

Obituaries

Colin James Oliver Harrison (1926-2003)

Colin Harrison was one of the most talented and least appreciated British ornithologists of his generation. Born in London, he gained a scholarship to a local grammar school and at first worked in a government testing laboratory, then as a librarian and school teacher. He had been interested in birds since childhood, and was soon publishing numerous notes. At this time, in the 1950s, he joined the Cambridge expeditions to study autumn migration in Norway, and later jointly authored the last report and summary of the results (*Sterna* 23, 29). He went on to secure a post in the Bird Room at the British Museum (Natural History), where he was placed in charge of the egg collection. This led to the publication of many notes and books about the nests and eggs of both European and North American birds.

He found, however, that eggs provided limited scope for expressing his talents, and quickly joined the group in the Bird Room studying bird behaviour, both in the field and in captivity. Their publications in *British Birds* and the *Avicultural Magazine* did not require stuffy and cumbersome official approval. In turn, this led to an increasing interest in biogeography and the sadly neglected avian palaeontological collections (unfortunately housed in a different department, which necessitated regular trips from Tring to London). Working through these with Cyril Walker, he produced a further stream of publications. His research on distribution is summarised in the *Atlas of the Birds of the Western Palearctic* (Collins, 1982), while his palaeontological findings are written up in

the *History of the Birds of Britain* (Collins, 1988), the latter an important book which failed to receive the attention it rightly deserved.

In particular, Colin's palaeontological work involved investigations into the early northwest European Eocene avifauna from places like Trafalgar Square, and a revision of the more recent prehistoric British collections from caves and other archaeological sites. Through his biogeographical work, he went on to demonstrate that the evolution of the present Palearctic avifauna came about through segregation of populations into western, central and eastern refugia during the glaciations. In this, Colin's contribution to ornithology was unique.

Personally, Colin was stocky, hairy, generous, and very good company, with a wide variety of interests. He did not seek the spotlight, being strangely defensive about his work and reluctant to discuss it. This was a pity, since his friends were always happy to help iron out the occasional problems with minor details. Instead, he developed as a back-room boy, sitting on committees and acting as an advisor to various official and voluntary bodies. As with several other leading ornithologists, I attribute this to lack of a university education, since whatever one may think of universities, they should do three things, inspire confidence, instil critical standards, and provide marketable qualifications. While he eventually gained a PhD in his 40s, it was a bit late.

W. R. P. Bourne

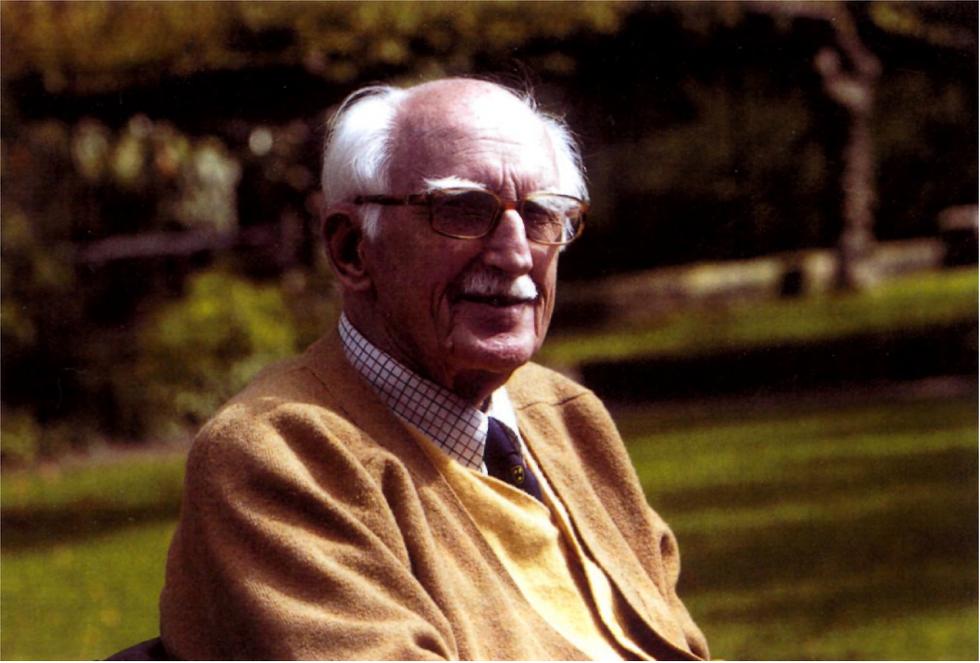
Paul Alexander Zino (1916-2004)

