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Foreword

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Foreword

What a fantastic conference this was. Over 193 delegates from more than 32 countries – including many of the 'great and the good' of the owl world – gathered in the magnificent setting of the MartiniPlaza in Groningen, The Netherlands, to listen to 86 presentations, attend a choice of the German Owl Group, Snowy Owl or Short-eared Owl workshops, wonderful films by Claus and Ingrid König, Ortwin Schwerdtfeger, and equally stunning slides presented by Serge Sorbi. What more could anyone ask for? Well unbelievably, there was more – a fascinating array of 43 posters to mull over during the coffee and lunch breaks, a day of brilliant field trips to witness the congregations of wild geese and waders for which The Netherlands is famous, and most importantly of all, a chance to put faces to names and 'network' with like-minded people. 'Names' quickly became 'friends' and many important links were made which will undoubtedly do much to improve global owl conservation and research in the years to come – precisely the reason why these conferences are so important.

It is now hard to remember the time I personally began working with owls some 42 years ago, when the number of serious owl fieldworkers and researchers were few and far between and the study of owls was a very new science indeed. The gathering together of so many dedicated people at Groningen proved conclusively that all over the world there are now individuals, specialist groups and organizations all working hard to learn more about and conserve these most charismatic of birds. No longer do any of us need to feel that we are lone voices crying in the wilderness. A committed band of brothers and sisters are of one mind, determined to learn all they can to ensure that we have the knowledge to enable us to provide the help the world's owls (and overall biodiversity) will undoubtedly need if they are to survive today's rapidly changing world. After listening to so many inspiring speakers I am sure I was not the only delegate to return home with renewed vigour and determination to continue my studies for as many years as are left to me.

The overall message which came out of the conference was loud and clear. The main 'problem' which faces the owls of the world is 'universal', i.e. the burgeoning human population. A population which inevitably demands changes in agriculture to intensively produce its food, bringing in its wake habitat destruction and degradation to provide housing, roads and industrial development, the loss of feeding grounds and safe breeding sites, on-going persecution in some countries; and of course the new ogre of climate change. All these were recurring themes in the presentations and discussions which followed. However, one thing above all remains firmly lodged in my mind. The realization that even with so many owl specialists working in the field, the stark reality is that we still know so very little about many of the world's owls, particularly those from the southern hemisphere – and this is the 21st century! We still have much work to do – but isn't that an exciting prospect!

On behalf of the World Owl Trust and all the delegates, I congratulate the organizing committee of Johan de Jong, David Johnson, Hein Bloem, Jim Duncan, Roy Leigh, Dries Van Nieuwenhuyse and



These proceedings are dedicated to the memory of Pat Hoad.

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Arnold van den Burg for giving us a magnificent five days we will long remember. We were all in awe of the way you seamlessly handled the inevitable 'blips' which are invariably thrown the way of organizers of huge events like this and we salute your expertise in riding the waves!

Nor must I forget to thank some other very important people who helped to make this a very special occasion. The staff at the MartiniPlaza Conference Centre were simply magnificent, always friendly and helpful, while the catering staff did a brilliant job of fulfilling our inner needs. The ever-present coffee was certainly a bonus, especially for those from far-flung countries who had to adjust to European time and the inevitable jet-lag – not to mention the fact that for many of us it helped to alleviate any danger of 'owl over-kill' when faced with such a plethora of papers to choose from and the after effects of the sumptuous lunches and dinners – not to mention the late-night 'sub-conferences' which took place round the bars of our hotels!

Finally I would like to give very special thanks to a wonderful lady whose love of owls and her wish to help them resulted in her leaving a magnificent legacy to the World Owl Trust which enabled us to be the primary sponsor of these Proceedings. We feel that there could be no better memorial to the late Pat Hoad than this volume, and we thank her partner Richard Langridge for agreeing with us.

Tony Warburton,
President, World Owl Trust

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