

The SOC Scotland's Bird Club



COUNCIL MEETING 81/02 18th June 2017 Minutes

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

Session 81/02 of Council was held at 10.30 hrs on the 18th June 2017 at the RSPB Loch Leven reserve, Kinross.

Present: President James Main (Chair), Jeremy Wilson (Vice President), David Heeley (Hon Secretary), Andrew Thorpe (Hon Treasurer), Iain Gibson, Alan Knox, Richard Leslie, Melvin Morrison, David Rackham, Neil Stratton, Paul Taylor and Chris Wernham.

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

Action

- 1 Welcome** The President, James Main, on behalf of Council offered congratulations to the Vice-President, Prof. Jeremy Wilson, on his recent election as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.
- 2 Apologies for absence** Apologies were received from Frank Hamilton (Honorary President), Helen Aiton, David Bain, Alison Creamer, Lesley Creamer, Roger Gooch and Bob McGowan.
- 3 Absent** John Campbell, Angus McBay and Geoff Sheppard, were absent.
- 4 Minutes of Council Meeting 81/01 held on 12th March 2017** The Minutes for meeting held on the 12th March 2017 were approved subject to a minor amendment.
- 5 Matters arising** 12th March 2017 §13: SOC speaker at Watson Birds event. The Chair, James Main (JM) reported that the talk would be by Ian Poxton on the topic of “Merlins in the Lammermuirs”.

All other action points had either been completed or were agenda items.
- 6 Membership categories and future subscriptions** Council received a paper for discussion prepared by the Treasurer, Andrew Thorpe (AT) in conjunction with the Development Officer, Jane Cleaver (JC) concerning the issues of (i) membership categories and (ii) future subscription levels. AT highlighted the fact that Council had, in the past, agreed that subscriptions should be reviewed every two years. In actual fact the last increase had been in 2013 as it had been agreed that the subscription level should not be increased in line with the previous policy in 2015. The matter was complicated by the fact that although some nine membership categories were advertised, there were some 25 categories in the accounting system, many of which had very few contributors. A potential case could be made for greatly simplifying the range of membership categories and addressing some of the ethical issues and issues of definition regarding

concepts such as “Family Membership”. Council agreed that the range of membership categories needed to be addressed in a systematic manner and agreed further that this issue should form part of the Strategic Review.

**Strategy
Review
Group**

AT proposed to Council that membership subscriptions should be increased, and that existing differentials between the categories be maintained. In particular he proposed that the Adult membership be increased to £36.00 p.a. with other category increases calculated *pro rata*. This level of subscription was broadly comparable to other similar organisations and represented a c12.5% uplift on current levels for the period 2013 - 2019. AT informed Council that, looking back over previous years, increases had varied from some 6% p.a. to 25% p.a. and that despite this there had been no noticeable impact on membership numbers.

Council accepted the proposal of an increase to £36 to the end of 2019, and also agreed that the matter should be addressed bi-annually. It agreed that it was preferable from a strategic point of view to have a policy of bi-annual increases at a modest and reasonable level rather than a lull followed by a significant rise.

AT agreed to put a notice to Members in the September issue of *Scottish Birds* concerning the increase and the review of membership categories.

AT

**7 Finance:
Update and
Report.**

The Treasurer, Andrew Thorpe (AT) reported to Council on a number of activities that he had been engaged in recently on behalf of the Club:

