

The SOC
Scotland's Bird Club
COUNCIL MEETING 79/01
8th March 2015 Minutes



Session 79/01 of Council was held at 10.30 hrs on the 8th March 2015 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, David Clugston, Alison Creamer, Roger Gooch, Alan Knox, Richard Leslie, James Main, Bob McGowan, and Paul Taylor.

In attendance: Jane Cleaver (SOC HQ)

		Action	
1	Apologies for absence	Apologies were received from Frank Hamilton, Martin Cook, Ray Murray, David Rackham and Wendy Hicks	
2	Absent	John Campbell, Angus McBay, Keith Macgregor, Geoff Packhard, Geoff Sheppard and Brian Smith were absent	
3	Minutes of Council Meeting 78/04 held on 30th November 2014	The minutes for meeting 78/04 were approved subject to minor amendments.	
4	Matters arising	<p>§ 5(i). Alan Knox (AK) has contacted the Biodiversity Heritage Library and informed Council that the digitisation of <i>Scottish Bird Report</i> was scheduled. The matter relating to adding the resultant PDFs to the SOC website would be addressed when the initial digitisation had been completed.</p> <p>§ 5(ii). The action point for Wendy Hicks was carried over.</p> <p>§ 9(ii). Management Committee action in progress</p> <p>§ 10. In progress</p> <p>§ 12. CMCI had contacted David Jardine and informed Council that no contracts were yet in place for the production of the proposed book. Council agreed that the matter was now firmly in the hands of the proposers if they wished to progress the project further,</p>	<p>AK</p> <p>WH</p>

§ 13(ii). Management Committee action point in progress

§ 15(i). Ian Thomson (IT) informed Council that he had been in touch with *Birders Against Wildlife Crime* (the BAWC) and that there would be a meeting with its office bearers at the conference on the 21st March. SOC has indicated its broad support for the *Hen Harrier Day* initiative, which will be held on 9th August 2015. He noted that BAWC was not a membership organisation and was still at an early stage of its development. Council agreed that it was moving in an appropriate direction, and that it was important for all to recognise that it (BAWC) was not an offshoot of the RSPB. It was noted further that Scottish interests were not, at present, well represented in its activities and that it was important that the views of SOC were known. IT will circulate a paper to Council summarising the position after the meeting on the 21st and would explore the possibility of getting a written contribution in *Scottish Birds*.

IT

§ 15(ii). IT provided a verbal summary of the issue surrounding the *Landward* television programme on driven grouse shooting. Council was pleased to note that they have announced that they are now going to produce a programme on wildlife crime which should go some way to redress the perceived lack of balance in the earlier production. Whilst this was seen as taking action after the event, it was agreed that a written response would be redundant and that it was a positive response overall to the criticisms that had been levelled at the producers.

§ 16(i). IT had obtained an outline figure for the costs of sponsoring one of the RSPB *Nature of Scotland* (NoS) awards. He had been informed that it would be approximately £5,000 per year. Council agreed that this sum was excessive when compared with any benefit that might accrue to the Club, and had further doubts about the manner in which nominations could be made and vetted. It was clear that the Club could make far better use of its funds for schemes that it already had in place. The success of the internal Branch Awards that commenced in 2014 was noted, as well as the existing scheme of Honorary Presidents and Honorary Memberships. It was agreed that the sponsorship of one of the NoS awards would not be pursued.

§ 16(ii) It had been agreed not to publicise the vacancy for Editor of the *Ayrshire Bird Report*. CMcI informed Council that a Bird Recorder for the Outer Hebrides had been identified.

§ 16(iv) Council was informed that the production of formal remits for its sub-Committees was progressing well with material awaited from just one of the groups. The remits and memberships would be presented to Council at a later date.

DH

5 Transfer of Assets and Liabilities to new SCIO

Alan Fox outlined the steps that needed to be taken to complete the conversion of the SOC to a SCIO. These were largely formalities but were important legal requirements for the transfer of assets and the winding up of previous bodies. He noted that a short meeting of the Property Endowment Fund had been held prior to the meeting of Council, and that final papers would be signed at the offices of the lawyers on 31st March 2015. He was still awaiting formal notification of the approval by the *Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust* (FIBOT) but assured Council that this did not signify any problems from FIBOT. Council noted that there should be a minor rewording of the Transfer Agreement to indicate that the signatories were Trustees of the Club.

