

# The SOC Scotland's Bird Club



## COUNCIL MEETING 79/04 29<sup>th</sup> November 2015 Minutes

*SOC Scottish Charity Number: SC 009859  
A Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation*

Session 79/04 of Council was held at 10.30 hrs on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 2015 at the RSPB Loch Leven reserve, Kinross.

**Present:** President Ian Thomson (Chair), James Main (Vice President), Alan Fox (Hon. Treasurer), David Heeley (Hon. Secretary), Alison Creamer, Lesley Creamer, Roger Gooch, Alan Knox, Melvin Morrison, David Rackham and Paul Taylor.

**In attendance:** Wendy Hicks (SOC HQ) and Jane Cleaver (SOC HQ)

### Action

- 1 Apologies for absence** Apologies were received from David Bain, Iain Gibson, Frank Hamilton, Richard Leslie, Bob McGowan and Ray Murray,
- 2 Absent** John Campbell, Angus McBay and Geoff Sheppard were absent
- 3 Introduction and Welcome** The President and incoming Chair of Council (Ian Thomson) welcomed Melvin Morrison as the new Branch Representative for Moray.

In his opening statement as the newly elected President he paid tribute to his predecessor, Chris McNerny for the excellent job that he had done during his time as President, the steady and balanced way in which he had led the Club and expressed the hope that he would be able, at least in part, to emulate Chris's leadership.

He highlighted that it was his wish that Council business should take on a more strategic focus, and that the development of the Risk Register by Management Committee (to be considered later on the agenda) had highlighted the need for the Club to develop a Strategic Plan and to develop Operating Objectives. He expressed concern that the Club had a tendency to be rather reactive and often looked to the past, whereas the most constructive way that Council could act would be to be more proactive, developing a clear sense of direction. This would be of considerable benefit to future Presidents and it was his desire to implement these changes during his Presidency. He concluded with a brief overview of a number of areas of the Club's activities (such as recruitment, the Library, Branch activities and legacy income) that all indicated the need for a systematic Strategic Review. He felt that such a Review would provide a timely statement of the current position of the Club, and would form the

stepping stone to a Strategic Plan.

Council welcomed the opening statement, accepting that many challenges lay ahead.

**4 Minutes of Council Meeting 79/03**

The minutes for meeting 79/03 held on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2015 were approved.

**5 Matters arising**

The majority of items on the Action List had either been completed or had been placed as Agenda items.

16<sup>th</sup> August 2015

§11 Young Birders – funding. Council agreed that the SOC would fund the Young Birders Training programme on the Isle of May in 2016

§11 Bird Reports produced by local clubs. JC informed Council that contacting local bird clubs that produce a county Bird Report was still in progress

14<sup>th</sup> June 2015

§14 Formation of a Birding Committee. It was agreed to defer discussion of this item.

§15 Visits by Waterston House staff to the *National Museums of Scotland* collections. Matter now closed.

§15 Payments to LINK. The Hon Treasurer (AF) noted that information had not yet been received from LINK about likely future contributions.

30<sup>th</sup> November 2014

§5. Copyright issues for digitising material from *Scottish Bird News*. It was noted that there had been no approaches made from copyright holders, and that it would be reasonable to declare that the consultation period had ended. Whilst noting that progressing with digitisation was not completely free of risk, Alan Knox (AK) agreed to prepare the relevant paperwork for signature by the President (IT). AK drew Council's attention to the issues surrounding the digitisation of *Scottish Bird Report*, and it was agreed that members would be informed of this by an announcement in the next edition of *Scottish Birds*.

**AK**

**6 AGM**

It was confirmed that there were no matters arising for Council action from the AGM held on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2015. Council noted the Tribute to Honorary President Keith Macgregor (AGM 2015 §3).

**7 Finance**

The Hon. Treasurer (Alan Fox) presented a written summary of the current financial position. He noted that overall it was essentially unchanged from the last meeting and that the Club's finances remained sound. He noted that legacy income was down compared to the same period in the previous year, although a £5k donation had been received to support the volunteer gardeners at Waterston House. He informed Council that he would be meeting with the Independent Financial Advisor (Sandy Scotland) before the next Council meeting, and with the investment planners to review the investment portfolio.

