

The SOC Scotland's Bird Club



COUNCIL MEETING 79/02 14th June 2015 Minutes

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

Session 79/02 of Council was held at 10.30 hrs on the 14th June 2015 at the RSPB Loch Leven, Kinross.

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

In attendance: Wendy Hicks (SOC HQ)

Action

- 1 **Apologies for absence** Apologies were received from David Bain, Jane Cleaver, David Clugston, Martin Cook, Roger Gooch, Richard Leslie and Geoff Packhard
- 2 **Absent** John Campbell, Frank Hamilton, Angus McBay, Keith Macgregor and Geoff Sheppard were absent
- 3 **Minutes of Council Meeting 79/01.** The minutes for meeting 79/01 held on 8th March 2015 were approved subject to minor amendments.
- 4 **Matters arising**

8th March 2015

§4 SOC and BAWC: Ian Thomson (IT) reported that there had been developments regarding the position of SOC and the BAWC. A meeting had been held on 21st March and there had been informal discussions regarding the widely publicised forthcoming *Hen Harrier Day*. It was agreed that further discussion of this would be taken as part of agenda items 12 - 14.

§6 Publicity for legacies: Wendy Hicks (WH) speaking on behalf of Jane Cleaver informed Council that printed inserts were being prepared for inclusion with the September edition of *Scottish Birds*.

§7 Branch funding and infra-structure. It was agreed that this item could be carried over to the next meeting of Council so that Jane Cleaver and Wendy Hicks could complete consultation with branches.

§8 and §9 Conference items. It was agreed that these would be discussed as part of the main agenda.

§14i Letter to NBN. The Hon Secretary (DH) reported that this had been completed.

§14ii Carry over of funding – Research and Surveys committee. The Hon Secretary (DH) reported that Council’s approval had been transmitted to the committee Chair.

§14iii Potential for using Skype at Council meetings. The Hon Secretary (DH) reported that he had contacted the Chairs of the more distant branches that did not routinely have a representative at Council meetings. There was little enthusiasm for the possible use of Skype at meetings from these branches as an alternative to attending in person. Additionally he had contacted Prof. Peter Slater in Orkney to canvas his views, with a similar result. A number of technical issues were discussed, such as the possible impact of slow broadband connections in remote locations, the alternative of using a conference call system via the telephone network and the extent to which the RSPB Loch Leven infrastructure could support these technologies. The important principle of inclusivity at Council meetings was recognised, but there was less clarity about the best method of achieving this. It was agreed that the proposal of using Skype (or similar) should be put on hold for the immediate future. There was wide agreement that the proposal might have a lot of merit in the future as people became more familiar with using this method for holding conversations and meetings and as fast broadband connections became more widespread thus making the approach viable. It was further agreed that the matter should be kept under review, and that the Club might have to consider implementing some form of training and familiarisation if it were to adopt this approach. DH informed Council that in his reply to branches, he had encouraged those that did not attend to forward any comments that they might have on items on the agenda with the reassurance that their comments would be presented to Council at the appropriate point in the meeting.

§14iii Use of Angus Grapevine Service – letter in reply to member. The Hon Secretary reported that this had been completed.

§14iv Termination of membership – letter to Mr. T. Johnson-Fergusson. The Hon Secretary reported that this had been completed.

30th November 2014

§16 Formal remits for sub-committees of Council. To be taken as an agenda item

§5 *Scottish Bird Report* – add PDF format files to website. This was reported as being in progress.

AK

§5 Digitisation of *Scottish Bird News (SBN)*. Council was informed that digitisation of *SBN* would raise a number of copyright issues. It was agreed that the best way forward was to adopt a pragmatic approach that balanced the risk of making public copyrighted work with the benefits of making the archive openly available. It was agreed further that an advertisement should be placed in *Scottish Birds* notifying readers of the intention to digitise *SBN* and that if anyone had objections to their material being used in this way that they should be invited to contact the SOC.

