

Avian Odyssey 2024

Birds: Brilliant & Bizarre



Atlantic Puffins © The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

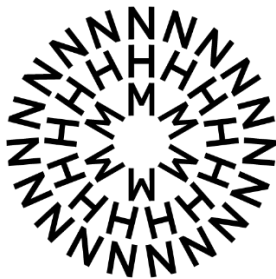
a journey into the wonderful world of birds with leading conservationists and ornithologists with a full day of inspiring talks at the Natural History Museum

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/study/events/british-ornithologists-club-annual-meeting.html>

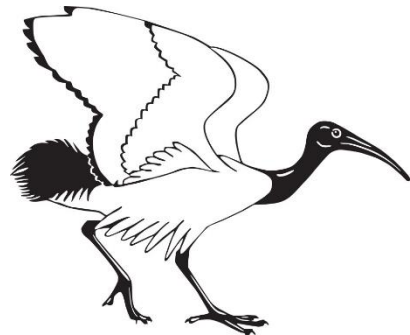
Saturday 21 Sep 2024

Flett Theatre (Exhibition Road Entrance),

Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London, SW7 5BD



**Natural
History
Museum**



Natural History Museum (NHM) & British Ornithologists' Club (BOC)

10:00 - 10:20 -- Doors open.

Natural History Museum (NHM) & British Ornithologists' Club (BOC)

Safeguarding species and giving nature a home – an RSPB perspective

Kevin Cox

Chair of Council, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

From incredible species found in the UK like Bitterns, Gannets, Puffins and Avocets, to spectacular species from across the globe such as Helmeted Hornbill and White-necked Picathartes, join Kevin, Chair of the RSPB, as he explores the charity's work in safeguarding species and giving nature a home both here and also overseas. Hear inspiring stories of people supporting species through science and research, and specific interventions such as the Albatross Taskforce. With birds facing threats from climate change, agricultural intensification, avian influenza, invasive species, and other pressures, the RSPB is at the forefront of bird conservation in the UK and overseas. The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, and one in six species are at risk of extinction from Great Britain. Through the RSPB's work with members, supporters, businesses, and government, it is playing a leading role in tackling the climate and nature crisis. Kevin will talk about the wonder of birds, the threats and challenges they face and how we can all play a role in supporting nature's recovery.

Biography

Passionate about nature and wildlife, Kevin has been on the RSPB's Council since 2011, and became Chair in 2017. Prior to this, his career in magazine publishing saw him become Chairman and Chief Executive of Origin Publishing, a company he founded in 1996 and subsequently sold to BBC Magazines. His interest in international conservation led to his involvement with the World Land Trust where he was a Council member and Chair of its trading company. He is a former Chair of Devon Birds and a member of the BTO, WWT and Devon Wildlife Trust amongst other conservation organisations. He lives in Devon on the edge of Dartmoor where he and his wife manage 150 acres of woodland and meadows as a nature reserve.

Natural History Museum (NHM) & British Ornithologists' Club (BOC)



Kevin Cox © The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

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Sanderling © The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)



Eared Grebe © The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

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11:00 - 11:20

Why Museums matter - the importance of bird collections in a changing world.

Professor Ken Norris

Deputy Director of Science at the Natural History Museum (NHM).

We are all acutely aware that nature is changing rapidly due to human activities. Research on wild birds have been critically important in helping us understand and address these changes. How important are bird collections to this type of research? If they are useful, what's stopping us making more use of them? My talk will discuss the research questions that bird collections can help us answer. It will go onto discuss what's preventing us from making better use of collections and the data embedded in them. The art of the possible is being transformed by new tools and technologies, and I will focus on the role artificial intelligence is playing in helping us unlock the data in collections. Hopefully my talk will persuade you bird collections are a critical research resource rather than the hoarding problem they are sometimes assumed to be!

Biography

Ken Norris is currently Deputy Director of Science at the Natural History Museum, UK. He has worked for nearly 40 years on the ecology and conservation of wild birds, including several endangered species. He joined the Museum in April 2020 to help it play its part in addressing the Planetary Emergency we face in terms of human impacts on the natural world (<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/about-us/our-vision-strategy.html>). Key to shaping a better future for people and our planet is learning from the past. To do this, the Museum needs to unlock its collections and release the data they contain. Helping this happen is a key part of Ken's leadership role at the Museum.