Following a query from Council regarding the Profit and Loss Account that he had presented, he agreed to check the figures regarding Annual Conference expenditure, which initially appeared abnormally high.

**AF**

(The matter of the forthcoming vacancy for Honorary Treasurer is minuted

under AOCB).

**8 Funding of Branches**

The Hon. Treasurer (AF) provided a verbal update on the action point carried over from the meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> August (70/03 §11) regarding the incorporation of any balances in Branch funds into the main Profit and Loss Accounts. He informed Council that he would be seeking the advice of Sandy Scotland (the Independent Financial Advisor to the Club) in the near future to determine exactly what information would be required. Council noted that the balances held were, in general, quite small but they nonetheless represent part of the Club's assets. It was noted that Branches should be encouraged to spend their balances to the benefit of their members.

It was agreed that AF would continue his work on a suitable template that could be used by Branches in reporting their finances to bring consistency to the reports.

**AF**

**9 Branch and Membership Development**

(i) The Development Officer (JC) presented a spreadsheet analysis of Branch finances, including room hire costs, balances held and financing of visiting speakers. The analysis highlighted the fact that there was considerable variation across the Branches regarding the cost of room hire, whether this was paid for centrally by Waterston House HQ or by the branch and the type of venue. The total cost of room hire amounted to some £3 - £5k p.a. Following a protracted and ultimately inconclusive discussion it was agreed that the Club must provide attractive venues for Branch meetings and visiting speakers and that these events were of considerable value and important to the health of the Club overall, despite the fact that such meetings were not actually attended by the majority of Club members. There was a general feeling that Branches should ideally operate in a financially independent manner, but at the same time it was recognised that this was simply not possible for some Branches with low numbers of members. It was agreed that this was one of the many issues that highlighted the urgent need for a strategic review of the whole subject of Branches within the future structure of the Club, and welcomed the proposal from the Chair (IT) that this be one of the main elements in the broader Strategic Review.

**IT**

(ii) JC presented an analysis of the current level of memberships, noting that with the revised reporting period Council would be in a position to consider quarterly trends at its next meeting. JC drew attention to the number of new members who joined on-line, and the fact that the website was a target for a lot of on-line searches. The data showed that recruitment was not really coming via Branches to any significant extent. Council welcomed the analysis, appreciating that getting a clear picture of why people left the Club was a far from easy matter, and reflected on the fact that membership might have reached its natural maximum.

(iii) Following discussion, it was agreed that the Club would not have an official presence at the Rutland Bird Fair in 2016. It was clear from 2015 that attendance did not yield a worthwhile number of new memberships in return for the amount or preparation required. It was agreed that JC would speak to the organisers regarding the impact that non-attendance in 2016 might have on the availability of a place in later years.

**JC**

(iv) Consideration of the value of having a Club presence at the Rutland Bird Fair led to a broader and more general discussion centering on the success of using the Birds of Scotland (BS3) DVD as a complimentary gift to new members. It was agreed that, although it was difficult to gauge the real impact

that this had, a replacement should be sought. It was agreed that it might be timely for the Club to consider publishing another book, such as a birdwatching site guide, that might be accompanied by a supporting smartphone app. Council agreed that this could prove to be an excellent type of project, but that considerably more thought needed to be put into the organisational and production details. Consideration should be given to publicising the project from the outset, and putting together an organising committee or group.

IT

(v) Council noted with regret that the Orkney branch had lost momentum, with low numbers of members and poor attendance at meetings. It noted that Prof. Peter Slater had been coordinating efforts at the Orkney Branch as an interim measure and had indicated that he did not wish to continue. Council noted its appreciation for his help and support. It was agreed that it would be a loss to the Club if the Orkney Branch were to close completely and that, given the competition from the RSPB and the Orkney Field Club that there would be some merit in exploring the possibility of setting up joint activities in Orkney with these other organisations.

JC

(vi) Council approved the proposed revisions to the draft Branch Guidance Document.

(vii) Council recorded its compliments to the Isle of May Young Birders group from 2015 for their presentation at the Annual Conference and their enthusiastic participation at the event. At the same time it was recognised that it would be wise to investigate alternative ways in which the participants could present their experiences to conference in order to prevent it becoming repetitive and losing the interest of the audience. It was agreed that JC would explore alternatives and report back to Council.

