

The SOC Scotland's Bird Club



COUNCIL MEETING 78/04 30th November 2014 Minutes

Session 78/04 of Council was held at 10.30 hrs on the 30th November at the RSPB Loch Leven reserve, Kinross.

Present: President Chris McInerny (Chair), Ian Thomson (Vice President), Alan Fox (Hon Treasurer), David Heeley (Hon Secretary), David Bain, Alison Creamer, Roger Gooch, Alan Knox, James Main, Bob McGowan, Ray Murray, David Rackham and Paul Taylor.

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

Action

- 1 **Apologies for absence** Apologies were received from David Clugston and Martin Cook.
- 2 **Absent** John Campbell, Angus McBay, Geoff Packard, Geoff Sheppard and Brian Smith were absent.
- 3 **Minutes of Council Meeting 78/03 held on 10th August 2014** The minutes for meeting 78/03 were approved subject to minor amendments.
- 4 **Matters arising**

§ 6. The Chair noted that David Heeley had agreed to become SOC Honorary Secretary and that this had been approved at the 78th AGM. On behalf of Council, CMcI welcomed David to his first meeting in his new role.

Council was aware that a vacancy had arisen to replace Hannah Grist. CMcI noted that Richard Leslie of the Lothian Branch had been approached and had agreed to stand. However, due to pressure of business and the need to prioritise the SCIO conversion work, RL's nomination had been overlooked in the preparation of the papers for the 78th AGM and thus his appointment could not be confirmed. The Chair had contacted Richard Leslie directly offering his apologies, and asking that he be co-opted to Council until the 79th AGM in 2015 when his appointment can be ratified. CMcI offered apologies for the oversight, and Council concurred with the action taken

§ 7. Noted as completed

§ 9. On behalf of Council the Chair thanked Alan Fox for the amount of work that he had done in preparing for the SCIO conversion of the Club. CMcI noted that the AGM was content with the proposal, understood the benefits that the conversion would confer, and were extremely complimentary regarding the progress to date. Overall it was felt that the process that had been put in place for notifying the membership about the changes to the Club Constitution that were required for the SCIO conversion had worked well in terms of openness and gaining feedback and that this was a model that could be adopted when needed in future

Most of the issues that had been raised regarding the revised Constitution had been minor editorial points, but there were one or two more substantive issues that needed to be discussed, but that this should be delayed for the near future so as to not impede progress on SCIO conversion. Any modifications would need to be approved by the AGM. It was therefore decided that Constitutional proposals would be discussed at the Council meeting on 14th June 2015. If Council considered that alterations were advisable then these would be presented to members in the same way as those needed for the SCIO conversion with a deadline for comments, and (taking note of members feedback) be presented to the 79th AGM in 2015. It was recognised that this might necessitate notification to Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator.

It was accepted that a period of stability for the Constitution was prudent, and that revisiting the issue on an annual basis was unlikely to bring any benefits. It was recognised at the same time that the greater length and complexity of the new Constitution meant that constitutional issues would almost inevitably arise that would have to be addressed.

§ 10. Council noted the success of the newly implemented Branch Awards scheme and the pleasure that they gave the recipients. It was regretted that there had been a certain confusion in some branches and not all of the original nominees had been announced at the Conference. The organisation of the scheme would be tightened up for 2015 with nominees being considered for approval at the August meeting of Council, and Waterston House notifying awardees in advance of the Annual Conference. The attractive nature and professional quality of the certificates was applauded, and Council agreed that the calligrapher would be welcome to invoice the SOC for the work. Possible nominations for national honours would be discussed at the August 2015 meeting.

**5 Minutes of
78th AGM 1st
November
2014 and
matter
arising**

The Minutes of the 78th AGM were noted. Under §6 a correction was indicated to the names of the solicitors who attended from Morton Fraser.

The AGM had raised the matter of possible digitisation of historic issues of *Scottish Bird Report* and this had been referred to Council for consideration. Council noted, first that the *Scottish Bird Report* had now been separated as a publication from *Scottish Birds*, and also that the on-line Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) contained a large amount of SOC material that was openly available and easily searchable, a facility that greatly enhanced its usefulness. It was agreed that Alan Knox would approach the BHL to see if they would add the *Scottish Bird Report* to their digital holdings, and whether the SOC could subsequently add the resulting PDFs to the SOC web site as well.

