



SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

ANNUAL REPORT

2017/18

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Please see pp26-28 inside for details of Council's proposed amendment to the Club's constitution at the 2018 AGM

A copy of this report can be viewed on the Club's website:

www.the-soc.org.uk/annual-report

A large-print hard copy is available from Waterston House on request

SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Annual Report and Financial Statements

For the year ended 31 March 2018

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Head Office

Waterston House
Aberlady
East Lothian
EH32 0PY

Club Officials

President: James Main
Vice President: Jeremy Wilson
Honorary Secretary: David Heeley
Honorary Treasurer: Andrew Thorpe

Office bearers are also members of Council

Council Elected Members

Elected at Club AGM (year of election/re-election):

Will Cresswell (2017)
Bob McGowan (2016)
Chris Wernham (2016)

Elected at branch AGMs:

Ayrshire – David Rackham
Borders – Neil Stratton
Caithness – Angus McBay
Central Scotland – Roger Gooch
Clyde – Iain Gibson
Dumfries – Lesley Creamer
Fife – Paul Taylor
Highland – David Bain
Lothian – Richard Leslie
Moray – Melvin Morrison
North-East Scotland – Alan Knox
Orkney – Helen Aiton
Stewartry – Jeremy Brock
Tayside – John Campbell
West Galloway – Geoff Sheppard

Honorary Presidents

Roy Dennis
Frank Hamilton

Honorary Members

Dougal Andrew
Ian Andrews
Stan da Prato
Iain Gibson
Mike Harris
Angus Hogg
Andrew Macmillan
Daphne Peirse-Duncombe
Ron Summers
Adam Watson

Independent Examiner

AW Scotland CA
10 Craighall Crescent
Edinburgh EH6 4RY

Bankers

Royal Bank of Scotland Plc
Edinburgh Castle Street Branch
109-109a George Street
Edinburgh EH2 4JW

Solicitors

Morton Fraser
Quartermile Two
2 Lister Square
Edinburgh EH3 9GL

Investment Advisors

Brewin Dolphin Securities
10 George Street
Edinburgh EH2 2PZ

SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Annual Report

For the year ended 31 March 2018

Council's Report

The Council has pleasure in presenting its report for the year ended 31 March 2018. This report is prepared in accordance with the charity's constitution and the Statement of Recommended Practice – Accounting and Reporting by Charities, and complies with applicable law.

CONSTITUTION

From 1st April 2015, the SOC operated under the charity's new constitution as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). The management of the SOC is the responsibility of the Council whose members are elected and co-opted under the terms of the constitution.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the SOC are to advance the education of the public in the study of birds in Scotland, and in furtherance thereof, but not otherwise:

1. To promote the study and documentation of Scotland's birdlife.
2. To promote interest in wild birds.
3. To support the conservation of birds and their habitats in Scotland.
4. To provide a focus for anyone with an interest in, and for information relating to, the study of birds in Scotland.
5. To encourage the practice and appreciation of the visual arts of natural history.

There have been no changes in objectives since the last annual report.

REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

Council

All Council members, by law, are trustees of the Charity. Four meetings were held at RSPB Loch Leven, Kinross, with some items of business also conducted by email. Council welcomed Will Cresswell, Professor of Biology at St Andrews University, who agreed to stand as an elected member. Will replaced Alison Creamer, who was thanked for her important contribution to the board over her four-year tenure. Jeremy Brock was also welcomed as Stewartry representative.

Much of the business during the year focused on the Club's finances, governance, new projects and conference planning. A running agenda item was progress on the proposed Local Bird Recorders meeting. The idea was met with enthusiasm by the recording community and a date was fixed for July 2018. At the same time, a small working group of Council (President, Vice-President and Will Cresswell) focused on putting together the programme of speakers for the Club's 2018 autumn conference. Earlier in the reporting period, another working group was formed, at Council's request, to consider the future direction of the Club's activities. The Strategy Group met regularly at Waterston House between June and March, in which time considerable progress was made, with the priorities for the Club under consideration and a proposal for how these might best be achieved. An interim report presented to Council recommended that the Club should appoint two Vice Presidents (see p28) allowing the President to concentrate more on developing the Club's public profile and outreach activities.

