

# **The British Ornithologists' Club**

*Founded 5 October 1892 Registered Charity No1169733*

## **The Chairman's Review 2022**

The Club celebrated the return to a non-pandemic world with three outstanding talks, a return to meetings in the upstairs room at the Barley Mow and the publication of a major work in the checklist series on the birds of St Vincent, the Grenadines and Grenada. (see Publications below). The talks are detailed in Robert Prÿs-Jones' report below. We were delighted to be able again to meet in person and we held an informal Christmas meeting at the Barley Mow when Tony Statham talked to a sizable group about birds in books and stamps followed by a general discussion on the future of the BOC, its opportunities and challenges.

The BioOne report for 2022 noted that the number of Bulletin hits was 134,876 which is only few more than last year. We have opened discussions with BioOne as to how best to optimise the reach of the Bulletin.

The Blog page had four new additions: Julian Hume on *Beneath the feet of the dodo - a new ground thrush from Mauritius*, Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne's interview with Christine Jackson on her book about William Yarrell, Andy Mitchell on translating the Cuban checklist into Cuban Spanish and Sarah Nichols on *Poo in Paradise: a week of field work on Heron Island*. The numbers accessing the Blog pages increased by 30% during the year.

Our Twitter account recorded 900 followers; Cuba in translation was downloaded by 178 people and the YouTube videos continue to reach sizable viewing figures.

Ten Newsletters were sent to the 391 Friends (a net gain of 3.4% on the previous year) on our mailing list, and were opened by 62% of recipients.

During the year the Club mourned the sad passing of two of its members. **Margaret Carswell** (1935-2022) died on 7 April 2022. She was the principal author of the BOU/BOC's *The bird atlas of Uganda* and her many significant contributions in birding and medical work in Africa are covered in her daughter Nell Carswell's moving tribute to her mother in BBOC 142(4).

**Clive Mann** (1942-2022) died in August 2022. Clive joined the BOC in 1972, became Hon. Secretary from 1996-2004 and Chairman from 2005-

2009.Clive was a regular attender at Club meetings and his genial presence will much missed. His major contributions to the Club and ornithology are set out in Edward Dickinson's and Michael Casement's Obituary in BBOC 142(4)

## **Financial Report 2022**

By way of explanation: Figures are shown on a cash-book basis (based on transactions in 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 then 'consolidated' to combine both BOC charities, Old BOC and the new CIO, although these charities are legally separate.

### **Income and expenditure**

Income in 2022 was £21,901 - £645 (or 3%) above the 2021 result. Herbert Stevens and Clancey investment income was £1,025 (or 8%) higher, while other investment income was £301 higher. Old BOC subscriptions continued to reduce and CIO donations, while higher, were not lifted in the year by a generous donation. Book sales were doubled (at £1,605) but no Gift Aid claim was made in the calendar year.

Expenditure in 2022 was £14,782 - a decrease of £16,653 (or 53%) in the year. No publication costs were incurred (over £18,000 were incurred in 2021), and BioOne and editorial costs were broadly unchanged. Website and meeting costs were each up around 50%.

The net surplus in 2022 was £7,119 - against a 2021 shortfall of £10,180.

Our investment income stood up well against the pandemic, and the economic fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but our annual result (surplus or shortfall) depends more on the timing of our publications. Operating costs continue to rise but these are, and should continue to be, well covered by investment income. Further publications are in hand (the whole costs of which are expensed as incurred) so, as subscription / donation income continues to fall, we must expect more shortfalls. Delays within the current publishing programme may allow 2023 to remain in surplus.

### **Balance Sheet**

A pro-forma 'combined' balance sheet at the end of 2022 shows assets of £476,855 - a decrease of £29,401 (or 6%) from £506,255 in 2021.

The value of our Herbert Stevens investment units fell by £22,356 (or 7%), the Clancey units fell by £2,517 (or 13%), and the units held by CIO fell by £12,193 (or 13%) – all reflecting the volatility following Russia’s incursion, and 2022 values may not be sustained through 2023.

Medium-term deposits grew to £55,318, with interest of £548 credited in the year. Deposit interest rates have become significantly more favourable in 2023.

