

CLUB ANNOUNCEMENTS

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Bulletin of the BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

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The 1010th meeting of the Club was held on Monday 27 November 2023 in the upstairs room at the Barley Mow, 104 Horseferry Road, London, SW1P 2EE. Twelve people were present: Ms A. Belman, Mr P. J. Belman, Mr K. Betton (*Speaker*), Ms L. Gallyer-Barnett, Mr A. Jackson, Mr R. Langley, Ms S. Nichols, Mr S. Palmer, Mr R. Price, Dr R. Prŷs-Jones, Dr A. Richford and Mr C. W. R. Storey (*Chairman*).

Keith Betton gave a talk on *Saving the Stone-curlew Burhinus oediconemus*. Keith, who is a long-standing volunteer with the Royal Society for Protection of Bird's (RSPB) Save the Stone-curlew project, first gave an overview of the family of stone-curlews or thick-knees (Burhinidae; ten species found worldwide). Only one species, *B. oediconemus*, is migratory in the major part of its breeding range. It is largely crepuscular and the birds can sometimes be quite noisy. The species is single-brooded in Mediterranean areas but double-brooded in England. Water is essential and drinking pools attract birds from many territories. Keith used ringing returns to illustrate the migratory routes and winter range of the English population, mentioning some of the hazards faced on migration, including occasional predation by Peregrines *Falco peregrinus* when crossing brightly lit urban areas at night.

Gilbert White described the Stone-curlew as abounding in parts of Hampshire and Sussex in 1768. More recently, the distribution has shifted away from downland, where there has been a decrease in rabbit grazing and an increase in human visitor pressure, onto farmland and military training areas. The shift is well mapped in the British Trust for Ornithology breeding atlases, with core populations now in the 'Brecks' and 'Wessex'. But although the range has contracted, the population, due to conservation intervention and management, has actually tripled.

Keith spoke about the work he has done as a volunteer with a small RSPB team that protects the Stone-curlews breeding in Wessex. With help from external funding, the RSPB established a conservation programme in the early 1990s, working closely with farmers and landowners, some of whom receive subsidies to manage areas to provide undisturbed nesting sites for c.15 pairs. Nests are monitored and egg biometrics are used to predict hatching dates so that farming operations can be avoided or carefully planned when young chicks are present.

With the successful recovery of some raptor populations in Wessex, Keith suggested that diversionsary feeding, particularly of Red Kites *Milvus milvus*, may be beneficial for both Stone-curlews and Northern Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* in the future. Colour ringing has been useful to estimate survival rates and establish site fidelity. The ringing process has also engaged local farmers and their families as stakeholders in the project. Autumn flocks occur (74 birds in 2023) and must include birds raised on other local sites not covered by the project.

Stone-curlews have now been downgraded from Red to Amber on the UK's Red List and the population is increasing. Despite years with cold springs which have adversely affected productivity, in Wessex numbers have increased from c.50 pairs in 1992 to 150 pairs today. Without help and intervention these fascinating birds would be unlikely to survive alongside modern farming. The project has been a huge success.

The meeting was recorded and a video of the event is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjyEaGv58Z4> and via the Club website at: <https://boc-online.org>.

The 1011th meeting of the Club was held on Monday 25 March 2024 in the upstairs room at the Barley Mow, 104 Horseferry Road, London, SW1P 2EE. Twenty-two people were present: Ms A. Belman, Mr P. J. Belman, Mr R. Bray, Mr B. Cockdshauil, Mr. J. Chapman, Ms M. Chapman, Mr S. Chapman, Ms C. Derrick, Ms L. Gallyer-Barnett, Ms F. Greenfield, Mr M. Jennings, Mr R. Langley, Mr T. Morgan, Mr Ş. Mustafa, Mr S. Palmer, Mr R. Peisley, Dr R. Prŷs-Jones, Dr A. Richford, Dr D. Russell, Mr G. de Silva Wijeyeratne, Mr C. W. R. Storey (*Chairman*) and Ms L. Vaughn-Hirsch (*Speaker*).

Laura Vaughan-Hirsch is project officer managing the White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* Project at the Knepp Estate, West Sussex, in collaboration with the Cotswold Wildlife Park (CWP), Wadhurst Park and local landowners, which aims to establish a self-sustaining population of 50 breeding pairs in southern England

by 2030. In her talk Laura addressed the life cycle of the species in Sussex and the challenges faced by the adults and their fledglings. Since 2019 cohorts of juveniles have been brought from CWP in August and kept in an enclosure prior to wild release. A population of 30 rehabilitated flightless birds from Poland is held in a large enclosure that provides a focus for occasional visiting wild birds and a source of free-flying young. In 2023 two pairs of flightless storks successfully fledged three young from ground nests.

The diet of free-flying storks at Knepp includes worms, invertebrates and small mammals. Analysis of stork pellets by Şeniz Mustafa has revealed beetles (Coleoptera) and Field Voles *Microtus agrestis* in the diet. Flightless and free-flying birds alike receive daily supplementary feeding.

The first wild chicks hatched in 2020; three active nests held nine eggs and four young fledged from two nests. In 2021 seven nests with 30 eggs fledged 14 young. The storks nest in oak (*Quercus*) trees, some with three or four nests, with the birds being territorial and loyal to nest site rather than a partner. Nests are constructed from a wide variety of natural woody sticks.

All birds are ringed. To date the project has ringed c.200 birds (137 at CWP and 65 at Knepp). Fifty are confirmed to have migrated and 24 are now dead. Of the latter, the cause of death for 12 could be established: nine were due to collisions or electrocution, mostly on electricity pylons in France and Spain. Other deaths included traffic collision and air sac infection. From birds fitted with GPS, Laura illustrated the fascinating patterns of dispersals across England, as well as France, Spain and Morocco.

Going forwards, Laura explained her role in public engagement, community connection across the continent, developing a schools' programme and engagement with landowners.

The meeting was recorded and a video of the event will soon be available via the Club's YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnPR9Y0Ya6gV35XpUBqAXBA>) and via the Club website at: <https://boc-online.org>.

Friends of the BOC

The BOC has since 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:

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

The *Bulletin* and other BOC publications

Since volume 137 (2017), the *Bulletin* of the BOC has been 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 five to six months. Prospective authors are invited to contact the *Bulletin* editor, Guy Kirwan (GMKirwan@aol.com), to discuss future submissions or look at <http://boc-online.org/bulletin/bulletin-contributions>. Back numbers up to volume 136 (2016) are available via the Biodiversity Heritage Library website: www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/46639#/summary; vols. 132–136 are also 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).