An Extraordinary Meeting of *Scottish Ornithologists Club Enterprises Limited* (SOCEL) needed to be held after the meeting of Council to pass a Special Resolution transferring SOCEL assets to the new SCIO.

The Chairman noted that the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator had consented to the conversion of the Charity to a SCIO. It was explained that the conversion would require the transfer of the assets and liabilities of the unincorporated association to the new SCIO. The SCIO would come into existence on 31 March 2015 and, on that date, the unincorporated association would cease to exist.

It was therefore proposed the Council should:

- (i) approve the terms of a Transfer Agreement, a copy of which was produced to the meeting, transferring the assets and liabilities of the unincorporated association to the SCIO and
- (ii) authorise Chris McNerny (President) to sign the Transfer Agreement on behalf of the unincorporated association.

After due consideration it was resolved that (i) the entry into the Transfer Agreement was hereby approved and (ii) Chris McNerny (President) was duly authorised to sign the Transfer Agreement on behalf of the unincorporated association. (this resolution had also received the written support of DR)

A resolution was passed giving formal approval for the Royal Bank of Scotland to act as bankers for the newly formed SCIO.

The Chair (CMcI) expressed thanks to Wendy Hicks on behalf of Council for the significant amount of work involved in ensuring that all of the routine contracts held by SOC at Waterston House were converted to reflect the new status as an SCIO.

Council thanked Alan Fox in particular for his considerable efforts in guiding the complex process to completion.

6 Finance

Council considered the Profit & Loss accounts that had been prepared by the Honorary Treasurer (Alan Fox) for the financial year up to 6th March 2015 with comparison data from the same period up to 6th March 2014. AF informed Council that his estimates indicated that the Club should end the year with a surplus of approximately £10,000. He noted that legacies totalling £54,000 had been received this year, but that he had so far not had any advance notice of future legacies. Council noted that there was an anticipation of higher sales at Waterston House next financial year and recognised that they constitute an important income stream. The Chair noted the buoyancy of Club finances over the past few years that compared extremely favourably with what was seen as the parlous financial state of the Club in earlier times.

Council discussed the issue of legacies at some length, recognising that they were an extremely important source of funding which had been used to good effect to fund various projects such as the *Young Birders* training programme. It was also noted that donations of ornithological libraries to the library at Waterston House were welcomed and that the sale of unwanted books enabled new purchases to be made to extend the collections. It was agreed that the benefit of legacies should be made more prominent. Action through law firms when making a will was seen as a possibility but it was agreed that this would be difficult to implement. Frequent reminders to members was seen as appropriate by the use of printed inserts in *Scottish Birds* and perhaps in future by taking a half or whole page spread in the journal. It was agreed that the

