

Bulletin of the BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

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CLUB ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman's Message

The talk by Dr Alex Bond (described below) was preceded by the Chairman's Review and the Trustees' Report and Accounts for 2016. Chris Storey reminded the meeting of the sequence of events leading up to the acceptance by the Charity Commissioners of the BOC's new status as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (BOC CIO) with a revised Constitution and a newly appointed Board of Trustees. The CIO came into existence on 18 October 2016. During 2016 the Trustees had taken the decision to publish the Bulletin in electronic format alone: during 2017 the four issues of Vol. 137 would be issued as .pdfs on the BOC website and from the beginning of 2018 the next volume, Vol. 138, would be published on the website of the American online academic publisher, BioOne. BOC had signed a three-year agreement with BioOne and looks forward to working with them to optimise the accessibility and visibility of BBOC Online.

The 986th meeting of the Club was held on Monday 12 June 2017 in the upstairs room at the Barley Mow, 104 Horseferry Road, Westminster, London SW11P 2EE. Twelve members (Friends) and five guests were recorded as present (but a considerable additional number in attendance alas went unrecorded).

Friends attending were: Cdr M. B. Casement, RN, Mr S. Chapman, Dr R. A. Cheke, Mr M. J. Earp, Mr D. Fisher, Mr R. Malin, Mr D. Montier, Dr R. Prŷs-Jones, Mr N. J. Redman, Mr S. A. H. Statham, Mr C. W. R. Storey (*Chairman*) and Mr A. Tye.

Guests attending included: Mrs B. Azvevo-Benitez, Dr A. Bond (*Speaker*), Mrs J. McDonald, Mrs M. Montier and Mr O. Prŷs-Jones.

Alex Bond gave a talk entitled *Gough Island: an unnatural history of mice and birds*. Taking the audience on the journey from Cape Town, South Africa, to Tristan da Cunha and then to Gough Island, Alex highlighted the plight of the seabirds on one of the world's most remote islands. House Mice *Mus musculus* were introduced in the 19th century, and now threaten the persistence of many of the island's endemic species, including the iconic Tristan Albatross *Diomedea dabbenena*, Atlantic Petrel *Pterodroma incerta*, MacGillivray's Prion *Pachyptila macgillivrayi* and Gough Finch *Rousettia goughensis*, and many, if not all, of the c.25 species of breeding birds on the island. Each year, nearly 1,000,000 seabird chicks that would have otherwise survived are predated by mice, a gruesome fate that was highlighted by a short film.

Thankfully, the eradication of introduced rodents has become a relatively common conservation intervention, and Alex highlighted plans by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (BirdLife in the UK) and Tristan da Cunha government to eliminate the rats through the use of cereal pellets with rodenticide broadcast by helicopter. While the challenges in an operation as complex as this on Gough are many, more than 15 years of research has gone into identifying the solutions to Gough's remoteness, cliffs and the potential for non-target mortality. Studies of captive husbandry and clinical pathology of the Gough Finch and Gough Moorhen *Gallinula comeri* have laid the groundwork for maintaining captive populations during the eradication operation, currently planned for the austral winter of 2019.

Finally, Alex discussed the current status of the island's three breeding albatrosses (Tristan Albatross, Sooty Albatross *Phoebastria fusca* and Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross *Thalassarche chlororhynchos*), showing the ongoing declines owing to bycatch in fisheries in the South Atlantic, but also highlighting the great strides that have taken place in reducing bycatch off southern Africa and South America. Working north, he ended the talk by previewing work done on Tristan and Nightingale islands to understand declines in Northern Rockhopper Penguins *Eudyptes moseleyi*, and the comparative populations of Nightingale Finch *Nesospiza questi*, which numbers 4000 pairs, and the sympatric Wilkins' Finch *Nesospiza wilkinsi*, numbering only 80 pairs.

Those interested in following the progress of the Gough Island Restoration Programme can visit the project's website: www.rspb.org.uk/GoughIsland.