

## **Bulletin of the BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB**

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# Bulletin of the BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Vol. 138 No. 4

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## CLUB ANNOUNCEMENTS

The 991st meeting of the Club was held on Monday 17 September 2018 in the upstairs room at the Barley Mow, 104 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2EE. Twenty-one people were present: Miss H. Baker, Mr P. J. Belman, Mr R. Baker, Mr T. Brown, Mr S. Chapman, Mr G. Davidson, Mr G. de Silva, Mr D. J. Fisher, Ms R. Gleave, Dr C. F. Mann, Dr H. Lloyd (*Speaker*), Mr D. J. Montier, Mrs M. Montier, Dr S. Pringle, Mr R. Pritchett, Dr R. Prŷs-Jones, Dr P. Rudge, Mr S. A. H. Statham, Mr C. W. R. Storey (*Chairman*), Mr S. Turvey, Ms J. White.

Huw Lloyd gave a talk entitled *Crabs, cranes, and cuckoos: developing bird conservation science in China*. China is making tremendous efforts to reach out to the international bird conservation community to help develop its next generation of bird conservationists. Since 2010, Huw Lloyd and colleagues have been working with Chinese universities and the China Ornithological Society, helping to develop these young scientists. These research collaborations have shed new light on the ecology of migratory Red-crowned Cranes *Grus japonensis*, revealing how they respond to the pressures of habitat change, and what sustains their wintering population. They have also discovered how some of China's threatened bird populations are likely to respond to climate change, and how vocal individuality in populations of male Common Cuckoos *Cuculus canorus* can be used as a non-invasive marker for monitoring their population.

## OBITUARY

### Patricia ('Paddy') A. Cottam (née Lawford), 1932–2018

Mrs 'Paddy' Cottam, who was born on 5 February 1932 and sadly died on 13 April 2018, worked as a curatorial Assistant in the British Museum (Natural History) (BMNH) Bird Room for six and a half years, from 1 November 1950 until 30 April 1957. The daughter of Commander Lawford, who worked in the Admiralty's Hydrographic Department in London, she grew up in London's suburbia, with periods in Dorset and Bath, in the latter of which she was a pupil at the Royal High School. Biology was her favourite subject and she attained a degree in Zoology from Chelsea Polytechnic through attending night school there. Following her initial curatorial apprenticeship after joining BMNH, early in 1952 she and a fellow young Assistant, Graham Cowles, were assigned to the avian osteology collection, which had just been moved into new accommodation in the museum basement. Partly due to the intervention of World War II, little curatorial work had been undertaken on bird skeletons for c.20 years, and the main task they initially set themselves was to prepare a separate avian osteology register, involving the extraction of relevant data from old registers as well as much new registering of backlogged specimens. On completion of this in 1953, a systematic re-curation of the collection was begun, which continued through Paddy's remaining years of service.

During 1954, Paddy was involved in her first scientific publication, when she assisted the Head of the Bird Room, J. D. Macdonald, to compile records of birds observed at sea during *HMS Challenger's* recent Pacific Ocean cruise (Macdonald & Lawford 1954). By 1955, the Department's Annual Report notes that 'Miss P. A. Lawford has carried out osteological research on the Pelecaniform characters of the Shoe-bill Stork, *Balaeniceps rex*', presumably arising out of the re-curation of storks and their allies on which she had been involved in the previous year. The following year's report noted that she had not only completed this research but begun further investigations into the osteology of the Anhimidae and Anatidae, although the latter never developed further due to her marriage to husband David on 6 October 1956 and subsequent departure from BMNH in spring 1957, when she moved to Lincoln.