WH

Alan Knox offered to contact the Biodiversity Heritage Library to see if they would be interested doing the digitisation.

AK

It was recognised that the Club website would need to be updated to include a specific notice regarding copyright issues for photographs that are uploaded, and that suitable wording would need to be found to cover the “non-exclusive” use of the material by the SOC, and that suitable copyright arrangements were in place for *Scottish Birds*.

WH

§9 Alternative approaches to branch concept. This matter was noted as still ongoing.

Management Committee

§10 2016 Spring Conference in Borders. WH reported that this matter had been completed following a constructive discussion with BTO Scotland

§13 Rate of pay for staff. This matter was in progress at Management Committee **CMcI**

§16. Gallery lighting. This action had been completed with additional quotations having been obtained.

5 SCIO Conversion

The Hon. Treasurer, Alan Fox (AF), informed Council that the process of conversion was now completed and that the SOC was now a *Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation*. He gave a verbal report concerning a number of issues that had been addressed during the complex process of transfer of assets. He noted that there were still some routine matters that had to be finalised, such as the necessity of letting SOCEL bank accounts “lie idle” for a statutory period to provide evidence to the Charity Commissioner that the company was no longer trading. He informed Council that all of these matters would be completed by the end of 2015, and that the conversion itself and the final signing off of the paperwork had gone smoothly at the offices of the lawyers (Morton Fraser).

The Chair (Chris McInerny) on behalf of Council thanked Alan Fox for the diligence he had shown, and for the large amount of effort that he had put into ensuring that the SCIO conversion went forward to a successful conclusion. He also expressed Council’s thanks to AF for identifying Morton Fraser as a suitable legal practice for carrying out the work on behalf of SOC. Experience had shown that the Club’s confidence was well placed and they had provided first class advice and service.

6 Finance and Investments

The Hon. Treasurer (Alan Fox) gave a brief verbal update on the financial position of the Club. He noted that the final accounts for the year were nearly completed and he estimated that the Club would show a small profit in the region of £5k - £10k for the financial year when share revaluations were excluded. He informed Council that he was not aware of any impending legacy income in the current financial year, but that sales income at Waterston House was likely to be slightly higher than the preceding year. The future financial position was a prediction of a slight deficit (although this might easily change) and that certain commitments and obligations such as a contribution to a BTO project would cease. This would to a certain extent be balanced by an exceptional charge of circa £8.5k for the final fees for the SCIO conversion. He estimated that the “worse case scenario” would be a planned deficit of £20k.

The Chair on behalf of Council thanked AF for his prudent management of the Club’s finances. He noted the contrast with the dolorous financial state that the Club had experienced in the recent past, and expressed confidence that the buoyant financial position would continue with the management policies and approaches now in place.

AF concluded with a brief summary of the investment portfolio managed by Brewin Dolphin, and resumé of the printed investment report that was included in the committee papers. He noted that there had been a modestly successful year that was in line with industry expectations for managed funds in unit trusts. The headline investment valuation now stood at circa £360k following profits and fees for the year. He noted that the Club could only access a proportion of this based on income. Council was informed that he would be meeting with Brewin Dolphin within the next month to discuss the portfolio but advised that he saw little reason to change the investment strategy. Council members were invited to accompany him to this meeting if they wished.

