

50 VOLUMES OF MARINE ORNITHOLOGY, 1976–2022: THE FOUNDING EDITOR LOOKS BACK

John Cooper, Founding Editor, Marine Ornithology, Rondebosch, South Africa (john.cooper61@gmail.com)

In 1976, I edited and produced the first issue of *The Cormorant*, as a bulletin of the then Southern African Seabird Group. Published in November as a stapled 20-page booklet in an A5 format, it contained a few short articles of a natural history nature. It seems remarkable that what began so modestly has grown into an international journal with a well-respected editorial team, publishing two or three hundred pages of peer-reviewed scientific papers a year, covering all aspects of the biology and conservation of the world's seabirds. Perhaps readers will find it interesting to read how this all came about.

The first seabird group was established in the United Kingdom in the 1960s. By the 1970s, similar seabird groups had been started to represent the Pacific seaboard of North and Central America and Australia (later Australasia). With these groups as examples, I started a seabird group to bring together amateurs and professionals interested in the seabirds of the southern African region. Half a dozen years previously, I had moved from a land-locked country in my early 20s to study African Penguins *Spheniscus demersus*—a species that at the time was, and still is— at risk of oiling from at-sea spills and shipping accidents. In 1979, while based at the University of Cape Town's FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, I chaired a committee that arranged and held an international symposium entitled "Birds of the Sea and Shore," the proceedings of which were published by the geographically expanded (in 1980) African Seabird Group (Cooper 1981). One of the overseas attendees was the late Ralph Schreiber, then Curator of Ornithology at the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles, USA who was well-known for his studies of the Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis* in Florida. After the symposium, we spent a few days together studying breeding Great White Pelicans *P. onocrotalus* on an offshore island not too far from Cape Town (Cooper 1980). We met again in 1982 in Cambridge, UK at a seabird conservation conference (Croxall *et al.* 1984). Around this time, Ralph was corresponding with marine ornithologists around the world about starting a journal specifically for seabirds. I expressed enthusiasm for his idea, as did others, but after investigating publication costs Ralph decided that it was not financially viable, and along with the demands of his seabird research, his journal never transpired. Following this disappointment I took a different tack, never once doing the sums or approaching a publishing house, and over a long period, by degrees, I expanded the scope of *The Cormorant* towards something approaching Ralph's unrealized vision.

After producing seven individually numbered issues of *The Cormorant* as a bulletin over four years, I changed to calling it a journal, commencing with Volume 8 in 1980. This explains the anomaly of the 50th volume being published in 2022, and not 50 years after the first bulletin in 1976. In a 1982 editorial, I mooted the idea that the existing seabird groups get together to publish a "*Journal of Marine Ornithology*" (Cooper 1982). Not much came of this suggestion, so "my" journal continued much as before, albeit with more pages and some longer articles. Still being produced on a typewriter, I spent many hours cutting and gluing italicized

scientific names in place, not always that evenly, to produce copy for the printer. I vividly remember being all agog when our departmental typist obtained a Facit "golf ball" machine that facilitated—albeit requiring a manual change each time—scientific names in italics to be typed directly onto the manuscript. No more sticky figures back in my office on weekends!

In 1984, I took another step with the journal, which was still being produced as an annual volume, usually in two parts, by renaming it *Cormorant*, with the subtitle "*A Journal of Southern Seabirds*." With an international editorial board and use of peer reviewers, the journal had taken another step forward, and a more professional look was obtained with right-hand justification of the text from Volume 12 of 1984. I also started to get the journal listed by abstracting services, and I produced, for the first time, reprints to send to authors. The next step was an increase in the page size, starting with Volume 16 (1/2) published in June 1988 and given a pleasingly light blue glossy cover and the prescient subtitle "*An International Journal of Marine Ornithology*." However, the first publication from north of the Equator had to wait another year with a short communication on skuas in Sri Lanka (da Silva 1989).

In 1990, I took the plunge with Volume 18 and renamed the journal simply "*Marine Ornithology*," the subtitle falling away. The combined two-part issue's contents assumed proper international flavour, with papers from Antarctica, Australia, the Tristan da Cunha group in the South Atlantic, and the French sub-Antarctic islands in the southern Indian Ocean. For the next five years, the journal followed this course. The Editorial Board was expanded to fit the global scope, although it must be said that I continued to fail to attract many submissions from the northern hemisphere. The year 1990 also saw the production of a cumulative index for the first 15 volumes of the journal (1976–1987) to mark the passing of its original name.

A highlight of the 1990s, of which I remain proud, was being able to attract a steady flow of papers from South American colleagues, quite a few of whom were publishing in English for the first time as early-career scientists. These manuscripts required careful editing, and at times quite extensive rewriting. Because the journal was still very much a one-man band, this became increasingly onerous, with many pre-dawn hours spent at the home computer before proceeding to campus for the day's work. Another highlight of this period was the publication of the entirety of Vincent Ridoux's PhD thesis on the diets of seabirds at the French sub-Antarctic Crozet Islands (Ridoux 1994) in a single issue of the journal. It still gives me pleasure to see it cited decades later—and to have travelled to Brest in France in 1992 to witness his oral defence (in French) as one of his examiners.

