Club Announcements

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CLUB ANNOUNCEMENTS

Bon Voyage? 250 years exploring the natural world

Bon Voyage? 250 Years Exploring the Natural World was the theme for a fascinating conference organised by the Society for the History of Natural History in association with the British Ornithologists' Club and held at the World Museum Liverpool on 14–15 June 2018, marking the 250th anniversary of Captain James Cook's first voyage to the Pacific on *HMS Endeavour*. Cook's voyages influenced many areas of science and endeavour—from astronomy and geology to natural history and anthropology. The meeting drew people from around the world to listen and discuss the history of natural history exploration on land to sea worldwide—the risks the early explorers took, the discoveries they made, and their contributions to science.

Knowsley Hall

Ahead of the conference, on 13 June, delegates visited Knowsley Hall, the home of successive Earls of Derby. It was the 13th Earl, Sir Edward Stanley (1775–1851) whose passion, beyond horse-racing, was his menagerie, aviary and natural history pursuits, which as a major landowner, and one of the richest in England, he was well able to indulge. He assembled a large collection of birds, mammals and plants, and became acquainted with John Latham, the foremost English ornithologist of his day. At the Zoological Society of London, Lord Stanley met Edward Lear and hired him to paint rare species in his own collection. He also became an avid collector of specimens from London and Liverpool dealers, and collectors returning from overseas with live and dead specimens. Contemporary visitors to Knowsley included John James Audubon, Charles Lucien Bonaparte and John Gould.

Conference visitors were also treated to a rare opportunity to examine close-up the paintings of Edward Lear who, besides entertaining children with his nonsense rhymes, was a very gifted artist. Guided by Stephen Lloyd, curator, we gathered in the library among cases of antiquarian portfolios and studied at leisure the finest works of L. J. Robins and Edward Lear.

The conference

The 25 speakers covered a wide range of explorations and discoveries, the full programme being available at: http://shnh.org.uk/events/past-meetings-events/. My summary here focuses on selected papers, notably those of a maritime and / or ornithological bias, which particularly attracted my attention. Jordan Goodman of Univ. College, London, set the scene with his talk on Cook and Banks. What became clear was after the first voyage of the three-mast barque *Endeavour*, starting in 1768, how better organised things became. The vessels were small and cramped, but in 1776 *Resolution* was specifically built with collectors and their collections in mind, with the space normally allocated to a certain degree of luxury for the captain being designed for scientific work. The captain occupied a small-sized cabin. How far Cook voyaged and the progress in navigation made in those 12 years, with the ability to calculate longitude with greater precision using Harrison's marine chronometer, is amazing. Sydney Parkinson was employed by Joseph Banks to travel with him on Cook's first voyage to the Pacific, drawing thousands of plants and animals in very difficult conditions. He died at sea during the voyage and is commemorated in the vernacular and scientific names of Parkinson's Petrel *Procellaria parkinsoni*. On Cook's third voyage on *HMS Resolution*, a converted collier, David Nelson and William Anderson collected vast numbers of living plants to bring back to Kew to create the world's finest botanical collection.

Edwin Rose, Univ. of Cambridge, explained how Banks and Daniel Solander used the Linnaean system of classification to record and classify natural history specimens. Solander had a system he had developed while working at the British Museum to manage the huge amount of information collected. Rose also described the transport of breadfruit plants from the Pacific, which when established were used to feed the workers in the Caribbean sugar plantations, as conflict prevented the supply of grain from America.

Preserving and transporting specimens in the early years brought its own challenges. Stanislav Strekopytov, of the Natural History Museum, recounted the evolution of preserving zoological specimens in spirit. For dry specimens, protection against insects was a pressing issue. A corrosive sublimate—mercury(II) chloride—was used at that time, and it continued to be used by taxidermists in Britain well into the 20th century.

1–3. Some the conference attendees at Knowsley Hall (Stephen Chapman)

4. Parkinson's Petrel *Procellaria parkinsoni*, by Joseph Smit, 1896, from *Catalogue of the birds in the British Museum*, vol. 25 (courtesy of Biodiversity Heritage Library)

5. At sea between the Auckland Islands and Campbell Island (© Tony Whitehead www.tonywhitehead.com)

The topic of preservation was picked up by Leslie Overstreet of the Smithsonian Libraries when she addressed *The (most important) books on the Beagle*. When it set sail in December 1831 on its second surveying voyage for the Royal Navy, *HMS Beagle* boasted a library of some 400 books on travel, exploration, natural history, navigation and related subjects, most belonging to Captain Robert Fitzroy. Naturalist Charles Darwin brought some of his own as well. Leslie showed that the two most important titles were small

booklets that illuminate Darwin's work as a practicing naturalist, collecting specimens and describing them in his letters and subsequent publications: the Paris Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle's *Instruction pour les voyageurs…* (1818) and Patrick Syme's *Werner's nomenclature of colours* (1821). She said that methods of preserving and transporting specimens (dead or alive) were a crucial and sometimes controversial interest for naturalists during the centuries. From 1800 arsenical soap was widely used. This is reflected in the incredible number of such publications, particularly in the 19th century, as these activities became more 'institutionalised'. During much the same period, in their correspondence and publications, naturalists had begun trying to define colour terms used to identify and distinguish species, as well as the pigments used to illustrate them, initially by incorporating colour charts in their own books and eventually by establishing standards intended for widespread adoption.