- 7 **Branch and Membership Development: update** The paper prepared by the Development Officer, Jane Cleaver (JC) was discussed *in absentia*. Council noted that the report was extremely useful in getting a snapshot of the membership situation. Some suggestions were made concerning the potential usefulness of additional statistical analyses such as graphical presentations of the number of total and new members and the issues of membership retention (noting the discussion of this topic at the March meeting of Council). It was agreed to defer further discussion of this important topic to the August meeting when JC had returned from annual leave. **JC**
- The report on the activities at the Scottish Birdfair raised the matter of how the Club might increase the attractiveness of its stand to the general public. It was noted that the Scottish Birdfair was predominantly a family event and that efforts could be made to make the Club’s presentation specifically more attractive to the younger attendees. One specific proposal was that consideration might be given to the use of taxidermy specimens and a sample of common bird nests on the stand to engage the attention. Council recognised that taxidermy always proved extremely interesting to the public and was a good way of engaging attention in the Club’s purposes. There were a number of health and handling issues that would need to be addressed in much the same manner as those confronting farm visit facilities, but it was felt that these were not insurmountable. Council member Bob McGowan noted that he could obtain suitable specimens from the National Museums of Scotland and would be prepared to provide assurances on issues of specimen provenance. **BMcG**
- Whilst Council recognised that this type of activity did not address the issue of the suitability of the age profile of the “target audience” and was extremely unlikely to convert into Club members, it was felt on balance that it would certainly raise the Club profile and that it was worth implementing for the next Birdfair. **JC**
- On behalf of Council, CMcI offered thanks and compliments to JC for preparing a useful and informative report.
- 8 **Conferences and Birdfair: update** The Office Manager, Wendy Hicks (WH) gave a report from the feedback received on the Spring Conference 2015 held in Glasgow. Overall the feedback was very positive and reflected a good event that was widely appreciated and enjoyed. Some comments had been made concerning the poor state of parts of the lecture theatre and some difficulties with catering and these had been reported to the University of Glasgow who had provided them. **PT / WH**
- WH informed Council that the 2016 Spring Conference would, with the agreement of BTO Scotland (BTOS), be held in Peebles in the Borders and would coincide with the launch of the forthcoming Borders Bird Atlas. There was discussion of suitable venues for the 2017 Spring conference, a year when SOC was the nominal “lead organisation”. A number of possibilities were considered. Paul Taylor (Fife Branch Chair) (PT) indicated that Fife could prove a good location for the event and was keen to put the proposal to the local committee to canvas their support. It was agreed that PT should start discussions within the Fife Branch with a view to holding the 2017 Spring conference at a suitable location (to be determined) in Fife.
- Looking further forward, it was noted that it was an appropriate time to start early consideration for Spring 2018. WH noted that BTOS was content for SOC to propose venues, and that one possibility might be in the Galloway / Dumfries area. One key factor was the absolute necessity for there to be local enthusiasm and support for the conference. Lesley Creamer (LC) agreed to bring the matter forward to the local branch Committee in Dumfries at its next meeting. **LC**
- WH concluded by informing Council that arrangements for the autumn

conference to be held in Pitlochry were now completed, and provided a sample brochure that would be mailed out to members with the next issue of *Scottish Birds*. On-line booking was now live and a capacity attendance was expected due to the excellent facilities at the venue (the Atholl Palace Hotel) and the controversial nature of the key theme. It was agreed that Ian Thomson (IT) would explore possible media contacts with the aim of attracting the attention of journalists on the national newspapers to the keynote presentations and the discussion session.

IT

9 Waterston House: update

The Office Manager, Wendy Hicks (WH) noted that these matters were more properly dealt with by Management Committee, but gave a brief verbal update of some of the activities: a professional “deep clean” had taken place with excellent results; sales of optical equipment were in excess of £4.5k (a somewhat surprising figure given the life-long service that can be obtained with modern equipment); the new lighting in the exhibition space had been installed to good effect. WH also noted the increasingly professional appearance of the printed materials produced by the Club since the appointment of the Development Officer (JC). The Club had moved to getting printed work such as conference flyers and other advertising done by an external printer, to complement the improved designs and layout. Although this increased the direct costs somewhat, Council fully supported this approach and felt that overall it was good value for money and reflected well on the Club’s external image.

