

# Bulletin of the BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

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## CLUB ANNOUNCEMENTS

### 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 19 May 2015.

#### AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Tuesday 20 May 2014 (see *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 134: 165–166, and the BOC website).
3. Receive and consider the Chairman's Review, The Trustees' Report and Accounts for 2014 (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 Trustees. The Committee proposes that:
  - i. Mr N. Redman be elected as Vice-Chairman *vice* Mr D. J. Fisher
  - ii. Mr S. Chapman and Mr A. Simmons (*vice* Mr R. R. Langley) be elected to serve as Trustees.
  - iii. Mr K. F. Betton has decided to step down as a Trustee and nominations are invited for the resultant vacancy.
6. Any other business (*any items should be received by the Hon. Secretary by 5 May 2015*)

#### Notes to the Agenda of the 2015 AGM

Item 5: Trustee nominees for election.

#### Stephen Chapman

Master Mariner, Fellow of the Nautical Institute, MBOU and lifetime birdwatcher, with first short note on predation of Coot *Fulica atra* nests published in his school magazine in 1958, Stephen is an active observer on behalf of the British Trust for Ornithology, as well as Vice-Chairman and database manager with the Royal Naval Bird Watching Society. Outside of these interests, he enjoys tall-ship sailing with the Jubilee Sailing Trust, is Chairman of the Southwater Scout Executive, and a recent Chairman of the Southwater Community Partnership. He retired from a career in shipping and marine consulting.

#### Alick Simmons

A 58-year-old veterinarian with a lifelong interest in wildlife observation, photography and conservation. After qualifying in 1978 and several years in private practice, he became a government veterinarian working overseas, culminating in his present role as the UK government's Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer. He has been watching birds since his early teens and has contributed over the years to various surveys and conservation efforts. During the last ten years he has further developed his interest in photography, travelling extensively to observe and photograph wildlife. In addition, he takes a keen interest in animal welfare and is a Council member of the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare and a trustee of the Humane Slaughter Association. Married with two children, he lives in Somerset.

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The 978th meeting of the Club was held on Tuesday 23 September 2014 in the upstairs room at The Barley Mow, 104 Horseferry Road, Westminster, London SW1P 2EE. Twenty members and seven non-members were present. Members attending were: Miss H. BAKER, Mr P. BELMAN, Mr K. F. BETTON, Cdr. M. B. CASEMENT, RN, Mr S. CHAPMAN, Mr D. J. FISHER, Mr M. GAUNTLETT, Dr A. GOSLER (*Speaker*), Mr P. JACKSON, Mr R. LANGLEY, Mr R. MALIN, Dr C. F. MANN, Mr D. J. MONTIER, Dr R. PRYS-JONES, Mr R. PRYTHERCH, Mr N. J. REDMAN, Dr P. RUDGE, Mr A. SIMMONS, Mr S. A. H. STATHAM and Mr C. W. R. STOREY (*Chairman*).

Non-members attending were: Mrs C. CASEMENT, Mr A. CHEKE, Mrs J. EVANS, Mrs M. GAUNLETT, Miss J. HADDON, Mrs B. HARRISON and Mr A. J. STONES.

Dr Andy Gosler spoke on *From ornithology to ethno-ornithology*. "As an ornithologist, I am fascinated by birds. As an ethno-ornithologist, I am fascinated that I am fascinated by birds!" was how Andy started his thought-provoking talk, which was partly a testimony of his personal career journey from ornithology, in which he became interested at the age of ten, to ethno-ornithology—the study of human relationships with

birds, in which as an experienced bird ringer he was inevitably embedded. His ornithological research over 30 years, mostly in connection with the Edward Grey Institute's world-renowned long-term population study of Great Tits *Parus major* in Wytham Woods, Oxford, had been focused chiefly on the question of adaptation—first on the eco-morphology of the birds' bills, and most recently on the adaptive function of protoporphyrin pigment spots on Great Tit eggs (a pattern that is common to the eggs of numerous small passerines). These studies had been the subjects of previous talks to the Club over the years, but in addition to their ornithological value, they had led to one realisation: that it is impossible to study ecology today without taking anthropogenic effects into account. For example, acid precipitation was probably the cause of long-term change in the pigmentation patterns of the tits' eggshells, which suggested a 6% decline in shell thickness due to a reduced availability of calcium in Wytham soils.