On the subject of governance and following up on a previous recommendation by former SOC Treasurer, Alan Fox, the formation of a Finance Committee was approved (see below). Two important items brought to Council by SOC Development Officer, Jane Cleaver, were the development of a mobile app 'Where to Watch Birds in Scotland' and an urgent re-design of the Club's website (see p6). A review of the Birds of Scotland Fund was presented to Council in March by the Fund Chair, David Jardine. It was agreed that the Fund should continue for a further period of ten years. Council acknowledged that the Fund had been effectively managed and used for a wide variety of projects in line with the original objectives.

A copy of approved minutes of Council meetings are available to view or download from the SOC website under the 'About Us/Staff, Committees & Office Bearers' tab.

Finance Committee

Following the finalisation of a remit, which went before Council, the Finance Committee was formed in the autumn, comprising three members – Andrew Thorpe (Hon Treasurer), Melvin Morrison (Moray branch) and Doreen Main (Lothian branch), with the Finance Officer in attendance at meetings. The Committee met twice in the reporting year as well as corresponding by e-mail. Its main purpose is to assist the Hon Treasurer in appraising matters such as investment policy, proposals for fundraising, financing of major one-off projects and other strategic financial matters. One of the team's first tasks was to organise the appointment of a Finance Officer to replace the retiring book-keeper, Jean Torrance. This was successfully achieved, with the preferred candidate, Mairead Lyons, taking up post in November. At the time of writing, a revised SOC Investment and Reserves Policy was being drafted, with a final version due to be posted on the Club's website.

Membership and Club development:

The total number of individual members of the Club to 31 March 2018 was 3293 (where family and joint memberships are each counted as two individuals), which represented a small downturn on last year (Figure 1), with only Borders, Dumfries, Highland and Tayside recording a small increase in numbers (Figure 2).

The Club is very fortunate that membership remains at such healthy levels, despite the prevailing difficult economic climate. Council welcomes all who have joined the SOC this past year and thanks those long-standing members for their continued support, many of who are not within reach of a local branch but keep in touch via their quarterly mailings of Scottish Birds and The Hoot, and, in some cases, travel great distances to attend SOC conferences.

