

# The SOC

## Scotland's Bird Club

### COUNCIL MEETING 79/03

### 16<sup>th</sup> August 2015 Minutes



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

Session 79/03 of Council was held at 10.30 hrs on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 2015 at the RSPB Loch Leven, Kinross.

**Present:** President Chris McNerny (Chair), Ian Thomson (Vice President), Alan Fox (Hon Treasurer), David Heeley (Hon Secretary), David Bain, Alison Creamer, Lesley Creamer, Roger Gooch, Alan Knox, Richard Leslie, James Main, Bob McGowan and David Rackham.

**In attendance:** Elizabeth Irwin (Fife Branch, for Paul Taylor), Jane Cleaver (SOC HQ), Wendy Hicks (SOC HQ)

#### Action

- 1 Apologies for absence** Apologies were received from Keith Macgregor (Hon. President), Martin Cook, Ray Murray and Paul Taylor.
- 2 Absent** Frank Hamilton (Hon. President), John Campbell, Angus McBay and Geoff Sheppard were absent
- 3 Keith Macgregor** The Chair (Chris McNerny) informed Council that Hon. President Keith Macgregor's illness had progressed to the point where he had been admitted to hospice care, and on behalf of Council noted that the thoughts of all were with his family at this time. The SOC had in the past nominated Keith Macgregor for a national honour in recognition of his contribution to ornithology, conservation and the SOC. Although the recommendation had not as yet been adopted, Keith had recently been informed of the nomination and had expressed his delight and gratitude that the SOC had wished to honour him in this way.
- 4 In Memoriam** Council paid tribute to the memory of Club member Dr. Bryan Nelson FRSE, MBE who died on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2015. He had a substantial international reputation as the leading world expert on the *Sulidae* and had played a significant role in the development of seabird studies more generally.
- 5 Minutes of Council Meeting 79/02.** The Minutes for meeting 79/02 held on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2015 were approved.
- 6 Letter from Club** The Chair informed Council that he and the Secretary had received a number

**Member**

of lengthy e-mails from a Club member expressing intense dissatisfaction at the outcome of a previous Council discussion, and decisions made regarding matters that he had raised in writing with the Chair as President. The item was being brought forward at this point rather than under AOCB as the approval of the Minutes of 14<sup>th</sup> June 2015 had a direct bearing on the topic. The Chair went on to outline the background to the topics that Council had discussed at its June meeting, what appeared to be misunderstandings concerning confidentiality, and accusations made in e-mails that the process of bringing this to Council for discussion was not appropriate and that the decisions of Council were flawed.

The Chair stated that in his opinion it must be accepted that the e-mails to the Secretary and himself were addressed, in effect, to Council as both of the post-holders were acting on Council's behalf and not in an individual capacity. Thus any criticisms made regarding process or outcomes were a matter of concern to the Club's reputation and standing. The e-mails referred to in the Chair's pre-amble were made available to Council for consultation.

Having considered the manner in which the original matters had been dealt with, and the process that had been followed at arriving at a view, Council confirmed that the actions taken were appropriate and fair and that the various decisions arrived at had been the subject of proper debate and consideration and this was reflected in the Minute of the Council meeting.

The Chair had also raised an separate issue concerning a Club member who had expressed a wish to attend Council as the local branch representative. This matter was deferred to AOCB.

**7 Matters arising.**

**14<sup>th</sup> June 2015.**

§4. Hen Harrier Day. Ian Thomson (IT) gave a brief verbal report of an event held on 9<sup>th</sup> August at Glen Turret near Crieff to mark "Hen Harrier Day". He noted that there had been quite a lot of recent press coverage of the issues surrounding the illegal persecution of Hen Harriers and the gathering at Glen Turret was part of a broader effort to raise public awareness of these. The event had been well attended with over 70 people there. IT represented the SOC. Overall it was seen as a very positive step which indicated that birders were not prepared to see native species suffer extreme persecution, and the level of support should serve as a "heads up" to the shooting industry. IT concluded that the press coverage was particularly welcomed, and that it was important that the views of those who continue to downplay both the level and population-scale impact of persecution should be robustly challenged in this way. Council noted that the forthcoming Annual Conference would be continuing this debate as part of the programme.

§7. Use of specimens at Bird Fair. Bob McGowan reported that the use of taxidermy specimens at the next Scottish Bird Fair would be considered nearer the time in 2016.

