

# **The British Ornithologists' Club**

*Founded 5 October 1892 Registered Charity No1169733*

## **BOC Annual Review and Accounts 2023**

### **Chairman's Review 2023**

The Bulletin had another very successful year in terms of content, page count, and reach: see Guy Kirwan's report and the BioOne 2023 report below. The year was also marked by an outstanding series of talks at the Barley Mow in Horseferry Road, London. We were further delighted to continue our association with the Linnean Society, with a joint live-streamed talk at Burlington House where Dr Will Smith presented *A Wild Dove Chase*, and in September we were able to hold the first post-pandemic regional club meeting with the Oriental Bird Club and the NHM. These events are set out in detail in Robert Prŷs-Jones' report below. The talks were recorded and posted on the Club's YouTube site, where the videos continued to reach a large audience, with Dr Catherine Sheard's talk, *What can Birds' Nests Teach Us About Evolution*, being watched 119 times.

The BioOne 2023 Report (<https://bioone.org/journals/bulletin-of-the-british-ornithologists-club/>) noted that the number of hits – full text access, PDF downloads and abstract views – was 141,701, up 5% on 2022 and considerably more than the 2019 figure of 75,530.

There were two new blogs: Amberley Moore, a very longstanding member of the Club, and its Secretary from 1989 to 1995 and Vice-Chairman from 1997 to 1999, wrote a fascinating account of the life of Herbert Stevens, the Club's great benefactor; and Kai Gedeon and Till Töpfer of the Leibniz Institute for the Analysis of Biodiversity Change, Museum Koenig Bonn, wrote on *Is the Crimson-crested Turaco a species in its own right?*

Our Twitter account recorded 965 followers, and the Spanish language version of the Cuban checklist was downloaded 1,861 times.

In addition to our Facebook and Twitter accounts, we added an Instagram account at the end of the year. The aim of the account is to reach a wider and more diverse audience with details of our talks, events, blogs, and the Bulletin.

Eleven email communications were sent to the 399 Friends on our mailing list (a net gain of 2% on the previous year) and were opened by 62% of recipients. New Friends can subscribe from the website link and gains roughly balanced those that chose to unsubscribe.

## **Financial Report 2023: RW Malin, Hon Treasurer**

Figures reflect transactions in our bank accounts in 2023, rather than allocate income or expenditure to any particular year. They are then 'consolidated' to combine both BOC charities, Old BOC, and the new CIO, although these remain legally separate.

### **Income and expenditure**

Income in 2023 was £20,762 - £1,139 (or 5%) below 2022. Herbert Stevens and Clancey investment income was up by £2,473 (or 18%), but CIO investment income was down £1,732 (or 40%), mainly due to the closure of one fund in Q4. Old BOC subscriptions continued down so that, despite slightly higher CIO donations, this income category was £592 (or 27%) lower. Book sales were only £318, 80% below 2022's figure of £1,287.

Expenditure in 2023 was £25,901 – an increase of £11,118 (or 75%) for the year. Most of the increase was £9,008 publication costs (£0 incurred in 2022). Editorial costs were largely unchanged, BioOne was around £600 more, and website and meeting costs were each up around £100. The one-day joint meeting with the NHM and the Oriental Bird Club, cost £1,127 (£0 in 2022)

The net shortfall was £5,139 (after £9,008 publications) – against a surplus of £7,119 in 2022.

The BOC's investment income stood up well against the turbulent global events and challenging economic conditions of 2023, and the year's shortfall was due to publication costs. Further publications are in hand (all costs continue to be expensed as incurred) meaning that, unless donation and subscription income rises appreciably, there will be more shortfalls. Delays within the current publishing programme may allow 2024 to remain in surplus. Trustees agreed in late 2023 that BioOne costs should be met out of Clancey funds, which will cover one of the CIO's biggest expenses. While not yet reflected in these figures, this change should enable us to meet rising operating costs for at least 5 years.

### **Balance Sheet**

A 'combined' balance sheet at the end of 2023 shows assets of £466,408 – a decrease of £10,447 (or 2%) from £476,855 in 2022.

The value of our Herbert Stevens investment units fell by £3,733 (or 1%). Clancey units held by the CIO fell by £2,973 (or 3%) before the funds were returned to us.