10 Future changes to Constitution

The Chair (CMcI) made a brief verbal statement regarding the most suitable approach to tackling any possible changes in the Club Constitution. Although the Minute of the meeting of 30th November 2014 (“Matters arising” page 2) suggested that Council might consider any changes that were required to the Constitution at the present meeting of June 2015, as President he was reluctant to implement a new set of changes for discussion at the AGM 2015 given the radical reworking of the Constitution that was required for the SCIO conversion and approved at the AGM 2014. He offered the view that the Club membership had taken the changes in their stride, were very supportive of Council in this, and that in his view the most prudent approach would be to proceed with the Constitution as it stood at present for at least the next year. He expressed the view that changing the Constitution annually would be ineffective, time consuming and of little real benefit.

It was recognised that the Constitution as it stood still contained some infelicities, ambiguities and possible omissions. CMcI proposed that Council members give these consideration over the next year and forward any suggestions they have for re-wording to the Hon. Secretary (DH) who would collate them and bring them to Council at a future meeting. These views and proposals were fully supported by Council.

Council / DH

11 Branch Awards

Some correspondence had been received from Clyde Branch seeking further clarification on the eligibility for the newly implemented scheme of Branch Awards. The correspondence raised issues that had not been addressed in the original specifications. Following brief discussion, Council confirmed that

(i) “joint awards” could not be made, and that nominees must be single individuals even though the efforts that were being recognised might have involved more than one person

(ii) a Branch Award could not be made posthumously

It was agreed that the Hon. Secretary (DH) would write to the Branch notifying them of these decision and thanking them for raising the issues.

DH

Although it was clearly the responsibility of individual Branches to nominate recipients for Branch Awards, it was noted that not all had done so in 2014 and

that some disappointment had been experienced by club members as a result. Wendy Hicks agreed that she would contact Branches with a reminder that nominations were now due.

**12 Proposed
Birds of
Scotland ID
Guide**

The Chair, CMcI, had contacted David Jardine as Chair of the *Birds of Scotland* committee seeking his views and advice on the issues that the Club would need to address if it were to proceed with the production of a *Birds of Scotland ID Guide* (minutes of Council November 2014 §12). David Jardine had provided an extremely useful and helpful summary of key points that in his view should be addressed if the proposal were to become a viable business proposition, based on his experiences in publication. These had been summarised in a supporting paper to Council. CMcI noted that these points had been forwarded to Alan Lauder, and that he had not as yet received a reply. He noted that Council would have ample opportunity to discuss any response that was made and would then be able to make a decision whether or not to proceed further with its support for and investment in the project.

**13 Sub-
committee
remits and
membership**

Council considered a set of papers outlining a draft set of remits for the sub-committees of Council, being:

- The Birds of Scotland Committee
- The Editorial (Publications) Committee
- The Library Committee
- The Management Committee
- The Research and Surveys Committee
- The Scottish Birds Records Committee

These had been prepared following an invitation by the Hon. Secretary (DH) to committee Chairs to submit a remit that they considered reflected generally the work that their committee performed. There was unanimous agreement that the committees as constituted worked well and were both diligent and effective. Council also expressed the view that it would not wish the committees to misinterpret Council's desire to give consideration to its committee sub-structure, particularly as in some cases the committees were responsible for the dissemination of a significant proportion of Club funds. Oversight of this was important as Council was responsible to the Club membership. Nevertheless Council fully supported the principle of devolved responsibility and recognised that committees needed to feel that they are responsible for decisions.

The discussion paper outlined a number of matters that Council might wish address, including monitoring of the committee activity, tenure of members, and reporting back to Council. Following discussion a number of points emerged:

- in many cases, discussions at Council were too detailed and overlapped with the work that might be expected to take place at committee level. This was noticeable with the remit of the Management Committee in particular
- there was a need to have an explicit chain of accountability to Council, either by formal minutes or some equivalent
- whilst some committees (e.g. Library Committee and Management Committee) held face to face meetings on a regular basis and produced minutes of these meetings, others did not. In the latter case it was often inherent in the nature of the business that regular meetings would be inappropriate, and in others the majority of the business was conducted electronically. The question then remained of how these committees

might report of Council on the decision that they had taken

- the tenure of Committee chairs and members, and the means by which they were appointed and ratified was, at present, unspecified

It was agreed the Council members would need some time to consider the matters raised by the papers to seek a way forward in addressing the issue of accountability. It was agreed further that Council members would forward their written comments to the Hon. Secretary (DH) who would collate them for discussion at the meeting in August.