Professor Ken Norris © Professor Ken Norris

Natural History Museum (NHM) & British Ornithologists' Club (BOC)



© The Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London

Birds, Science, People – a powerful combination.

Professor Juliet Vickery

CEO British Trust for Ornithology (BTO)

Britain has a rich history of watching and loving birds, and it has formed the basis of a remarkable and detailed understanding of the behaviour, ecology and changing fortunes of our breeding and wintering birds. This talk will showcase how the work of thousands of volunteers, over many generations, has provided invaluable insights to birds from our mountain tops to our coastlines and out onto our high seas. How it has helped us understand changes at the UK level right down to what is happening on our doorsteps. Now scientists are building on this rich history and combining ‘boots and binoculars’ with new technologies, such as sound recording and satellite tagging, to enable us to watch and listen to birds in novel ways. The stories we can tell, alongside new ways to tell them, will help more people and communities to engage with nature and, in doing so help safeguard our brilliant birds for the future.

Biography

Juliet has led research teams in academia, at the Universities of Oxford, East Anglia and Edinburgh and two environmental NGOs, British Trust for Ornithology and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Her work focusses on the impact of land use change, the conservation of globally threatened sites and species and the decline of migrant birds. She is currently CEO of British Trust for Ornithology and holds an Honorary Research Fellowship in the Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge and an Honorary Professorship at the School of Biological Sciences, University of East Anglia.



Professor Juliet Vickery © Juliet Vickery / British Trust for Ornithology, BTO

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Common Redshank Chick © Sarah Kelman / British Trust for Ornithology, BTO



Common Cuckoo © Edmund Fellowes / British Trust for Ornithology, BTO

Natural History Museum (NHM) & British Ornithologists' Club (BOC)

12:00 - 12:20

Avian Adventures beyond Wallace's Line

Dr Mike Edgecombe

Oriental Bird Club (OBC)

The archipelago of Islands that make up eastern Indonesia offer a very different flavour of birdlife from that of the Sundaic region further west. Mike will take us on a voyage to some of the least explored islands and share with us some of the bird species that make this area so special. Following in the footsteps of the explorer Alfred Wallace and others we will get a sense of the wonders they must have experienced

Biography

Mike Edgecombe has been a keen birder for over 50 years. He has travelled widely in all seven continents His main area of interest has always been South-east Asia and he has been a member of the Oriental Bird Club since its inception. He was a Council trustee of the Club for over 20 years and the Club's Chairman for 5 years. His professional life was spent as a dental surgeon but now retired, he has even more time to pursue his passion. He is also a keen photographer and videographer and when not travelling he spends a great deal of time birding in his home county of Norfolk UK.



Dr Mike Edgecombe © Michael Edgecombe

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Philippine Pitta (Talaud) © Michael Edgecombe



Female Black-naped Fruit-Dove © Michael Edgecombe

12:30 - 14:00 -- LUNCH / Exhibition

14:00 - 14:20

White-necked Picathartes *Picathartes gymnocephalus* – an African Avian oddity

Dr Hazell Shokellu Thompson
African Bird Club (ABC)

Africa is home to an amazing array of at least 1400 bird species that are found nowhere else on earth. One of the most striking of these endemic species is the White-necked Picathartes or Bare-headed Rockfowl – *Picathartes gymnocephalus*. This avian oddity has a beautiful but bizarre appearance, holds a systematic position that has been the subject of some controversy and displays behaviour that has often been described as “unusual and strange”. In this talk, I briefly review some of the fascinating aspects of the biology and ecology of the species – including its morphology, systematics, and behaviour. I also review its conservation status, and that of its only conspecific – the equally enigmatic, Grey-necked Picathartes, *Picathartes oreas*. I conclude by highlighting the vital role local communities and bird clubs are playing in its conservation.

