

Session 6: Speciation

Date: Wednesday 1 November, 2017
Time: 11:25 – 11:45
Room: Seminar Room

The Blue Tit

Presenting author: **Martyn Stenning**

Authors: **Martyn Stenning¹**

Affiliations: ¹University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom

Sporting a mix of blue, yellow, white, green and black, the unmistakable blue Tit *Cyanistes* spp. reflect the colours of a planet affected by a burgeoning human population. Fortunately, blue tits are adapting well to modern humanity, taking advantage of our propensity to feed birds in our gardens and provide boxes for them to nest in. Blue tits are one of only a few bird taxa that show a current increase in numbers. In turn, this charismatic little cavity nester proves to be an excellent model for biological research, and currently features in around 100 new scientific publications every year. This book is the result of a personal quest by author Martyn Stenning to bring some of these discoveries together into one accessible volume.

The Blue Tit begins by inviting readers into the intimate life of our bird as it attempts to reproduce, describing the many proximate challenges faced by Blue Tits when rearing offspring. The story moves on to the fluid state of Blue Tit variant classification across a native Palearctic range and progresses into population structure, life-time ecology and an exploration of ultimate factors that determine Blue Tit breeding success. It culminates with an in-depth exploration of Blue Tit research and concludes with a genial selection of personal anecdotes and an overview of Blue Tit appearances in folklore and poetry.

The talk will focus in on blue tit evolutionary history, speciation and current taxonomy, which is in a state of flux. Several published authors have analysed blue tit DNA in order to refine the understanding of blue tit evolutionary history, but this has raised almost as many questions as answers. There are currently eight recognised species of *Cyanistes* and 21 subspecies named and reported in Avibase, which is an online repository of current taxonomic authorities.