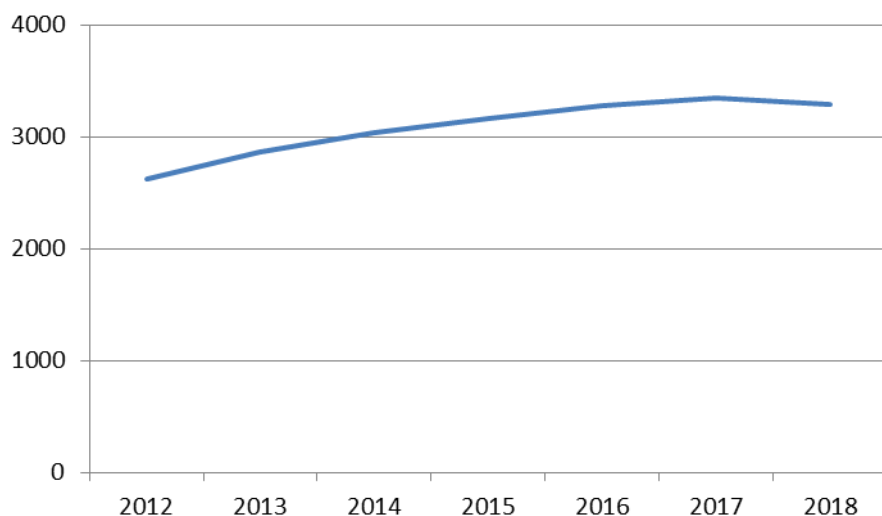


Figure 1. Total number of members

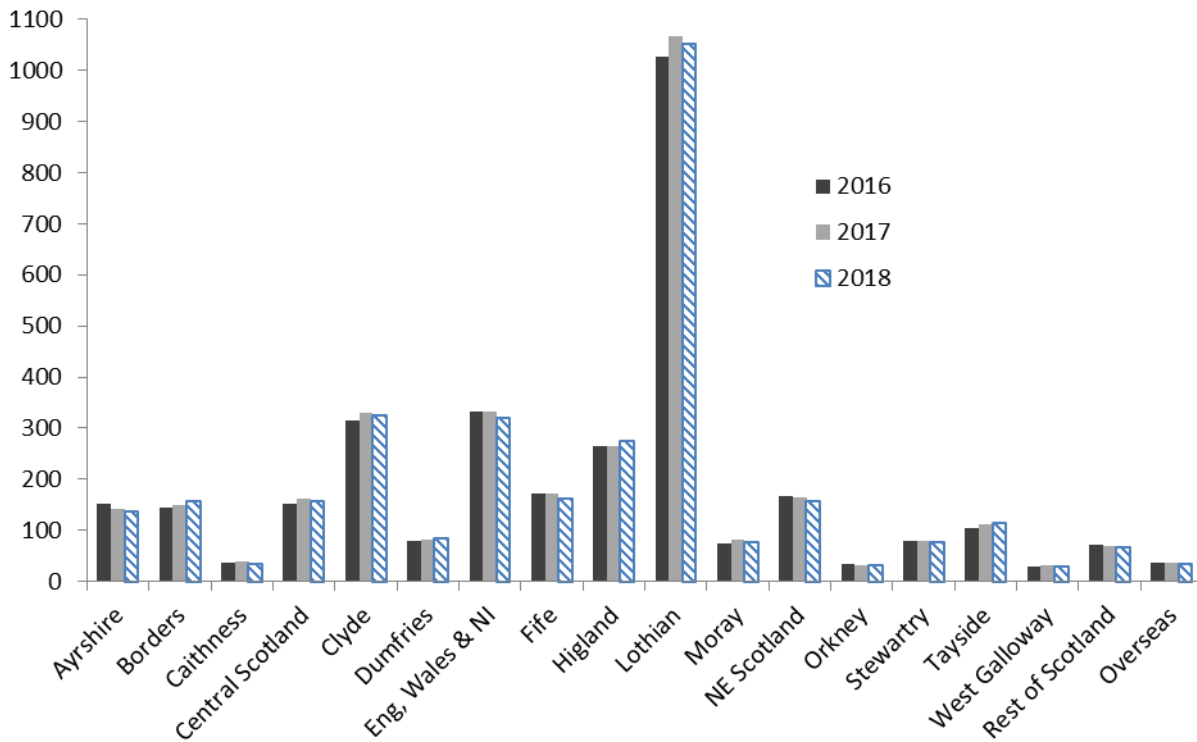


Figure 2. Total number of members by geographic location

The split by membership type was a similar picture to previous years. However, disappointingly, student membership was down by around 25%, compared to having almost doubled in the previous year.