AK

It was agreed that SOC HQ (Wendy Hicks) would investigate and report back

WH

on any copyright issues that might have to be addressed with digitising material from *Scottish Bird News*.

- 6 Finance** Council considered the Profit & Loss accounts that had been prepared by the Honorary Treasurer for the financial year up to 25th November 2014 with the comparison data from 2013. AF highlighted that the Club was approximately £30k ahead of the same period last year and that it was on track to break even. This was despite the fact that there had been some exceptional items (such as the costs associated with SCIO conversion). AF clarified that the item referred to in the paper as Branch Refunds was for items that Waterston House had purchased for Club Branches, and was not a reclaim of unspent funds. It was noted that the LINK subscription had not yet been paid for the current year and that any balances should take this into account. Council thanked the Honorary Treasurer for the work involved in providing the analysis, and offered its compliments for the clarity of the report.
- 7 SCIO Conversion** The Honorary Treasurer (Alan Fox) provided a verbal report on the progress made towards SCIO conversion and outlined the next stages of the project. The formal application process now needed to be initiated with the relevant documentation being submitted to the OSCR before Christmas. Documents had been circulated to Council, and subject to a few minor amendments, corrections and additions (such as inclusion of some mention of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme, the role of networking via the LINK scheme and clarification of the Club's use of Honoraria) the documentation (referred to as the Paper Apart) was accepted as appropriate. Council noted the satisfaction expressed at the AGM with the SCIO conversion project (see Minute referred to at §5 above). New Trustee forms for signature had already been circulated to members of Council and these would be collated by Waterston House staff for inclusion.
- 8 LINK** Alan Fox indicated that he wished to stand down as the main point of contact for LINK. Wendy Hicks had agreed that this role could be passed to Waterston House staff as it primarily concerned communicating various LINK items to the relevant or most appropriate person. AF wished to remain as the Club's representative on the LINK *Marine Task Force* and Council were content to endorse this. He provided a brief verbal note of the work of the MTF on Marine Protected Areas,

Ian Thomson provided a verbal update on the work of the Wildlife Crime Taskforce (noting also the theme of the next SOC Spring Conference). The issues to be raised in the forthcoming reports from the WCT would be politically sensitive and there had been a deliberate delay in publication to allow the new Justice Secretary (Michael Matheson) to take up his post. IT also noted that LINK was an important lobbying organisation for SOC because, as a Club, it lacked the full-time professional staff with expertise in this area that other larger organisations can deploy.
- 9 Membership and Branch Development** Jane Cleaver (SOC HQ) spoke to a paper that gave an update of membership, recent promotional activities, attendance at Birdfairs and Branch Development.

Council welcomed the new approach to using direct e-mail shots to members and there was some feeling that this had a beneficial impact on the numbers

attending branch meetings. It was noted that it was too early to be able to assess the impact of new printed promotional materials, especially the insert that was prepared to accompany the RSPB's *Nature's Home* magazine, but nevertheless it was clear (from the use of promotional codes) that there had been a number of new joiners as a result.

Following discussion, Council agreed that the Rutland Birdfair was something that the SOC should be involved with. It was recognised that it was the most significant wildlife and natural history fair in Britain. Whilst it was not easy to evaluate the impact of SOC attendance on, for example, recruitment of new members, it was an invaluable opportunity for networking and promoted the Club in a positive manner to a UK wide audience. The club did need to reconsider the promotional offers that are part of the new member recruitment pack (see §12 below). It was agreed that SOC should attend in 2015, and evaluate in December whether to continue. Council thanked all those involved in 2014.

Council noted that difficulties currently being experienced in the Orkney branch due to a lack of volunteers who are willing to participate as Branch Committee members. The Branch Secretary has recently had to stand down for personal reasons leaving all of the Committee positions un-filled. JC will circulate a letter to members in Orkney regarding the situation, noting that the Branch might have to be disbanded if a Branch Committee could not be formed. The Chair recognised that this was a problem that was common to many clubs and not unique to SOC. There was a need to be realistic and if there was no appetite at local level for running a Branch then disbanding it was the appropriate course of action.

