

## Club Announcements

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# Bulletin of the BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

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## CLUB ANNOUNCEMENTS

The 987th meeting of the Club was held on Monday 18 September 2017 in the upstairs room at the Barley Mow, 104 Horseferry Road, Westminster, London SW1P 2EE.

Sixteen friends and three visitors were recorded as present. Friends attending were Miss H. Baker, Cdr. M. B. Casement, RN, Mr S. Chapman, Dr N. J. Collar (*Speaker*), Mr M. Earp, Dr C. Fisher, Mr D. J. Fisher, Mr R. Langley, Mr D. J. Montier, Mr R. Pritchett, Mr D. Prŷs-Jones, Dr R. Prŷs-Jones, Dr D. C. D. Russell, Mr. S. A. H. Statham, Mr C. W. R. Storey (*Chairman*) and Mr P. Wilkinson.

Visitors attending were Mr G. de Silva, Ms J. Hatton and Mrs M. Montier.

Dr Nigel Collar gave a talk entitled *Preparing the Illustrated Checklist: value vs vanity*, and provided the following summary. World checklists are necessary but unforgiving confections. International conservation organisations and legal instruments require a list that is at once stable yet flexible, standardised yet sensitive. Using a set of criteria based on degree of phenotypical differentiation, the recent HBW and BirdLife checklist has sought to assess multifarious taxonomic suggestions emerging from the (mostly molecular) literature, but has also proposed a considerable number of novel changes. I called the talk 'value vs vanity' because, while there is obvious value in having a world list, it inevitably needs a degree of grandiose self-obsession to take on such a task and a degree of the opposite quality to keep reality in check. I thought of calling it 'Taxonomy and the Augean Stables', 'Taxonomy and the Minotaur's Labyrinth' or 'Taxonomy and the Punishment of Sisyphus', but these all project a mythical status on the work which is scarcely apposite.

Use of the Tobias criteria (*Ibis* 152: 724–746, 2010) helped the project to confront a significant number of issues which remained poorly researched and resolved. Criticisms of these criteria appearing in various papers as brief but sharply targeted asides can all be answered, including ones relating to the problem of paraphyly. One particular criticism, that the criteria ignore molecular evidence, is unfounded; it is just that there is no way to incorporate such evidence into the system of scoring that the criteria operate. Molecular scientists commonly propound that no genetic difference indicates conspecificity; but cases exist where genetic differences have not been found between taxa and yet the taxa in question are sympatric, so clearly species. Intriguingly, an Australian parrot has now been found to be able to discriminate subspecies by olfaction (*Anim. Behav.* 95: 155–164, 2014); is this perhaps a clue to the means by which Procellariiformes tell each other apart at colonies at night?

A recent call has been made for a single world list (*Nature* 546: 25–27, 2017) to be created through the International Union of Biological Sciences. As it happens, the four current world lists (IOC, 'Howard & Moore', Clements, and HBW-BirdLife) are in discussions to see if they can merge, which is generally recognised as desirable provided uniformity does not stifle independence of thought. That we are on safe ground in this last regard is indicated by the almost-as-recent call to revise the global avifauna according to the Phylogenetic Species Concept (*PLoS ONE* 11[11]: e0166307, 2016), which is likely to keep everyone on their taxonomic toes for many years yet.

## CORRIGENDA

986th Meeting. The lists of those attending included: Dr A. Tye and Mrs B. Azuero-Benites. Apologies for these errors in transcription (C. W. R. Storey).

## REVIEWS

Woods, R. W. 2017. *The birds of the Falkland Islands*. BOC Checklist 25. British Ornithologists' Club, Tring. 256 pp, 64 colour plates. ISBN 978-0-09522886-6-4. £29.99.

Following a hiatus of eight years, and the publication of the last jointly issued BOC and BOU checklist to the West Indian island of Barbados, the series emerges newly invigorated, under the fresh editorship of David Wells and the sole auspices of the BOC, with this extremely useful volume to the Falkland Islands. The author of this addition to an often invaluable but somewhat eclectic series, Robin Woods, has impeccable credentials, not only having produced two of the other most important modern works on the region's avifauna, *Guide to birds of the Falkland Islands* (1988) and *Atlas of breeding birds of the Falkland Islands* (co-authored with his wife),

but also many other manuscripts on Falkland birds in the periodical literature. His connection with the archipelago goes back more than 60 years, starting in 1956.