JC

(viii) It was agreed that the issues surrounding the operation of the system of Local Bird Recorders, improving communications between the individuals and the Club, and considering the long-term future of both the Bird Recorders and Bird Reports that they produce should be a core part of the forthcoming Strategic Review.

IT

**10 Conferences update**

(i) Annual Conference at Pitlochry.

Council recorded its appreciation of the generous sponsorship that had been received from Swarovski, and acknowledged the excellent work done by Wendy Hicks at Waterston House in organising a very successful event, and of Kathryn Cox at HQ for ensuring the smooth operation of the bookings. Participant feedback was extremely good indicating high levels of satisfaction from the membership, vindicating the choice of location. Financially there would be a small loss to the Club but this was well within planning limits.

Wendy Hicks (WH) reported that there had been some unfortunate confusion with the company with whom she had been dealing with respect to the forward booking of the Atholl Palace, and that regrettably the main contact had now left the company in question. It transpired that a firm booking for dates for 2016 at the Atholl Palace had not been made as anticipated. However, the Atholl Palace Hotel were prepared to honour the arrangements concerning prices, and would accept a booking for 2017 for the traditional weekend in October. For 2016, they had indicated that this period was not available to the Club, but they could accommodate a booking for the end of September. Council agreed that this would be a suitable alternative and that the pressures that it placed on the production of the Annual Report and Financial Report

were not insurmountable. It was agreed that a notice of this would be placed in the next issue of *Scottish Birds*, with the conference organised thematically around the topic of “Marine, Coastal and Island Bird Life”.

(ii) Spring Conferences.

Paul Taylor (Fife) confirmed that the Fife Branch were extremely enthusiastic about hosting the Spring Conference in 2017 with a number of possible speakers already identified. The Branch Committee had investigated suitable venues, and the conference would most likely be held at in the new Biomedical Sciences building at the University of St Andrews. The date of 18<sup>th</sup> March 2017 was agreed.

Council noted that the mailing for the 2016 Spring Conference to be held in the Borders was in preparation.

Lesley Creamer (Dumfries) informed Council that the Dumfries Branch had approached the task of organising the 2018 Spring conference with gusto, with a venue already identified. The date of 17<sup>th</sup> March 2018 was agreed.

**11 Nominations for National Honours**

The Hon. Secretary (DH) read out the list of nominations received for possible submission by the Club for the award of a National Honour. (79/03 §10). Summarising the merits of the various candidates, the Chair (IT) noted that, in his view, it would be most appropriate for the nominee to be a person who made a significant contribution by working in the background, but who did not necessarily either seek the limelight or have a high public profile. Council agreed that individuals with these attributes tended, unfairly, to get overlooked. As all of the candidates nominated were considered to be worthy of consideration, it was agreed that the best way forward was to delegate the final decision to the Chair (IT). It was further agreed that the Hon. Secretary would prepare a confidential Minute with the list of nominees for the files at Waterston House.

IT  
DH

**12 Branch Development Officer**

The Development Officer (JC) withdrew for this item.

Council was informed that Jane Cleaver’s contract expires in March 2016. The Management Committee had considered this issue at its meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> September, and through the Chair (IT) wished to make a firm recommendation that the post be placed on a permanent contract, given the significant and positive impact that the Development Officer had made. The Hon. Treasurer (AF) indicated the overall cost per annum to the Club would be in the region of £30k, noting that the Club had sufficient reserves to enable the appointment to be made from a financial standpoint.

Council were unanimous in accepting the recommendation of the Management Committee that the position should become permanent and that Jane Cleaver should be asked to continue in this capacity.

**13 Honoraria**

The Hon. Treasurer (Alan Fox) and the Hon. Secretary (David Heeley) withdrew for this item.

Council agreed that the Hon. Treasurer and Hon. Secretary should both be offered the maximum honorarium of £1000 each for services in the preceding Club year (from the 2014 AGM to the 2015 AGM). It was further agreed that the ceiling for the 2015/16 period would remain at £1k.

