

# Bulletin of the BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

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## CLUB ANNOUNCEMENTS

The 982nd meeting of the Club was held on Tuesday 15 March 2016 in the upstairs room at the Barley Mow, 104 Horseferry Road, Westminster, London SW1P 2EE. Twelve members and two non-members were present. Members attending were: Miss H. Baker, Mr S. Chapman, Mr G. M. Kirwan, Mr P. Jackson, Mr R. R. Langley, Mr R. W. Malin, Mr D. Montier, Mr S. Pringle, Mr R. Pritchett, Dr R. Prÿs-Jones, Mr N. J. Redman and Mr C. W. R. Storey (*Chairman*).

Non-members attending were: Mrs B. Harrison and Mrs M. Montier.

Dr Robert Prÿs-Jones, of the Natural History Museum, spoke on *The Soul of the Collection: key developments in the documentation of the British Museum's bird collection, 1753 to 1909*. His talk aimed to give an overview of the manner in which scientific documentation of the museum's bird acquisitions developed and improved over the first 150 years from its foundation in the 1750s. It was based on research conducted initially in conjunction with Jenni Thomas, who has already published an overview of the period up to 1836 in *Archives of Natural History* 39: 111–125 (2012) to which interested readers should refer. During its first 50 years, the museum's focus was almost entirely on the acquisition of 'novelties', notably new species, almost all of which went on display. Little interest was shown in associated information beyond generalised locality, many specimens decayed due to poor preparation and the rigours of display, and few details were kept of what was lost or destroyed. This situation persisted into the first 30 years of the 1800s, although on the credit side at least an attempt at the systematic cataloguing of the collection was begun, though this remained both extremely partial and largely unpublished.

It was only in the 1830s that the situation seriously began to improve with, firstly, the appointment in 1830 of George Robert Gray as the museum's first staff member solely responsible for birds and, secondly, as a result of a Parliamentary Committee into 'the condition, management and affairs of the British Museum' that was set up to address perceived gross deficiencies in wider museum management. Key recommendations from this Committee resulted in the setting up in 1837 of the modern museum registration system, whereby every newly accessed specimen was immediately recorded in a standardised format with a unique identifying number, and led to a start in producing and publishing the first systematically arranged scientific catalogues of bird specimens held. However, it was only with the appointment in 1872 of the great Richard Bowdler Sharpe as bird curator that previously slow improvements accelerated to a grand culmination. In the course of less than 40 years up to his death in 1909, he increased the size of the collection by more than an order of magnitude, introduced clear separation between a mounted display collection and much larger bird skin research collection, and wrote a massive history of the bird collection that provides an unrivalled source of information on the collectors of the specimens held. Most importantly, however, he oversaw the production of the great 27-volume *Catalogue of birds in the British Museum (1874–98)*, which has been referred to as 'unquestionably the most important work in systematic ornithology that has ever been published'. The bird collection had its 'soul', one still constantly referred to more than 100 years later.

## CORRIGENDA

In *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 136: 14–27, The pigeon names *Columba livia*, '*C. domestica*' and *C. oenas* and their type specimens, the author, Thomas M. Donegan, has drawn attention to a number of errors of commission on his behalf.

On p. 21, the last paragraph should commence: 'The type series comprises: (i) Stock Doves studied by Aldrovandi (1600) and copied by subsequent authors (Fig. 1) and a juvenile Woodpigeon illustrated by Aldrovandi (1600) (Supplementary Materials, Figs. 3C–D), probably near Bologna in Italy...'

On p. 22, first full paragraph: 'Stable nomenclature is furthered by establishing a lectotype for *oenas* because the name's type series includes Stock Dove, Woodpigeon and Feral Pigeon specimens.'. The fourth paragraph should read: 'Other birds illustrated or referred to in the original description of *oenas* discussed above become paralectotypes as a result of this lectotypification (although at least one and possibly both of Albin's (1738) plates and one of Aldrovandi's (1600) plates are not Stock Doves).'

These changes have no impact on, and indeed reinforce the need for, the lectotype designation for *oenas* in this paper.