

Rarities Committee news and announcements

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P. G. Lansdown and the Rarities Committee

Committee membership is listed on the inside front cover each month, and on the back of the title page. In the absence of further nominations (*Brit. Birds* 82: 418-419), Graham Catley started his term of membership on 1st April 1990, replacing Dave Britton, who retired as the longest-serving member on 31st March 1990. Dave served for ten years, and his identification expertise and knowledge of the Northeast and its observers, his constructively critical consideration of records and his inimitable, clearly expressed views made him a major contributor to the Committee's deliberations. Dave Britton originated the concept of species statistics, and his dedicated and professional approach to their compilation for nine annual reports is greatly admired.

The following points of interest arise mainly from the Committee's annual meeting (plates 235 & 236) at Blunham, Bedfordshire, on 28th April 1990.

Removal of species from Rarities Committee list

Despite the removal at the end of 1987 of Crane *Grus grus* and Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* from the list of species considered by the Committee, the number of rare-bird records processed annually has continued to increase and was approximately 40% higher for 1989 than for 1983. The ever-growing interest in birdwatching in general and in migrants and rarities in particular has resulted in many species being recorded more frequently now than ten, or even five, years ago. After very full and lengthy discussion, the Rarities Committee decided in principle to make further deletions from its list of species considered. This resolution was made easier by the recent announcement (*Brit. Birds* 83: 211) regarding the collation and analysis of records of scarce migrants, a status which is adopted by any species deleted from the Committee's list. For each species, in addition to the number which occurs annually, a major factor influencing the Committee's decision was its comparative ease of identification and record-assessment. Records of the following species dated up to 31st December 1990 should continue to be submitted to the Committee, preferably via the local recorder, whilst those dated from 1st January 1991 should be sent only to the appropriate county or regional recorder. The figures in brackets indicate the number of individuals of each species accepted to date each year during the ten-year period 1979-88.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* (14, 6, 14, 15, 20, 21, 30, 19, 30, 31)

Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata* (9, 7, 5, 8, 10, 14, 6, 14, 10, 11)

Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* (12, 2, 21, 10, 18, 10, 25, 15, 35, 31)

Pallas's Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus* (11, 22, 33, 126, 8, 7, 21, 11, 57, 56)

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* (11, 14, 23, 11, 17, 7, 7, 25, 11, 22)

Papers covering the identification problems of each of these species, highlighting pitfalls, will appear in this journal in due course. Despite the comparative ease of record-assessment for most of these species, the Committee is aware that an additional burden will now fall on county and regional records committees and will be pleased to continue to consider any particularly difficult or contentious record, at the request of a recorder. The reduction in the Committee's workload after 1990 will allow more time for the consideration of records of the genuinely rare species, and more time to carry out long-planned reviews of records of certain species, e.g. American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, Pacific Golden Plover *P. fulva* and Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*.

Removal of subspecies from Rarities Committee list

After some discussion, the Committee decided to cease consideration and publication of records of all rare subspecies of species not on its list. Those currently occurring most frequently are Brent Goose *Branta bernicla nigricans* ('Black Brant'), Teal *Anas crecca carolinensis* ('Green-winged Teal'), and Stonechat *Saxicola torquata maura/stejnegeri* ('Siberian Stonechat'). Records of all such subspecies dated up to 31st December 1990 should still be submitted to the Committee, preferably via the local recorder, whilst those dated from 1st January 1991 should be sent to the appropriate county or regional recorder for assessment. As with species deleted from its list, the Committee will be pleased to continue to adjudicate on any very difficult or contentious record, at a recorder's request. So that the national picture of the occurrence pattern of rare subspecies is preserved in the archives, the Committee will continue to act as a repository for all such records and will liaise with the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee regarding potential sub-specific additions to the British and Irish list.

Rare birds statistics

The Committee has appointed Peter Fraser as its Statistician. This is a new position and will cover all statistical aspects of the Committee's work, the most important one of which is the compilation of the running totals for each species for the annual 'Report on rare birds in Great Britain'.

Election of new members

Iain Robertson retired from the Committee in March 1990 and his place is currently being filled, in an ex-officio capacity, by Peter Clement. Iain served for five and a half years and the Committee will miss his thorough knowledge of very rare species gained during his increasingly busy schedule as a foreign bird-tour leader, ironically the reason for his retirement. His familiarity with Shetland and Fair Isle and his expertise in ringing matters were further particularly useful aspects of his membership.

With effect from 1st September 1990, PGL ceased to be a voting



235 & 236. The Rarities Committee annual meeting, Bedfordshire, April 1990. Above, left to right, Dr J. T. R. Sharrock (Managing Editor), Keith Vinicombe, Graham Catley, Chris Heard, Alan Brown, John Marchant, Peter Lansdown (Chairman), Steve Gantlett, Rob Hume, Mike Rogers (Secretary), Alan Dean and Peter Clement. Below, 'at work'. (Erika Sharrock)



member of the Committee. This vacancy has been filled, in an ex-officio capacity, by Dr Colin Bradshaw. PGL continues to serve as Chairman.

As a result of these two changes and the retirement of the longest-serving member, three vacancies will arise in the ranks of the Committee from 1st April 1991. The Committee's nominees are Peter Clement, Dr Colin Bradshaw and Brian Rabbitts. Each is a thoroughly experienced observer who has travelled widely to see and study birds. Peter lives in

Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, and has made several contributions to this journal, notable amongst which is 'Field identification of West Palearctic wheatears' (*Brit. Birds* 80: 137-157, 187-238). Colin comes from North Shields, Tyne & Wear, and has recently contributed four 'Mystery photographs' texts (*Brit. Birds* 81: 320-321, 596-599; 82: 113-115, 472-474). Brian lives in Burnham-on-Sea and has been Recorder for Somerset for five years.

As usual, we invite other nominations, which should be sent to me by 31st December 1990. If further nominations are received, a postal election will take place, in which county and regional recorders and bird observatories will be invited to vote.

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