Continuing the theme of skin preservation, the French ornithologist Jean-Baptiste Bécœur's (1718–77) father, was an apothecary. Bécœur studied pharmacy then devoted himself to natural history, studying mainly insects and birds. He developed a method that preserved bird specimens and prevented them from being damaged by insects. His efforts helped revolutionise the conservation of bird specimens and ornithology at the Paris museum. His method was based on arsenic, but he died without publishing the recipe of arsenical soap. It appeared again early in the 19th century. Bécœur's secret had been handed to François Levaillant (1753–1828), who sold the recipe together with his collection of birds, animals and plants to the French government in 1797.

Zoë Varley in her talk on *Robert Fitzroy: captain, collector and collaborator* emphasised the importance of Fitzroy's contribution to the overall success of the second voyage of the Beagle (of which he was captain), including the amassing of a distinct and largely overlooked zoological collection. The young and high-flying Fitzroy, who incidentally developed the instrument for accurately measuring barometric pressure, closely collaborated with Darwin in the task of collecting and documenting zoological specimens, which now largely reside at the Natural History Museum in London and Tring.

Edward Dickinson described how the French naturalist for the Paris museum, Alcide d'Orbigny, travelled extensively in South America between 1826 and 1833. He visited Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia, and returned to France with an enormous collection of more than 10,000 natural history specimens. D'Orbigny wrote at length and brought major collections and exquisite drawings back to France. Several zoological and botanical taxa are named in his honour, including the Rusty-vented (or Creamy-breasted) Canastero *Asthenes dorbignyi*, a species of Furnariidae found in montane scrub in the Andes of Peru, Chile, Bolivia and north-west Argentina, and Grey-breasted Seedsnipe *Thinocorus orbignyianus*, which occurs in temperate grasslands in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Peru.

Robert Prŷs-Jones's talk remained in the 19th century with a focus on how Wallace's Sarawak bird collection sheds light on the development of his ornithological knowledge. Alfred Russell Wallace spent eight years in the Malay Archipelago, visiting Sarawak, where he collected *c.*100 bird species, early in the trip and spending longer there (15 months) than anywhere else. Robert drew on Wallace's field notebook *Birds collected in Borneo* and his revealing annotations on the labels of his specimens to analyse the identification problems Wallace faced in the field, and how his ornithological knowledge and ability to identify the birds he collected evolved over time.

Carlo Bovolo of Fondazione Filippo Burzio, Turin, presented a paper that dealt with the Italian zoologist Filippo De Filippi (1814–67) and his diplomatic and exploratory endeavour for the Kingdom of Italy. Professor Filippi sailed on the corvette *Magenta* as scientific director on a three-year round-the-world voyage. He died in Hong Kong of hepatitis and his assistant Enrico Giglioli was left to publish their findings. De Filippi's or Masatierra Petrel *Pterodroma defilippiana*, a seabird in the family Procellariidae, endemic as a breeder to the Juan Fernández Islands, is named in his memory.

HMS Dryad, sister ship to *HMS Nymphe*, took Edwin Jennings, taxidermist, to the Auckland and Campbell Islands (see photo) in 1878, about the time that Joseph Hatch started exploiting seals and later penguins for fat and oil, so explained Rosi Crane. That said the final conference paper before the reviewer had to leave focused on 20th century natural history explorations made by museum staff aboard the New Zealand government *SS Hinemoa* and other steamships. Rosi Crane, Honorary Curator, History of Science at the Otago Museum in Dunedin, approached this by drawing on the specimens that have survived. Commercial and scientific interests were served by a series of ad hoc expeditions that benefitted museum collections until, in 1895 and 1903, staff carried out the first scientific dredging in New Zealand. Then in 1907 a major scientific expedition utilised the ship's services, setting up camp for the summer on Auckland and Campbell: Rosi's slides depicted the wholesale slaughter of Southern Elephant Seals *Mirounga leonina* for their oil, bringing the species to the verge of extinction at the end of the 19th century. At this point the sealers switched to catching and processing young penguins *Eudyptes* at Nuggets Point on Macquarie Island. This in turn had a devastating impact on their population. Such practices are outlawed today.

