



## CLUB ANNOUNCEMENTS

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# Bulletin of the BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

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### Chairman's message

At the end of last year we had hoped that something like normality might have returned in 2021. In the event covid-19 restrictions and an understandable individual reluctance to travel into central London has meant quarterly talks have been held via Zoom. As reported in previous Bulletins, we have had four outstanding talks with large international audiences, numbers that have been added to by viewers of the YouTube recordings: for example Alex Lees' talk, *Does bird feeding help or hinder avian conservation?* was attended by 195 live, and the YouTube video has since been watched 330 times. The success of these Zoom talks has certainly substantially advanced the Club's charitable objectives of educating the public and encouraging scientific debate on matters ornithological. The 2022 programme is in preparation (see below).

The Annual Report and Accounts for 2020 were submitted as required to the Charity Commission, distributed to Friends on 31 October 2021 and posted on the BOC website: <https://boc-online.org/wp-content/uploads/BOC.ChairmansReview.2020.pdf>. Under normal circumstances they would have been presented at a Review Meeting prior to a Barley Mow talk, with the opportunity for discussion and debate. In the absence of such a meeting we would be very pleased to answer by e-mail any questions that may arise.

Chris Storey

### Recent Meetings

#### Monday 18 October 2021

#### Alexander Lees—*Does bird feeding help or hinder avian conservation?*

*Abstract:* The talk discussed emerging evidence for positive and negative impacts resulting from the provisioning of wildlife with food, water and breeding sites in our gardens. Whilst some provisioning is targeted at single species of conservation concern, generalised provisioning is far more common and can exceed the local availability of natural resources for recipient species. Generalised provisioning is enthusiastically promoted by many conservation organisations as a means to foster connection with nature and help wildlife. However, there is now emerging evidence that such a vast input of additional resources into the environment has diverse, ecosystem-wide consequences.

The direct effects upon species that are regularly fed has garnered most research interest; these are generally positive in leading to increased survival, productivity and hence population growth, although disease transmission at feeding sites within and between species is a serious concern. However, the broader implications of regular feeding for the recipients' non-provisioned competitor species, prey and predators are under-appreciated, and the talk illustrated the pathways via which these may generate pervasive negative impacts for wider biodiversity. Notably, an array of subordinate competitor species that do not make use of human provisioning have suffered serious population declines over the past few decades. There is now an urgent necessity for an in-depth reevaluation of the what, when, where and why of garden bird provisioning.

*Biography:* Dr Alexander Lees is a senior lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University and works on the ecology, biogeography and conservation of birds, especially in Amazonia. He is especially interested in how competition shapes avian community structure in the current era of global change. Alex has written more than 120 scientific papers, books chapters and books, and sits on the steering committee of the Sustainable Amazon Network.



**Monday 15 November 2021****Ken Smith**—*Bars and spots: varying fortunes of our British woodpeckers*

**Abstract:** Compared with the rest of north-west Europe, Britain has a relatively impoverished woodpecker avifauna with only three widespread species—Green *Picus viridis*, Great Spotted *Dendrocopos major* and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers *Dryobates minor*. Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers are increasing in Britain, whereas Lesser Spotted is in ongoing serious decline and is Red-listed. Ken drew on the long-term studies he has conducted in conjunction with his wife Linda and various colleagues and volunteers to explore the reasons for the contrasting trends in Great and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker populations. For Great Spotted, the rise in garden bird feeding, decline in European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* numbers and overall increase in dead wood availability in woodlands may all be linked to its substantial British population increase in recent decades, which has included colonisation of Ireland. For Lesser Spotted, it appears that low breeding success is the key reason underlying its decline. Although Great Spotted Woodpeckers do predate the nests of the smaller species, this is not the main driver of the low breeding success of Lesser Spotted, and there is no evidence that predation has increased in recent decades. Understanding why so few young are raised is likely to require detailed studies of their feeding ecology in the chick-rearing period, during which aphids play a surprisingly important role. It is striking that in the Netherlands, both Great Spotted and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers are currently increasing in numbers.