- Development Officer would arrange for printed inserts reminding members of the importance of legacies to the Club to be sent out with *Scottish Birds* twice a year, along with a half or full page printed spread on the topic in the journal. **JC**
- 7 **Branch and Membership Development** Jane Cleaver (JC) presented a summary of Branch and Membership Development activity, bringing the highlights to the attention of Council. Council was pleased to note that progress had been made on establishing a branch committee on Orkney and that a number of initiatives were underway in West Galloway. Council noted the general issue of the difficulty experienced by branches in finding members willing to serve on local committees, a problem that was not unique to SOC.
- JC had produced a draft of a Guidance Document for branches and invited written feedback from Council members to be received by the end of March. The Chair passed the compliments of Council to JC for what would become an important and useful document. The matter of funding speakers expenses was discussed at some length. Speakers expenses have to be paid and speakers have to be hosted by the branch. The main point of discussion revolved around whether the funding should come from branch or central funds. The matter was complicated because of the very different membership levels across the different branches and this was reflected in significant differences in the level of funds held. Different branches also had different approaches to, for example, the funding of audio-visual equipment and their maintenance. It was agreed that the matter warranted a more extensive discussion at a future meeting, and that JC would consult with Wendy Hicks and produce a discussion document for the June meeting. **JC / WH**
- Alan Knox (AK) tabled papers for discussion that presented a graphical analysis of trends in membership, comparing numbers joining and those leaving after different periods of time for the period between 1998 and 2014. Council was pleased to note the overall increase in membership to over 3000 in 2014. The graphs showed a number of interesting features but it was agreed that identification of the causes of these (such as the dip in membership 2010 – 2011) and the abrupt rise in those leaving after three years in 2011 – 2012 was largely speculative. Council expressed its thanks to AK for the useful and thought provoking analysis and agreed that closer attention should be given to the some of the more subtle aspects of membership retention activities.
- 8 **Young Birdwatchers Training Week** Council agreed that the *Young Birdwatchers* (YB) presentations at the 2014 Conference had been successful and that a lot of good had come of it, both from the PR perspective and from advancing the Club’s strategic aims. Feedback from attendees and participants alike had been uniformly positive for this initiative, and that it was clear that supporting it was an excellent use of Club funds. The “themed” nature of the 2015 conference was recognised, but nonetheless Council was keen that a similar set of presentations should become an annual fixture as long as the project continued. Ian Thomson agreed to look at the structure of the programme for 2015 Conference to identify the most appropriate time when a *Young Birdwatchers* slot could be held. **IT**
- Council was pleased to note that, although only six applicants could be accepted at the moment each year for the YB scheme, the overwhelming majority of the 30+ applicants met or exceeded the criteria for acceptance. Interest in the project was high and it had the support of other organisations such as *Scottish Natural Heritage*.
- 9 **Conferences and Birdfair** JC presented a verbal progress report on preparations for the 2015 one day *Scottish Birdwatchers Conference* to be held in Glasgow in partnership with the BTO Scotland (BTOS). She informed Council that there had been 170

bookings (with a maximum of 200) and that in line with previous conferences a number of last minute applications were anticipated. There was an estimate of an overall profit for the Club of £300. Council welcomed the fact that the organisation was being done by a local branch (Clyde) and was pleased to note that the 2016 one day conference would be held in Peebles. There was a reciprocal arrangement with the BTOS where each organisation (SOC and BTOS) alternated as lead organiser. For 2016 BTOS had agreed that, whilst retaining its role as the lead organisation, the SOC Borders Branch might take the initiative as local organiser in 2016 as the conference will coincide with the publication of the local Borders Bird Atlas.

The 2015 Annual Conference will be held at the Atholl Palace Hotel in Pitlochry, and Wendy Hicks was working on making this a semi-permanent venue with a three year booking. IT presented a verbal outline of a proposed conference programme built around the theme of *Upland Birds* with one of the more high profile events being a debate and panel discussion. The key idea was that the debate should be aimed at an audience wider than just SOC members, that it should promote discussion, and that it would benefit from a degree of controversy in the debate.

WH

Council members were reminded that nominations needed to be received for Branch Awards 2015, that the matter of nomination had been devolved to local committees, and that branches could only advance one nomination. The Chair noted that certain members had been disappointed in 2014 not to have received an award, but stated that this was out of the control of both Waterston House and Council as it was a responsibility of branches to decide on a nominee and to make sure that this information was properly forwarded.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 10 Waterston House Report | The circulated Waterston House Report was noted. The Chair thanked Wendy Hicks in her absence for preparing this for Council. |
| 11 Subscription Rates | Alan Fox presented an analysis of subscription rates in the different categories and the impact that there might be on these of an increase in line with the increase in the Consumer Price Index since they were last set. Any increase of this type would be small and it was agreed that no increase should be implemented at the moment and that this should be publicised.

