

The British Ornithologists' Club

Founded 5 October 1892

Registered Charity No1169733

Chairman's Review for 2020

2020 was a particularly challenging year for us all. We have very much missed meeting in person both as a committee and with friends over food and drink after the Barley Mow talks. However, with the rest of society we have rapidly learnt to Zoom and rely on the internet to sustain our interests and work. The planned series of talks, including the joint talks with the Linnean Society, were rapidly re-jigged and by the end of the year, through Robert Prÿs -Jones's outstanding efforts, we held two highly successful Zoomed talks as detailed below. Zooming has enabled very many more people both in the UK and abroad to participate and we hope to continue to offer that facility even when in-person events are resumed. And the talks posted on YouTube continue to attract considerable viewers.

The three-year BioOne contract came up for renewal at the end of the year. After careful consideration and consultation we decided to renew the contract for a further three years.

We were very sorry to learn of Robin Woods' death. His outstanding *Birds of the Falkland Islands* , which came out in 2017, is a fine memorial to his life and work and the Bulletin of December 2020 (140(4)) carried a moving tribute by Mark Adams.

It is also an extremely sad duty to record the sudden death of David Fisher on 22 May 2021. David was a long standing member of the Club , serving as a Trustee and latterly helping as a manager of the website. Steve Rooke pays a moving tribute to David in the August 2021 edition of British Birds, outlining his

considerable contributions to the world of birds and birding and emphasising David's cheerful and helpful nature. The Club was certainly the beneficiary of his willingness to help and he will be very much missed.

Financial Report 2020

The effect of the pandemic on our financial position has been marked, but as Richard Malin points out below less than we might have feared.

By way of background: Figures are shown on a cash-book basis (using payments through our bank accounts in the calendar year) and do not seek to allocate income or expenditure to a particular year, past or future. The figures are 'consolidated' to show combined numbers for both BOC charities, Old BOC and the new CIO, but these charities are not legally combined.

Income and expenditure

Income in 2020 was £18,500.72 - £3,180.76 (or 15%) below the 2019 result. Income from Herbert Stevens was £5,625.06 (or 33%) lower, while other investment income was £2,273.27 higher. Falklands book sales were £912.07 higher. Old BOC subscriptions and new CIO donations both fell - the former by £259 (or 13%), the latter by c. £160, as donations in the prior year proved to be one-offs. A Gift Aid claim for 2020 has yet to be made.

Expenditure in 2020 was £20,534.30 - an increase of £8,264.53 (or 67%) compared to 2019. The £9,207.35 cost of our forthcoming Cuba publication was paid up-front but savings were made elsewhere: no meeting or conference costs (£0 against £740 in 2019); no legal fees (£0 against £720 in 2019); and reduced BioOne costs (£3,040 against £3,324). Editorial and publication costs were £511.55 higher (less than expected due to late billing / underbilling), while other admin costs were largely unchanged.

The net deficit for 2020 was £2,033.58 - against a surplus of £9,411.71 in 2019. Without publication costs the 2020 'running' surplus would have been £7,137.77 - a reduction of £2,237.94 (or 24%) from 2019.

A smaller 'running' surplus than this is expected in 2021 - as our Herbert Stevens and other investment income remains impacted by the pandemic, and our operating costs rise. With further publications in hand (the cost of which is expensed as incurred), and as subscription / donation income continues to fall, we expect to report another deficit in 2021.

