

SOC Clyde Branch Annual General Meeting, Thursday 22nd April 2021

MINUTES

Due to the continuing Covid-19 restrictions the branch AGM was held as an online Zoom video conference. However, this led to a bigger than usual attendance for an AGM with 37 participants being online.

The meeting was Zoom hosted by Ian Fulton. Ian welcomed everyone and explained that this would be an abbreviated version of an AGM due to the format of meeting and the impracticality of voting.

1. Minutes of previous AGM

The minutes of the previous AGM had been available on the SOC web site for some time. There were no comments made regarding these and no matters arising.

2. Office Bearers' Reports

2.1 Chairperson's Report

Zul Bhatia presented the Chairperson's report. This is attached as Appendix 1.

2.2 Secretary's Report

Ian Fulton presented the Secretary's report. This is attached as Appendix 2.

2.3 Excursions Convenor's report

David Palmar presented his report verbally. Obviously, no excursion activities had been held due to the current situation. It is hoped that we may be able to restart excursions possibly later in the year 2021.

2.4 Treasurer's Report

Liz Parsons presented the accounts. It was noted that some of the balance in the account is restricted for expenditure and this would be made clear.

2.5 Local Recorder's Report

Unfortunately, Iain Gibson, Clyde Branch Recorder, was unable to submit a report.

3. Election of Office Bearers and Committee Members

Because of the ongoing Covid-19 situation the committee proposed that all the current office bearers and committee members would continue in post until next year's AGM.

There was no objection raised against this proposal.

Therefore, the following office bearers will remain in post

Chairperson – Zul Bhatia
Treasurer – Liz Parsons
Secretary – Ian Fulton
Branch Representative on SOC Council – Zul Bhatia

Clyde Branch Recorder – Iain Gibson

The following Committee Members will remain in post

Toby Wilson, Iain Gibson, David Palmar, Sandy McNeil, Fiona McLean, Kevin Sinclair, Andrew Russell, Donald Wilson, Emma Anderson and Rebecca Dickson.

It was noted that the Branch is looking for a new Treasurer and Secretary as Liz Parsons and Ian Fulton would like to step down once replacements are in post. Members should contact Zul Bhatia if they wish to step forward.

4. Any other business

Indoor meetings will be on Zoom until further notice and again Clyde and Central branches will be twinned for meetings. The first meeting being held on Thursday 9th September.

Ian Fulton thanked all for attending and closed the meeting.

Minutes prepared by Ian Fulton, Secretary, SOC Clyde Branch

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Appendix 1

Chairperson's Report

I have now been in post for just over three years as Chair and I have continued to work closely with our Clyde Branch Committee. The branch continued to input in to the running of the SOC nationally with **Fiona Maclean** on the Management Committee and myself on Council. Fiona & I are also both on the small team developing a Safeguarding Policy for the SOC to protect minors and vulnerable adults. The Management Committee and Safeguarding policies are almost ready to be signed off

The Covid-19 Pandemic had a major impact on many of our activities of course during this period. All face to face meetings were cancelled although we were able to meet online, of course. All our planned excursions were cancelled. Nationally, HQ activities were severely affected. Cancelled / postponed meetings co-ordinated by HQ included the Spring Conference (Elgin), the Branch Development (Grantown), Scottish Bird Recorders meeting (Stirling) and the Annual Conference (Pitlochry). HQ was totally closed for a time and then operated on a very restricted basis. All Council and other HQ meetings were held online. One of the benefits of the online meetings/conferences is that many more people join them than would otherwise be the case. For example, I myself joined some BTO Conference sessions, the BTO/SOC Spring Conference, the annual SOC Conference, etc. **Andrew Russell** who leads for us on Twitter joined our planning from Shetland!

The branch is in very good heart with good numbers attending meetings and members being involved in much fieldwork. Apart from watching, enjoying birds and reporting them (increasingly via BirdTrack which received 96,883 records in 2020), members also took part in many other surveys including Breeding Bird Survey, BTO Garden Birdwatch, Heronries Census, Nesting Neighbours / Nest Record Scheme, WeBS, Big Garden Birdwatch, Goose monitoring, International Swan Census and the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme. Some members were also leading/volunteering with the nest box projects at various sites via the Friends of Glasgow's LNRs and at Linn Park. Private projects (sometimes extending beyond the Clyde area) included winter gull monitoring in some of Glasgow's parks. Lesser Whitethroat habitat restoration, Eider counts, moulting flocks of Red-breasted Mergansers, wintering divers and documenting overland seabird movements/inland records.

The Clyde Ringing Group continued to be very active and their studies included Constant Effort Sites, migration studies, estimating breeding success and population levels of many passerines, and ringing of gulls, terns, waders (including Jack Snipe). They made some remarkable discoveries which were reported widely.