Medium-term deposits (Clancey) grew to £73,547. £16,948 of this increase was returned funds, and £1,272 was interest credited in the year. This credit was 132% higher than 2022, because deposit interest rates rose throughout 2023. We are seeking other higher rate opportunities with our recently returned funds.

2023

	Old	BOC	CIO	BOC	Total
Income					
Herbert Stevens/Clancey		£0.00		£16,252.60	£16,252.60
Subs/donations		£1,209.50		£375.00	£1,584.50
CIO dividends		£0.00		£2,606.55	£2,606.55
Book Sales		£0.00		£318.08	£318.08
Gift Aid		£0.00		£0.00	£0.00
Interest		£0.00		£0.00	£0.00
		£1,209.50		£19,552.23	£20,761.73
Expenses					
Editor		£0.00		-£5,460.71	-£5,460.71
Eng-Li		£0.00		-£4,464.00	-£4,464.00
BioOne		£0.00		-£4,335.00	-£4,335.00
Website, Zoom		£0.00		-£1,113.83	-£1,113.83
Meetings/room hire		£0.00		-£252.55	-£252.55
Conference		£0.00		-£1,127.10	-£1,127.10
Publications		£0.00		-£9,007.99	-£9,007.99
Legal		£0.00		£0.00	£0.00
Misc		£0.00		-£139.42	-£139.42
		£0.00		-£25,900.60	-£25,900.60
Deficit for 2023					-£5,138.87
Balance Sheet					
31.12.23					

Bank	£62.19		£94,506.53		£94,568.72
CIO bank deposits	£0.00		£73,547.71		£73,547.71
PayPal	£0.00		£155.89		£155.89
Herbert Stevens Investments	£0.00		£298,135.47		£298,135.47
CIO Investments	£0.00		£0.00		£0.00
Clancey Investment	£0.00		£0.00		£0.00
Total	£62.19		£466,345.60		£466,407.79
			Balance Sheet 31.12.22		£476,854.64
			2023 Decrease in Assets		-£10,446.85

**R W Malin**  
**Hon Treasurer**

### **The Bulletin: Guy Kirwan, Hon Editor**

Vol. 143 comprised 616 pages (the second consecutive year with a new record page count) and 43 papers of broad geographical scope, although contributions on New World (especially Neotropical), Afrotropical, and Indo-Pacific region birds were especially well represented once again. The high page count, and level of submissions (see below), seem to be now reasonably well entrenched. The Bulletin was unquestionably fortunate that most referees continued to deliver their reviews promptly, despite the many pressures. The only new names introduced in the Bulletin in 2023 were for a new subspecies of the bulbul *Rubigula dispar* and a new genus, *Dicranurania*, for the Mexican Woodnymph *Thalurania ridgwayi*. Other papers of exceptional interest included taxonomic revisions of the Karamoja Apalis *Apalis karamojae*, the Square-tailed Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne nitens*, the Red-legged Thrush *Mimocichla rubripes*, the African Barred Owlet *Glaucidium capense*, and the Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler *Erythrogonys erythrogonys*. For papers published in 2023, the interval between receipt and publication was 3–19 months, with a mean of *c.*7.3 months. The Bulletin received a total of 62 new manuscripts in 2023, of which 17 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 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

## Meetings in 2023: Robert Prÿs-Jones

Having during 2022 at last got back to holding our regular Club dinners and talks in-person at the Barley Mow in Westminster, this continued throughout 2023, with the talks subsequently being posted online via YouTube, linked to the Club's website <https://boc-online.org>, allowing numerous people unable to attend in person to view them. As well as three regular meetings, recent tradition was followed by holding a fourth in conjunction with the Linnean Society of London at their premises. To round off a successful year, after a gap since 2019 largely caused by the covid pandemic, the Club also held a successful joint one-day meeting with the Oriental Bird Club (OBC) and the Natural History Museum (NHM) at the latter's site.

