

The British Ornithologists' Club

Founded 5 October 1892

Registered Charity No. 1169733

Chairman's Review for 2019

The Club ended 2019 in a strong financial position; with a substantial increase in the number of 'hits' and, we hope, readers on the open access Bulletin on the BioOne site; an engrossing programme of very well attended quarterly meetings; and an ambitious publications schedule. In addition the Club held a very successful joint one-day meeting in October in the Flett Theatre, Natural History Museum (NHM), in partnership with the NHM and the Neotropical Bird Club. The details are set out below.

The year however was saddened by the death of Martin Woodcock, distinguished artist, avid birder and prominent member of the Club. BBOC no.139 (2 - June) carried an obituary by Andrew Richford, in which he paid fitting tribute to Martin and his considerable contribution to ornithology.

Financial Report

Financial Report 2019

Richard Malin, Hon. Treasurer, writes:

By way of background: These figures are prepared on a cash-book basis (using actual payments through our bank accounts in the calendar year) without allocating income or expenditure to a particular year, past or future. The figures are 'consolidated' to show combined figures for both BOC charities, Old BOC and the new CIO, but these charities are not legally combined.

2019

	Old	BOC	CIO	BOC	Total
Income					
H Stevens		£0.00		£17,208.86	£17,208.86
Subs / donations		£1,974.50		£560.29	£2,534.79
Dividends				£1,132.07	£1,132.07
Book Sales		£0.00		£483.13	£483.13
Gift Aid				£321.75	£321.75
Interest		£0.88		£0.00	£0.88
		£1,975.38		£19,706.10	£21,681.48
Expenses					
Editor		£0.00		-£4,885.70	-£4,885.70
Eng-Li		£0.00		-£2,265.00	-£2,265.00
BioOne		£0.00		-£3,324.00	-£3,324.00
Website		£0.00		-£175.00	-£175.00
Meetings		£0.00		-£431.40	-£431.40
Conference		£0.00		-£312.67	-£312.67
Legal		£0.00		-£720.00	-£720.00
Admin		£0.00		-£156.00	-£156.00
		£0.00		-£12,269.77	-£12,269.77
Balance Sheet					
31.12.19					
Bank		£258.47		£29,613.56	£29,872.03
CIO deposits		£0.00		£53,201.41	£53,201.41
H Stevens Inv		£0.00		£319,960.72	£319,960.72
Clancey Inv		£0.00		£91,234.22	£91,234.22
CIO Investment				£16,690.31	£16,690.31
		£258.47		£510,700.22	£510,958.69

Income

Income in 2019 was £21,681.48 – roughly the same as 2018. Distributions from Herbert Stevens and other investments were up by c £3,000, but a £1,400 lower Gift Aid reclaim, £800 lower book sales (62% reduction) and £500 net reduction in subscriptions and donations (lower Old BOC subscriptions not offset by increased CIO donations), brought results back to the same level .

Expenditure

Expenditure in 2019 was £12,269.77 – an increase of £2,075.25 (or 20%) compared to 2018. The largest increase was BioOne (£3,324) against a 2017 cost of £841. Editorial costs rose by £464 (10.5%). Other admin costs were broadly level, in aggregate.

Surplus

The net surplus for 2019 was £9,411.71 – a decrease of £1,939.98 (or 17%) on 2018.

A much smaller surplus is expected in 2020 - our Herbert Stevens and other investment income will fall in light of market conditions, we have further publications in hand (the cost of which is expensed as incurred), and our subscription / donation income continues to decline.

Balance Sheet

A pro-forma combined balance sheet at the end of 2019 shows assets of £510,958.69 - a net increase of £53,155 (or 11.6%) on the 2018 total of £457,803.

The value of our Herbert Stevens investment units grew by £34,787 (or 12%), and the value of our newly acquired Clancey units rose by £6,699 (or 8%) – both reflecting the higher investment values prevailing at 31 December 2019, values that have not been maintained since year-end.

Our medium-term bank deposits remained unchanged at £53,201, growing by £988 interest credited in the year.

BBOC Online

Guy Kirwan, Hon. Editor writes:

