

# The British Ornithologists' Club

*Founded 5 October 1892*

*Registered Charity No1169733*

## The Chairman's Review for 2021

In 2021, the Club continued to consolidate its online presence. We held four Zoomed talks as detailed in Robert Prÿs-Jones' report below. The talks were marketed through Eventbrite with an average of 115 registrations per talk; the Zoom recordings were placed on YouTube where to date the viewing figures for each talk ranged from 96 to 605, with an average of 345 for the four talks.

The Bulletin has increased its reach, the 2021 BioOne Report noting that 'Annual hits for the title by online users' were 134,147, some 23,000 more than in the previous year and with a pro rata share of 2.34% of hits on the BioOne Open Access collection. Seven new blogs were added to the Blog page ranging from *New Guinea Islands in the Sky* by David Bishop in March to *Forbes-Watson's Swift* by Etienne Marais in July. According to the number of views on Twitter and the number of webpage visits (proxy for blog reads) there has been an overall increase in blog engagement since 2020. The number of Twitter engagements (e.g. likes, retweets and follows) essentially stayed constant.

Year	Views on Twitter	Engagements on Twitter	Page visits
2020	3058	158	18
2021	3721	157	37

Regular Newsletters continued to be an important means of communication with Friends on our mailing list. Fourteen Newsletters were sent out and on average were opened by 67% of recipients. The number of Friends increased by 9% during the year.

On a more personal note, the Club sadly mourned the death of two long-standing members.

**David Calder** (1925–2021) died on 25 January 2021. David was the Club's Chairman from 1980 to 1983. BBOC 141(2) carried a moving tribute by his daughter, Philippa Luker and Tony Statham.

**Bill Bourne** (1930-2021) died on 31 May 2021. He joined the Club in 1956 and became a regular contributor to the Bulletin. Stephen Chapman noted in his extensive obituary (BBOC 141(3)) that it was at Bill Bourne's suggestion that *Pterodroma madeira* should be known as Zino's Petrel in honour of the Zino family (Frank Zino being a member of the Club).

## **Financial Report 2021 - R W Malin, Hon Treasurer**

By way of explanation: Figures are shown on a cash-book basis (based on transactions in our bank accounts during the calendar year) and do not seek to allocate income or expenditure to a particular year, past or future. The figures are then 'consolidated' to combine both BOC charities, Old BOC and the new CIO, although these charities are legally separate.

### **Income and expenditure**

Income in 2021 was £21,256, up by £2,755 (or 15%) above the 2020 result. Herbert Stevens investment income was £1,170 (or 10%) higher, while other investment income was £633 higher. Old BOC subscriptions continued to reduce but CIO donations increased by £900 due to a generous donation of £1,000 from the executors of Robin Woods. Lower book sales (£571, or 40% down), were offset by Gift Aid claims for 2019 and 2020.

Expenditure in 2021 was £31,435, an increase of £10,902 (or 53%) above 2020. Almost £9,000 of this increase was publication costs, being: £1,000 to translate Cuba; £10,190 for St Vincent; and £7,000 for Yarrell. BioOne costs were up £728 (mainly exchange rate related), and editorial costs were £738 higher (due to an increase and underbilling). Publication and website costs were each up around £250, while other admin costs were largely unchanged.

The net 2021 shortfall was £10,180, against a 2020 shortfall of £2,034. Without publication costs, 2021 would have shown a surplus of £8,010, up from £7,134 in 2020.

A smaller 'running' surplus than this is to be expected in 2022 - our investment income has stood up remarkably well against the pandemic, but the effects of the invasion of Ukraine are harder to predict. Operating costs continue to rise, further publications are in hand (the costs of which are expensed as incurred), and as subscription/donation income continues to fall, we expect to report another shortfall in 2022.

### **Balance Sheet**

A pro-forma 'combined' balance sheet at the end of 2021 shows assets of £505,255, an increase of £38,495 (or 8%) from £467,760 in 2020.

The value of our Herbert Stevens investment units grew by £39,088 (or 14%), the Clancey units grew £5,583 (or 7%), and the units held by CIO grew by £3,147 (or 20%) - all reflecting the pandemic 'bounce back' by 31 December 2021. Volatility has returned since Russia's incursion, and 2021 values are unlikely to be sustained in 2022.

Medium-term deposits grew to £54,770, with interest of £651 credited in the year.