From this point, Andy switched the focus of his talk to the relationship between humans and birds. He pointed out that attention to birds was a human universal that to the best of our knowledge has been reflected to some extent in every one of the 7,000 cultures (based on language groups) on Earth. Furthermore, across countries, avian and linguistic diversity appear correlated, although the causes of the correlation were likely to be complex and diverse. Despite these relationships, most conservationists hadn't appreciated the importance of human cultural connections with birds for the promotion of bird conservation. This was a particular concern now since linguistic diversity was declining in parallel with loss of biodiversity; with the loss of languages went local knowledge of plants and animals encoded within those languages. A good example is from the UK, where general knowledge of natural history was in sharp decline (Andy presented data from his recent study of Oxford biology undergraduates showing that half couldn't name five British birds), and that it was a truism to say that people will not work to save what they did not know. Finally he presented data from his own study of 3,290 recorded folk names (collated by etymologist Michel Deshayes) of 78 passerines, showing the strong significance that birds had had in English folk culture pre-1900. Andy is director of a new project in collaboration with BirdLife International, the Ethno-ornithology World Archive, which seeks to collect folk knowledge of birds globally, and subject to permissions from knowledge-holders, share this online: [www.zoo.ox.ac.uk/egi/research-at-the-egi/ethno-ornithology-world-archive-ewa/](http://www.zoo.ox.ac.uk/egi/research-at-the-egi/ethno-ornithology-world-archive-ewa/)

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#### **Joint meeting on Asian Birds with the Oriental Bird Club and Natural History Museum, London, 22 November 2014**

Around 140 people attended this excellent joint meeting and were rewarded with a superb range of talks. Pamela Rasmussen set the scene by reviewing the new species and rediscoveries of Asian birds that have occurred in recent times. Since 1998, working with co-authors she has, of course, described six new Asian bird species herself. Primarily, her talk described the processes involved in looking for such species, both in the museum and in the field. The audience enjoyed the stories behind the rediscovery or discovery of several notable species, including Forest Owllet *Heteroglaux blewitti*, Serendib Scops Owl *Otus thilohoffmanni* and Flores Scops Owl *O. alfredi*—to mention just three.

Debbie Pain then reported the latest news in the international plan to save the Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmaeus*. Survey work along the Chinese coastline has found 226 birds at three coastal sites, against a background of massive habitat loss and a significant level of trapping. Meanwhile, on the breeding grounds in Chukotka, Russia, huge efforts are underway to help the birds to achieve higher fledging success by reducing their exposure to potential predators. In parallel, there is also the UK captive-breeding programme that looks set to succeed soon.

Next, Chris Gooddie gave us an insight into the birding opportunities at Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park, where 415 bird species have been reported to date. Located in the Bukit Barisan Mountains in Sumatra, the park has a total area of 3,568 km<sup>2</sup>, and spans three provinces. It was the site of the rediscovery of Sumatran Ground Cuckoo *Carpococcyx viridis* in 1997, the first sighting in 81 years. Chris certainly put the case that this park deserves more attention from birders.

After the lunch break, Stuart Marsden outlined recent work on the success or otherwise of large frugivorous birds inside and outside protected areas in Asia. The results of this work have shown that frugivores are seriously threatened due to habitat loss and hunting. His research team has surveyed 25 species of pigeons, parrots and hornbills over nearly 500 km of line transects on Luzon in the Philippines. They noted an absence of large parrots from many sites with apparently intact habitat, and even where they are present, these species exhibited lower densities than related species in similar habitat in mainland Southeast Asia. However, those in protected areas have fared better in most cases.