- Finance Committee. AT noted that the new Finance Officer (to be appointed later in the year) would be in attendance at the Finance Committee *ex officio*. The Treasurer would be the Chair with Club members Doreen Main and Melvin Morrison (Branch Representative for Moray) acting on behalf of the membership and Council respectively. The first meeting was scheduled to take place in August and it was anticipated that some adjustment to remits and procedures might be needed as the Committee bedded in.
- Financial Documents. Digitising the archive of financial documents had commenced with two paid volunteers assigned to the task. AT noted that it was at present difficult to estimate the overall magnitude of the job and hence how long it would take. Some documentation had, by law, to be retained, but nevertheless there was a large volume of documentation to be scanned. He anticipated that a reasonable estimate could be made once more progress had been made with scanning.
- Club Insurance cover. AT had met twice with the insurance broker to review the levels of Club cover. The Club had, perhaps unusually, an “all inclusive” policy that covered all elements of insurable risk. Some aspects of the Club’s facilities such as the wooden construction of Waterston House and the public safety issues regarding the pond at Waterston House could lead to a reluctance on the part of some insurers to provide quotations. On balance, he recommended that the Club accept the advice of the Insurance Broker to continue with the present insurer (AXA). The overall cost of insurance through a Master Policy would increase somewhat due to increases in insurance tax and index linking. In passing AT confirmed that the policy covered all aspects of Club activity including Branch outings, etc., and cover for decisions taken by Trustees. Council expressed some concern over the level of insurance for the re-building costs of Waterston House. At present it was noted that this was some £1m 97k. It was unclear whether this continued to be a realistic figure, and Council expressed the view that had a duty of care to ensure that the Club was properly

**Finance
Committee**

covered. It was agreed that this matter should be referred to the Management Committee for a revaluation for the purposes of rebuild insurance. This should become a regular activity, perhaps on a 10 year cycle.

Management
Committee

- AT confirmed that the Club’s Bookkeeper, Jean Torrance was retiring but had generously offered to continue in post until Christmas 2017 to enable the Club to make a new appointment at the level of Finance Officer. The anticipated duties would cover more than a bookkeeping role, and AT noted that some difficulties might be anticipated in finding a single suitable candidate who could fulfil both roles.
- Meetings had been held with the Independent Financial Advisor, Sandy Scotland, to finalise the Annual Accounts. He had informed AT that the *Quickbooks* accounting software that the Club currently used was not, as far as he was aware, used by any other comparable organisation. Further, AT informed Council that the requirements of the Charity authorities meant that the output from *Quickbooks* had to be completely reformatted for the purposes of annual financial reporting, imposing additional time burdens. Council agreed that it would be prudent to move as soon as possible to a new accounting system that more closely matched the requirements.
- Council noted that the *SOC 200 Club* had been wound up, although some difficulties remained over the closing of the bank account. On behalf of Council, the Chair, James Main, noted with appreciation the significant financial contribution that the *200 Club* proceeds had made. Noting the tribute in the latest issue of *Scottish Birds*, Council expressed thanks to Daphne Pierse-Duncombe and Vicky McLellan for organising and running the *200 Club* which had been in operation for some 28 years.

AT

Moving to the Balance Sheet and the Profit and Loss Accounts, AT drew Council’s attention to a recent legacy of £20k from the estate of Duncan Watt. He noted that this did not appear in the current accounts, but would appear in the next financial year. It was agreed that it would be appropriate to put a short note of appreciation for this bequest in *Scottish Birds*, and that the executors would be approached to confirm that they would agree to this.

WH

Attention was drawn to the long standing fact that operating income did not cover operating expenditure. This pattern repeated that of previous years. Council concurred that this was a complex issue, noting that, as a charity, it had a duty to spend income, legacies and where appropriate income from the investment of legacies, in furtherance of the charitable aims laid out in the Constitution. AT pointed to the significant assets possessed by the Club and the fact that overall the Club was in a sound financial position. It was felt that a move to budgetary financial planning would provide a much better balanced and strategic approach, and it was agreed that this should be a matter of priority for the Finance Committee to consider.

Finance
Committee

8 Branch and Membership Development: Report.

The Development Officer, Jane Cleaver (JC) presented a report on the current membership situation. In summary, the Club had some 3350 individual members at the date of the report which represented a steady increase from 3185 over the preceding two years. Analysis of method of application to join further highlighted the importance of the Club’s digital presence with 67% of new applications being made online. Online searches also proved an important factor and had a significant role in publicising the SOC. JC noted a new survey was being planned using Survey Monkey to enable a better understanding of the reasons behind lapsed memberships. JC concluded that being able to maintain a steady increase in

memberships in the current climate should be viewed as a good performance for a small charity such as the SOC.