2021					
	Old BOC	CIO BOC		Total	% of total
<b>Income</b>					
H Stevens/ Clancey	£0.00	£12,753.95		£12,753.95	60.0%
Subs / donations	£1,640.50	£1,375.00		£3,015.50	14.2%
CIO dividends		£4,037.91		£4,037.91	19.0%
Book Sales	£0.00	£824.46		£824.46	3.9%
Gift Aid		£622.94		£622.94	2.9%
Interest	£1.08	£0.00		£1.08	0.0%
	<b>£1,641.58</b>	<b>£19,614.26</b>		<b>£21,255.84</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Expenses</b>					
Editor	£0.00	-£5,125.77		-£5,125.77	16.3%
Eng-Li	£0.00	-£3,550.00		-£3,550.00	11.3%
BioOne	£0.00	-£3,768.00		-£3,768.00	12.0%
Website	£0.00	-£614.02		-£614.02	2.0%
Meetings	£0.00	-£50.00		-£50.00	0.2%
Conference	£0.00	£0.00		£0.00	0.0%
Publications	£0.00	-£18,189.72		-£18,189.72	57.9%
Legal	£0.00	£0.00		£0.00	0.0%
Admin	£0.00	-£137.98		-£137.98	0.4%
	<b>£0.00</b>	<b>-£31,435.49</b>		<b>-£31,435.49</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Balance Sheet</b>					
<b>31.12.21</b>					
Bank	£66.43	£17,992.45		£18,058.88	3.6%
CIO deposits	£0.00	£54,769.87		£54,769.87	10.8%
Herbert Stevens Investments		£324,225.43		£324,225.43	64.0%
CIO Investments	£0.00	£90,516.47		£90,516.47	17.9%
Clancey Investment		£18,684.61		£18,684.61	3.7%
	<b>£66.43</b>	<b>£506,188.83</b>		<b>£506,255.26</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>31.12.20</b>			<b>Total</b>	<b>£467,760.29</b>	
<b>Combined 2021</b>			Increase	£38,494.97	
Income	£21,255.84				
Expenses	-£31,435.49				
<b>Shortfall</b>	<b>-£10,179.65</b>		<b>2020 Shortfall</b>	<b>-£2,033.58</b>	

## The Bulletin – Guy Kirwan, Hon Editor

Volume 141 comprised 496 pages (only slightly smaller than the record set in 2020) and 40 papers of broad geographical scope, although contributions on the New World (especially Neotropical), Afrotropical, and Indo-Pacific region birds were particularly well represented. The high page count, and level of submissions (see below), were both undoubtedly reflective of the ongoing (albeit diminishing) pandemic. The Bulletin was unquestionably fortunate that most referees continued to deliver their reviews promptly, despite the many pressures. Two new taxon names were introduced in the Bulletin during 2021, including a new fossil raptor from Cuba, and a new family-group name for the oddball Crested Shrikejay *Platylophus galericulatus*. Other papers that registered a strong interest on social media included a taxonomic revision of the humble Dunnock *Prunella modularis*, the first southern African record of the Forbes-Watson's Swift *Apus*

*berliozzi*, and a revisionary perspective on the infamous (at least in British ornithological circles) Hastings Rarities. For papers published in 2021, the interval between receipt and publication was 3–14 months, with a mean of *c.* 6.5 months. The Bulletin received a total of 56 new manuscripts in 2021, only slightly fewer than in the record-breaking year of 2020. Of these 56 submissions, 13 were rejected, one withdrawn following review, and the remainder 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 Chris Sharpe; and to Eng-Li Green, of Alcedo Publishing, for her constant dedication to Bulletin duties, including production of the index and updating the website. 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.

## **Meetings in 2021 - Robert Prÿs-Jones**

My report for 2020 dwelt on the impact of covid, which resulted in meetings being unable to take place prior to the autumn, by which time the Club had got to grips with the (then) new world of Zoom. It concluded with the hope that in-person dinner meetings could soon be resumed in 2021, as these clearly have benefits that Zoom cannot entirely provide. In the event, this did not prove possible, but four extremely successful talks nevertheless took place via Zoom, attracting far larger live audiences (well over 100 in some cases) than in-person talks would have, as well as proving extremely popular when made available subsequently via the YouTube link on the Club's website.