The Bulletin

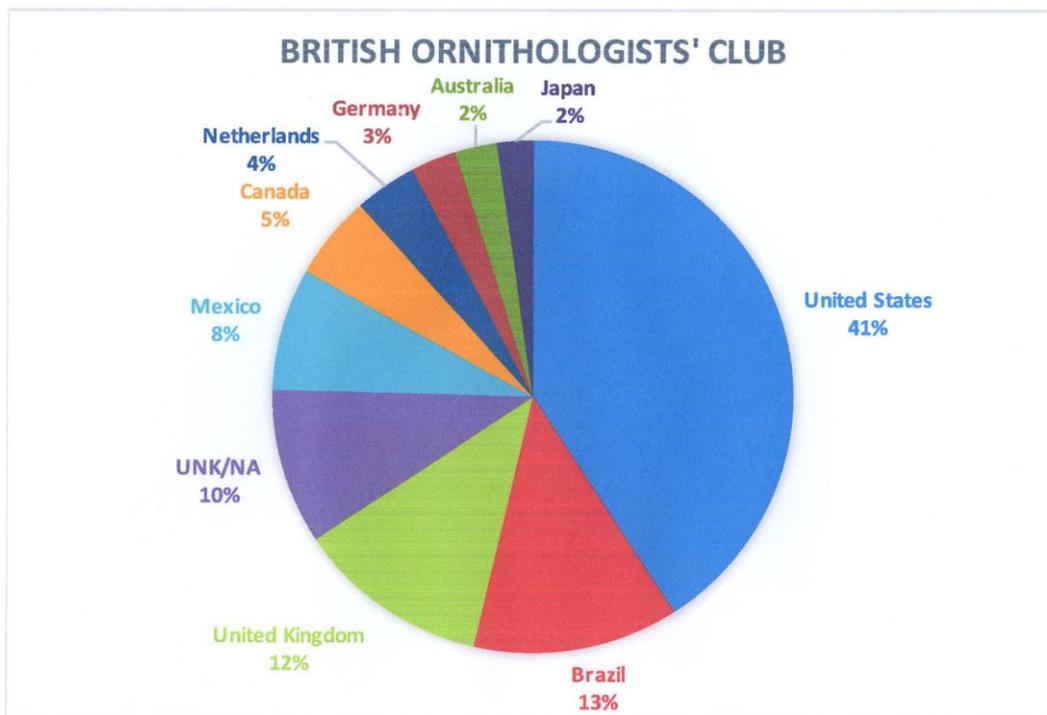
Vol. 139 comprised 388 pages (a slight reduction on the previous year's record) and 35 papers of broad geographical scope, although contributions on New World, especially Neotropical, birds were particularly well represented. Several new taxa were described in the Bulletin during 2019, including two new cryptic species from West Africa, a new bulbul on Borneo, and a new subspecies of honeyeater in Australia. Other papers that registered a strong interest on social media included a review of knowledge of a potentially new taxon of storm-petrel that breeds in the Gulf of Guinea. For papers published in 2019, the interval between receipt and publication was 2–12 months, with a mean of *c.*5.9 months. The Bulletin received a total of 37 new manuscripts in 2019; a marked decrease on 2018, but very similar to annual totals between 2013 and 2017. Of these 37 submissions, seven have been rejected to date and the remainder have been accepted, in some cases subject to substantial and currently incomplete revision.

Grateful thanks are due, as ever, to referees who have given freely of their time and expertise; members of the Working Group on Avian Nomenclature (WGAN), especially Richard Schodde, and the Bulletin's Associate Editors, Lincoln Fishpool, Robert Prÿs-Jones and Frank Steinheimer; and to Eng-Li Green, of Alcedo Publishing, for her constant dedication to Bulletin duties, including production of the index and updating the website in tandem with David Fisher. Chris Storey and Robert Prÿs-Jones helped prepare the cover information and Club Announcements, whilst staff at The Natural History Museum, Tring, continue to offer much-needed assistance in all manner of ways.

At the end of 2019, our longest-serving Associate Editor, Frank Steinheimer, retired from his formal involvement with the Bulletin, after 11 years of valuable assistance. Frank now heads one of the largest natural history collections in Germany, based at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, and his duties have increased considerably in recent years. We thank Frank most warmly for his considerable contributions to the Bulletin, especially his knowledge of

zoological nomenclature. The Club has fortunately engaged the assistance of Lincoln Fishpool as a new Associate Editor, since June 2019.

In addition, BioOne report that the number of hits on the journal has gone from just under 13,000 in our first year as an online open access journal to 74,530 in 2019, the number of hits being comparable to similar journals in the BioOne collection. The following chart shows the distribution of hits:



Conference and Talks

Meetings in 2019

Robert Prÿs-Jones, Hon. Secretary writes:

As has become the norm over the past decade, the year's meetings comprised four evening dinner talks plus a full-day joint meeting, which this year was held in partnership with the Neotropical Bird Club (NBC) and the Natural History Museum (NHM) in the latter's excellent Flett Theatre on Saturday 26 October. Although at different times the BOC has joined in such meetings with all four of the main regional bird clubs, it is with the NBC that it has formed the closest relationship, this being the third such joint meeting in nine years – and an excellent one it was! During a diverse day comprising half a dozen talks reflecting on the biology and conservation of the astonishingly diverse Neotropical avifauna, we were particularly fortunate to have one of Brazil's foremost ornithologists, Luís Fábio Silveira, open the event by delivering an outstanding plenary lecture on *Avoiding extinctions in the most threatened area in the Neotropics: the Pernambuco Centre of Endemism*. Luís currently holds a major grant to research conservation requirements in this part of the Atlantic Forest region, and he communicated his deep knowledge of its biology in a highly accessible and strikingly illustrated fashion.