**BMcG**

§8 Spring Conference 2017. Elizabeth Irwin, on behalf of Fife Branch, informed Council that the possibility of holding the 2017 joint BTO / SOC Spring Conference in Fife had been discussed by the local Committee and that there had been a lot of enthusiasm for the idea. Preliminary steps were being taken to identify suitable venues, and the Branch were keen to take the project forward.

**WH / PT**

§8 Spring Conference 2018. Council were informed by Lesley Creamer (LC) that the possibility of holding the 2018 Spring Conference in the Dumfries region would be discussed at the local Branch Committee meeting in

**WH / LC**

September.

§8 Media contacts for Annual Conference 2015. Ian Thomson noted that there were a number of people that he would contact in order to get good press coverage for the Conference, in particular given the main theme. There was a possibility that there could be some coverage on the radio (with perhaps an interview with IT) and Council agreed that this would be worthwhile and valuable.

IT

§10 Collation of proposed amendments and corrections to the Constitution. The Hon. Secretary (DH) noted that this was ongoing.

DH

§11 The Hon. Secretary (DH) noted that a letter had been sent to Clyde Branch informing them of Council's decision that posthumous and joint Branch Awards could not be made.

§11 Wendy Hicks (WH) confirmed that Branches had been sent a reminder regarding the nomination of members for Branch Awards to be presented at the Annual Conference.

§14 The Hon. Secretary (DH) confirmed that a letter had been sent to Iain Gibson regarding the outcome of the discussions held in response to his letter to the President (Chris McInerny).

§14 The Hon. Secretary (DH) confirmed that a letter had been sent to Andy Musgrove (BTO) with Council's initial comments on the proposals received for the future development of *Birdtrack*. Further discussion of this was an agenda item.

§14 Ian Thomson noted that assessing the potential for forming a "Birding Committee" that could address issues such as *Birdtrack*, Local Bird Recorders and generally coordinate birding activity was ongoing.

IT

§15 The Hon. Secretary (DH) confirmed that a letter had been sent to Ian Darling forwarding Council's best wishes on his being awarded the OBE. A gracious e-mail had been received in reply that was conveyed to Council by the Chair (CMcI).

§15 The Hon. Treasurer (Alan Fox) informed Council that the payment to LINK of £400 approximately could in all likelihood turn out to be a recurrent item with LINK sending an annual request for funding. Council deferred a decision as to whether to continue funding until the situation was clarified. AF agreed to bring the matter to Council when a new request was received.

AF

30<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

§5 Copyright clearance for photographic material during the digitisation of *Scottish Bird News*. Wendy Hicks (WH) informed Council that a notice had been prepared for the forthcoming *Scottish Birds* and it had also been placed in a number of other publications. The notice provided details of the proposed digitisation, and provided contact information for copyright holders should they wish to raise any copyright issues with the SOC with respect to the project. Alan Knox confirmed that arrangements with the Biodiversity Heritage Library were in place, and digitisation could proceed when the period of public consultation was completed and the relevant forms had been signed by the Club President.

WH / AK

**8 Finance**

The Hon. Treasurer (Alan Fox) presented a summary of the financial year to date. He drew Council's attention to the decreased levels of legacy income when compared to the preceding year, which ended with a surplus of approximately £2.5k. The fact that there had been no legacies in the current

period and that there was a long “lead time” for legacies to take effect meant that there would be a negative impact on the Club’s financial position. This would be offset to an extent by a fall in spending, such as the lawyers’ fees levied for the SCIO conversion which was now completed, and the conclusion of support for the BTO’s *What’s UP?* project. AF’s current estimate was that the Club would finish the current financial year with a deficit of approximately £20k which he indicated was well within the planning limits. Council thanked AF for his prudent management of the Club’s financial affairs.

**9 Branch Awards**

Wendy Hicks (WH) reported on progress to date with nominations for Branch Awards that would be presented (where possible) at the 2015 AGM. It was noted that there had been some refinement of the process after the inaugural award presentations in 2014 with reminders sent to Branch Secretaries in July. There had been an uneven response in 2014 (with some accompanying disappointment of Club members as a result). WH noted that not all branches had at the present time contacted her with their nominations. Council was clear that it was very much a matter for Branches to use this opportunity to recognise the contribution of their local membership and hoped that there would be as full a response to the initiative as possible.

