

# **The British Ornithologists' Club**

*Founded 5 October 1892 Registered Charity No1169733*

## **BOC Annual Review and Accounts 2024**

### **The Chairman's Review 2024**

The most innovative event of the year was Avian Odyssey 2024 conference held on 21 September 2024 at the Natural History Museum London, in conjunction with the regional bird clubs, and in association with, and support of, the Natural History Museum's exhibition *Birds Brilliant and Bizarre*. It was universally considered an outstanding success, covering in detail the many challenges facing birdlife worldwide. Under BOC meetings in 2024 below, Robert Prŷs-Jones gives a detailed account of this event and the other meetings held during the year, both at the Barlow Mow and in conjunction with the Linnean Society at Burlington House. We were delighted to continue this association with the Society. There were two other outstanding talks given at the Barley Mow : in March by Laura Vaughan-Hirsch on the Stork programme at Knepp ( White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* nesting in Sussex ) and in November by Utka Perlitas of Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey, on Unveiling diversity: phylogeography, species limits, and evolutionary history of turacos (Aves: Musophagidae) who provided 'A compelling close to a typically diverse year of Club talks.'

Guy Kirwan reports that the Bulletin had another successful year noting that 'Vol. 144 comprised 476 pages (something of a dip after two 'bumper' years) with 41 papers of broad geographical scope, although contributions on New World (especially Neotropical), Afrotropical, and Indo-Pacific region birds once again were especially well represented.' He welcomed two new Associate Editors, 'Juan Freile and Flavia Montaño-Centellas ... [who] unquestionably strengthened our capacity, broadened our outreach to capable referees, and spread some of the workload.'

The BioOne 2024 Report noted that the number of hits in 2024, - full text access, PDF downloads and abstract views - was 160,962 an increase of 14% over 2023.



The report details the articles most accessed during 2024,

Rank	Article Title	Volume	Hits
1	Audubon's Bird of Washington: unravelling the fraud that launched The birds of America	Vol. 140	237
2	A consolidated checklist and new avifaunal records for southern Tigray, Ethiopia	Vol. 143	177
3	The taxonomic status of Crimson-crested Turaco <i>Menelikornis (leucotis) donaldsoni</i>	Vol. 142	166
4	The world's largest hummingbird was described 131 years ago	Vol. 144	147
5	Specimens of the extinct Spectacled Cormorant <i>Urile perspicillatus</i>	Vol. 144	138
6	What's in a name? Nomenclature for colour aberrations in birds reviewed	Vol. 141	109
7	On Temminck's tailless Ceylon Junglefowl, and how Darwin denied their existence	Vol. 137	100
8	The taxonomic history of Black-shouldered Peafowl; with Darwin's help downgraded from species to variation	Vol. 143	94
9	The dark side of birds: melanism—facts and fiction	Vol. 137	86
10	An updated checklist of the birds of Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil, with comments on new, rare, and unconfirmed species	Vol. 140	80

and the top users by **Institution** and **Country**,

Rank	Institution	Hits
1	Johns Hopkins University	629
2	University of Illinois at Chicago	269
3	University of Cambridge	161
4	Universiteit Twente	148
5	Cornell University	99
6	UB Freiburg (WIB6049)	96
7	Natural History Museum London	94
8	Michigan State University	78
9	Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso do Sul (UFMS)	72
10	Universiteit Utrecht	59

Rank	Country	Hits
1	United States	2,489
2	Brazil	497
3	United Kingdom	462
4	Netherlands	347
5	Canada	213
6	Australia	211
7	Germany	202
8	Mexico	87
9	Sweden	73
10	India	70



At the beginning of the year, the Club launched a series of biographies of the founders of the Club. Robert Prŷs-Jones introduced the series in The founding of the British Ornithologists' Club, and its main protagonists in the Bulletin 144 (1), 91-95, (4 March 2024) <https://doi.org/10.25226/bboc.v144i1.2024.a10>, followed by the opening Blog on Richard Bowler Sharpe. Biographies were posted monthly ending in June 2025: <https://boc-online.org/boc-blog/founding-biographies>.

An additional Blog was posted with the title: Henry Seebohm lives on in the splendid British Ornithologists' Club Gavel.

Our social media following grows. We have 3,200 followers on Facebook, 755 on Instagram, but so far only 52 on BlueSky.

During the year we published four videos of talks on YouTube, which accumulated 1,214 views; there were a total of 2,386 views across all the talk videos and an additional 50 YouTube subscribers. The PDF of Cuba in Translation has been downloaded 2,298 times since publication in 2021.

## **Financial Report 2024**

RW Malin, Hon Treasurer

Figures reflect transactions in our bank accounts in 2024, 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 charities are legally separate.