Although the total number of islands is 780, most of the land area of the archipelago (12,200 km<sup>2</sup>) comprises just two of these, East and West Falkland. The islands' capital, Stanley, is located in the north-east corner of East Falkland, which island is certainly the most frequently visited, not just by ornithologists.

In contrast to his 1988 work, which provided accounts for 185 species, Woods' latest checklist recognises 205 bird species as occurring in the islands, of which 55 are resident breeders, six breeding summer visitors, nine possible breeders, seven are former breeders, 11 non-breeding visitors, 12 transient visitors and 105 are vagrants, the latter group unsurprisingly being predominantly of New World origin. Another 54 species have been mentioned as occurring, but definite proof is unavailable at present. These latter are the subject of the one of the book's penultimate sections, whereas the bulk of the volume, 126 pages, comprises the accounts pertaining to the confirmed species.

The format and design of the species accounts will be at once distinctive yet familiar to frequent purchasers of the checklist series. Regular sections include: 'Alternative names', 'Distribution' (covering world range), 'Falklands' (status and distribution within the archipelago), 'Taxonomy', 'Comments' and 'Study material' (relevant specimens located at museums throughout the world). The level of detail should satisfy most users. Scattered across 32 pages within this section of the work, the colour plates (maps, plus photographs of habitats and birds) provide welcome accompaniment. The checklist's 'top' and 'tail' comprises a series of introductory sections then appendices, references and index, respectively. Among the preparatory material are checklist mainstays such as 'Geography', 'Climate and weather', 'Habitats', 'Human impacts and responses', 'Ornithological history', 'Overview of the avifauna' and 'Palaeornithology', while the seven appendices comprise a gazetteer of place names, complete list of confirmed species, tables of species by status, whereabouts of specimens (listing total holdings museum by museum), Important Bird Areas, a list of non-avian taxa mentioned in the volume, and alternative scientific and vernacular names. The 23 pages of references attest to a thorough review of the available literature.

Robin Woods' legacy and enduring association with Falkland Island birds is cemented with this important work, which I foresee being collectively welcomed by students of island avifaunas, those interested in the birds of South America or the Western Hemisphere in general, or 'mere' collectors of the series. My one regret is that, with the switch to a softback design, the series will lose some of its more physical durability—my copy displays a rather worrying amount of 'wear and tear' following but a few months of largely undisturbed shelf-life.

*Guy M. Kirwan*

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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): Jason Anderson, Juan I. Areta, John Atkins, Jorge Avendaño (\*), Bas van Balen (\*), Bruce M. Beehler, Peter Boesman (\*), Vincent Bretagnolle, Mark Brigham, Michael Brooke, Diego Calderón (\*), Caio J. Carlos, Alice Cibois (\*), Nigel Cleere, Mario Cohn-Haft, Charles T. Collins, Marco Aurélio Crozariol, Richard Dean, Thomas M. Donegan (\*), Dale Dyer, Andrew Elliott, Anthony J. Gaston, Héctor Gómez de Silva, Manuel Grosselet, David T. Holyoak, Steve N. G. Howell (\*), Julian P. Hume, Johan Ingels, Morton L. Isler, Lia Kajiki, Mary LeCroy, Gabriel Leite, Manuel Marín, Jeff Marks, Michael Mills, Ricardo Palma, Storrs L. Olson, José Fernando Pacheco (\*), Glauco Pereira, Vítor Piacentini, Aasheesh Pittie, Thane K. Pratt, Richard O. Prum, Robert Prŷs-Jones, Paulo C. Pulgarín, Peter Pyle, Sébastien Reeber, Frank Rheindt, Phil Round (\*), Richard Schodde (\*), Karl Schuchmann, Thomas S. Schulenberg, Frederick Sheldon, Hadoram Shirihai, Frank D. Steinheimer, Michael Tarburton, Alan Tennyson, Bert Theunissen, Jean-Claude Thibault (\*), Andrew Vallely, Bianca Vieira, Dick Watling, André Weller, David R. Wells and John van Wyhe.—THE HON. EDITOR