**Branches**

**10 National awards and honours**

The Chair (CMcI) recalled that in the past the Club had nominated a member who had served the Club in a distinguished manner for a national honour. Although the previous proposal had not borne fruit, it was felt that it would be timely to consider the appropriateness of forwarding another nomination. Whilst the process involved a certain amount of paperwork, and it was virtually impossible to determine what criteria the awards committees applied when making their final decision, Council concurred that it should give the matter consideration. It was agreed that the Hon. Secretary (DH) would send a circular e-mail to Council members soliciting recommendations and that the possible list of names would be discussed at the next meeting of Council to see if a consensus had emerged.

**DH**

**11 Branch and membership development**

The Development Officer (Jane Cleaver) presented a report providing an update on Membership and Branch development. The report included a graphical summary of new memberships and cancellations, showing that the membership stood at some 3248 on 10<sup>th</sup> August. Council welcomed the analysis as a very useful summary. Following discussion, it was felt that some modifications could be beneficially made to the methods of analysis. It was agreed that in future, the reporting period for new memberships and cancellations should be quarterly, synchronised with the quarterly periods of the financial year. This would provide consistency and enable comparisons that could not be made easily with the present reporting period which was based on unevenly spaced dates of meetings of Council. Council also requested that the sectional pie charts be upgraded to include numerical information that would facilitate comparisons and analysis of trends.

**JC**

JC reported on the Young Birders Training Course held at the Isle of May Bird Observatory (IOMBO) 4<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> July 2015. Council whole-heartedly supported this initiative and welcomed the presentations given by past participants at Annual Conferences. Council agreed to provide supporting funding for 2016 should the IOMBO be prepared to continue with the Course. It was felt that the sum involved represented very good value for money in raising the Club profile and as a way of addressing one of its core aims.

**JC**

A brief discussion was held regarding the placing of membership promotional advertisements in the small number of local Bird Reports that were produced by local bird clubs rather than by branches of the SOC. It was appreciated that

there might be some sensitivities about this but that it would be potentially valuable means of promoting the Club. One possibility would be for there to be a companion advertisement for the local bird club alongside the SOC material. It was agreed that it would be worthwhile to investigate this further and that JC would approach the report editors concerned. **JC**

Council considered a second draft of the Branch Guidance Document that would be circulated to Branch Secretaries, seeking clarification on a number of items. It was noted that it was necessary to ensure that the guidance in the document was aligned with the provisions of the Club Constitution. JC invited members to forward any further comments to her. Council recognised the importance of the paper, and its usefulness in supporting Branch Committee members in their roles.

JC and Alan Knox (AK) presented a comprehensive spreadsheet analysis that had been prepared in response to an initial discussion at the meeting of 8<sup>th</sup> March 2015 regarding the funding of Branches and the way that local funds were used to support visiting speakers, to purchase of equipment (such as data projectors and laptop computers), pay for room hire and to cover incidental expenses. AK noted that some of the data were based on extrapolations and estimates as not all Branch accounts were held in the same format. The paper provided an interesting insight into the way that the Branches supported their activities with a wide spread of costs incurred, and a wide spread in the level of contribution from HQ that was not always related in any obvious way to the size of the Branch. Council welcomed the analysis, which had been prompted initially by production of the new Branch Guidance Document, and the need to include material in it regarding those items that Branch funds would be expected to cover, and those where support would come from HQ. A number of inter-related issues were identified producing a lengthy and detailed debate. The key points were:

- (i) the present system was, in effect, *ad hoc* and seemed to have developed over time without reference to any particular Club policy
- (ii) the existing approach in the main functioned in an acceptable manner, although there were considerable differences between branches in the level of HQ support received and no obvious rationale why this should be the case. For some branches the costs of room hire for meetings were met from Branch funds, whereas in others this expense was met from central funds. Council noted that this raised the immediate issue of fairness of treatment over branch expenses
- (iii) there was considerable variation between branches in the level of balances held (whilst it was acknowledged that some of these difference might be due to grants awarded to support research projects). These balances are not included in the Annual Accounts, although the funds are clearly owned by the Club. It was confirmed that branches have a responsibility to spend the money in support of Club activities, this being a general point for all charities

It was agreed that, as a general principle, branches should be expected to be financially self-sufficient. At the same time it was recognised that a single over-arching policy could probably not be implemented simply given the wide variation in branch size and that some Branches may need support. It was agreed that the Development Officer (JC) would contact Branches to find out whether room hire charges for meetings were met from central or Branch funds. **JC**

In order that the Branch Guidance Document could be sent out, it was agreed **JC**

that the Development Officer (JC) would produce an interim section regarding branch finances with a revision to be sent out later when a clearer policy had emerged. The Hon. Treasurer (Alan Fox) agreed to produce a template that could be used for Branch Accounts that would capture expenditure in a more complete manner than at present and that would enable more accurate comparisons between branches to be made.