Alec Zino was a major pioneer in the study and conservation of the birds of Madeira, one of which he rediscovered and almost single-handedly resurrected from the dead. Although born into a family with commercial interests in the island, he was educated in England. In his youth he was a great sailor, fisherman and hunter, holding the all-time record for shooting 32 of the elusive local Red-legged Partridges *Alectoris rufa* over his dog in a day, and taking an oar with the local whalers. He underwent a Pauline conversion when invited by his friend Gerry Maul, Curator of Funchal Museum, to cook for a multi-disciplined expedition to the uninhabited Selvagen (Salvage) Islands, between Madeira and the Canary Islands, in 1963. It was here that he met two Frenchmen, Christian Jouanin and Francois Roux, which led to lifelong collaboration in the study of the local seabirds.

When he returned to the Selvagens in his yacht *Yam Seng*, in 1967, the lessors of the traditional right

to take young Cory's Shearwaters *Calonectris diomedea* complained that the fishermen were poaching too many, and agreed to let Alec take over the lease to stop the trade. His family built a house in the islands and started ringing Cory's Shearwaters; they began the first detailed study of the shearwaters' breeding biology (*Ibis* 113: 212-217) and this work has continued ever since. The Portuguese Government eventually bought the islands, but initially provided no protection for breeding seabirds. Then, in 1976, following wild talk after the revolution, fishermen began to slaughter the birds. Alec secured a television film of the carnage, leading to protection and, eventually, inclusion of the islands in the Parque Natural de Madeira in 1986.

Alec also made visits to the Desertas Islands to the east of Madeira, where he studied Fea's Petrels *Pterodroma feae* nesting on Bugio, the outermost island. This aroused his curiosity about the smaller petrel *P. madeira*, originally found nesting among the upper



214. Alec Zino. Photo from family collection.

peaks of the main island in 1903, but not described as distinct until 1934, by which time the site had been forgotten. Alec played recordings of the voice of Fea's Petrel to the local people, which led to rediscovery of the location. Inadvertently, he told a collector about this discovery, who then trapped several birds; fortunately, Alec caught him in time to release most of the birds he had taken (*Bull. B. O. C.* 124: 3). He and his family have since led the fight to protect the few score remaining birds from cats and rats, and secure the site and the Desertas as nature reserves. Seldom can it have been more appropriate to name the wonderful bird they rediscovered and saved after them: Zino's Petrel. The Zino family have also studied the endemic Trocaz Pigeon *Columba trocaz*, and co-authored the best checklist of the island (*Bol. Mus. Mun. Funchal* 47 (262): 63-100).

Personally Alec was a big man, handsome, charming, intelligent, cultivated, scholarly, industrious and generous, indeed almost too generous, as described above. He was most frustrated when arthritis limited his activity latterly, but remained bright and interested to the end. He was given a Certificate of Merit by the UK Minister for Agriculture in 1988, made a Comendador do Infante Dom Henrique (Henry the Navigator, cousin of Henry V) and awarded the Gold Medal of the Town of Funchal in 1990 for his work on conservation. He leaves a wife, Yvonne, four children and ten grandchildren, and was about to become a great-grandfather. His son, Dr Frank Zino, is continuing his work.

W. R. P. Bourne