JC

Council agreed that in the longer term there was a need for the Club to evolve its approach to local branches, especially as figures indicate that only about one sixth of SOC members attend branch meetings. Various possibilities for exploiting digital technology, such as virtual branches were discussed noting that these alternative approaches might prove especially attractive to younger members. It was agreed that this issue would be referred to the Management Committee for consideration.

Management
Committee

10 Conferences

Wendy Hicks (SOC HQ) gave a brief report on the Annual Conference that had been held in Perth at the beginning of November. There were 162 attendees and all 100 rooms of the Station Hotel had been occupied. Due to the competitive prices offered by the hotel, the conference had returned a net profit that would help to defray the losses incurred in previous years. Council agreed that given the importance of this annual event, the SOC conference could operate at a small loss and that this was to be expected due to the inherent uncertainty in predicting the overall cost of attracting high quality external speakers. There were healthy sales from the SOC stand and a good income from the raffle. From the feedback received it was clear that the quality of the programme was the main factor in attracting attendance with the talks being the favoured highlights.

WH informed Council that the Atholl Palace in Pitlochry had been approached as a potential venue for 2015, with the hope that in the long term a venue could be found to host the conference for a number of years in succession. WH was awaiting their quotation.

It was noted that the 2015 Spring Conference held in conjunction with the BTO would be on March 21st 2015 at the Western Infirmary in Glasgow, and was being organised by the Clyde Branch Committee. SOC and BTO take alternate years for the organisation of this conference. Borders Branch

indicated a wish to run the 2016 conference to coincide with the publication of the South-east Scotland Bird Atlas. It was agreed that Wendy Hicks would discuss this possibility with the BTO as it would be their year as lead organisation. **WH**

11 Bird Fairs: Rutland 2014& 2015, Scottish Bird Fair 2015 These matters were considered under §9.

12 Proposal for new field guide to Scottish Birds (Alan Lauder by invitation) Alan Lauder was invited to attend Council to present this item, a proposal for a *Birds of Scotland ID Guide* that would be based closely on the recently published *Birds of Ireland Field Guide* which was an attractively presented soft-back book that used selected photographs rather than painted illustrations for the identification guide. It was noted that the Irish book had sold circa 4,000 copies to date and was competitively priced at 18.00 Euro. There was lively and comprehensive discussion of the various levels of involvement that SOC might have with the project. Overall, Council were enthusiastic and supportive, and felt that SOC should be take on a role in the publication of this work. The potential value of the book as a promotional tool seemed especially to be welcomed (see §9 above). A number of matters needed to be clarified, such as the potential to use the BS3 Fund to support the publication and the liaison with the Publications Committee. It was also felt that there would be a particular need to make sure that robust mechanisms were in place to manage the publication, especially managing the business and financial aspects. It was agreed that the Chair would contact David Jardine to seek advice on these matters. It was agreed that CMcI should email Alan Lauder to let him know that SOC would support this book, but that the details would have to be clarified, with David Jardine's input.

CMcI

(Secretary's note: Both AL and DJ have already been contacted by CMcI)

13 Staff Salaries Wendy Hicks and Jane Cleaver withdrew for this item.

Following discussion, and on the recommendation of the Honorary Treasurer, it was agreed that staff salaries should be increased in line with the Consumer Prices Index, which currently stood at 1.2%. It was agreed further that as Council did not wish the Waterston House staff in future to suffer what amounted to an effective reduction in pay on an annual basis that there should in subsequent years be an automatic increase in line with the CPI and that this did not have to be discussed further by Council.

AF

The different rates amongst hourly paid staff were discussed. It was unclear to Council how these had arisen and for what reason they were in place. It was recognised that this was a complex and sensitive matter and referred the issue to Management Committee to consider at its December meeting within the accompanying context of Annual Staff Appraisal. The need for openness and transparency in this area was noted.

Management Committee

14 Annual Honoraria The Honorary Treasurer (AF) and Honorary Secretary (DH) withdrew for this item.

Council agreed that the Treasurer (Alan Fox) should receive the maximum honorarium of £1000 plus £250 for his continued role as the main LINK

representative. The outgoing Secretary Mike Martin will be offered £500 for his services to the Club the year 2014. The ceiling for the Treasurer and Secretary posts will again be set at £1000 for 2015.