Not too much changed with the journal in the second half of the 1990s, save for a further increase in page size to A4 in 1996 with Volume 24, primarily to reduce printing costs. A highlight of this time was the publication, as a single issue, the proceedings of the

Third International Penguin Conference, which I and others hosted in Cape Town in 1996. At 210 pages long, I gratefully accepted the help of an editorial group to deal with the 28 papers published (Brossy *et al.* 1999). All along, the journal was funded out of personal and institutional subscriptions, with (of course) no charge made for my own services.

With the journal's workload getting seriously out of hand I took the next, and perhaps the most important step, in its slow evolution. Following correspondence with the Pacific Seabird Group, enabled by my old "Fitztitute" colleague Alan Burger, publication of *Marine Ornithology* became the joint responsibility of the African and Pacific Seabird Groups, with the latter offering some financial support. Volume 29 of 2001 appeared under the joint editorship of myself and Tony Gaston in Canada, with the two of us sharing the load of processing incoming manuscripts. With this change came a reduction in page size to something more akin to a USA quarto, and a front cover design that, for the first time, included a colour photograph of a seabird (for this issue a rather blurred Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*). The displaying Bank Cormorant *Phalacrocorax neglectus*, the emblem of the African Seabird Group that I had carefully traced years earlier from my own photograph and used on every front cover since 1976, was banished to an inside page! More importantly, we updated and expanded the Editorial Board and added a new subtitle, calling it "*An International Journal of Seabird Science and Conservation*". After a year or so of our joint editorship, production and distribution of copies moved from South Africa to Canada—saving me from what had become a large job with each issue.

I remained an Editor with Tony Gaston, with several others coming aboard, until 2009 when I finally—after 33 years!—relinquished all editorial duties and from then have been listed as the journal's Founding Editor, which always gives me a little feeling of pride to see when my latest *gratis* copy appears in the post from Canada. Under Tony's capable leadership, the journal became jointly published by a suite of five seabird groups, which I am sure has increased the journal's geographical coverage (although papers from Europe are still relatively sparse). Production having moved to North America, Tony took aboard a Managing Editor to help. The journal also obtained an electronic character with its open-access publication on the *Marine Ornithology* web site (<http://www.marineornithology.org>), with Benjamin Saenz as its long-standing Online Editor. The website includes all but the first handful of bulletins of *The Cormorant*, as well as the 1976–1987

cumulative index. The occasional publications of Pacific Seabird Group symposia as single issues also became a feature—as did the inclusion of coloured illustrations. Another change of the electronic era was PDFs replacing paper reprints.

Following a couple of years of their joint editorship, in 2014 with Volume 42, Tony Gaston moved into the role of Managing Editor, and David Ainley of the USA took over as the sole Editor-in-Chief, with Louise Blight in Canada starting as Managing Editor in 2016, positions these two continue to hold. The effort to assist persons who lack English as a first language continues, and the journal these days has a wider geographical coverage. Under their able tutelage, I look forward to seeing what is to be published in Volume 50 of 2022.

My closing thoughts? Looking back, I could have perhaps moved *Marine Ornithology* along its evolutionary course at a faster rate. But I think it is fair to say it has reached my vision of a well-respected, peer-reviewed journal that covers the whole world's seabirds—and has achieved pretty much what Ralph Schreiber had in mind. The year 2022 is a milestone of my own as I reach three-quarters of a century. I will certainly not be around to see Volume 100, but am confident that the journal I started all of 46 years ago is on a good path to that goal.

REFERENCES

- BROSSY, J.-J., COOPER, J., CRAWFORD, R.J.M., KLAGES, N. & SHANNON, L. (Eds.) 1999. Proceedings of the Third International Penguin Conference. *Marine Ornithology* 27: 1–210.
- COOPER, J. 1980. Fatal sibling aggression in pelicans—a review. *Ostrich* 51: 183–186.
- COOPER, J. (Ed.). 1981. *Proceedings of the Symposium on Birds of the Sea and Shore held at the University of Cape Town, 19–21 November 1979*. Cape Town, South Africa: African Seabird Group. 474 pp.
- COOPER, J. 1982. Seabird groups of the world unite! *The Cormorant* 10: 1.
- CROXALL, J.P., EVANS, P.G.H. & SCHREIBER, R.W. (Eds.) 1984. Status and conservation of the world's seabirds. *International Council for Bird Preservation Technical Publication* 2: 1–778.
- DA SILVA, R.I. 1989. Identity of skuas *Catharacta* in Sri Lanka. *Cormorant* 17: 79–81.
- RIDOUX, V. 1994. The diets and dietary segregation of seabirds at the subantarctic Crozet Islands. *Marine Ornithology* 22: 1–192.