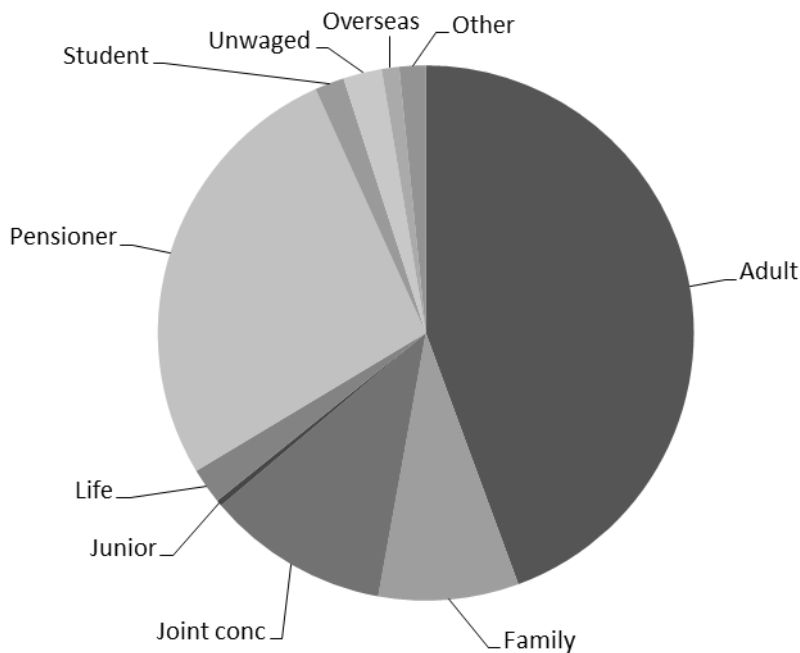


Figure 3. Membership by category at 31 March 2018 (based on 2755 subscriptions, as opposed to individual members). The category 'Other' includes Local Bird Recorders and Honorary memberships.

A total of 183 new subscriptions were registered this year, compared with 248 in the previous year, representing a fall of around 25% (figure 4). Major technical issues with the Club's website over a sustained period in 2017 (detailed further on) are thought to have contributed to the downturn, given that the site is the primary vehicle for attracting and processing new memberships. Other possible contributing factors could be the increase in membership fees as well as the absence of a Scottish Bird Fair, which has helped to boost the Club's public profile in previous years.

The Club recorded 244 losses in memberships this year, slightly more than last year (201) . A small proportion (around 10%) of the losses was attributable to members sadly passing away, while 35% were members actively cancelling their subscription. Where a reason for the decision to leave the Club was provided, a change of circumstances and financial constraints were the overriding factors. Among the myriad other reasons were frailty, declining health and time constraints, all cited as preventing participation in Club activities. Lapsed memberships – where no renewal payment is made or a direct debit is cancelled but no notification is received – accounted for over 50% of lost support (131 memberships in total).