### **Income and expenditure**

Income in 2024 was £20,189, -£573 (or 3%) below 2023 level. Herbert Stevens and Clancey investment income was down by £858 (or 5%), and there were no CIO dividends in the year (£2,607 in 2023). Old BOC subscriptions were down by £45, CIO donations were £81 higher - so this income category was £36 (or 2%) higher. Book sales were £2,253, a 7-fold increase (£1,935) on 2023. Gift Aid of £810 (covering the prior 3 years) was claimed, and £111 interest was received (c.f., nil in 2023).



Expenditure in 2024 was £28,862 – an increase of £2,961 (or 11%) over the year. Most of the increase was legal costs incurred of £2,585 (due to changing the mechanism by which we hold Herbert Stevens investments) and higher BioOne charges (mainly exchange rate related, of £680). Editorial costs were largely unchanged, but we incurred higher publication costs of £9,419 (£9,008 in 2023). Website costs rose by £226, but meeting costs were around £50 lower. The Annual conference, this year with the African, Neotropical and Oriental Bird Clubs, the Ornithological Society of the Middle East, and BirdLife International, cost £1,802 (£1,127 in 2023) but the cost was shared by the five clubs and £340 had already been reimbursed by year end. Due to the timing of billing, Alcedo's charges for the Bulletin were £1,176 lower.

The net shortfall was £8,673 (including £9,419 publication costs) – some 69% higher than the 2023 shortfall of £5,139.

The BOC's investment income stood up well in 2024, and the year's shortfall was largely due to publication costs. Further publications are in hand (and all costs continue to be expensed as incurred) meaning that, unless donation and subscription incomes rise appreciably, there will be more shortfalls. BioOne costs are now refunded by Clancey (to cover one of the CIO's biggest expenses) which reduces the Clancey balance, and hence the amount of interest accrued. This is not immediately reflected in CIO income as interest on CIO deposits is paid at maturity, or at year end, but it will show through in 2025 and beyond.

## **Balance Sheet**

A 'combined' balance sheet at the end of 2024 shows assets of £471,718 – an increase of £5,296 (or 1%) from £466,422 in 2023.

The value of our Herbert Stevens investment units increased by £10,108 (or 1%) – more than offsetting our annual deficit.

Medium-term deposits (Clancey) reduced to £53,286 from £73,548. £23,286 of this decrease was a withdrawal to cover past BioOne costs, £2,797 was interest credited in



the year, and £225 was a late payment from Eden Tree. Despite the withdrawal, interest credited was more than double that in 2023, as deposit interest rates rose in 2023.

The CIO held Building Society deposits were £79,480 at year end, being £40,000 on a 1-year fixed deposit, and £39,480 on an Instant Access account – both at Saffron Building Society. The balance of the latter includes £980 interest credited on 31.12.2024 (and appear as income in the 2025 figures). Interest on the former will be paid on maturity (22.03.25) and will show in our 2025 results.

We opened an account at Invest & Fund (a residential property lending platform) in mid-2024 and had invested £27,700 by 31.12.24 – in a portfolio of c. 10 loans, mainly having lot sizes between £250 and £3,500. The loans pay interest of around 7.5%, and this will benefit our 2025 figures.



R W Malin  
Hon Treasurer

7 March 2025



## **The Bulletin**

Guy Kirwan, Hon Editor

Vol. 144 comprised 476 pages (something of a dip after two ‘bumper’ years) with 41 papers of broad geographical scope, although contributions on New World (especially Neotropical), Afrotropical, and Indo-Pacific region birds once again were especially well represented. The Bulletin was unquestionably fortunate that most referees continued to deliver their reviews promptly, despite the many pressures. For the first time in some years, no new taxon names were published in the Bulletin in 2024. Papers of particular interest included: reviews of the history and available specimens of two extinct or presumed extinct species, Spectacled Cormorant *Urile perspicillatus* and White-eyed River Martin *Pseudochelidon sirintarae*, a suggestion that the Sangihe Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx sangirensis* represents a separate (but extinct) species, comments on the taxonomy of various North American birds (the first paper in a projected short series), the first reports of eight Old World bird taxa in French Guiana, and a fresh taxonomic analysis of the mysterious Malagasy endemic *Coua cristata maxima*. For papers published in 2024, the interval between receipt and publication was 2–18 months, with a mean of c. 6.8 months. The Bulletin received a total of 50 new manuscripts in 2024, of which 11 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, Juan Freile, Flavia Montaña-Centellas, 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. Both Juan Freile and Flavia Montaña-Centellas were welcomed as new Associate Editors at the start of 2024, and have unquestionably strengthened our capacity, broadened our outreach to capable referees, and spread some of the workload. 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.