Council agreed that the *Scottish Birds* editorial team would be offered the same honoraria as in the preceding year (Minute of Council 78/04 30<sup>th</sup> November 2014 §14). The Editors of *Scottish Birds* Stan da Prato, Jimmy Maxwell, Harry Scott and Stuart Rivers will be offered an Honorarium of £200, and the

Coordinating Editor (Ian Andrews) will be offered £500.

It was noted that maxima did not have to be set for the honoraria offered to the editors of *Scottish Birds* as this requirement of the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) only applies to recipients who are Trustees of the Club.

(The Minute for the discussion on Honoraria was taken by Wendy Hicks, Office Manager Waterston House)

- 14 **Proposal for *Birds of Scotland ID Guide*** Council recalled that at its meeting in November 2014 (Minute §12 79/01) it had discussed and agreed in principle to consider supporting a proposal to produce a new *Birds of Scotland ID Guide*. Despite the passage of time, and a written request for clarification on a number of key issues regarding content, production and marketing, key details were still lacking and no progress appeared to have been made by the proposers. It was agreed that in the interests of the Club, and within the context of considering alternative publication projects, it would be prudent to withdraw support for the proposal. It was agreed that the Hon. Secretary would write to the proposers. **DH**
- 15 ***NBN Atlas of Living Scotland*** The National Biodiversity Network had approached the SOC regarding a proposal to develop an *Atlas of Living Scotland*. Due to pressure of business it was agreed to defer discussion of this project to the next meeting. **DH (agenda)**
- 16 **RSPB member on Council; SOC member on RSPB Committee** Management Committee had referred this long-standing item back to Council following its meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2015 (§4). It was noted that, in the past, the RSPB had been invited to have a member of their organisation sitting on Council. This arrangement was to a certain extent reciprocal with a member of SOC Council attending the Scottish Committee of the RSPB. The Chair (IT) noted that the Scottish Committee of RSPB was an extremely influential and authoritative body, and that having a member of SOC on it should be seen as a considerable honour for the Club. The representative had been the previous Hon. Secretary (Mike Martin) who had stood down from the post.
- It noted that it was a matter entirely for the RSPB to initiate the process of finding a replacement and that no formal approach to SOC had been made as yet, but the Chair (IT) indicated that he would continue to attempt to find out what progress there was within RSPB concerning this. **IT**
- With respect to the issue of RSPB representation on Council, it was unanimously agreed that this arrangement would be of considerable benefit to the Club and that an outside perspective would be particularly welcomed in future discussions on strategic development. There was less unanimity about whether the RSPB representative should, as in the past, fill a vacancy for an Elected Member, or whether the appointment should be an invitation to attend. Council agreed to defer further discussion, but noted that IT had tentatively identified a suitable individual within the RSPB who might be prepared to join Council if invited. **IT / DH**
- 17 **Sub-Committee Remits and Membership** Council continued its deliberations of 16<sup>th</sup> August 2015 (79/03 §17) regarding the structure and remits of its sub-committees. The Hon. Secretary (DH) provided a brief verbal summary of a circulated paper that described the responses that he had received from the Committee Chairs regarding an enquiry into the various methods that are deployed when appointing members, and the normal durations of their tenure.
- The Chairs of two of the committees, the Editorial (Publications) Committee (EPC) and the Birds of Scotland Committee, had queried whether the groups

that they were associated with were actually committees at all in any meaningful sense. In neither case was there an established method for appointing members (and none had been needed to date), and in both cases the work was all conducted via e-mail correspondence without the need for formal face to face meetings. The Chair of the EPC noted that there might potentially be a need in future for some form of Publications Committee for decision making, leaving the EPC to continue with the editorial work on the Club's journal. The creation of a Publications Committee was not considered a priority.

Succession planning for Committee Chairs was seen as a difficulty. Although somewhat *ad hoc*, all Committee Chairs used a number of relevant criteria for expertise when seeking to appoint new members.

It was agreed that the Hon. Secretary would prepare a revision of the earlier document summarising the Council Sub-committees for final approval at the next meeting. **DH**

- 18 Risk Register** Council received a summary report of the work of the Management Committee on Risk Management over the previous year. This had resulted in the production of a comprehensive Risk Register, graded in terms of likely impact on the Club's activities and the likelihood of occurrence. The Chair (IT) recorded Council's appreciation to the Hon Secretary for steering the project to a successful conclusion. Management Committee recommended that Council should now take ownership of the Risk Register, and consider the most appropriate steps to take to mitigate the mains Risks that had been identified.