**AF**

Council agreed to continue the discussion of this topic at its next meeting. (agenda item)

**DH**

**12 Conferences update**

Wendy Hicks (WH) gave a brief verbal update on the Annual Conference 2015 to be held in Pitlochry. Numbers already booked were in line with previous years at this point in time and were what would be expected, The number of student attendees was still low, but it was noted that this was not unusual as late booking for this group was the norm, with bookings tending to be received closer to the deadline. WH reported that, given the conference theme of “Scotland’s Upland Birds”, she had e-mailed the Atholl Estate (local to Pitlochry) with details of the conference programme and had forwarded details of the booking process. A preliminary outline of speakers had been drawn up for the 2016 Spring Conference.

**13 Library Archive Review**

Council received a detailed and comprehensive report from the Library Committee of an in-depth Review of Service of the SOC Archives. The paper was presented by Alan Knox (AK). He stated that the key aim of the review was to enable the unique materials in the Archive to be made more widely available than at present, to increase the “visibility” of the Archive, and to ensure that the Club took advantage of the internet for accessing the collection. The Review set out a number of objectives for the forthcoming year. Three points were brought to the specific attention of Council:

- the Library Committee had conducted a review of the small and unstructured collection of art works held in the Archive. Anything of direct archival or Club relevance had been identified and set aside. It was intended that the remaining works be disposed of. It was proposed that the future policy regarding works of art should be the same as that adopted for books, namely that if donated works were not deemed to be of archival or institutional relevance then they would be passed into the second-hand market. Council endorsed these decisions.
- Council was invited to note the policy that had been implemented regarding the digitisation of tapes, CDs and printed materials.
- The Library Committee brought to Council’s attention the fact that a lack of physical storage space was becoming a problem that was only partially offset by digitisation, and that was likely to become more acute in the future.

AK noted that digitisation brought with it the need for a clear approach to long-term digital storage and a policy for backing up the digital archive. One possibility that was proposed was to use online “cloud” storage over the internet. He noted further that the pressure on physical storage could be eased if the Club’s financial records were also digitised and stored in this way, thus freeing up much-needed shelf space. Council supported both of these proposals, and referred the matters to the Management Committee (meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> September) for consideration.

**DH /  
Management  
Committee**

Council thanked AK and the Library Committee for the report, and thanked Ian Elfick in particular for his contribution.

- 14 Sponsorship of NBN conference attendance** The Chair, Chris McNerny (CMcI), informed Council of an e-mail that he had received, as President, from the National Biodiversity Network. The message contained details of a forthcoming conference that they were organising. One of the aims of the conference was to increase student participation (with presumably the intention of increasing the use of the NBN database) and the NBN were enquiring whether the SOC would be willing to help support student attendance at the conference by making a financial contribution. Whilst Council were supportive in general terms, especially with respect to encouraging student participants, at the same time it considered that the project had not been fully thought through and that there were many details missing. In any case, Council noted that SOC was a small organisation with little or no free funds, and that the Club already had its own approach to fostering student interest. It was agreed that the Hon. Secretary (DH) would write a supportive letter to NBN setting out these points whilst politely declining funding. **DH**
- 15 Birdtrack agreement and related matters** The Council representative on the BTO *Birdtrack* Steering Group (Stuart Rivers) had forwarded to Council another iteration of the developing Agreement for participants in the *Birdtrack* system. This followed on from the previous discussions at Council (see §14 Council Minute 14<sup>th</sup> June 2015). No direct response had been received from the BTO to the written outline response that had been sent to Andy Musgrove by the Hon. Secretary. The latest paper indicated that *Birdtrack* was very much “work in progress”, and Council agreed that it was an extremely important tool for Local Bird Recorders and the core activities of the SOC generally.
- It was felt that the issue was too complex and detailed for consideration at a full meeting of Council, and that the best way to progress the matter was for it to be overseen by a Steering Group that could investigate properly the implications of any developments for the SOC and make recommendations to Council regarding the best way to proceed. Ray Murray (Council member for Borders and Honorary Member of SOC) had indicated that he would be interested in being involved in the working group. It was felt that the group might comprise some four of five members, and that most of the work could be conducted using e-mail. The Chair (CMcI) agreed to write to Ray Murray for advice on the best composition and membership of the group, and ask him also to give some consideration to how the group might develop in future to address the continuing issues surrounding the coordination of the efforts of Local Bird Recorders, the production of Local Bird Reports, and how the Club should address specific “birding” concerns. **CMcI**
- 17 Council sub-committee remits** Council considered a paper that summarised the responses received to a consultation on the remits of the various sub-committees and a number of issues that needed to be addressed regarding routine reporting, membership, duration of tenure and, importantly, the manner in which Council could reassure itself that it was maintaining an appropriate level of oversight.
- A number of points were agreed:
- Committee Chairs need not, as a matter of principle, be existing members of Council
  - there should be a form of regular annual reporting to Council for those committees that do not produce minutes. It was agreed that the Report could be a short written summary of the year’s activities submitted for consideration at the meeting of Council.
  - the Club post-holders (President, Vice-President, Hon. Treasurer, Hon.