Turning to specific development projects, Council welcomed the fact that the Young Birders Training Course (YBTC) had provoked considerable interest on social media and that the Club had received over 20 applications to date. Unfortunately only six applicants would be accepted, and Council noted in discussion it would not be feasible to run more than one Course at the Isle of May, and that it would be financially unfeasible to run additional programmes at other locations. Council welcomed the fact that JC had submitted the YBTC for consideration for that *RSPB Scotland – Nature of Scotland Awards 2017* in the Youth Education category. The shortlist would be announced in September with the awards ceremony in November.

Council expressed concern regarding the continuing difficulties with the Club website. The system had crashed when a relatively modest update to some of the web pages had been uploaded, and the website had not been fully restored. JC had consulted with external experts, and it became apparent that it would not be feasible to re-write the existing code and update the website in its current form. The expert opinion was that the website was large and complex, the coding was dated and some of the system plugins had not been updated. Council learned that the average lifespan of a modern website was four years. Council agreed that the best policy would be to completely redesign the website, taking the opportunity at the same time to create a system that would also be suitable for access by mobile systems such as smartphones and tablet computers, and one that had the latest security features. JC had written tender documentation, and four potential development companies had been identified. Overall the redesign would cost £10k - £12k. The new website would entail a maintenance contract of some £100 per month, but this sum included hosting the website and any necessary routine technical maintenance. It was anticipated that the new website would be live shortly after the Annual Conference.

JC

9 Birding Site Guide App.

JC informed Council that further progress had been made on the Birding Guide app project. Martin Cook (Secretary of Moray Branch) had agreed to act in an editorial role with a meeting planned by the end of the month. An “App Working Group” needed to be set up with a remit to finalise the site guide templates and gather content. This would then enable form costings to be obtained.

JC / AK

10 Conferences: Update and Report.

The Office Manager, Wendy Hicks (WH) , presented a report of the Spring 2017 Birdwatchers Conference held in Dunfermline in collaboration with BTO. Feedback from attendees showed high levels of satisfaction with the event which had featured, once again, a good range of high quality presentations and talks.

Moving to the Annual Conference 2017, WH noted that the flier that had been included in the recent edition of *Scottish Birds* had already attracted a number of bookings, inclining towards a modest increase in numbers at the equivalent point in 2016. The Brochure for the conference included a back page full colour advertisement for the first time, and this had helped to defray the production cost. It was noted with regret that Swarovski had decided not to provide a subsidy for 2017 as it would be providing support elsewhere. Council recorded its appreciation for the generous sponsorship that Swarovski had awarded for a number of years.

WH concluded with noting that it was hoped to be able to book the Atholl Palace Hotel for the 2018 Annual Conference. Preferred dates had been submitted but prices had yet to be discussed and agreed. Council concurred that the three year block booking scheme worked well and the Pitlochry had proved to be an excellent venue for a number of reasons.