IT noted that one of the key outcomes from the work of Management Committee on this topic was the identification of a pressing need for the Club to produce a Strategic Plan. This would provide the appropriate foundations for dealing with, amongst other things, risk mitigation, and should give the Club a much clearer view of the ways in which it should develop in the future.

It was agreed that the Management Committee would consider the most appropriate ways in which a strategic planning exercise could be conducted, possibly seeking external guidance on the best way forward. **IT**

- 19 Appointment of Chair of Library Committee** Council noted that David Clugston had stood down as Chair of the Library Committee, and that Alan Knox (AK) had been nominated by the Library Committee as successor. AK made clear that he was not willing to take on the role simply on the basis of this nomination but was prepared to stand for election, and withdrew at that point.

**Appointment of Alan Knox as Chair of the Library Committee:**

Proposed: Roger Gooch

Seconded: James Main

Appointed unopposed.

Alan Knox rejoined Council and was congratulated on his appointment.

Council noted that David Clugston was keen to continue his association with the Waterston House library, and wished to remain Honorary Librarian. It was agreed that the Library Committee would be invited to produce a form of Job Description for this title before any decision was taken. **AK**

- 20 AOCB** (i) Vacancy for Honorary Treasurer. The Honorary Treasurer (Alan Fox) had indicated that he wished to stand down at the 2016 AGM at the end of the Club year. The Chair (IT) paid tribute to Alan's significant contributions as Treasurer over a period of some eight years and his prudent management of the

Club's finances. On behalf of Council and the Club members he offered thanks in particular to Alan for the key role he had played in guiding the Club through the process of conversion to a SCIO. Regarding the search for a successor, it was agreed that the issue needed to be resolved as soon as possible, noting that the appointee must be a Club member. AF agreed to produce a form of job description to assist in identifying appropriate candidates.

AF

(ii) 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Council noted that 2016 would be the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the SOC. It was agreed that there would be no advantage in having extensive celebrations given the proximity of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. However, it did present an opportunity for publicity, and it was agreed that a few events might be held at Waterston House with a possible press release.

JC / WH

(iii) Report of the Wildlife Crime Penalties Review Group. Council noted the very recently published Report of the Wildlife Crime Penalties Review Group convened by Prof. Mark Poustie of the University of Strathclyde Law School. It was pleased to note that the Review panel had made a number of Recommendations, amongst which were that the scope and severity of the penalties be increased very significantly for crimes of this type. Council welcomed these Recommendations, and it was agreed that the Hon Secretary should write to Dr. Aileen Mcleod MSP, Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform welcoming the Conclusions of the Review and urging that the Recommendations be implemented in full by the Scottish Government as soon as possible.

DH

(iv) Banning the use of lead shot. Council noted the recent publicity regarding a petition to ban the use of lead shot because of the deleterious effect that it was having when ingested by birds. It was agreed that SOC should publicly endorse this petition, and indicate its support using its Twitter and Facebook pages, as well as including material on the topic in the next issue of *Scottish Birds*.

(v) Marine Protected Areas. Alan Fox, acting as the SOC representative on the LINK Marine Task Force, informed Council about the forthcoming consultation concerning the environment surrounding Fair Isle. He drew Council's attention to the work that was continuing on the creation of Marine Protected Areas. It was agreed that this was a crucial topic that was relevant to the 2016 conference theme, and Council looked forward to receiving future updates.

- 21 **Dates for meetings of Council 2016** It was agreed that Council would meet on the 6<sup>th</sup> March, 12<sup>th</sup> June, 14<sup>th</sup> August and 27<sup>th</sup> November 2016. It was noted that these dates were slightly earlier than the schedule for 2015, but this meant that the 2017 schedule could be moved to later dates.
- 22 **Next Meeting** 6<sup>th</sup> March 2016 : 10.30 at RSPB Loch Leven reserve

Signed:



Date: 6<sup>th</sup> March 2016

Ian Thomson, President