Balance Sheet

2020					
	Old BOC		BOC CIO		Total % of total
Income					
H Stevens Investments	£0.00		£11,583.80		£11,583.80 63%
Subscriptions / donations	£1,715.50		£400.00		£2,115.50 11%
CIO Dividends	£0.00		£3,405.34		£3,405.34 18%
Book Sales	£0.00		£1,395.20		£1,395.20 8%
Gift Aid	£0.00		£0.00		£0.00 0%
Interest	£0.88		£0.00		£0.88 0%
	£1,716.38		£16,784.34		£18,500.72 100%
Expenses					
Editor	£0.00		-£4,387.25		-£4,387.25 21%
Eng-Li	£0.00		-£3,275.00		-£3,275.00 16%
BioOne	£0.00		-£3,040.00		-£3,040.00 15%
Website	£0.00		-£425.93		-£425.93 2%
Meetings	£0.00		£0.00		£0.00 0%
Conference	£0.00		£0.00		£0.00 0%
Publications	£0.00		-£9,207.35		-£9,207.35 45%
Legal	£0.00		£0.00		£0.00 0%
Admin	£0.00		-£198.77		-£198.77 1%
	£0.00		-£20,534.30		-£20,534.30 100%
Balance Sheet at 31.12.20					
Bank	£74.85		£27,958.04		£28,032.89 6%
CIO bank deposits	£0.00		£54,118.59		£54,118.59 12%
H Stevens Investments	£0.00		£285,137.11		£285,137.11 61%
Clancey Investments	£0.00		£84,933.95		£84,933.95 18%
CIO Investments	£0.00		£15,537.75		£15,537.75 3%
	£74.85		£467,685.44	Total	£467,760.29 100%
Combined 2020					
Income	£18,500.72				
Expenses	-£20,534.30				
Surplus	-£2,033.58				
Combined 2019 Surplus	£9,411.71		31.12.19	Total	£510,958.69
	-£11,445.29		Change		-£43,198.40 -8%

A pro-forma combined balance sheet at the end of 2020 shows assets of £467,760.29 - a decrease of £43,198.40 (or 8%) from £510,958.69 in 2019.

The value of our Herbert Stevens investment units fell by £34,823.61 (or 14%), and the value of our newly acquired Clancey units fell by £6,300.27 (or 7%) - both reflecting the markedly lower investment values prevailing on 31 December 2020. Values have continued to be volatile since year-end, and it is far from clear that 2019 values will return in 2021.

Medium-term deposits grew to £54,118.59, from interest of £917.18 credited in the year.

R W Malin
Hon Treasurer.

BBOC Online

Vol. 140 comprised 504 pages (a new annual record) and 39 papers of broad geographical scope, although contributions on New World, especially Neotropical, and Pacific region birds were particularly well represented. The record page count, and level of submissions (see below), were both undoubtedly reflective of the pandemic, with many workers having more time to write up results! The Bulletin was unquestionably fortunate that most referees continued to deliver their reviews promptly, despite the many pressures. Several new taxa were described in the Bulletin during 2019, including a new fossil vulture species and fossil *Ornimegalonyx* owl, both from Cuba, and two new subspecies of *Amytornis* grasswrens in Australia. Other papers that registered a strong

interest on social media included a review of Audubon's Bird of Washington, which author Matthew Halley revealed to be probably a fabrication designed to ensure the commercial success of his famous publishing project. For papers published in 2020, the interval between receipt and publication was 1–47 months, with a mean of *c.*6.2 months, but this declines to 4.9 months when we discount two papers that were only resubmitted after periods after more than a year and more than three years! The Bulletin received a total of 61 new manuscripts in 2020 an increase on 2019 (see above), and the largest total during the incumbent's editorship. Of these 61 submissions, 13 were rejected 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 and Robert Prÿs-Jones; 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 the late 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.

Guy Kirwan Hon Editor

Meetings in 2020

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic had a severe effect on the BOC's meetings in 2020. Unlike in most previous years over the past decade, no joint one-day conference with the Natural History Museum and one of the regional bird clubs was feasible. Even more unusually, only two evening meetings took place, and

both could only happen on-line using Zoom, as the usual in-person dinner meetings were impossible due to the restrictions in place.