## **BOC meetings in 2024**



## Robert Prŷs-Jones

Club meetings in 2024 comprised regular talks early and late in the year, at the usual venue of the Barley Mow, Westminster, and, in between, one lecture jointly with the Linnean at their venue in Piccadilly and a one-day conference held in conjunction with the Natural History Museum at their Flett Theatre in South Kensington. As is now usual, the events were all subsequently posted on-line via YouTube, linked to the Club's website <https://boc-online.org>, allowing numerous people unable to attend in person to view them.

The March talk was delivered by Laura Vaughan-Hirsch on White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* nesting in Sussex. Now also a committee member of the Club, Laura is project officer managing the introduced White Stork project at the Knepp Estate, West Sussex, which aims to establish a self-sustaining population of at least 50 breeding pairs in southern England by 2030. In her fascinating presentation, she focused on the history and life cycle of the species in Sussex and the challenges faced by the adults and their fledglings, considering in particular such factors as diet and the problems faced by those individuals that migrate.

This was followed by the joint meeting with the Linnean Society in May, at which Catherine Sheard, University of Aberdeen, spoke on What can birds' nests teach us about evolution? Having overviewed the diversity of birds' nests and the limitations to our current understanding of the reasons for this, she discussed her recent research in building up a detailed comparative database of nest traits of the world's birds. Among her findings from this so far are, at a macro level, that the types and locations of nests that species build do not correlate with climate, but to some extent do with both body size and a flight ability index. On a more fine-grained level, cup-nesting passerines nesting in colder places build bigger nests, but cold cannot be clearly linked to the structure of nests themselves.

The full-day joint meeting with the NHM in their Flett Theatre in September was the 10<sup>th</sup> to date and the most ambitious given the diversity of nine ornithological organisations invited to contribute. Entitled Avian Odyssey 1, and with a focus on conservation, proceedings began with Kevin Cox (RSPB) talking on Safeguarding species and giving nature a home, overviewing the RSPB's involved with bird conservation in Britain and overseas. Following this in the morning session, Ken Norris (NHM) spoke on Why Museums matter – the importance of bird collections in a changing world),



followed by Juliet Vickery (BTO) on Birds, Science, People – a powerful combination), respectively highlighting the key roles that specimen collections and a co-ordinated widespread network of amateur observers can have in protecting species. The final talk of the morning session and the three initial afternoon lectures were given by representatives of bird organisations covering the main geographical parts of the world: Mike Edgecombe (OBC) spoke on Avian adventures beyond Wallace's Line, Hazell Shokellu Thompson (ABC) on the White-necked Picathartes *Picathartes gymnocephalus* – an African avian oddity, Rob Sheldon (OSME) on Understanding the migration routes of the critically endangered Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* and Joseph Tobias (NBC) on South America: the Bird Continent. Closing the day was an impassioned speech by Nigel Collar (BirdLife) on Birds – brilliant, bizarre, belittled and broken, highlighting the massive scale of the conservation problem we now face and urging us to organise for it. Overall, an always informative, at times depressing, but overall inspiring, event that hopefully sets the stage for similar events to come.

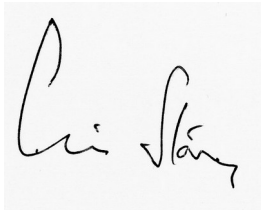
The final contribution of the year came from Utku Perktas, Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey, on Unveiling diversity: phylogeography, species limits, and evolutionary history of turacos (Aves: Musophagidae). His talk on this bird family endemic to sub-Saharan Africa covered his research into their phylogeography, species limits and evolutionary relationships using museum collections and DNA sequencing, with results leading to a novel reclassification of the family. Furthermore, he also outlined his co-operative, on-going project to create historical databases of biocultural diversity by integrating African bird specimen data, offering new insights into turaco evolutionary history. A compelling close to a typically diverse year of Club talks.

## **Trustees and Administration**



The Club was delighted to welcome Laura Vaughan-Hirsch as a trustee. Laura is the project officer managing the White Stork Project at the Knepp Estate, West Sussex. After reading Biology at Royal Holloway University, she worked in Education as a Science Teacher and Middle Leader at a secondary school in Horsham.

Finally, I must add my personal thanks to my fellow Trustees, to Guy Kirwan for his continuing outstanding editorship of the Bulletin, to Nigel Redman, commissioning editor of the Checklist series, to Eng-li Green, and Sarah Nichols, and to Frank Mullen for recording and editing the talks on YouTube. Without their unstinting work the Club would not be able to flourish.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Storey', on a light grey background.

Chris Storey, Chairman

28 August 2025