Robert Prýs-Jones then outlined the amazing life of Allan Octavian Hume, often referred to as the 'Pope' of south Asian ornithology. Born in 1829, Hume had a varied life as a civil servant, political reformer and ornithologist. Much of his adult life was spent in British India where seemingly he soon began accumulating a personal collection of bird specimens, which was destroyed during the violent rebellion of 1857. However, Hume started again and eventually amassed a huge collection of almost 100,000 specimens collected by himself and others—at that time, the largest of its type anywhere in the world. Hume kept details of every specimen in his collection, but tragically these were stolen and sold off as waste paper by a servant in 1883. This was a huge blow to him personally, but also to the world of ornithology, as he had intended to write a definitive book on the birds of British India. Hume subsequently lost his interest in collecting and

ornithology, but passed his collection to the British Museum (Natural History), now in Tring, where it retains its importance as key reference material.

Finally, Per Alström shared his most recent work on a range of warblers and larks using DNA to reveal some unexpected relationships and cryptic species. He showed how DNA analysis has revolutionised phylogenetic studies. Not only have DNA sequences become easier to obtain, but more powerful computers have enabled more rigorous assessments of their relationships. His examples showed how some species have evolved strikingly different features from their close relatives, potentially obscuring their relationships, and his work has revealed a number of new species across Asia.

Both this and the first talk of the day proved that there is still much to be discovered in Asian ornithology based on a combination of rigorous field work and ever-more powerful analysis.

Keith Betton

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## OBITUARIES

### Philip Arthur Dominic Hollom (1912–2014)

Born on 9 June 1912 in Bickley, Kent, Phil Hollom (affectionately known as PADH to some) was to become a birding hero to many amateur ornithologists. He authored and co-authored several of the key books that helped birdwatchers to improve their field skills from the 1950s onwards. He reached the great age of 102 before his death on 20 June 2014.

Phil's first memory of birds was of being lifted up at the age of four to peer into the nest of a Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*. The memory was as clear to him nearly 100 years later, and he told his friends how he could still recall the beautiful mud-lined nest and the bright blue eggs that it contained. As a boy he was fascinated by birds and used to catch them using a garden sieve held up with a twig and a piece of string. In the 1920s, it was the only way that he was able to handle birds.

Between the ages of ten and 14 he attended Heddon Court School in Cockfosters. The headmaster recognised his interest in birds and allowed Phil to wander around the neighbouring agricultural land. He was the only boy permitted to do this. In 1926 he moved to King's School in Bruton. There were many nesting birds nearby, so Phil decided to carry out an intensive study.

By 1928, Phil had met a fellow teenage bird enthusiast in his village called Tom Harrison. Harry Witherby was then in charge of the national bird ringing scheme and Phil and Tom were regular visitors to Harry's house on Chobham Common, Surrey, where they were taught the finer details of bird study. In the summer of 1929 Phil ringed >250 Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica*. In fact, he continued his studies of these birds in Bruton well into his early nineties—making an annual trip from his Surrey home to do so.

On leaving school at 17, Phil got a job, but continued his bird studies, being guided by Harry Witherby and Max Nicholson, and in 1931, when just 19 years old, he jointly organised a national survey of Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus* with Tom, at a time when many new gravel pits were being excavated around west London but none was shown on the available maps. Eager not to miss any potential grebe habitat, Phil met the Marquis Masa U. Hachisukato at a BOC dinner and the two men discussed a solution to the problem. Not only was the Marquis a member of the Japanese Royal family, he was also a keen pilot. A few days later they took to the air, making several low passes over west London, with Phil marking all of the new gravel pits on his map.

As a young man he attended many BOC meetings and was also invited to join the London-based 1937 Bird Club. He soon found himself dining on a regular basis with several others who were to shape the face of British ornithology over the next half-century. He joined BOC Committee in 1938, but was forced to stand down when his wartime duties had to take priority.

In 1940 Phil joined the Royal Air Force and travelled to Pensacola in Florida to learn how to fly. He spent eight months there. Between 1942 and 1946 he was based in various places around the country and was honoured to fly VIPs on special visits. These included the Archbishop of York and the Anglo-American Committee on Palestine, who he spent six weeks transporting around the Middle East and Europe in a Dakota. It was these visits that made him realise that there was no book to help people identify birds in Europe.