Biography

Dr Hazell Shokellu Thompson is a Sierra Leonean Environmental Consultant and a member of the African Bird Club with more than 40 years experience in bird conservation. He conducted the first comprehensive study of the rare White-necked Picathartes (*Picathartes gymnocephalus*) in West Africa. In a 20-year career with BirdLife International, Hazell served as Africa Regional Director; Global Director; and Interim CEO. Hazell has also been Guest Lecturer in Conservation Biology at the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute in Nigeria. Currently, he is Chairman of the Better Earth Foundation (Jos) and a lifelong member of the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone.

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Dr Hazell Shokellu Thompson © Hazell Thompson

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©David Monticelli

White-necked Picathartes © David Monticelli

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Understanding the migration routes of the Critically Endangered Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*.

Dr Rob Sheldon

Chairman of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East, the Caucasus and central Asia (OSME).

The Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*), a critically endangered species, has experienced significant population declines, likely due to high mortality during migration or on its wintering grounds, both of which are poorly understood. Since 2007, a long-term study has been tracking the species using historical records, satellite tagging, colour-ringing, and targeted field surveys. Research has identified two main migration routes from the breeding grounds in Kazakhstan. The birds spend approximately one-third of the year on breeding grounds, one-third on wintering grounds, and one-third migrating. Understanding their migration is critical to saving them and reversing their recent declines.

Biography

Dr Rob Sheldon has worked in nature conservation for almost 30 years, including 12 years with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) where he undertook research on the Sociable Lapwing. From 2014-16 he worked for the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) as the Director of the King Khalid Wildlife Research Centre (KKWRC) in Saudi Arabia. He recently returned to Saudi Arabia to work for Soudah Development as the Director of Nature and Ecosystem Restoration. Sandwiched between his roles in Saudi, Rob worked as a freelance consultant. Since 2013, he has been the Chairman of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East, The Caucasus and Central Asia (OSME). In 2023 he joined the Board of Directors of British Birds and became the Chairman earlier this year.



Dr Rob Sheldon © Robert Sheldon

Natural History Museum (NHM) & British Ornithologists' Club (BOC)



Sociable Lapwing © Robert Sheldon



Sociable Lapwing © Robert Sheldon

15:00 - 15:20

South America: The Bird Continent

Professor Joseph Tobias

Neotropical Birding and Conservation (NBC)

Bird diversity reaches its peak in South & Central America, home to over a third of the world's bird species. Some of the most incredible avian wonders lurk in the varied landscapes of the Neotropics, set against a backdrop of ongoing discovery and escalating environmental challenges. This talk will take you on a brief tour of highlights from Amazonian swamps to Guatemalan volcanoes, and from Caribbean beaches to Patagonian glaciers. It will be a tale of beauty, despair and hope, describing the plight of some of the world's rarest birds, as well as ongoing efforts to save them.

Biography

Joe Tobias has spent four decades in bird research, bird conservation, and travelling widely in search of birds. After completing a PhD on the European Robin at Cambridge University, he worked for several years with BirdLife International and co-founded the Neotropical Bird Club. Inspired by expeditions to South America, he returned to academia, joining the Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology at Oxford University to study bird song and speciation. Since 2015, he has led a research group at Imperial College London focusing on bird ecology, evolution and conservation.



Professor Joe Tobias © Joseph Tobias

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Birds—brilliant, bizarre, belittled and broken