R W Malin   Hon Treasurer

2022

	Old	BOC	CIO	BOC		Total	% of total
<b>Income</b>							
H Stevens/ Clancey		£0.00		£13,779.29		£13,779.29	62.9%
Subs / donations		£1,485.50		£691.31		£2,176.81	9.9%
CIO dividends		£0.00		£4,339.13		£4,339.13	19.8%
Book Sales		£0.00		£1,605.13		£1,605.13	7.3%
Gift Aid				£0.00		£0.00	0.0%
Interest		£0.76		£0.00		£0.76	0.0%
		<b>£1,486.26</b>		<b>£20,414.86</b>		<b>£21,901.12</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Expenses</b>							
Editor		£0.00		-£4,805.36		-£4,805.36	32.5%
Eng-Li		£0.00		-£5,088.00		-£5,088.00	34.4%
BioOne		£0.00		-£3,799.00		-£3,799.00	25.7%
Website, Zoom		£0.00		-£990.08		-£990.08	6.7%
Meetings / room hire		£0.00		-£100.00		-£100.00	0.7%
Conference		£0.00		£0.00		£0.00	0.0%
Publications		£0.00		£0.00		£0.00	0.0%
Legal		£0.00		£0.00		£0.00	0.0%
Admin		£0.00		£0.00		£0.00	0.0%
		<b>£0.00</b>		<b>-£14,782.44</b>		<b>-£14,782.44</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Surplus for 2022</b>						<b>£7,118.68</b>	
<b>Balance Sheet</b>							
<b>31.12.22</b>							
Bank		£52.69		£25,096.44		£25,149.13	5.3%
CIO bank deposits		£0.00		£55,317.57		£55,317.57	11.6%
Paypal				£28.43		£28.43	0.0%
Herbert Stevens Investments				£301,869.31		£301,869.31	63.3%
CIO Investments		£0.00		£78,322.66		£78,322.66	16.4%
Clancey Investment				£16,167.54		£16,167.54	3.4%
<b>Total</b>		<b>£52.69</b>		<b>£476,801.95</b>		<b>£476,854.64</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**The Bulletin** Guy Kirwan, Hon Editor

Vol. 142 comprised 546 pages (a new record) and 39 papers of broad geographical scope, although contributions on New World (especially Neotropical), Afrotropical, and Indo-Pacific region birds were especially 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. Four new taxon names were introduced in the Bulletin during 2022, two new family-group names, for *Erpornis zantholeuca* and the genus *Pteruthius*, a subfamily name, Sasiinae, for the piculet genera *Sasia* and *Verreauxia*, and *Geokichla longitarsus* for a new subfossil ground thrush species from Mauritius. Other papers of exceptional interest included the restitution of *Fregetta lineata* as a valid species of storm petrel in Pacific Ocean, a comprehensive catalogue of fossil and subfossil Cuban birds, and the commencement of a series on the breeding of Brazilian birds. For papers published in 2022, the interval between receipt and publication was 3–11 months, with a mean of c.6.8 months. The Bulletin received a total of 51 new manuscripts in 2022, only slightly fewer than in the record-breaking year of 2020 and the slightly less busy year of 2021. Of these 51 submissions, eight 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; the Bulletin's Associate Editors, Bruce Beehler, Lincoln Fishpool, Robert Prŷs-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 Prŷs-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 2022** Robert Prŷs-Jones

After the covid-enforced move in 2020 to on-line only meetings via Zoom, which then continued throughout 2021, the Club was finally able to return to in-person meetings from the second talk in 2022. Although the ability to dine and socialize is important to friends of the Club, such talks unsurprisingly tend to attract a smaller live audience than has been achieved via Zoom. An effort was therefore made to get the best of both worlds by also transmitting in-person talks live via Zoom. After initial attempts, however, technical problems related to the usual dinner venue of the Barley Mow pub caused the Club to desist with simultaneous Zoom broadcasts from here. Nevertheless, all Club talks are still posted subsequently on YouTube, accessible via the Club website <https://boc-online.org/> .

The year's talks began with a Zoom contribution by Kathryn Rooke (Natural History Museum assistant archivist), who spoke on *The Importation of Plumage (Prohibition) Act of 1921, as told through the Natural History Museum's archive collections* on 21 March. Massive demand for bird feathers for millinery purposes during the Victorian and Edwardian periods led to concomitant major declines in populations of species most affected, notably among egrets, grebes, birds of paradise and hummingbirds. Kathryn highlighted the important role played by the Natural History Museum in a lengthy campaign, led by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, in response to this, seeking to end the importation of bird feathers from across the then British Empire. Success was eventually achieved with the passing of a 1921 Act of Parliament.