The first meeting of the year had been planned for 23 March, when Beth Okamura, Natural History Museum, was due to speak on *How birds shape freshwater diversity*. This had to be called off at little over a week's notice, but the Club was fortunate that Beth then agreed to deliver it via Zoom later in the year, on 21 September, thereby becoming the guinea pig for this at least temporary movement to on-line only for the Club's talks. In the event, the re-scheduled event proved extremely satisfactory: technical gremlins were held to a minimum; the on-line talk was free and open to anyone who registered for it, so garnering a wider than usual audience; and Beth delivered some fascinating insights into the profound effect of waterbird movements on the development and dynamics of freshwater communities and consequent impacts on aquaculture and emerging fish diseases.

BOC evening meetings have been running continuously since 1892, and 2020 was the year in which the 1,000th such event was due to take place. To celebrate this milestone, it had been planned to hold two special lectures by eminent scientists, organised in conjunction with the Linnean Society and taking place at their central London premises. The first of these, on 21 June, was intended to be by Professor Jared Diamond from the University of California, Los Angeles, on the subject of *What's so special about New Guinea birds?* In addition to being a Pulitzer-prize-winning author of five best-selling books about human societies and human evolution, Jared is the world authority on New Guinea birds and also has long-standing links to the BOC. Unfortunately, his planned 2020 visit to the UK was cancelled due to covid restrictions, but it is still hoped that he will be able to deliver his talk in person during 2022.

The second such lecture planned was to be delivered on 16 November by Jon Fjeldså, Professor of Biodiversity at Copenhagen University, on *The evolution of passerine birds explained*, a topic regarding which he is lead editor of a major new book. Although unable through covid restrictions to attend in person, Jon

most kindly agreed to give his presentation via Zoom, which was very efficiently organised by the Linnean Society. To probably the largest audience ever for a BOC evening meeting, Jon delivered a tour de force that covered a huge amount of ground as he explained how molecular phylogenetics have in recent years revolutionised our understanding of the relationships of songbird groups. Moreover, in delivering it Jon was kind enough to highlight both the past and the continuing relevance of research published by the Club's *Bulletin* since 1892.

As is now usual, both the talks that took place in 2020 remain available to view via the Club's website. Although the Club's evening meetings in early 2021 have continued to be solely via the medium of Zoom, it must be hoped that in-person dinner meetings can be resumed relatively soon, as these clearly have added benefits that Zoom cannot entirely substitute for.

Robert Prŷs-Jones

BOC Publications

After a long gestation, *The Birds of CUBA* was published. It is no. 26 in the Checklist series and the second to be published solely by the BOC. It is a major work of scholarship and an outstanding tribute to the authors and to the unstinting work of David Wells and Nigel Redman, who as Editor saw it through the final stages of publication.

Trustees and Administration

I am delighted to say that Sarah Nichols, who is studying for a PhD in parasite dynamics in the sequential colonization of silver eyes in the South Pacific Islands supervised by Prof Beth Okamura and Dr Sonya Clegg, has been co-opted onto the Committee as website manager and as the creator and editor of the BOC Blog. The Blog is a new and important addition to the BOC website. Sarah took over

the web manager responsibilities from Eng-Li Green at the end of the year, Eng-Li having decided to lighten her online work load. The Club is however relieved and reassured that Eng-Li will continue to provide design and related services in respect of the Bulletin.

The Trustees would like to thank Guy Kirwan for sustaining the relevance and impact of the Bulletin: in a crowded online market place the Bulletin continues to attract outstanding articles and we are very grateful to Guy for all his work.

Thanks are also owed to Robert Prÿs-Jones for ensuring , in spite of the coronavirus restrictions , that we were able to hold two Zoomed talks.

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.

Josephine Rogers continued to manage the MailChimp lists and to provide admin support to Stephen Chapman in the issue of the regular newsletters.

Finally may I add my personal thanks to my fellow Trustees and Guy Kirwan, Nigel Redman, Eng-Li Green, Sarah Nichols and Josephine Rogers. The Club wholly depends on the many hours of dedicated commitment by all concerned and I am very grateful.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Storey', is centered on a light gray rectangular background.

Chris Storey, Chairman

20.9.21