The talk year kicked off on 29 March, when Ron Summers (RSPB Scotland) spoke on *Abernethy Forest: its history and ecology*, highlighting the long-term studies and habitat management that the RSPB has been conducting in this key remnant of the formerly widespread Caledonian pinewoods. Ron himself has contributed greatly to these studies, and he drew in particular on research in which he has been involved on the Western Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*, Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus* and crossbills *Loxia* spp., balancing his focus on birds with much information on the fascinating wider environment.

On 24 May, the Club's 1,000<sup>th</sup> recorded evening meeting was delivered by Steve Portugal (Royal Holloway University of London), a Club committee member, who discussed his research into *Bird flight and co-operative aerodynamics*. The talk fell into two main parts: firstly, using novel biologging technology to reveal remarkable new insights into the factors influencing both how individual Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus*

*eremita* position themselves in the species' characteristic V-formation flights and the aerodynamic interactions that take place between them; secondly, using studies of the seemingly more unstructured flocks of homing pigeons *Columba livia* var. to demonstrate how the personalities of individual birds provide insight into their exploratory and homing abilities, as well as their flock positioning during homing flights.

The British public are probably the most avid garden feeders of wild birds in the world, and over many years this has been promoted, including by conservation organizations, as a fundamentally good thing, even if with a caveat regarding its potential for spreading disease. The 18 October talk *Does bird feeding help or hinder avian conservation?* by Alex Lees (Manchester Metropolitan University) took wider issue with this concept, adducing evidence that points to the increased survival, productivity and hence population growth in the already common dominant species making most use of bird feeders being offset by serious population declines in subordinate competitor species. The compelling take home message was that there is now an urgent necessity for an in-depth re-evaluation of the whole rationale of garden bird provisioning and its largely unforeseen side effects.

The year's talks closed with a presentation on 15 November by Ken Smith (now retired from the RSPB) entitled *Bars and spots – varying fortunes of our British woodpeckers*, summarising his and his wife Linda's many years of research on the family, complemented by that of volunteers who are increasingly stimulated to contribute by the Ken's and Linda's on-line site [www.woodpecker-network.org.uk](http://www.woodpecker-network.org.uk). Ken particularly focused on the varying fortunes of the Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dryobates minor*, with the former increasing in numbers and the latter in serious decline over many years. Data collected to date point to low breeding success among Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers as the key reason underlying their decline, with changes in feeding ecology, rather than predation, seemingly being the key driver. Intriguingly, the situation in Britain is in contrast to the near continent, with both species currently increasing in the Netherlands. All these talks remain available on YouTube via the Club's website, so do catch up with any of these excellent presentations that you missed. Although the first (March) talk for 2022 will continue via the medium of Zoom only, the Club currently hopes to run combined in-person and Zoom meetings later in the year. This should include a key presentation on the birds of New Guinea by Professor Jared Diamond that was originally planned for 2020 but has had to be postponed since due to covid. Keep an eye on the Club's upcoming meetings page on its website – <https://boc-online.org/meetings/upcoming-meeting> - to discover exactly when meetings will occur and in what format.

## **BOC Publications**

The Club was delighted that 2021 saw the publication by John Beaufoy, in association with the BOC, of Christine E. Jackson's outstanding *A Newsworthy Naturalist: The Life of William Yarrell*. This important and beautifully produced book set out in compelling detail Yarrell's life and times as a great 19<sup>th</sup> century naturalist. The work was edited by Robert Prÿs-Jones and we hope that it will be the first of a series of BOC biographies.

## **Trustees and Administration**

The Trustees would like to thank Guy Kirwan for another outstanding BBOC year. Guy's unstinting hard work and editorial flare ensured that the Bulletin continued to go from strength to strength as indicated in the BioOne statistics quoted above. Thanks are also owed to Robert Prÿs-Jones for ensuring that we were able to hold four excellent Zoomed talks plus a Friends' meeting at the Barley Mow pub (the first since the pandemic). This gathering in December did not count as a formal meeting of the Club but its occurrence should be marked as it reestablished the Club's long-standing tradition of meeting in person for discussion and a meal. On this occasion trustees gave short presentations about the lives and times of the 15 founding fathers of the Club with the intention that these accounts would shortly be published as blog posts on the Club's website.

The Trustees are particularly indebted to the Trustees of the Herbert Stevens Trust for their skillful management of the Club's funds in the current circumstances.

Finally, I should like to add my personal thanks to my fellow Trustees, and to Guy Kirwan, Nigel Redman, Eng-Li Green and Sarah Nichols. I am very grateful for all their unstinting help and advice.

Chris Storey, Chairman  
16 August, 2022