

Bulletin of the BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

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CLUB ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman's Message

Welcome to the new online open-access journal. As you will have seen, we are publishing *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* during 2017 on the BOC's website, moving in 2018 to the umbrella of BioOne. We hope that you will let us know your thoughts concerning the new format either at the meeting on 12 June or directly by e-mail.

We begin 2017 in our new charitable structure: we are now a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) with a board of trustees and a new constitution. The Charity Commission has endorsed our 'charitable objects' with confirmation that the work of the charity will be for the public benefit. Details of our new office address, bank account, the names of the trustees and their terms of office, together with the new constitution, have been posted on the website.

The fundamental decision to move the Bulletin to open-access and online was taken bearing in mind the realities of current trends in academic journal publication, the slow decline in the readership of the hard copy *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* and our public benefit charitable responsibilities. Nevertheless, in moving to its new online-only format, the Bulletin's commitment to being fully Code compliant remains in place.

We have considered several possible online sites for *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.*, including our own. In the end, we have entered discussions with an American online publisher, BioOne. They have an impressive list of open-access ornithological journals, are enthusiastic about adding *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* to their list and offer attractive services, including ensuring the journal will be fully searchable and accessible on all devices. Their website is: <http://www.bioone.org>.

However, we cannot take *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* to the BioOne site until January 2018. This means that for the current year we are placing *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* in .pdf format on our own website, where you are now reading the first issue of Vol. 137. In making this transition, we are beholden to Guy Kirwan, our *Hon. Editor*, and Eng-Li Green, our very capable designer and webmaster. I should add that our agreement with the Biodiversity Heritage Library stands and we will be integrating the BioOne arrangements with BHL in due course.

In another initiative, to reduce our costs we have removed our stock of books (the *Occasional Publications* plus the Uganda checklist) from Peterborough and they are now being stored by Richard Malin, our *Hon. Treasurer*. We propose to enable members / friends to purchase copies of individual titles for a nominal sum inclusive of postage, and details of these will shortly be issued and also placed on the website. In respect of the JPC checklists published jointly with the BOU, the current plan is that they will be sent to the Natural History Book Service for purchase in the normal way.

The meetings at the Barley Mow continue, but owing to changes in the Barley Mow's diary we have had to move our meetings to Mondays. I trust that this shift will fit in with your own arrangements. At the meeting on Monday 12 June, Alex Bond will talk on *Gough Island—an unnatural history of mice and men*. The meeting will include a review of the past year and the trustees will be available for questions. Details of the meetings on Monday 18 September and Monday 6 November are currently being arranged.

Finally, I hope very much that as many members as possible continue to support the Club as Friends of the BOC. The Club has seen many changes in its long history but none, I suspect, as challenging and far-reaching as those we are currently engaged in.

Chris Storey

The 984th meeting of the Club was held on Tuesday 15 November 2016 in the upstairs room at the Barley Mow, 104 Horseferry Road, Westminster, London SW1P 2EE. Thirteen members and three non-members were present. Members attending were: Miss H. Baker, Mr P. Belman, Mr S. Chapman, Mr M. Earp, Mr D. J. Fisher, Mr G. M. Kirwan (*Speaker*), Mr R. Langley, Mr R. W. Malin, Dr C. F. Mann, Mr D. J. Montier, Dr R. Prÿs-Jones, Mr S. A. H. Statham and Mr C. W. R. Storey (*Chairman*).

Non-members attending were: Mrs M. Gauntlett, Mr D. Russell and Ms J. White.

Guy Kirwan gave a talk entitled *When failure equals success: searching for the Critically Endangered Hooded Seedeater *Sporophila melanops* in central Brazil*. The mysterious Hooded Seedeater *Sporophila melanops* is known only from the type specimen, a male, collected in the 1820s by the Austrian naturalist and explorer Johann Natterer, on the rio Araguaia in central Brazil. A female specimen, postulated potentially to represent the

same species, also collected in the state of Goiás, Brazil, by Gustav Baer in 1906, was identified decades later by Rodolphe Meyer de Schauensee. As was explained, Natterer's extraordinary travels in Brazil (17 years!) yielded a host of novelties and specimens of several species rediscovered only within the last c.2 decades. His contribution to Brazilian ornithology is understated versus his better-known contemporary, Spix, perhaps in part because his bird collections were only written up much later by Pelzel in the late 1860s.

Guy explained how *Sporophila melanops* has become the great enigma of Brazilian ornithology, which prompted him and co-workers in Argentina and Brazil to search for it in the field (without success) and to study the two specimens in museums in Austria and the USA, as well as sequence their DNA. The results of their investigations have effectively removed any doubts regarding the status of the proposed species. Based on the morphological and genetic data, the female is either a Yellow-bellied *S. nigricollis* or Double-collared Seedeater *S. caeruleascens*, whereas the male is one of the so-called 'capuchinos', a group of seedeaters with colourful male plumage that breed in the Southern Cone, but which are virtually undifferentiated molecularly. It is probably a Dark-throated Seedeater *S. ruficollis* showing melanism on the cap feathers, but it might be a melanistic-capped individual of a local population of seedeaters known to breed in the Esteros del Iberá, Corrientes, Argentina, to which the name *S. ruficollis* is potentially applicable; a hybrid provenance currently seems unlikely. The full results were published last year in *PLoS ONE* 11(5): e0154231.

In addition to describing the major result of his work in this region of Brazil, which has effectively removed a species from the Red Data List, Guy also described some of the basic constituents of its avifauna. Together with colleagues in the USA and at the Museu Nacional, in Rio de Janeiro, their field work has yielded improved knowledge of the range and status of several globally threatened species and range extensions for many commoner birds. In addition, other work (recently published in the journal *Emu*) has elucidated an interesting hybridisation phenomenon in two species of riverine tanagers, Crimson-fronted Cardinal *Paroaria baeri* and Red-capped Cardinal *P. gularis*, with once again genetic data providing some of the key details.