Secretary) should have the right to attend any meeting of a Committee. Members of Council should also have a right to attend, having given suitable prior written notice to the Committee Chair

- Committee Chairs should serve for a period of three years in the first instance, but be eligible for re-appointment at the discretion of Council. However, this limitation should not be applied to the present incumbents and should only be brought into effect for new appointments
- Committee membership (members and Chair) should be formally approved (“signed off”) annually by Council. The membership summary would be the same as that provided in the Annual Report to the AGM and could be presented at the Council meeting preceding the AGM

Council considered that there was an aspect of best practice in having an element of rotation to committee membership. At the same time it recognised that individual expertise and a willingness to contribute were key factors in the success of the present arrangement. Further, there was a wide variation in the manner that the different committees operated (for example e-mail vs. face to face meetings, regular scheduled meetings vs. continuous interactions) and that it would not be necessary or perhaps desirable for the same policy to be applied to all committees. It was agreed that it would be beneficial to obtain the opinion of the committee Chairs regarding rotation and appointment of committee members, and that the Hon. Secretary would write to the Chairs and present a synopsis of their views at the next meeting.

**DH**

**18 AGM**

Wendy Hicks (WH) presented the latest draft of the Annual Report that would go before the membership at the October Annual General Meeting. It was noted that the report was virtually complete, but some material still needed to be incorporated and details finalised and other sections might benefit from a modest expansion of content. Some minor editing was required to the Minute of the 2014 AGM to properly reflect the procedural aspects of approval as being “without dissent”. It was agreed that the Hon. Secretary would forward a revised version of the Minutes to WH.

**DH**

Council thanked WH for the significant amount of work that had been put into creating an interesting and informative document.

**19 AOCB**

The Hon Secretary (DH) and the Chair (CMcI) had been notified by the Secretary of Clyde Branch that a Club member had expressed a wish to be the Branch Representative on Council, now that David Clugston had stood down from the role.

It was brought to the attention of Council that the revised Club Constitution states that:

“Each Branch shall elect a Branch Representative to represent the Branch on Council” (§37.10).

Scrutiny of the minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Clyde Branch held on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2015 showed that the position of Branch Representative on Council remained vacant at the end of the meeting with no nominees or volunteers coming forward. Council concluded that a proper election for Representative had therefore not been conducted and that the post was still unfilled. It was agreed that any nominee should be proposed and seconded, and a vote held at a branch AGM with the outcome minuted. In the opinion of



Council it was important that this process was adhered to, with the new status of the Club as a SCIO, given that Council members automatically become Trustees of the Club during their tenure.

It was agreed that Hon. Secretary would write to the Clyde Branch Secretary and the member concerned outlining these decisions, and indicating to the Branch that Council would welcome the attendance of a local committee member in a non-voting capacity in the interim.

**DH**

**20 Date of next meeting**

29<sup>th</sup> November 2015: 10:30 at RSPB Loch Leven

Signed:



Date: 29<sup>th</sup> November 2015

Ian Thomson, President