Kicking off the year's presentations, Robert Prÿs-Jones (NHM scientific associate) spoke in March on *Wallace's Sarawak bird collection and the development of his ornithological knowledge*, in a talk which aimed to highlight how the integration of information from the diaries/notebooks of an important 19<sup>th</sup>-century ornithologist with that from his specimens and their accompanying labels can provide intriguing insight into the development of his knowledge of a novel (to him) and poorly-known avifauna.

Following this, in May, there was a compelling joint presentation by Richard Sales and Steve Watson (independent researchers) on *The Peregrine Falcon*, highly illustrated (including by video) and based on their ground-breaking recent book of the same name. Richard's area of special research interest, namely the interaction between anatomy and behaviour underlying the Peregrine's flight characteristics and prey capture, synergistically complemented the broader focus of Steve's decades-long field study in Gloucestershire on Peregrine ecology and population characteristics, resulting in a particularly comprehensive overview.

The joint one-day meeting with the OBC and NHM took place in mid-September in the NHM's Flett Theatre, ideally suited to such presentations. The keynote speech was delivered by Pamela Rasmussen, an NHM scientific associate who has recently taken up the post of lead taxonomist at Cornell University's Laboratory of Ornithology. Much of Pam's research has focused on the Asian avifauna, but the principles derivable from her talk on *Avian taxonomy in the era of citizen science* are applicable much more widely. She was followed by

three fascinating presentations by Sayam Choudhury on *Can we still save the Masked Finfoot Heliopais personatus?*, James Eaton on *Successes and failures: how to find or fail in the quest for new and lost birds*, and Mike Edgecombe on *Mongolia – birds and more in Asia's last wilderness*. Overall, a very successful and much-appreciated day.

Early November saw the simultaneous in-person and Zoom joint meeting at the Linnean Society, in which Will Smith, who recently completed a DPhil at Oxford University's Edward Grey Institute, spoke on *Rock Doves and the process of 'extinction by hybridization'*. The Rock Dove *Columba livia* is the wild form of the feral domestic pigeon and, following widespread hybridization over many years, pure Rock Doves are now extinct across much of Europe. Will's work has focused on remote sites in Scotland and Ireland with Rock Dove populations that have experienced limited interbreeding with feral pigeons, providing both a case study to investigate the process of 'extinction by hybridization' and a valuable natural comparison for those who study domestic pigeons in the laboratory.

Finally, in late November, Keith Betton (currently Chair of the Hampshire Ornithological Society) described his involvement in *Saving the Stone-curlew Burhinus oedicnemus*. Since 2009 he has been part of a small RSPB team that works towards conserving the Stone-curlews that breed in the Wessex region. This was originally set up in the early 1990s and aims to work with farmers and landowners to manage areas to provide suitable undisturbed nesting sites. Without help and intervention, Stone-curlews are unlikely to survive alongside modern farming, but in Wessex the population has increased from about 50 pairs in 1992 to 150 pairs today.

Overall, as befits a club with the worldwide remit of the BOC, 2023 saw a wide-ranging programme spanning diverse regions, bird species and topics. Long may it continue!

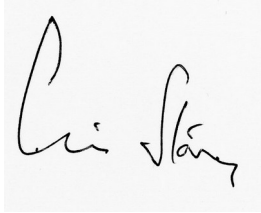
**Robert Prÿs-Jones**

## **Trustees and Administration**

The Club is greatly indebted to Guy Kirwan for his outstanding editorship of the Bulletin and to Robert Prÿs-Jones for organising the talks programme, which has been in his care since 2010. Next year he will hand over these responsibilities to others, having established an outstanding track record for which we are very grateful.

At the end of the year, Richard Price, Nigel Crocker, and Stephen Rumsey, trustees of the Herbert Stevens Trust, said that they wished to retire as soon as was practicable. Their dedication to the Club and their skilful management of the Trust funds over many years has ensured a firm financial base on which the Club has been able to develop its online presence as well as its book publishing. The Club is very much in their debt, and we send them our thanks and best wishes for the future.

Finally, I must add my personal thanks to my fellow Trustees, and to Guy Kirwan, Nigel Redman, Eng-li Green, and Sarah Nichols, as well as to Frank Mullen for recording and editing the talks on YouTube. We are also delighted to welcome Cecilia Derrick into the team, who at the end of the year launched the Club's Instagram account. 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

20 August 2024