Dr Nigel Collar

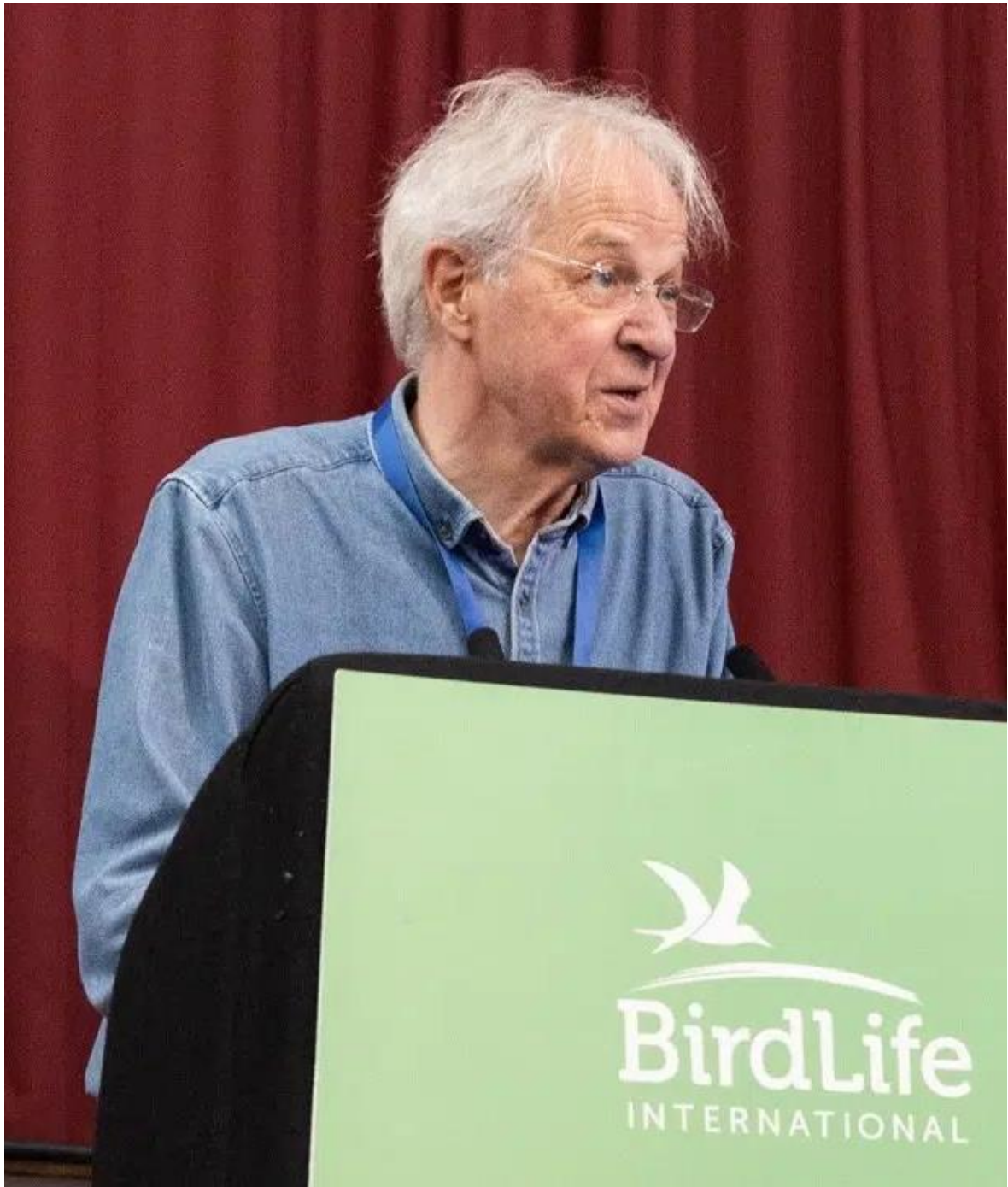
Leventis Fellow in conservation biology

BirdLife International

The future of life on earth as we know it depends on decisions the human species takes in the next ten years. We may celebrate the beauty of birds now, but everywhere we look we see bird populations crashing down, and our apparent powerlessness leaves us only “hope” to cling to. Nature—birds—will not survive on the basis of hope. Nature has suffered our violence for centuries and now it is poised to deliver violence back to us. We need fortitude and resolution, not hope, to bring peace to these warring factions—humanity and nature.

Biography

Dr. Nigel Collar originally took degrees in English but switched to helping with an attempted reintroduction of the Great Bustard into the UK. After a spell working on the comprehensive regional 9-volume avifauna *Birds of the Western Palearctic* he moved to what is now BirdLife International in 1981, focusing on the documentation and conservation of threatened bird species.



Dr Nigel Collar © BirdLife International

16:00 - 17:00 -- Opportunity to visit galleries and the exhibition. Birds: Brilliant and Bizarre

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