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Photo by W.R. Barrow

Atlantic Brant off Grand Manan Island, N.B., Spring, 1988  
(a species of interest both to new research initiatives (p. 6) and to Speirs Award Winner).

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## EDITOR'S MUSINGS

What is an "ornithologist"? By definition, it is someone who studies birds, but that may be too broad. At the recent I.O.C., someone remarked that ornithology was now part of "mainstream biology", meaning that bird research now embraces all facets of zoology rather than being mainly field studies or collecting for museum work on taxonomy and evolution. Our vocation has become respectable, viewed as a branch of science rather than a disguised hobby. For many of us, however, our work still retains a recreational element that is lacking in most other employment, including other branches of biology. This recreational aspect is one of the strengths of ornithology, linking professionals and amateurs and thus encour-

aging public support for our endeavours. So my first question might be rephrased as "Does recreational interest in birds set ornithologists apart from other scientists who use birds as the subjects of their biological studies?" A recent article by Bonita McFarlane in *Wildlife Society Bulletin* (22: 361-370, 1994) addresses the question of what motivates birdwatchers, which is pertinent for other ornithologists as well. Many scientists who work with birds mainly in the laboratory retain an interest in their subjects as living creatures; this is almost inevitable for students of behaviour and vocalizations, but may not be for those who work, for example, with cell biology or anatomy. Some students of behavioural ecology who work with birds

claim no background or interest in birding, but there is more to recreational interest in birds than the competitive side which makes "birding" a pejorative term for some people. But if no clear distinction can be made between ornithologists and other biologists who use birds as vehicles for study of phenomena or structures, rather than as living organisms that are interesting in and for themselves, how can we justify S.C.O. as a separate association? Perhaps one answer is that most "other biologists who use birds" sooner or later come under the spell of these fascinating creatures, thus developing a recreational interest where none existed beforehand?

The Editor

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## I.O.C. NEWS

As 1994 is another I.O.C. year, I am temporarily reviving this feature of early issues of the S.C.O. newsletter, to report on the 21st International Ornithological Congress, held in Vienna 20-25 August 1994. These Congresses, occurring only once every four years, seem to me to flit by with amazing rapidity. It already is eight years since the Ottawa I.O.C. of 1986, "our Congress", support of which was one of the stimuli that got the S.C.O. off and running. Most Canadians on the International Committee, the governing body of these Congresses, were appointed, partly to generate an invitation for a Congress in Canada in 1986, at the (West) Berlin Congress of 1978, now sixteen years ago. And at my first Congress, in 1962 at Ithaca,

N.Y., I met many big names I knew from the literature, and also some new Ph.Ds; I was happy to meet two of the latter once again in Vienna, 32 years later, when they were now, respectively, presidents of the 21st I.O.C. (Chris Perrins) and of the British Ornithologists' Union (Janet Kear). Time marches on inexorably, but people and their writings provide some of the links that keep our interest in birds alive and active.

I requested the following account from a younger person who might feel more intensely the kind of excitement that I remember feeling during and after attendance at my first International Ornithological Congress.

The Editor

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The setting for this year's I.O.C. was the Hofburg Conference Centre in Vienna, a name that does not do the venue justice - we were in the principal palace of the Habsburgs, from which the Austro-Hungarian Empire was ruled. I doubt I'll ever attend an academic conference in quite as opulent a setting, with frescoed ceilings, towering marble columns, gilt chandeliers, and history.

Now if they had just worked on the air-conditioning... The setting was formal, but the attendees were not; the conference was a terrific place to talk with real people whose names you'd only seen on papers. And there were a lot of people to meet: roughly 1,500, from all around the world. I particularly noticed a large number of relatively young ornithologists (graduate students and recent



