The whole Clyde branch Committee met twice online in the last year with sub-committees meeting at other times. Some of the various activities we have been involved in over the last year are outlined below.

Bird Reports / Atlas / App

I don't want to pre-empt the Recorders report, but did want to say a huge thank you to all the volunteers who helped with converting records received in Word format in to Excel. It has been a considerable job to get a year's worth of records converted, but as more and more people use BirdTrack, this work has reduced in volume. We were able to complete 2011-2014 in the past twelve months. **Val Wilson**, who leads on maintaining the SOC database of birds recorded in the Clyde, did a sterling job of 'cleaning up' the data where required and uploaded all the records to BirdTrack monthly. There are now over 700,000 records in the Clyde database.

We have started working on the big backlog of Clyde Bird Reports, the last published report being for 2008. With the Local Recorder **Iain Gibson** concentrating on getting the 2009 Clyde Bird Report done, a team of us have got together and are working on the 2010 one. We have met on Zoom several times to agree a way forward, drawn up Guidelines and started writing species accounts. The response from people wanting to get involved has been amazing and we have encouraged less experienced members to get involved too with coaching, mentoring and encouragement given. Just over 90% of the species accounts have been written as I write this.

Having finally received the 2007-11 Clyde Tetrad Atlas data from BTO, we were able to make some progress on this too and have produced some **very** preliminary sample maps. There is still a very long way to go before we can say we are getting there.

The SOC Where to watch Birds App continues to be very popular and it won the BTO Marsh Award for Local Ornithology in October 2020.

SOC Youth Connect

This is an initiative (launched in 2018) to look at how we can integrate and welcome more young people in to the SOC. The group wasn't particularly active in the last year mainly due to Covid-19 but we did have a social on Zoom in February 2021 and traffic on their Facebook page has increased since then. A recently-formed sub group (on which I sit) to take BTO Scotland / SOC Youth Work forward should result in more activity. We have met once so far.

It was very pleasing that one of our founding members, **Michael Sinclair**, received the Marsh Award for Young Ornithology from the BTO in October 2020.

New Venue for indoor meetings

Due to all our meetings being online for the foreseeable future, our move to Renfield St Stephens Centre on Bath Street is on hold for now

BirdTrack training

SOC is a BirdTrack partner and we have been promoting its use for many years. We got in touch with the BTO and their BirdTrack Organiser **Scott Mayson** ran a training event for us in December 2020. It was attended by about 30 people (all but one from the Clyde area) and was well received.

Crops for Wildlife

We have been talking about this for some time, but unfortunately Covid-19 and the inability of organisations we were hoping to work with to react quickly has meant that no progress was made with the previously identified partners. A new opportunity has arisen via the recently-formed Lochwinnoch Force for Nature group and we are pursuing this together with the Yearnstane project.

Branch website

It was agreed at our February 2021 Committee meeting that we would look at creating a website. We formed a small sub-group - Committee members **Emma Anderson**, **Rebecca Dickson**, **Jane Allison** (SOC Development Officer) and myself, looked at many SOC / Bird Club sites and together with an invaluable branch member with considerable experience of creating websites (**Kevin McCormick**), have made a great deal progress in advancing this project. The SOC Highland branch has been particularly generous in sharing their experiences and content too. Our next step is to take a full proposal with costings to the whole branch Committee for approval.

Boxes for Barnies project

Following the discovery of a significant population of Barn Owls in southern part of Renfrewshire in 2020 and the opportunity to help them by providing more boxes for them to breed/roost in, we teamed up with the Garnock Connections project and have built and put up 19 new boxes in the area this winter just gone. Most of the funding came via the Heritage Lottery fund. 20 volunteers offered to help in different ways with seven constructing the boxes and two helping with the installation so far. Monitoring is yet to come. It was a great project in terms of liaising with local landowners/farmers and it created a lot of goodwill for the SOC.

SOC Discussion Group

Chris Waltho and I put a bit of effort in to trying to get a discussion group going (similar to the Lothian one which has been operating for 30 years). We were keen to widen the area beyond the Clyde and had a Zoom meeting with reps from Ayrshire, Clyde Island and even a bit of Argyll. Unfortunately, it was difficult for everyone to sustain enthusiasm beyond that first meeting and a few emails and the idea was abandoned at least for now. A meeting bringing some of the Clyde fieldworkers together in December 2020 to discuss showed more promise and will be pursued in the future.

The Future

Unfortunately, the uncertainty surrounding Covid-19 restrictions make it difficult to plan with certainty but it is currently assumed that the rest of the meetings for 2021 will be online. We look forward to seeing each other face to face at our new venue at sometime in 2022. Due to the success of the online meetings attracting people who otherwise would not have attended a physical meeting, we will be looking at how we can continue to benefit from the online presence. We look forward to resuming excursions in due course.

