

The SOC

Scotland's Bird Club

COUNCIL MEETING 81/03

13th August 2017 Minutes



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

Session 81/03 of Council was held at 10.30 hrs on the 13th August 2017 at the RSPB Loch Leven, Kinross.

Present: President James Main (Chair), Jeremy Wilson (Vice President), David Heeley (Hon Secretary), Andrew Thorpe (Hon Treasurer), David Bain, Alison Creamer, Lesley Creamer, Roger Gooch, Alan Knox, Bob McGowan, Melvin Morrison, David Rackham, Neil Stratton, and Paul Taylor.

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

Action

- 1 **Vacancy for Honorary Secretary** The Chairman, James Main, informed Council that the Secretary, David Heeley had indicated to him that he was prepared to serve a further two years subject to approval at the 2017 AGM. Council welcomed this announcement.
- 2 **Apologies for absence** Apologies were received from Frank Hamilton, Helen Aiton, Iain Gibson, Richard Leslie and Chris Wernham.
- 3 **Absent** John Campbell, Angus McBay and Geoff Sheppard were absent.
- 4 **Minutes of Council Meeting 81/02 held on 18th June 2017** The minutes for meeting 81/02 18th June 2017 were approved subject to a minor correction.
- 5 **Matters arising** §12 Bird Recorders Conference: The Chair, James Main (JM), noted that he had been in further contact with the cadre of Local Bird Recorders and that there was some enthusiasm for holding a Bird Recorders Conference after a lapse of some years. JM was awaiting a more detailed response from Mark Holling and agreed to report back to Council following this contact. **JM**

All other items on the Action List were Agenda items.
- 6 **Finance** The Treasurer, Andrew Thorpe (AT) offered a resumé of recent activities relating to the financial management of the Club:-
 - Subscriptions. The agreed increase in adult membership subscription to £36.00 p.a. will be notified to members in the September issue of *Scottish Birds*. The subscription rates for all other categories of membership will be adjusted *pro rata*. Waterston House would be sending out notifications.

- Finance Committee. It was intended to hold the inaugural meeting of the newly formed Finance Committee by mid-September. A priority would be to devise a suitable advertisement for a Finance Officer, with the advertisement appearing in late summer / early autumn.
- Financial documents archive. AT informed Council that the digitisation of the archive of financial documents was proceeding well. About 100 hours of effort had resulted in over 80% of the archive being processed.
- Accounts. The end of year Accounts for the period 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017 had been prepared (the figures having been received by Council at its meeting in June 2017). AT had met with the Independent Financial Advisor (Sandy Scotland) twice, and the Accounts were ready to be submitted to OSCR. The Secretary, David Heeley (DH) would circulate the final version to Council members. The broad summary showed that the overall income was c£277k and the overall expenditure was c£298k. The deficit was down from the £34k of the previous year. Capital appreciation was c£50k. (Secretary's note: in a subsequent meeting, Sandy Scotland had advised AT to (a) include the latest legacy from the estate of Duncan Watt and (b) to include an element for depreciation. These refinements resulted in the final Accounts circulated showing a healthy surplus). DH
- Branch Funds. Branch Accounts had now been included in the Accounts. It was noted that the response from Branches had been somewhat patchy for a number of reasons, and AT undertook to notify branches earlier in 2018 to improve the response. Council noted that some Branches in fact held very significant balances, amounting overall to > c£60k. In most cases the Branches concerned considered these to be earmarked for specific projects such as the future publication of a local Bird Atlas or as funds set aside to underwrite research projects. In most cases these excess funds had been generated by local initiatives such as the sale of publications and fund raising events. After discussion it was agreed that Treasurer needed to know about these funds in order to gain a complete and accurate picture of the Club's financial state, without necessarily wanting to assimilate the funds into central accounts. At the same time Council recognised that the existence of such significant amounts not clearly within the control of the Club posed potential constitutional difficulties. It was agreed that the Finance Committee should consider the issues as early as possible, and that the Strategy Group could also fruitfully consider the matter in the context of the relationship between Branches and the more central aspects of Club administration. AT agreed to report back to Council when he had a more detailed picture of Branch returns. AT
- Balance Sheet. Moving to consider the Profit and Loss accounts and the Balance Sheet, AT noted that legacies have now moved into general funds; sales of artworks showed a significant increase on the previous year but cautioned that this was a very variable (if valuable) source of income; the *Birds of Scotland* fund still had some residual monies in it and the *BOS* group were due to discuss how this might best be deployed; the Club's insurance was now up to date and the Club was in possession of all of the relevant certificates; finally AT was pleased to note that the ratio of the Club's assets to liabilities was in the region of 20:1 with the overall value for the SOC of some

£1.5m. He felt that this represented a healthy and sustainable financial picture.