WH

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| 11 | Formation of a Birding Committee: matter carried forward | This matter had now been referred to the Strategy Group who would, as part of their remit, be considering the overall committee structure and what committees the Club and Council needed to service its needs. In discussion it was recognised that more needed to be done to integrate the activities of the Local Bird Recorders and to ensure that any prospective Birding Committee would have this as part of its remit. | Strategy Group |
| 12 | Bird Recorders Conference: matter carried forward | The Chair, James Main (JM) informed Council that he had contacted all Local Bird Recorders regarding a possible Conference. The response had been somewhat disappointing although there had been a few expressions of interest. Continuing the preceding discussion on a prospective Birding Committee, Council agreed that the best way forward would be to await the Strategy Group's recommendations regarding desirable Committee structures, but it was agreed that reviews of the role of the Recorders, the online Scottish Bird Report, and an assessment of the overall status of "bird" issues within the SOC was overdue. | |
| 13 | Proposal for Commemorative Plaques | The Chair, James Main (JM) informed Council that he had received an e-mail from Club member Peter Holt asking that consideration be given to the installation of commemorative plaques in Waterston House honouring the contributions of Donald Watson and (separately) George Waterston. He further indicated that it would be suitable, should the project go ahead, to install the plaque to Donald Watson on his centenary in 2018. Peter Holt had made a generous offer of £1000 towards the cost should Council agree to proceed. Council noted that this matter had, in fact been already under consideration by the Library Committee who had received early notice of the proposal. The Chair of the Committee, Alan Knox (AK) indicated that the Library Committee would wish to recommend that the plaques be installed and noted that a draft of suitable wording was being prepared and that a manufacturer for the plaques had been identified. It was agreed that the project should be left to the Library Committee to complete with liaison with the Management Committee in finding the most appropriate place for their display. It was noted in passing that the plaques would serve a useful purpose in providing information to the visiting public who frequently enquired about the identity of George Waterston and Donald Watson after whom the HQ, Library and Art Gallery were named. | Library Committee / Management Committee |
| 14 | European Bird Atlas: Species sponsorship | Council was informed that the Club had been contacted by Prof. Jeremy Greenwood soliciting species sponsorship for the forthcoming <i>European Breeding Bird Atlas</i> . The Chair, James Main (JM) noted that the SOC had provided sponsorship for the last UK <i>Atlas</i> . Council agreed that sponsorship would be excellent publicity for the Club in an important international publication. It was agreed that, as previously, the Club would offer to sponsor the Crested Tit and that an application would be made to the SOC's <i>Birds of Scotland</i> Fund for the sum of €500. It was agreed further that Prof. Greenwood be invited to write a short piece for <i>Scottish Birds</i> regarding the <i>European Breeding Bird Atlas</i> . | JM / WH |
| 15 | Comments on Strategic Planning Exercise | Council received a summary of comments from Members on the prospective Strategic Planning exercise based on submissions received by the Secretary, David Heeley (DH). No substantive issue had been raised, although it had been recognised that any strategic planning should include significant flexibility and not be too restrictive. The document was passed to the Strategic Planning Group as one of the inputs to their meeting scheduled for 23 rd June. It was confirmed that the Strategic Planning Group comprised the President (James Main), the Vice-President (Jeremy Wilson), the Treasurer (Andrew Thorpe), David Rackham and Chris Wernham. | |
| 16 | Matters for Approval: Appointment to | Council approved the appointment of Paul Taylor (Fife Branch representative) to the Management Committee. It noted his significant contributions to the work of the Committee during his tenure as Acting Vice-President and a short period of secondment | |

**Management
Committee**

- 17 AOCB** 1. The Chair of the Library Committee, Alan Knox (AK), offered Council a brief resumé of recent developments in the Waterston House Library:
- The Librarian, Karen Bidgood had retired as had been intimated at an earlier meeting. A suitable successor had been identified and the post had been offered and accepted with a start date in September 2017. He noted that the contract was being drafted for signature.
 - AK noted that the British Library had indicated that it intended to digitise cassette tape recordings held in the Waterston House archives. These include a number of historically interesting and unusual items such after dinner speeches.
 - The Library had received digital copies of two PhD theses that had been based on research using the library archives, highlighting the importance of maintaining this resource. AK noted that the Library would welcome receiving any other doctoral dissertations on subjects relevant to the SOC.
2. The Office Manager, Wendy Hicks, informed Council that the *Birds of Scotland* Fund had agreed to support an application for funding from the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme (SRMS) for financial assistance in producing annual reports. The Fund had agreed further that such support would be for a period of three years, but that “strenuous efforts be made to improve the provision of better funding for the SRMS from Scottish Government and Scottish Natural Heritage...” (see §16, Council Minutes 80/01 March 2017).
- 18 Next Meeting** 13th August 2017 : 10.30 at RSPB Loch Leven

Signed:



Date: 13th August 2017

James Main, President