If approved, set up branch website, using it as an opportunity not only to showcase the work and activities going on, but also to get more people involved in practical conservation projects/fieldwork/survey, etc.

Continue to promote the study, enjoyment and conservation of wild birds and their habitats across the Clyde area making use of the considerable bird data we hold. Make more progress on using the 2007-2011 Atlas data.

Consider novel ways of engaging more people with the Clyde SOC including having a 'bird race' for fun and enjoyment as well as possible fundraising.

Working on the 2010 bird report has highlighted how poorly recorded many common species are. Encourage more recording and reporting of all species, and consider picking some scarcer species such as Nuthatch, Jay, Little Ringed Plover, Stock Dove, etc for special surveys.

Challenges still remain, of course. Little further progress has been made with developing Paisley Moss LNR as a reserve in co-operation with Glasgow Airport. No contact has been made with Scottish Wildlife Trust over the management of Cathkin Marsh. I haven't been personally involved in either of these two issues myself, so far.

Acknowledgements

Many people's contributions have already been acknowledged in the relevant section above, but for the branch to operate as successfully as it has, there are so many more people involved. Thank you

to all of you who have supported the Clyde Branch in one way or another this year. If you have any feedback or suggestions, please let one of the Committee members have them.

Zul Bhatia

Chair, Clyde Branch of the SOC

April 2021

Appendix 2

Secretary's Report

There were very few external communications. Most of these were either from birding holiday companies promoting their trips or from publishers promoting a book. It was not felt appropriate to pass these on to the branch members.

Clyde Branch membership now stands at 334 memberships or 388 persons (counting joint memberships as two persons) plus 13 Student members. This is an increase of 35 adult members compared with last year, a bigger than usual increase in members.

The distribution list for the daily Clyde Grapevine news message now stands at 250. Again, many thanks to Val Wilson for all her efforts in maintaining such a high standard of service and for her enduring patience with contributors. Val has not missed one single day in the last year, a truly remarkable performance.

Social media continues to become an increasingly popular medium for information sharing and recording.

For Clyde Branch SOC members we have a 'WhatsApp' group called 'Clyde SOC Bird News'. Val Wilson is the administrator of this group. This now has a count of 78 subscribers and is proving to be interesting and a popular way of reporting sightings when out in the field. Reports will be picked up from here for the daily Grapevine and the Clyde database.

Other social media initiatives which are public rather than SOC specific are

- the Facebook 'Clydebirds' group administered by SOC member John Molloy. This group now has 862 members. We have been using this Facebook group to announce SOC meetings and to advertise the Grapevine and other branch activities.
- the Facebook 'Baron's Haugh Wildlife Sightings' which was set up to replace the website which the late Jimmy Maxwell maintained for many years. After less than a year this has over 500 members
- a Twitter account '@clydebirding' was set up in October 2020 and now has 339 followers

Our winter indoor meetings programme for the 2020-2021 season was drastically affected by the Covid-19 restrictions. All our meetings were replaced by online virtual Zoom meetings for which we were twinned with the SOC Central Branch.

Despite some initial trepidation and teething problems this worked extremely well. The meetings were attended by about 70 to 80 people from Clyde and Central Branches. Some of the attendees, such as Bute and Arran residents, were people who would never have made the journey to Glasgow on a winter's night for a physical meeting. We even had Hayley join our meetings from Tiree.

SOC HQ has requested that we do not schedule any face-to-face meetings for the rest of this calendar year. So at least the first half of next winter's meetings will again be held via Zoom. Longer term it is possible that we may continue to use the Zoom technology for some of our meetings. We may also investigate the possibility of live streaming or recording physical meetings so that more of our branch members can participate without the worry of traveling to Glasgow.

The meetings which were held over the winter were

- September : previously postponed branch AGM followed by a presentation by Sandy McNeil 'Winter birding and other wildlife in Spain
- October : 'Short-eared Owls' by John Calladine
- November : 'Peregrines in Southern Scotland' by George Smith
- December : 'Crossbills and garden birds-studies in ornithological data' by Ben Swallow
- January : 'An overview of the RSPB's conservation science programme' by Prof Jeremy Wilson
- February : 'Emma Turner, pioneer ornithologist and photographer' by Prof Jeremy Greenwood
- March : 'Albatrosses and other birds of South Georgia' by Robert Paterson
- April : 'Nocturnal Migration – things that go “tseep” in the night' by Simon Gillings

At all but the first of the meetings above, Ian Fulton gave a short presentation of recent sightings in the Clyde area illustrated with some of the many excellent photographs taken in the area.

Ian Fulton, Secretary, SOC Clyde Branch