Stephen Chapman

Conclusion

The conference brought together a remarkably stimulating range of topics and styles of presentation. In addition to the papers highlighted by Stephen Chapman above, areas of enquiry ranged from the naming of Australian animals (Jack Ashby, *Contrary to the general laws of nature: Europe's earliest encounters with*

Australian animals), to Spruce's voyages in Amazonia and the Andes (Luciana Martins, *An ethnologist avant la letter: Robert Spruce collecting in South America*) and Deborah Wace's artwork in response to the French D'Entrecasteaux scientific expedition to Recherche Bay, Tasmania in 1792–93 (Deborah Wace, *Art and history in the French garden at Recherche Bay*).

The whole event, including the behind-the-scenes tours of the World Museum's collections and the dinner at The Ship and Mitre, was a delightful reminder of the benefits of meeting with members of other societies dedicated to exploring and describing the natural world. The BOC's thanks go to all participants and the creative and indefatigable organisers, and in the hope of more collaboration with SHNH in the future.

Chris Storey

CORRIGENDA

In Sánchez *et al*. (*Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl*. 138: 93–100), Fig. 2 (p. 95) was incorrectly credited by the authors to Ariel A. Fonseca-Arce, but the photograph was taken by Javier Tenorio.

In reporting the discovery of Slate-crowned Antpitta *Grallaricula nana* in north-west Ecuador, Freile *et al*. (2018, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl*. 138: 141) erroneously asserted that Donegan (2008, *Bull. Brit. Orn Cl*. 128: 150–178) had suggested that 'the population in the West Andes of north-central Colombia and the headwaters of the Magdalena Valley… might represent an unnamed subspecies, due to its vocal characters'. What Donegan (2008) actually suggested is that the population of this species from the head of the Magdalena Valley and from the *nudo de Pasto* (in the Colombian dptos. of Cauca, Huila, and on the east slope of the Andes in Nariño) is geographically continuous with the Central Andes / Ecuador / Peru population (*occidentalis*), but might show some intermediate characters in plumage and voice with subspecies *nana* of the East Andes. Donegan (2008) considered the head of the Magdalena Valley population to be unidentified to race, owing to a lack of materials. Moreover, Freile *et al*. (2018: 141) incorrectly claimed that Donegan (2008) 'curiously' included that population within the same 'putative subspecies' as a disjunct West Andes population. However, Donegan (2008: 151) instead elucidated 'small differences' in voice and plumage between the Colombian West Andes population (referred to therein as '*occidentalis*?') and race *occidentalis* (type locality in the Central Andes), suggesting (p. 161) that the former should be 'provisionally treated within *G. n. occidentalis*, but requires further investigation' as a possible undescribed subspecies. The West Andes population and head of the Magdalena Valley populations were treated separately in the text and some appendices of Donegan (2008: 174, 175). This does not affect the subspecific identification (*occidentalis*) of the Ecuadorian west slope population that Freile *et al*. (2018) discovered.

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 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.

Monday 12 November 2018—6.30 pm—Joe Tobias—*The shape of birds, and why it matters.*

Abstract: Birds vary widely in size from the Bee Hummingbird *Mellisuga helenae* to Common Ostrich *Struthio camelus*, and come in a staggering range of shapes. Last century, the field of ecomorphology began to shed light on the way birds are shaped by habitat preferences and foraging behaviour, but studies focused on relatively few species and left numerous gaps in understanding. This talk will explore recent research based on detailed measurements of almost all of the world's bird species, describing how this new influx of information has been combined with spatial, phylogenetic and ecological data to help answer some fundamental questions, such as how does bird diversity arise, and how can it best be conserved?

Biography: Joe Tobias studied the behaviour of the European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* for his Ph.D. at Cambridge University, then worked for ten years in environmental NGOs including BirdLife International, focusing on bird research and conservation projects in South-East Asia, Madagascar and the Neotropics. Returning to academia, he developed a research programme in evolutionary ecology and conservation

biology as a Lecturer at Oxford University, before taking up a Senior Lectureship at Imperial College London. His current research focuses on the evolution and conservation of avian diversity.

Friends of the BOC

The BOC has from 2017 become an online organisation without a paying membership, but instead one that aspires to a supportive network of Friends who share its vision of ornithology—see: http://boc-online.org/. Anyone wishing to become a Friend of the BOC and support its development should pay UK£25.00 by standing order or online payment to the BOC bank account:

Barclays Bank, 16 High Street, Holt, NR25 6BQ, Norfolk
Sort Code: 20-45-45
Account number: 53092003
Account name: The British Ornithologists' Club

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), if you would kindly inform him if you intend becoming a Friend of the BOC.

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), to discuss prospective 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; 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. 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).