as providing some brief thoughts on the perennial question of prospects for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker *Campephilus principalis bairdii* in Cuba.

Dr James Francis Monk, DM (1915–2014)

James died peacefully at home in Goring-on-Thames on 8 May in his 99th year. His memorial service on 27 May at nearby Streatley parish church was packed with his many friends and admirers. The congregation was greeted by the soft sounds of a dawn chorus, and readings and hymns, chosen by James himself, while the eulogies gave appropriate tribute to his lifelong passion for birds.

Born in India, where his father was on the staff of St. Stephens College through the Cambridge Mission to Delhi, but aged four he was sent to England to be brought up by an aunt in Cheltenham, then to Twyford preparatory school where his interest in birds was first ignited. Subsequently, as a student at Winchester College (1924–29), he was encouraged to follow the example of his illustrious predecessor Edward Grey,

later Viscount Grey of Falloden (1876–80), in whose memory the college nature reserve is named. James studied medicine at Trinity College, Oxford, where he came to know many influential and well-known ornithologists, who were later to have a major influence on his subsequent ornithological career, leading to his membership of the BOU, and the BOC, which he joined in 1946.

Having achieved his final medical qualification in 1941, James was drafted into the Royal Army Medical Corps and in 1943 was sent to North Africa where, during breaks from tending casualties, he birdwatched in the desert. The opportunity to witness the spring migration through Tunisia stimulated his interest in trans-Saharan migration. After the war, he returned to pursue a medical career and his love of ornithology, and met his future wife, Diana, at his mother's house in Oxford; their courtship included visits to watch birds at local sewage farms. James entered full-time General Practice in Goring-on-Thames in 1947, remaining until his retirement as senior partner in 1981. His earlier research on malaria gained him a degree (Oxford) in 1950.

James married Diana in February 1948, and they remained in Goring for the next 66 years. Returning from their honeymoon, the discovery of a pair of Wrynecks *Jynx torquilla* in the garden led to James undertaking a national review for the British Trust for Ornithology of the status in Britain of this increasingly rare species (*Bird Study* 10: 112–132, 1963), while his analysis of the breeding biology of Greenfinch *Chloris chloris* was distinguished for being the first paper published in *Bird Study* (1: 1–14, 1954).

His special interest in landbird migration resulted in two papers: Elliott, H. F. & Monk J. F., 1952, Land-bird migration over the Suez route to East Africa, *Ibis* 94: 526–530; and Moreau R. E. & Monk J. F., 1957, Autumn migration in southwest Portugal, *Ibis* 99: 500–508. It was at this point that I first made contact with James. Our early careers were remarkably similar, and although my Winchester College tutors groomed me for a medical career, I followed my family tradition and joined the Royal Navy, pursuing my lifelong interest in birds via the Royal Naval Birdwatching Society. So began lengthy correspondence with both James and Reg Moreau, who encouraged me in my own studies on this subject in the Mediterranean. Following advice from both David Lack and Bill Bourne, I made a series of recordings of radar echoes from an aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean during 1961–63, which resulted in a paper in *Ibis*. It was only thanks to James, who took infinite trouble to edit my amateur drafts that it finally appeared in print, and he also authorised the inclusion of photographs, which were rather a novelty at the time. Many other authors were similarly grateful for his care and editorial advice.

When Reg Moreau died in 1970, James undertook to finish his nearly completed final work: Moreau, R. E. & Monk, J. F. (1972) *The Palearctic-African bird migration systems*. Academic Press, London.

In 1975, it was almost entirely via James' initiative that the BOU launched a series to cover parts of the world for which up-to-date and comprehensive avian checklists were unavailable, and for 13 years James organised and edited these. This series continues to this day, but responsibility for publication has recently transferred solely to the Club.

Over a period of 32 years, James held every important office in the BOU, except Hon. Treasurer, serving as Assistant Editor of *Ibis* 1956–60, Editor 1960–66, Hon. Secretary (1967–72), Vice-President 1978–82 and President 1983–87. He was a Life Member of the BOC, where his record was equally impressive, as Vice-Chairman 1965–68, Chairman 1968–71, Editor *Bull. BOC* 1976–91 and he continued on BOC Committee 1991–94. In 1992 he edited the Bulletin's Centenary Supplement 112A *Avian systematics and taxonomy*. The Club was especially indebted to James, who donated proceeds from the sale of his personal library, amounting to over £3,600, to establish a fund to help finance BOC publications. His contribution to ornithology and publications was described, in the citation for his award of the BOU Medal in 1988 (*Ibis* 130: 471–472), as 'unique in this century', but remarkably he earned this accolade whilst a GP in a very busy practice. How he managed to achieve this using only a typewriter, before the advent of computers, remains a mystery to all who knew him.

His family recall their father was often preoccupied with his papers, working late at night and at weekends. This prompted his younger daughter to put a notice on his study door reading 'Ibis going on in here. Please knock before going in. Thank you.'

James was famed for his approachability and generosity with his time among all who worked closely with him. He was wise and very shrewd with his advice. As an impecunious student at Oxford he came to know Richard Meinertzhagen and even tutored members of his family. Tom Gladwin commented that, although he didn't understand his concern at the time, James advised 'care' in analysing Meinertzhagen material.

As editor, he took infinite care to make papers accessible to a wide readership, and his own writings appealed to a wide circle of amateur birdwatchers. In the early 1990s he wrote regularly for the monthly *Goring Gap News*, and his texts were subsequently published as *Birds for all seasons, chronicles from the Thames Valley* (1997). His daughter Catherine read a delightful extract from one of these at his memorial service.

James was first and foremost a conscientious fieldworker but, throughout his long and eventful career, he was also passionate about his family, his garden and his dogs. His final years were marred by deteriorating eyesight and mobility problems, but he remained alert to the end, and enjoyed exchanging bird anecdotes with visitors. He never complained, and was lovingly supported by family and friends; the service collection was for the Royal National Institute of Blind People (Talking Books) from which he had benefitted so much in his latter years of blindness.

Michael Casement