**Biography:** Dr Ken Smith is now retired and lives in Sussex, but for almost 30 years he worked for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in what is now the Centre for Conservation Science. Over that time, he worked on a wide range of species and habitats, and contributed to many conservation initiatives. In the 1980s he completed his first RSPB project on woodland breeding birds—a national survey which was repeated in 2003/04. This was sufficient to kindle an enduring interest in woodlands and especially woodpeckers. In 2015, Ken and his wife Linda set up [www.woodpecker-network.org.uk](http://www.woodpecker-network.org.uk) with the express purpose of promoting the study of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers and collecting important data on their nesting success. When he lived in Hertfordshire, Ken was a long-standing committee member of the Herts Bird Club, was British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Regional Rep for ten years, and organised much survey work in the county. He has the unique distinction of being an author of three successive county atlas / avifaunas—1968/72, 1988/92 and 2007/11. He was Chair of the BTO Ringing Committee for six years and, since moving to the West Sussex/Hampshire border, has been a member of the scientific committees of both Sussex and Hampshire Ornithological Societies.

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**Forthcoming Meeting**

Note that the date (21 March) is still provisional and that it is still unclear whether the meeting will be held both in person, at the Barley Mow, 104 Horseferry Road, Westminster, London SW1P 2EE, or solely online via Zoom. Those interested in attending should keep an eye on the Club's website (<https://boc-online.org/meetings>) or Twitter account ([https://twitter.com/online\\_BOC](https://twitter.com/online_BOC)) for confirmatory details.

**Monday 21 March 2022—6.30 pm—Kathryn Rooke**—*The Importation of the Plumage (Prohibition) Act of 1921, as told through the Natural History Museum's Archive collections*

**Abstract:** In the Victorian and Edwardian period, a demand for bird feathers in fashionable millinery led to the most luxurious of plumes being worth, quite literally, their weight in diamonds. Demand for feathers of egrets, birds of paradise, hummingbirds, grebes and more were pushing bird populations across the world to the brink of extinction. In this talk, I share records from the Natural History Museum's archives that document the museum's contribution to a lengthy campaign, led by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, to end the importation of bird feathers from across the then British Empire, which eventually resulted in the passing of the Importation of Plumage (Prohibition) Act in 1921.

**Biography:** Kathryn Rooke is the Assistant Archivist at the Natural History Museum, London, and Archivist at the former Rothschild property, now local history museum, Gunnersbury Park. She is a history graduate and Archives and Records Management post-graduate who has previously worked for Lancashire Archives, The Clothworkers' Company, The Barber-Surgeons' Company and The School for Oriental and African Studies. After a brief three-year stint in Taiwan, she is now London-based with her family, and enjoying the opportunities NHMUK has brought to revisit a childhood of birdwatching and bug-collecting.

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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): Charles

Anderson, Felicity Arengo, Phil Atkinson, Ignácio Barberis, John M. Bates, Jeremy Bird, Murray D. Bruce, Don Buden, Geoff Carey, Caio Carlos, Terry Chesser, Alice Cibois (\*), Nigel J. Collar (\*), Nicholas W. Daudt, Normand David, Rene Dekker, Jared Diamond, Stephen Diaz Franco, Tulio Dornas, Bob Dowsett (\*), Françoise Dowsett-Lemaire, Will Duckworth, Jack Dumbacher, Guy Dutton, Andy Elliott, Steven Emslie, Brian Finch, Clifford Frith, M. Eulàlia Gassó Miracle, Harold F. Greeney, Kees Hazevoet, Steve Hilty, Steve N. G. Howell, Julian Hume, Nigel Hunter, Colin Jackson, David James, Helen F. James, Justin Jansen, Ulf Johansson, Andy Jones, Adam Scott Kennedy, Alex Kirschel, Alan Knox, Paul Leader, Michel Louette, Chris Lyal, Miguel Marini, John McCormack, Bob McGowan, Włodzimierz Meissner, Michael Mills (\*), Vitor Piacentini, Aasheesh Pittie, Robert Prŷs-Jones (\*), Pamela C. Rasmussen, Nathan Rice, Marcos Rodrigues, Phil Round (\*), Douglas Russell, Richard Schodde, Manuel Schweizer, Hadoram Shirihai, Adrian Skerrett, Frank Steinheimer (\*), Ron Summers, Thomas Tietze, Matt Toomey, Till Töpfer, Alan Tye, Carlos Vereá (\*), Gary Voelker, David R. Wells, Phil Whittington, Gary Wiles, Trevor Worthy, Iain Woxvold (\*), Kevin J. Zimmer and Kristof Zyskowski. — THE HON. EDITOR

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### 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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://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](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).