Paddy's *Balaeniceps* publication (Cottam 1957) is striking for more than one reason. Firstly, as a young female Assistant, she had nevertheless impressed her superiors sufficiently to be supported not only by the Head of the Bird Room, but also by the Zoology Department Keeper and Deputy Keeper (acknowledged in the paper), in undertaking a major piece of research and publishing it as sole author. Secondly, the research itself was quite remarkably prescient and retains a continuing importance. Although Gould had suggested a possible Pelecaniform relationship for *Balaeniceps rex* when he described the species in the early 1850s, consensus opinion for the following 100 years had placed it close to the storks. Paddy's osteological conclusions have since been largely supported by morphological and molecular research that points to a close relationship between pelicans, the Shoebill and Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta*, the last-named not included

in her study. The importance of Paddy's work was immediately recognised, as shown by a letter of August 1957 from the eminent anatomist Prof. A. J. E. Cave, St Bart's Hospital, to J. D. Macdonald, in which he commented '...this is an excellent and gratifying piece of work ... [which] demonstrates what good work can be effected by the unbiased observant eye and a modicum of common sense ... Your lady has produced a little classic which will [long] retain its significance in 'the literature''.

Paddy loved working in BMNH and clearly had a close and easy-going friendship with her Bird Room colleagues, notably Graham Cowles, who remained working on birds in the museum until his retirement in 1991 and continued to correspond with her up to her death. This included her relationship with J. D. Macdonald, as revealed in letters they exchanged during the period immediately following her retirement. In mid-May 1957, Paddy returned to London to give a lecture at the Zoological Society on her *Balaeniceps* research. Writing to Macdonald prior to this, she asked him to please 'tell Graham that it will be much more frightening than getting married', to which Macdonald replied that she need have no worries as not only had she something really interesting to put across but, moreover, the lecture would soon be over and done whereas the marriage was only just beginning!

In Lincoln, she endeavoured unsuccessfully to find work in a local museum, but ended up working at Fisons until the birth of her first daughter in 1959. Following periods in Hitchin, where her second daughter was born, and Brentwood, the family moved long term to Newcastle in May 1969. To her great frustration, she was again unable to obtain paid work in a natural history museum and had to retrain as a secretary, working in this role in a hotel, a garage and, for many years, a school. However, she also began volunteering in the Hancock Museum (now the Great North Museum: Hancock), Newcastle, initially on a few afternoons but, after retirement, for five mornings a week. Her association with the Hancock, where she identified, catalogued and labelled their important osteology collection, lasted approaching 30 years and, in the words of her family, 'saved her! A major exhibition on 'Bones' staged by the Hancock in 2017 was in important part dependent on her many prior years of work, and while volunteering there she published her only other scientific paper of which I am aware (Cottam 1991), as well as providing input to work published by others on whale bones. She is remembered by a then senior staff member there, Alec Coles, as someone who selflessly gave her heart, soul and much time to a cause she passionately believed in.

I am grateful to Fiona Waugh, daughter of Paddy, and to Alec Coles, Graham Cowles, Dan Gordon and Effie Warr, former colleagues of Paddy, for information.

#### References:

- Macdonald, J. D. & Lawford, P. A. 1954. Sight records of birds in the Pacific compiled from the bird log kept during the recent cruise of H.M.S. Challenger. *Emu* 54: 7–28.
- Cottam, P. A. 1957. The Pelecaniform characters of the skeleton of the Shoebill Stork, *Balaeniceps rex*. *Bull. Brit. Mus. (Nat. Hist.)*, Zool. ser. 5: 49–72.
- Cottam, P. A. 1991. White Tailed Eagle – two more records for Northumberland. *Trans. Nat. Hist. Soc. Northumbria* 55: 291–293.

Robert Prŷs-Jones

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### REFEREES

I am grateful to the following, who have reviewed manuscripts submitted to the Bulletin during the last year (those who refereed more than one manuscript are denoted by an asterisk in parentheses): David Allan, Jorge Avendaño, Rob Bjijsma, Elisa Bonaccorso, Frederik Brammer, Guilherme Brito, Terry Chesser, Nigel J. Collar (\*), Jo Cooper, Andrea Corso, Geoffrey Davison, Andrew Elliott, Brian Finch (\*), Juan F. Freile, Hector Gómez de Silva, Harold F. Greeney, Hein van Grouw (\*), Steve N. G. Howell (\*), Julian P. Hume, Nigel Hunter, Morton L. Isler, Ron Johnstone, Niels Krabbe, Alex Lees (\*), Wayne Longmore (\*), Clive F. Mann, David Manry, Daniel Mennill, Israel Moreno-Contreras, Pat Morris, José Fernando Pacheco (\*), Robert J. Payne, Vítor Piacentini, Tony Prater, Robert Prŷs-Jones (\*), Paulo C. Pulgarín, Peter Pyle, Joel Ralston, Frank Rheindt, Dominic Rollinson, Roger Safford, Richard Schodde (\*), Thomas S. Schulenberg, Christopher J. Sharpe (\*), Frank D. Steinheimer (\*), Fernando Costa Straube, Michael Tarburton, Till Töpfer, Don Turner, Andrew Vallely, George Wallace, David R. Wells (\*), Kevin J. Zimmer (\*) and Kristof Zyskowski. —THE HON. EDITOR