The day's remaining five talks picked up in quality where Luís's left off. The two other morning contributions directly complemented the plenary by explicitly addressing key conservation issues in two further countries. Christian Devenish considered the *Conservation of dry-forest endemic birds in north-west Peru*, using his research results to recommend key sites for the conservation of threatened Tumbes endemics. Martin Schafer of the Fundación Jocotoco spoke on *Using science to protect Ecuador's most threatened birds*, focusing in particular on his organisation's long-term research and conservation efforts on the globally threatened El Oro Parakeet *Pyrrhura orcesi* and Pale-headed Brush Finch

Atlapetes pallidiceps. The afternoon session opened with Alexander Lees speaking on the topic of *Diversity in avian mimicry*, stressing that apparent cases of visual mimicry between unrelated birds seem to be especially prevalent in the Neotropics. Samuel Jones then outlined his studies into *The physiology/behaviour nexus in a Central American cloud forest songbird, the Black-headed Nightingale Thrush* *Catharus mexicanus*, investigating seasonal shifts in territorial behaviour and their impact on energetics. Finally, Joseph Tobias closed the proceedings in highly appropriate fashion with his talk on *Frontiers of knowledge: a quarter-century of Neotropical discovery*, including some predictions as to what we might expect from the coming twenty-five years.

The four evening meetings were characterised by the sheer range of ornithological topics that they covered. In March, Julia Day overviewed *Continental vs island evolution of a "great speciator": resolving the Zosterops taxonomic conundrum*. Based on molecular and morphological data from almost all currently recognised African taxa, she provided insight into the often cryptic relationships among this highly uniform group, in work that will lead to substantial revision of their taxonomy. In June, Julian Hume returned with a talk on *Birds of Lord Howe Island: past, present and future*, drawing on recent studies that he has been involved in regarding the avian paleontology of the island, which was first observed by Europeans as late as 1788, to reveal how some endemic species have managed to survive despite the impact of man and his accompanying rats eliminating others. In September, Pat Morris spoke on *Revisiting the Hastings rarities – taking the long view*, using his recent investigations to flag up what he considers to have been a too casual acceptance of the scope of any fraud that may have taken place and, in particular, defending the taxidermist George Bristow from the posthumous calumny that has been heaped on him. The year's talks closed in November, when the audience present was treated to a fascinating exposition by Tim Birkhead on *The wonderful Mr Willughby – the start of scientific ornithology*, in which Tim outlined his research demonstrating that Francis Willughby was every bit as brilliant as his co-author and friend John Ray, and can truly be considered the world's first ornithologist.

For those who missed them, many of the evening talks are available as videos on the BOC website. They are well worth catching up with, especially given the fact that, as of mid-May 2020, when this report was written, all planned 2020 meetings are currently on hold due to the government lockdown resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. Do, however, keep an eye on the relevant website that will give information as to if/when they are able to restart:

<http://boc-online.org/meetings/upcoming-meeting.>

BOC Publications

The major effort in 2019 was the preparation for publication in 2020 of the checklist on the Birds of Cuba. During the year David Wells, who has handled the early editorial work associated with this checklist with great skill, decided to stand down as our commissioning editor and to hand over the role and the final stages of Cuba to Nigel Redman. The Club owes David a considerable debt of gratitude for all his work on the checklist series, and we shall very much miss his dedication and constant helpful commitment to the Club.

The Falkland Islands Checklist continues to sell and, of the original print of 400 copies, 181 remain in stock.

Trustees and Administration

Nigel Redman decided to retire as Vice-Chairman at the end of his term of office in October. We are very grateful for all his work as trustee and delighted that he will nevertheless continue as our checklist commissioning editor.

Gehan Silva de Wijeyeratne (Chairman of the London Bird Club and author of guides to the fauna and flora of Sri Lanka published by John Beaufoy Publishing, Bloomsbury etc.) and Tony Statham (previously Secretary to the Club) were elected as trustees from 1 January 2019. Dr Andrew Richford (publisher) and Dr Steve Portugal (Reader, Centre for Ecology, Evolution and Behaviour, Department of Biological Sciences, Royal Holloway, University of London) were elected as trustees from 1 January 2020. The Club is very fortunate in having four new and distinguished trustees.

The Trustees would like to thank Guy Kirwan for his distinguished editorship of the Bulletin which continues to attract outstanding contributions to ornithological studies; Robert Prys-Jones for his unstinting efforts in ensuring that the quarterly talks at the Barley Mow go from strength to strength and for organising the annual conference; and Frank Mullen for videoing and editing the talks posted on YouTube.

The web is central to our activities and we are very grateful to Eng-Li Green and David Fisher for their contributions in keeping the site up to date and readable. The Trustees are indebted to the Trustees of the Herbert Stevens Trust for their clear advice on the management of the HS Trust funds and their wholehearted support of the Club.

The Club continues to have the administrative support of Josephine Rogers in managing the MailChimp lists and helping Stephen Chapman with the issue of the regular Newsletters.

The Club, as previously noted, continues to receive a constant flow of ad hoc enquiries at its official email address, ranging from requests to identify birds to help in dealing with injured swans: although time consuming such requests are welcome evidence that the Club is active on the web!

Finally, as Chairman I know how much I depend on the professional competence and hard work not only of my fellow trustees but also Guy Kirwan, Nigel Redman, Eng-Li Green, David Fisher and Josephine Rogers. The foregoing thanks to my colleagues tend to have a formulaic tone, but they are sincerely and very well meant.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Storey', written in a cursive style.

Chris Storey, Chairman