

OSME NEWS

Geoff Welch

Sandgrouse 34 (1) editorial

OSME Council wishes to dispel any notion that the editorial in Sandgrouse 34 (1) regarding the expanded area of interest for papers to be considered for publication could be interpreted as OSME 'encroaching' into areas covered by the African Bird Club and Oriental Bird Club. As stated, the sole intention was to make authors aware of an additional 'outlet' for the publication of papers on species, research and conservation issues which are of relevance to those resident in or visiting the OSME region. The editorial was in no way meant to imply that OSME would be expanding any of its other activities such as the provision of grants or the appointment of Country Contacts.

Arrived at last!

The bird skins collection of the Institute of Zoology in Almaty, Kazakhstan, is one of the most important in Central Asia and has played a key role in resolving taxonomic questions surrounding many bird species *eg* unravelling the Turkestan/Daurian Shrike complex, splitting Booted Warbler into two species, separating Pale Martin from Sand Martin, and ongoing studies of the Lesser Whitethroat and Asian Short-toed Lark complexes. Additionally, many of the great names associated with species found in Central Asia have worked at the Institute over the years—Peter Simon Pallas, EA Eversmann, Nikolai Zarudny and NA Severtzov to name but a few. In 1946 over 300 scientists were



Plate 1. OSME Chairman Geoff Welch in the Institute of Zoology, Almaty, with (from left to right) Dr Sergey Sklyarenko, Professor Anatoly Kovshar and Dr Anatoly Levin, after inspecting some of the specimen boxes, March 2012. © Geoff & Hilary Welch

employed in the zoological section of the Institute, today there are less than 10 many of whom are working in a voluntary capacity. The skins collection is in a particularly poor condition with no suitable storage facilities. Therefore when the Natural History Museum, Tring, UK, announced that it had a large number of wooden specimen boxes it needed to dispose of, OSME offered to coordinate an international effort to transport the boxes to Almaty. A partnership was established between OSME, the Natural History Museum, the British Ornithologists' Club, the American Natural History Museum (Frank Chapman Memorial Fund) and a group of Swedish ornithologists led by Lars Svensson who together raised the funds required to cover the packing and transport costs. After numerous technical and bureaucratic delays, the boxes finally arrived in Almaty in early 2012 where they were warmly welcomed by staff at the Institute—see Plate 1. The major

task of transferring the specimens to the boxes is now underway. This international effort has enabled a start to be made on safeguarding this unique resource for use by current and future generations of researchers, both from Central Asia and around the world.

Conservation and Research Fund update

In February 2012, Dr Christine Booth, a lecturer at Oxford University, took over as chair of the Conservation and Research Fund (CRF) sub-committee. Christine is currently reviewing the grant application guidelines to develop a standardised format which will help ensure that future applications provide all of the information required by the CRF for assessing applications quickly and objectively. The other members of the CRF sub-committee remain the same—Richard Porter, Michael Brombacher, Vasil Ananian and Rob Sheldon.