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### FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

See also BOC website: <http://www.boc-online.org>

**BOC MEETINGS** are open to **all**, not just BOC members, **and are free**.

Evening meetings are in **an upstairs room at The Barley Mow, 104 Horseferry Road, Westminster, London SW1P 2EE**. The nearest Tube stations are Victoria and St James's Park; and the 507 bus, which runs from Victoria to Waterloo, stops nearby. For maps, see [http://www.markettaverns.co.uk/the\\_barley\\_mow.html](http://www.markettaverns.co.uk/the_barley_mow.html) or ask the Chairman for directions.

The cash bar opens at **6.00 pm** and those who wish to eat after the meeting can place an order. **The talk will start at 6.30 pm** and, with questions, will last c.1 hour.

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**Monday 18 March 2019—6.30 pm—Julia Day**—*Continental vs. island evolution of a ‘great speciator’: resolving the *Zosterops* taxonomic conundrum.*

*Abstract:* Different environments, such as islands and continents, have had profound effects on how biodiversity is shaped. While evolutionary processes are predicted to follow different patterns in island and mainland radiations, the extent to which these geographical contexts influence evolutionary trajectories remains poorly understood. This is in part because few studies have focused on species-rich groups of highly dispersive animals, which can colonise both continents and extensive archipelagos over comparable timeframes. In this talk I will focus on how resolving the evolutionary relationships of white-eyes (*Zosterops*)—lauded as a ‘great speciator’—in Africa, Arabia and associated islands, combined with morphological data, has allowed us to better understand evolutionary processes across these different geographic landscapes. I will also discuss how museum collections and genetic data have aided in the task of deciphering the tricky and sometimes infuriating taxonomy of this highly cryptic group, leading to a likely substantial increase in mainland species.

*Biography:* Julia Day is Associate Professor at University College London and has developed a research programme in evolutionary and, more recently, ecological research. She mainly works on species-rich groups of African fishes but, being a birder, couldn’t resist the challenge of working on a notoriously difficult-to-identify avian group.

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Friends receive regular updates about Club events and are also eligible for discounts on the Club’s Occasional Publications. It would assist our Treasurer, Richard Malin (e-mail: [rmalin21@gmail.com](mailto:rmalin21@gmail.com)), if you would kindly inform him if you intend becoming a Friend of the BOC.

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#### The *Bulletin* and other BOC publications

From volume 137 (2017), the *Bulletin* of the BOC has become an online journal, published quarterly, that is available to all readers without charge. Furthermore, it does not levy any publication charges (including for colour plates) on authors of papers and has a median publication time from receipt to publication of six months. Prospective authors are invited to contact the *Bulletin* editor, Guy Kirwan ([GMKirwan@aol.com](mailto:GMKirwan@aol.com)), to discuss future submissions or look at <http://boc-online.org/bulletin/bulletin-contributions>. Back numbers up to volume 132 (2012) are available via the Biodiversity Heritage Library website: [www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/46639#/summary](http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/46639#/summary); vols. 132–136 are available on the BOC website: <http://boc-online.org/>

BOC Occasional Publications are available from the BOC Office or online at [info@boc-online.org](mailto:info@boc-online.org). Future BOC-published checklists will be available from NHBS and as advised on the BOC website. As its online repository, the BOC uses the British Library Online Archive (in accordance with IZCN 1999, Art. 8.5.3.1).