**Council /
DH**

DH would contact the chairs of committees that did not provide minutes on a regular basis to seek their views on the most effective way in which the work of their committee might be reported to Council, possibly on an annual basis.

DH

14 SOC and raptor studies; Birdtrack agreement; Birdtrack and County Bird Reports

A number of inter-related issues were taken together, the discussion being led by the Vice-President, Ian Thomson (IT)

(i) SOC and Raptor Studies.

The Chair (CMcI) had received on 16th May 2015 a long and detailed e-mail from Iain Gibson (IG) of Clyde Branch (also the Clyde Local Bird Recorder). The letter raised a number of issues (not entirely related) and centred mainly on what was perceived as a lack of SOC involvement in the SNH-led Partnership against Wildlife Crime Scotland project (PAWS) in particular in relation to Hen Harriers, and also what was claimed to be less than satisfactory arrangements between SOC and the Scottish Raptor Study Group for the sharing of data. A number of other matters were raised in addition that were expressions of personal opinion or which related explicitly to local issues in the Clyde area. These were not considered appropriate for Council discussion.

- concern was raised about the level of involvement of SOC in the SNH “Heads up for Harriers” project. IT pointed out that through his professional involvement, SOC is kept well informed about the issues of raptor persecution, and the work of the PAW Scotland Raptor Group. SOC however is not a member of PAW Scotland and thus was not a partner in the “Heads up for Harriers” project. He confirmed that SOC was a member of the Scottish raptor monitoring scheme.
- the letter expressed concern about the relationship between Raptor Study Groups and the SOC regarding monitoring data. It was confirmed that SOC is a member of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme, but that there was an extensive network of Local Recorders and it was noted further that the concerns of SOC extended over a much wider range than a single group of species. Other developments that SOC was aware of such as extending the capabilities of the BTO based Birdtrack database had to be taken into account. In concluding this area of discussion it was noted that a large proportion of Raptor Study Group members are also members of SOC, perhaps rendering any additional Club level involvement unnecessary.
- the letter made mention of the involvement of local branches in “planning issues” (without being more specific). Council noted the Club does not, as a small organisation, have the capacity in terms of staff or resources to become involved in dealing with planning matters. There are on occasion opportunities to comment, but these are dealt with on a case by case basis. Council also expressed the view that these types of matters were best dealt with at a local level where the issue of local impact is better understood. On the other hand, the SOC membership of LINK meant that it did through this route become involved in influencing policy on larger national level issues. SOC has

regularly, through social media, drawn attention to nationally significant planning issues, and can also comment through its membership of LINK. It also, for example, made available RSPB “postcards” that members could sign to indicate their opposition to the Strathy South windfarm at the last annual conference

It was agreed that the Hon. Secretary (DH) would write to Iain Gibson outlining the results of Council’s deliberations, and thanking him for his communications. **DH**

(ii) BTO proposal for changes to the Birdtrack recording system and database, and proposals for changes to the Partnership Agreements and funding mechanisms.