Alan Fox indicated that he wished to stand down as the main contact for LINK (see §8 above)

The Editors of *Scottish Birds* Stan da Prato, Jimmy Maxwell, Harry Scott and Stuart Rivers will be offered an Honorarium of £200, and this will be set as the ceiling for 2015. It was agreed that the Coordinating Editor (Ian Andrews) should be offered the increased sum of £500.

Minute of §14 taken by Wendy Hicks (SOC HQ)

15 *Hen Harrier Day and Birders Against Wildlife Crime*

Ian Thomson informed Council about the recent *Hen Harrier Day* which was an informal attempt in England to raise public awareness of conservation issues at the start of the Grouse shooting season. This, and the loosely associated group of *Birders Against Wildlife Crime* had made extensive and highly effective use of social media and the internet. IT broadened the discussion to encompass Scottish matters, in particular the recent spate of raptor persecutions on the Black Isle. Council discussed whether there should be an equivalent *Hen Harrier Day* in Scotland. It was strongly felt that the Club should be involved in supporting these initiatives, and that it had a role in lobbying for the licensing of shooting estates and similar matters. It was agreed that the President should write to BAWC indicating the explicit support of SOC for their activities, and that an e-mail regarding *Hen Harrier Day* would be circulated to members.

WH / IT

On a related issue, Council were extremely disappointed at what could be seen as a lack of proper balance in the *Landward* television programme on 28th November 2014 concerning driven grouse shooting. It was agreed that Ian Thomson would draft a letter to the producers on behalf of SOC seeking clarification.

IT

16 AOCB

i. Following a query from Alan Knox (North-east Scotland), Council agreed that papers for Council meetings should be deemed to be Confidential as any proposals they might contain had not been discussed and approved. It was recognised that Branch Representatives could benefit from seeking the views of Branch Committee members on agenda items. The approved Minutes of Council were considered a matter of public record.

ii. The Chair noted his recent attendance at the high-profile RSPB *Nature of Scotland Awards* ceremony. There was a discussion about the possibility of the SOC sponsoring one of the awards (for example for Services to Ornithology) where the recipient would not be restricted to Club members. Such an award would be quite distinct from the recently introduced Branch Award scheme. It was felt that Council had insufficient information to explore the proposal further, and asked Ian Thomson to investigate the issue, particularly the financial aspects, and to report back at a future Council meeting

IT

iii. The Chair reported that there had been difficulties in filling the vacant post of County Bird Recorder in the Outer Hebrides, and the associated problem of timeous production of the local Bird Report. There were similar problems in Ayrshire finding someone to act as Editor for the Ayrshire Bird

CMcII / DR

Report as the County Bird Recorder had moved out of the district and had resigned from the editing post. It was agreed that an advertisement should be placed in Scottish Birds advertising these two vacancies.

iv. Wendy Hicks provided a verbal update on the previously approved expenditure to install improved lighting in the Waterston House Gallery. Although the quotation obtained seemed on the high side at circa £3k, Council were reassured that the sum actually represented good value for money if a professional job was to be done. WH was asked to obtain other quotations before proceeding, but it was noted that the lowest quotation was not necessarily the best option and that an emphasis should be placed on ensuring that the fittings were of high quality and that the lighting provided the enhancements to the Gallery that were needed.

WH

v. Following a query, the Chair noted that the production of formal remits for the various sub-committees was still an outstanding matter and that the delay had been caused by the over-riding requirement of completing the SCIO conversion and the associated work required on the Constitution. The remits would be presented to Council for consideration at a later meeting.

DH / CMcI

17 Dates of meetings 2015

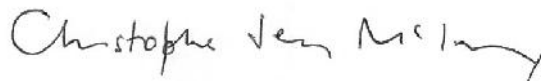
The forward dates for meetings of the Council in 2015 were confirmed as 8th March 2015, 14th June 2015, 16th Aug 2015 and 29th November 2015.

(Secretary's note: the venue availability for these meetings has now been confirmed)

18 Next Meeting

Sunday 8th March 2015: 10.30 at RSPB Loch Leven, Kinross

Signed:



Date: 8th March 2015

Chris McInerney, President