With his wartime commitments behind him, Phil rejoined BOC Committee in 1947–49 (and again in 1959–63). He spoke warmly of the friendships he made at the Club. At least one member was keen to take advantage of Phil's regular journeys around Europe. Richard Meinertzhagen gave him a list of cheeses that he hoped might be obtained on his behalf!

In 1952 Phil published his first book, *The popular handbook of British birds*. However, he was frustrated that there was still no European field guide to birds. By chance he met Guy Mountfort, founder of the World Wildlife Fund, who had exactly the same idea to publish such a book. Over lunch they discussed their separate plans, but as Mountfort had already signed up Roger Tory Peterson to illustrate his book, Phil was quickly persuaded to join the team. The result—in 1954—was *A field guide to the birds of Britain and Europe*. It was a groundbreaking work and has since appeared in many languages.

Guy Mountfort organised several major birdwatching expeditions to Europe and the Middle East, and Phil was always invited to join them—to the Coto Doñana in south-west Spain in 1957, Bulgaria in 1960

and Jordan in 1963. They ignited Phil's fascination for travel, and he visited Syria, Turkey, Iran, Tunisia and Morocco, among more than 50 countries, and was able to watch birds in most of them, reporting the more interesting discoveries in *Ibis*. These trips resulted in him co-authoring yet another book, *Birds of the Middle East and North Africa* in 1988.

Phil's last contribution to ornithological literature was in the 1970s and 1980s, when Max Nicholson brought together a team to create *The birds of the Western Palearctic*. The nine volumes appeared between 1977 and 1994, and Phil wrote and checked much of the text. He also contributed a large number of sound-recordings from his travels, which were displayed as sonograms. The British Library has all of his most important recordings archived.

Phil Hollom was a modest man who shunned the limelight, and always seemed to be slightly surprised by the popularity of his books. In creating the *Popular handbook* in 1952, and co-authoring *A field guide to the birds of Britain and Europe* (universally known as 'Peterson, Mountfort and Hollom'), he made birds more accessible to everyone. His contribution to ornithology was recognised by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, British Trust for Ornithology and BOU, all of which awarded him medals for his achievements. He was also made an Honorary Member of the BOC after celebrating 50 years of membership.

Keith Betton

### Hiroyuki Morioka (1931–2014)

Morioka-sensei, known to many friends as Luuk, died in Tokyo last December, leaving a daughter. He graduated from Kyoto University in 1960 and subsequently undertook post-graduate work at the University of Illinois under Walter Bock, studying the anatomy and relationships of thrushes, mimic thrushes, dippers and wrens. He took his Ph.D. there in 1967 and in the same year he worked as a researcher at the Dept. of Ornithology, American Museum of Natural History, New York.

On returning to Japan he joined the National Science Museum in Tokyo, became Curator of Birds in 1972, Head of the Division of Tetrapoda in 1982, and then Director of the Dept. of Zoology in 1995. In 1996 he was appointed Curator Emeritus of the museum. He was thus the museum's main correspondent with ornithologists around the world for almost 25 years. In addition to curatorial duties, he managed to spend time in the field not just in Japan, but in the Philippines, Nepal and Thailand, and published notes relating to each of these countries, as well as guiding a catalogue of non-passerine material in the Raffles Museum, Singapore.

Morioka-sensei joined the Ornithological Society of Japan in 1948 and was a member until his death, serving on its Council in 1971–2001, as Vice President in 1975–79 and President in 1991–93. He also assumed the important role of editor of *Tori* in 1979–90 and again in 1993–98.

He was recruited to join the Standing Committee on Ornithological Nomenclature (of the International Ornithological Committee) in 1986 and served until 2012, staunchly supporting stability of names in nomenclature. Many of his publications were in Japanese, but he was a main editor of the fifth (1974) and sixth (2000) editions of the *Checklist of Japanese birds*, published by the Ornithological Society of Japan. In 2005, with colleagues, he also published a monograph on types of Japanese birds both in and outside Japan, including both extant and lost specimens. Gentle and courteous, he will be much missed by all who had the pleasure and privilege of working with him.

Walter J. Bock, Edward C. Dickinson, Isao Nishiumi and Richard Schodde

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