

# Bulletin of the BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

---

Vol. 135 No. 3

Published 6 September 2015

---

## 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 19 May 2015, with Chris Storey in the Chair. Sixteen members were present.

**1. Apologies for absence** were received from David Fisher.

**2. Minutes of AGM 2014.** The Minutes of the 2014 AGM held on 20 May 2014 which had been published (*Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 133: 165–166, and on the BOC website) were approved and signed by the Chairman.

**3. Chairman's Review, Bulletin Editor's Report, Trustees' Report and Accounts for 2014.** Copies of the document were available at the meeting. The Chairman began by thanking David Montier, who has retired as *Hon. Treasurer*, for his considerable contribution over the years to the Club. He added that he was delighted that Richard Malin had been elected at a Special General Meeting on 23 September 2014 to succeed David as *Hon. Treasurer*. The Chairman also thanked the Committee members, in particular David Fisher and Richard Langley, whose terms of office would end at the completion of the AGM. He also thanked Guy Kirwan, Eng-Li Green and Steve Dudley for their support and work during the past year. He concluded by noting that since the Annual Report went to press the Committee had held further discussions about the future of the Club and agreed that whilst efforts could be made to reduce costs, etc., and preserve the present *modus operandi* of the BOC, a successful outcome of this endeavour was far from certain and did not address the decline in membership, nor how best the BOC might operate in the 21st century.

The Committee had reached the view that the BOC would only survive if it took imaginative and bold initiatives in the light of the profound digital changes affecting both academic publishing and society in general. Therefore, rather than managing an inevitable slow decline, it was proposed that the BOC should adopt a radically different approach to deliver its principal mission. The Committee suggests that by embracing the digital revolution the BOC should be able to establish a coherent plan for the future, broaden its 'reach' and increase the dissemination of current taxonomic thinking to a larger potential audience. The BOC could become an online only organisation and the Bulletin an open-access publication. However, many details needed to be considered and a working group has been established to produce a detailed proposition, which would then be put to members for comment prior to any formal proposal for change. In answer to views from the floor, Pat Sellar and Tony Statham indicated their support for such an initiative.

The *Hon. Treasurer* reported that the result for the year showed a small surplus (of around £1,000) compared to an overall deficit of around £6,000 in 2013. This improvement largely stemmed from reduced printing costs and an increase in investment income. Income from subscriptions had continued to decline, but the cost of membership administration had risen. The Club has substantial investments, the value of which increased to more than £420,000 by the year-end, and this provides BOC with a strong base from which to address the membership cost challenge and to contemplate an online future.

Vol. 134 comprised 336 pages and 35 papers of broad geographical scope, although contributions on Neotropical birds remained particularly well represented. Taxonomy and nomenclature are Bulletin mainstays, and taxonomic papers on the genus *Pitohui*, Three-striped Warbler *Basileuterus tristriatus*, Cuban Bullfinch *Melopyrrha nigra*, Blackish Antbird *Cercomacra nigrescens*, Grey-headed Bristlebill *Bleda canicapillus*, Scaled Ground Cuckoo *Neomorphus squamiger* and McConnell's Flycatcher *Mionectes macconnelli* were published during the course of 2014. For the first time since 2004, no new taxa were proposed in the Bulletin's pages this year. For papers published in 2014, the interval between receipt and publication was 4–23 months, with a mean of *c.*11.4 months. The Bulletin received a total of 37 new manuscripts in 2014. Of these, six have been rejected to date and the rest have been accepted or are still being refereed for potential publication.

**4. Election of Trustees.** Nigel Redman was elected as Vice-Chairman (*vice* David Fisher). The meeting also elected Stephen Chapman and Alick Simmons (*vice* Richard Langley) to serve as Trustees.

**5. Any Other Business.** On behalf of the Club, the Chairman presented David Montier with a gift in recognition of his very special work for the BOC.

The 980th meeting of the Club was held on Tuesday 19 May 2015 in the upstairs room at the Barley Mow, 104 Horseferry Road, Westminster, London SW1P 2EE. Fourteen members and nine non-members were present. Members attending were: Miss H. Baker, Mr K. F. Betton, Mr M. Gauntlett, Mr G. M. Kirwan, Mr R. R. Langley, Mr R. W. Malin, Dr C. F. Mann, Mr D. J. Montier, Dr R. Prÿs-Jones, Mr N. J. Redman, Mr P. Sellar, Mr A. Simmons, Mr S. A. H. Statham, and Mr C. W. R. Storey (*Chairman*).

Non-members attending were: Ms K. Duke, Mrs M. Gauntlett, Mr P. Hollom, Dr H. McGhie (*Speaker*), Mrs M. Montier, Mr A. Richford, Mrs J. Storey, Ms D. Summers.

Dr Henry McGhie, Head of Collections and Curator of Zoology at Manchester Museum, spoke on *Who do you think you are, Henry Dresser? Birds, books and business*. Henry Dresser was one of the most important British ornithologists of the 19th and early 20th centuries. 2015 marks the centenary of his death, but just who was he and what did he do? Viewed from the present perspective, with well-formed science institutions and societies, it is difficult to imagine how a band of independent-minded men banded together to shape the institutions we have today. Henry Dresser and his contemporaries embraced the Victorian ideal of self-help, and took full advantage of their opportunities to further their personal interests. Dresser was born in Yorkshire and his father worked as a merchant dealing in Baltic timber. Henry was educated to assume the family business and travelled very widely in northern Europe from the age of 14; he also spent time in New Brunswick, and in Texas during the American Civil War. Wherever he went, he furthered his bird skin and egg collection (a must-have for any serious 19th century ornithologist), using business trips as an opportunity to meet curators, naturalists and collectors overseas.

When he settled down in London, in his late twenties, Henry and his ornithologist friends collaborated closely, building their own specialist collections and mixing in scientific society. Dresser specialised in Palearctic birds and his collections helped produce the eight-volume *History of the birds of Europe*, begun with Richard Bowdler Sharpe of the British Museum. Henry went on to produce several other important reference books: monographs on rollers (Coraciidae) and bee-eaters (Meropidae), a condensed manual of Palearctic birds, and another work on European birds' eggs. He was a 'mover and shaker' in the development of early bird protection laws, and a leading light in the early Society for the Protection of Birds (now the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds), as well as in the British Ornithologists' Union and Zoological Society of London. Henry's collections are now mostly in the Manchester Museum. Dresser's life will form the subject of a book, due to be published in 2017.