The talk following, delivered on 16 May by Dr Martin Stervander (Natural History Museum Bird Group fellow) concerning *The Evolutionary History of a remarkable radiation of South Atlantic finches*, was the first since 2019 to take place in-person in the Barley Mow pub, with a simultaneous Zoom broadcast. The fascinating *Nesospiza* "buntings" or "finches", now known to belong to the family Thraupidae, occur on the remote, volcanic Tristan archipelago in the South Atlantic, which comprises three islands: the smallest and oldest (Nightingale, 4 km<sup>2</sup>) holds two species; the mid-aged and sized Inaccessible (14 km<sup>2</sup>) holds two subspecies of a third species; and the largest and youngest (Tristan, 96 km<sup>2</sup>) had an extinct species now known from a single specimen. The presentation focused on the key importance to the genus of the only indigenous tree *Phylica arborea*, and on the implications of the discovery that the two taxa on each of Nightingale and Inaccessible are their own closest relatives.

On 6 Oct, in conjunction with the Linnean Society and at their venue, it at last proved possible to hear, via Zoom, the talk by Professor Jared Diamond (University of California, Los Angeles) on *What's so special about New Guinea birds?* that had originally been scheduled for an in-person delivery in June 2020. It proved to be well worth the wait! Based on his many years of experience working there, Jared delivered a tour de force overview of the diversity of extraordinary adaptations of birds that inhabit the huge island and the geographical reasons underlying this. As a result, New Guinea has proved ideal terrain for studying speciation, ecological segregation, and other biological phenomena.

The year's main meetings concluded on 21 November with a Zoom presentation by Professor Michael Cherry (University of Stellenbosch) on *What can be done about range declines in South Africa's forest dependent birds?* Over half of South Africa's forest-dependent birds have suffered range declines over the past 30 years, with these being particularly concentrated in the Eastern Cape region despite an increase there in forest cover. Study suggests that much of the problem is habitat degradation arising from informal harvesting of forest products, notably bark harvesting that is increasingly being driven by commercial demand.

Based on this research, suggestions have been provided for improved methods of monitoring and control that could lead to better enforcement of existing law on sustainable harvesting.

In addition to the wide diversity of topics covered by the excellent speakers in the year's regular talk programme, an extra in-person meeting on 28 November was arranged for regular Club friends and attendees to discuss ideas for a series of blog posts on the founding members of the Club, complemented by an informal talk given by Committee member Tony Statham on *Bird books and bird stamps*.

Robert Prÿs-Jones

## **BOC Publications**

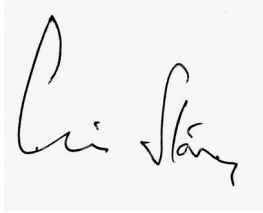
Towards the end of 2021 the Club published James W. Wiley's *The Birds of ST VINCENT, THE GRENADINES AND GRENADA, An Annotated Checklist*. No.27 in the BOC's checklist series. The manuscript was almost finished before James Wiley died on 19 September 2018. Not long before his death Paul Buckley and Allen Keith promised they would see it through to completion. With the help of many of James's colleagues, his wife Beth Wiley (who provided his working files) and Nigel Redman the checklist was made ready for publication. Christopher J. Sharpe in his review in BBOC 142(1) noted that the checklist is '...a worthy addition to the BOC checklist series as well as to the author's already impressive body of literature on the West Indies. A key piece in the jigsaw of West Indian ornithology, it becomes the standard account of the avifauna of St Vincent, the Grenadines and Grenada. The editors and the authors' collaborators are to be congratulated on seeing this valuable work through to completion.'

## **Trustees and Administration**

The Bulletin is at the core of what the Club is about and under Guy Kirwan's skilful editorship it continues to attract outstanding contributions in the fields of avian systematics and distribution: the Trustees are very grateful to him for his professional dedication and sheer hard work. Robert Prÿs-Jones must also be thanked for organising the Club's talks programme.

The Trustees are indebted to the Trustees of the Herbert Stevens Trust for their successful management of the Club's funds in uncertain times. Based on their work the Club has been able to continue to finance both its core activities and its book publishing programme.

Finally, I must add my personal thanks to my fellow Trustees, to Guy Kirwan, Nigel Redman, Eng-li Green, Sarah Nichols and to Frank Mullen who records and edits the talks for uploading onto YouTube. Without their unstinting work the Club would not be able to flourish.

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

Chris Storey, Chairman

28.9.2023