7 Branch and Membership Development

The Development Officer, Jane Cleaver (JC) presented a brief analysis of current membership recruitment:

- New membership figures were somewhat lower than in the corresponding period in the previous year, but JC noted that there had not been a Scottish Bird Fair and that the Club website had suffered significant technical problems (now in the process of being resolved with a new website being designed).
- Online searches were returning increasing numbers of hits, and that overall there was the highest number ever of individual members. Council welcomed this trend. As ever it was proving difficult to get a firm idea of why some members allowed their membership to lapse, but JC was pleased to note that this was not a high figure and that it was not a cause for concern. By the same token, Council noted that the Club lacked a clear idea of why people joined in the first place and that many members were not aware of the full range of activities and facilities that the SOC provided for their benefit.
- It was felt that the forthcoming upgrade of the Club's membership database should provide opportunities for clearer and more reliable analyses of these issues.

With regard to Club development, JC outlined the implications of the forthcoming legislation on Data Protection. This would place considerable restrictions on the type of communications that the Club could have with members via, for example, e-mail in particular. Informing members of the changes and obtaining the necessary consents posed certain difficulties given the relatively low proportion of members attending Branch events. It was agreed that an insert in *Scottish Birds* would be the most effective method. Council was pleased to note the progress made on the new website project with the identification of a suitable design team and website host. JC informed Council that the new website should be ready by 1st October, but would not go live until after the Annual Conference where the new system would be advertised. JC concluded with an update on the Site Guide app for smartphones, noting that considerable progress had been made with successful meetings with the prospective editorial team.

8 Conferences

Annual Conference. The Club Administrator, Wendy Hicks (WH) informed Council that there had been some 100 bookings for the Annual Conference in Pitlochry to date, a respectable figure for mid-August with four sponsored students so far with some 12 expected to apply overall. There had been positive feedback regarding the programme. WH noted that 2018 would be the start of a new three year block for booking the venue and that some increase in costs was to be expected.

Spring Conference 2018. The Club Administrator, Wendy Hicks (WH), is liaising with Dumfries Branch to ascertain final costs for holding the event and organising the conference brochure. There is some uncertainty as to whether BTO Scotland will be able to assume responsibility for taking the bookings this time as they are in the throes of a major IT systems overhaul. WH is continuing to liaise with the BTO over this. As Dumfries branch was not due to hold its Committee meeting until the end of August, no further details were available at the meeting of Council.

- 9 **Annual Report and 2017 AGM** The Club Administrator, Wendy Hicks (WH) noted that the Annual Report was in the process of being finalised. The Financial Report would be made available to members when completed (see §6 above). Council noted that elected member Alison Creamer would be stepping down after four years service at the 2017 AGM; the Chair, James Main (JM) invited suggestions for a suitable replacement to be sent to him by e-mail.
- 10 **Branch Awards** Considering Branch Awards, Council noted that 2017 was the fourth year of the scheme and that the number of candidates being nominated had declined quite significantly. The question arose as to whether the scheme should continue. Following a largely inconclusive discussion which recognised that the fall off had been anticipated at the start, it was agreed that Branch Awards should still be available but that the Strategy Group could be invited to consider the issues raised in the broader context of recognising meritorious contributions.
- 11 **Strategic Planning Group: Update** The Chair, James Main (JM), gave a verbal update on the first two scoping meetings of the Strategic Planning Group with the 2015 Risk Register report and the Lucy Johnson 2011 review of Cub Members providing a useful starting point. The Group had identified a clear need for an Operating Framework for the Club, but agreed that in broad terms the Club’s objectives remained appropriate and that an emphasis on the “Scottish” element was important. There were a number of areas where the SOC could properly take a lead in a national debate and context. Considering issues of governance, JM noted that the Group had concerns that the roles of President and Vice-President were ill-defined and it was unclear what constituted reasonable expectations of these posts, and what responsibilities and authorities were attached to them. Consideration of these issues and the roles of the various Committees and their development would form an important aspect of the Groups future deliberations.
- JM noted that the Secretary, David Heeley (DH), had agreed to join the Group and invited Council to note that the Group would be inviting outside members to participate in discussions as the need arose.
- 12 **AOCB**
- The Chair, James Main (JM), on behalf of Council welcomed the news that Jeremy Brock (JB) had been appointed Chair of Stewartry Branch and Branch Representative on Council. JB had indicated that he would be attending meetings as regularly as possible. Stewartry would therefore be represented for the first time for a number of years.
 - David Bain (DB; Highland) noted that there was a planning proposal for a golf course development at Coul Farm at the mouth of Loch Fleet that posed a potential threat to birdlife and that there was a petition against the proposal. Council confirmed that it would not make any direct response as an organisation regarding this (in line with previous decisions). Disseminating the information to members raised issues under data protection legislation, which was due to become much more stringent in future. The Development Officer (Jane Cleaver) stated that any use of the Club’s email system would set an unwelcome precedent, would be inadvisable and most likely illegal. It was agreed that DB would be invited to write a short article for the digital magazine *Hoot!* outlining the local issues and with pointers to the appropriate websites.
- 13 **Papers received** Council received the following documents:
- The revised remit for Honorary Secretary

- Approved Minutes for the meeting of Management Committee 7th April 2017
- The implementation of the Grade Point system and associated Spinal Pay Scale for staff with the accompanying Operational Procedures – now in place.

14 Next Meeting 3rd December 2017 : 10.30 at RSPB Loch Leven

Signed:



Date: 3rd December 2017

James Main, President