

Editorial

This is my first issue of *Sandgrouse* as Editor and my first duty, indeed a pleasure, is to express my whole-hearted admiration of Guy Kirwan's achievement in that job. Guy's patience during the handover period, when we could get together but rarely due to our respective absences to various parts of the globe is very much appreciated.

I don't intend to introduce editorials as a regular feature, but to restrict them for special occasions, or when the OSME Council has agreed a policy matter that is of interest to the membership or authors.

Council has agreed that its policy of seeking authors of papers and notes from nationals of the countries within the OSME region should be reinforced. Accordingly, as *Sandgrouse* Editor, I am introducing a couple of changes. The first is that OSME are seeking short papers that will obtain basic but important data for areas and regions that (as far as we know) lack that data: I am asking for papers whose main theme is phenology of a single species. For an example, see the Common Swift papers in this issue. We hope to encourage contributions from readers who may not have formal academic training but who are good observers, because phenological data are a mainstay of our understanding of species.

The second change deals with local knowledge, specifically oral information that derives from the traditional societies of the world. Here in western society, too many of us have become distanced from that tradition, and we fail to value it and we fail to record it. Historians have long appreciated its value, but the more formal world of scientific and academic publishing has often avoided, ignored or denigrated it. The need for rigour in formal papers is unquestioned, but now the rules are taken as an end, rather than a means to an end. If you think about it, rules do not define what you may do, they set limits beyond which you need to think clearly what you might do instead, but of course you have to be prepared to argue your case. Oral, or anecdotal evidence, is invaluable; a perfect example comes from Syria, where Gianluca Serra carefully evaluated local anecdotal information that revealed a hitherto unknown (to the rest of the world) colony of Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita*.

Evaluation is the key. Anecdotal information must be evaluated at source and every time it is recounted. From this issue of *Sandgrouse* onwards, we are including formal method of identifying anecdotal information. Within a paper or short note, evaluated anecdotal information is indicated by including it in bold braces, thus, {...}. On occasion, the positioning of the braces may be disconcerting for the reader, but I assess this as a small price to pay.

On a separate subject, there are also occasions when formal notes are inadequate for full acceptance of a record, but the value of mentioning the record remains high. On such occasions, the information will be regarded as hypothetical and will be included in bold square brackets, thus, [...].

Each paper or note in *Sandgrouse* that contains information in either of the above two categories will be identified as such.