Council had received a number of papers from Stuart Rivers (SR) relating to proposals under discussion by the *Birdtrack Steering Group*, on which SR is the SOC representative. It was noted that BTO was wishing for a response from SOC, preferably by the end of June. The documents, including committee minutes and discussion papers, raised a number of important and complex matters. Two of the most significant for SOC were the proposals that there be different classes of “partner” in the Birdtrack project, and second that BTO were anticipating that the different classes of “partner” would make significant contributions to the future financial costs of developing the project. Council made a number of observations on the proposals: (i) the developments to *Birdtrack* seemed largely centred on expanding the geographical areas from which records could be accepted (for example The Netherlands), and it was far from clear what advantages this might confer on a national group such as SOC (ii) the projected funding required was in the region of £250k, but no budget breakdown had been provided explaining how this was calculated and what levels of funding applied to different activities such as staff salaries. Council had no idea what the funds would be spent on (iii) the documentation differentiated between “core partners” and “associate partners” without explaining the implications of these different categories and the linkage if any to funding (iv) Council considered that it would be imprudent to commit to any form of on-costs, and on the face of it the proposal was very different from a normal project. It was noted that SOC was involved with Birdtrack from the start as it grew, in part, from early efforts by SOC to set up its own data recording system.

After lengthy discussion it was agreed that there was insufficient information to even begin to frame a suitable response. In any case, the papers had been received too late for proper consideration (whilst acknowledging the sterling efforts of SR to get the documentation to Council as soon as he received them). Council had particular concerns about the future shape of the project, the nature of any long-term agreements and their potential financial impact.

It was agreed further that it was not possible to give a reasoned response within the timeframe indicated by BTO, and the Council were responsible to the membership to act prudently. The Hon. Secretary (DH) was asked to write a short-term response to Andy Musgrove, the BTO Chair of the *Birdtrack Steering Group*, requesting clarification of the matters outlined above and indicating that Council would be discussing the matter further at its August Meeting. **DH**

The Chair (CMcI) expressed thanks to Stuart Rivers in his absence on behalf of Council for his contribution to the work on the Steering Group in his role as SOC representative.

(iii) Local Bird Reports, bird recording and *Birdtrack*

IT noted that it was timely that SOC consider the inter-related issues

surrounding the role of Local Bird Recorders, the production of county Bird Reports, and the ways in which Birdtrack was used to support these activities. These matters depended to a large extent on the future shape of the *Birdtrack* system. There was some sympathy for the view that Council was not perhaps the appropriate body to be discussing these matters and that there was a potential role for a new “Birding Committee” (or similar) that would provide more integration of the work of Local Recorders and make recommendations to Council on these issues. It was agreed that Ian Thomson would prepare a proposal document for the August meeting.

IT

15 AOCB

(i) Council member Bob McGowan (BM) indicated that he was in a position to provide opportunities for members of Council to view the ornithological research collections held by the National Museums of Scotland. He noted that there would shortly be a ministerial visit to the new site. Several members expressed an interest in such a visit and BM agreed that he would circulate proposed dates when such visits could take place. He also indicated that he would be equally happy for Waterston House staff to attend, although it was agreed that this could provide difficulties for staffing cover.

BM

CMcI /
WH

(ii) Council were delighted to note that Ian Darling, a former President of SOC, former Chair of the Isle of May Bird Observatory Trust and former Chairman of the RSPB had been recognised with the award of an OBE in the Queen’s Birthday Honours List “*For voluntary service to the Conservation of Wild Birds and Land Management in Scotland*”

It was agreed that it would be appropriate to include a mention of this in the next issue of *Scottish Birds*. Council asked the Hon. Secretary (DH) to write an appropriate letter to Ian Darling congratulating him of his honour.

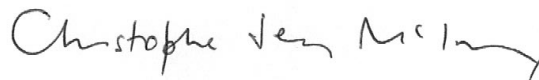
DH

(iv) The Hon. Treasurer (Alan Fox), the SOC representative on the LINK Marine Taskforce asked if Council would approve a one-off payment of circa £400 to LINK to support their work on marine conservation. He noted that the work was largely to support preservation of the sea-bed environment and thus was somewhat indirectly in support of birds, although the work did have importance for the preservation of seabird feeding areas. Council approved the payment, and would reconsider its position if the payment looked as if it were likely to become an annual expenditure.

AF

16 Next Meeting 16th August 2015: 10.30 at RSPB Loch Leven

Signed:



Date: 16th August 2015

Chris McInerny, President