Any increase in the future might be more substantial as a consequence, but it was agreed that no decision could be taken on this at present. |
| 12 Office Bearers 2015 | As a formal matter, the Chair asked the Honorary Treasurer (Alan Fox) if he would be prepared to continue to serve, to which he agreed. |
| 13 Proposal for Vice-President 2015 - 2017 | Council was delighted to note the nomination by Ian Thomson of James Main of Lothian branch as Vice-President for 2015 – 2017. This nomination would be presented at the 2015 Annual General Meeting. |
| 14 National Biodiversity Network Consultation | Council discussed a paper that had been circulated from the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) outlining their proposed Strategy for 2015 onwards and the invitation that SOC had received to comment. It was noted that SOC was not, in fact, a major holder of data in the sense that this would be of direct interest to the NBN but rather that all of the data relevant to the NBN project was already forwarded from <i>Birdtrack</i> , run by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) in which SOC was a partner, or from the local recorders via local records centres. Following discussion a number of themes and concerns emerged: |

- SOC had concerns about the nature of the data held on the NBN

database insofar as a user could be satisfied that the information was accurate, reliable and valid. Council noted the high standards that were set for the acceptability of records by its Records Committees and the key role played by local Bird Recorders in acting as an early filter. NBN strategy would need to address this.

- Council had concerns about the commercial use of the data held by NBN and how this could be sensibly regulated so that the originator of the data could derive benefit.
- Council supported the broad principles of openness and transparency for the results of scientific enquiry, but equally noted that a key part of the process of science was that the results should be open to challenge, test and scrutiny. Council members were already aware that certain data sets held by NBN were questionable at best and that the Strategy failed to address this important point.

It was agreed that the Hon. Secretary (DH) would collate these comments and pass them on to NBN. The closing date for responding had been the 27th February 2015, but DH had obtained agreement that SOC could submit a late response.

DH

14 AOCB

i. A request had been received from the Chair of the Research & Surveys Committee (Tom Dougall) that the group might be allowed to carry over residual funds from one financial year to the next. Under the existing arrangements this did not appear to be possible. Council fully supported this proposal which it recognised would permit longer term financial planning for project support, and felt that it was both sensible and useful. It was agreed that a cap of twice the annual allocation should be placed on any annual carry over, a sum of £6,800 at current funding levels. (Secretary's note: Chair of R & S has been informed).

DH

ii. A brief discussion was held regarding possible venues for meetings of Council following a note from members of some of the more remote branches that attendance presented difficulties due to the lack of public transport to RSPB Loch Leven. Council noted that there were a number of distinct advantages to holding meetings at the present location (including the fact that RSPB did not levy a room charge on SOC). It was felt that transport arrangements could be made for local pick-up and that any change in venue would inevitably place a heavy administrative load in Waterston House staff without there being any particular benefit. It was accepted that use might be made of internet communication using applications such as *Skype* that would enable a branch representative to listen to and participate in discussions. It was agreed that this would be investigated.

**CMcI /
WH**

iii. The President (CMcI) had received a complaint from a member in Angus that his text and internet access to the *Angus Grapevine* (AGV) alerting service had been withdrawn. Council noted in a very brief discussion that this was a matter entirely for the *Angus & Dundee Bird Club*, a private members' organisation that ran the AGV. It was agreed that the Hon. Secretary would contact the member concerned pointing out this fact.

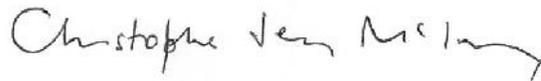
DH

iv. The President (CMcI) had been alerted to the fact that a member from the Dumfries and Galloway branch (Mr.T. Johnson-Fergusson) had been convicted at Oban Sheriff Court for the offence of lewd, indecent and libidinous practices and behaviour against children, and had received a prison sentence of 18 months. Council was unanimous in the view that he could no longer remain a

member of the SOC and that his continued membership would be extremely injurious to the good name and reputation of the Club. Council requested that his membership be immediately terminated under the authority of Section 12.1 of the Constitution, that the Hon. Secretary write to inform him that this was the case, and to inform the Dumfries & Galloway Branch that this had occurred. **DH**

16 Next Meeting Sunday 14th June 2015: 10.30 at RSPB Loch Leven

Signed:



Date: 21st June 2015

Chris McInerny, President