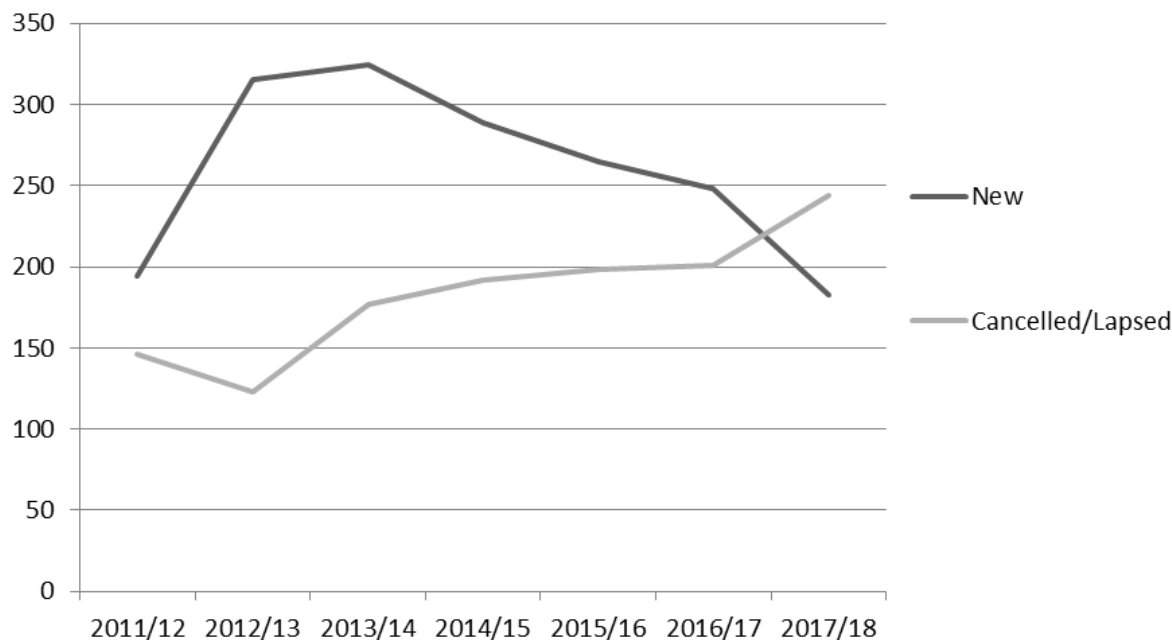


Figure 4. New and cancelled/lapsed memberships

The issues that plagued the SOC website at the end of last year’s reporting period turned out to be of a more serious nature than originally thought. As such, Club Development Officer, Jane Cleaver, made a recommendation to Council that the site undergo a major re-design. Jane worked tirelessly with Glasgow-based development company, Mucky Puddle, throughout the second half of 2017, and the new website went live in mid-January. Mindful of evolving security and compliance best practices, a maintenance contract was put in place with Mucky Puddle to ensure the platform is protected from hackers, kept bug-free and updated with the latest plug-ins.

The re-design also provided an ideal opportunity to bring the site up to date in terms of compatibility with mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets, and to streamline the online payments system with an integrated Direct Debit and card processing facility. Each form on the site was re-worked to make it simpler and faster to complete and content pages benefitted from a fresh new look, featuring striking images by renowned wildlife photographer and long-standing SOC supporter, Laurie Campbell.

With the website re-design complete, Jane was able to turn her attention to the Club’s exciting ‘Where to watch birds in Scotland’ mobile app project, expected to be launched in early spring 2019. By the end of the reporting period, visual mock-ups of how the app might look and should function had been produced by the app working group (Jane, Martin Cook and Alan Knox). It was also decided that the new resource should make use of population information in the SOC’s 2007 publication, *The Birds of Scotland 3*, with data to be updated where possible. At the time of writing, a detailed development brief for the project had been sent to six carefully selected app developers, with current SOC website maintenance company, Mucky Puddle, winning the contract.

With help from Club stalwart, Willie Prest, Jane compiled a comprehensive guide to leaving a legacy to the SOC. The pack includes useful and easy-to-read information for anyone considering leaving a gift and illustrates the types of project that have been made possible to date from legacies. The guide is available on the SOC website (under the 'Support Us' tab) or a paper copy can be requested by contacting the office.

Six more budding ornithologists set sail for the Isle of May early in July to take part in the Young Birders' Training Course (YBTC). A partnership effort between SOC and Isle of May Bird Observatory, with additional support on the island from SNH and CEH, 21 applications were received and once again, Stuart Rivers and Mark Oksien were joined by Lothian Branch member, Alison Creamer, to lead the course. A blog written by this year's participants is available to view on the SOC website, under the 'Get Involved' / 'News and Stories' tab).

On behalf of the YBTC partnership, Jane submitted an application in June to RSPB Scotland's 'Nature of Scotland Awards 2017', putting the project forward for the 'Innovation' and 'Youth and Education' award categories. Unfortunately, the application was not shortlisted. However, undeterred, Jane has put the project forward again for the 2018 awards. In a bid to better quantify the impact of the course on the career development of the participants, a questionnaire was devised and circulated to all students who have participated in the scheme since its launch.

Jane continued to establish links with the young naturalists' networking group, A Focus on Nature (AFON) and promote their (free) mentoring scheme for young naturalists. During the course of the year, two SOC members were in touch to sign up to the mentoring scheme. Seeking to grow its reach throughout the UK, AFON appointed a regional representative for Scotland (a previous participant on the YBTC) and launched an AFON-Scotland Facebook group.

The Club's e-digest, *The Hoot*, continued to be well received, prompting a regular stream of positive comments and interest from members. Four issues were circulated to members during the year, serving to fill the gap between quarterly issues of *Scottish Birds*. Jane would like to thank all those who have contributed material to the publication, particularly Chris McInerney for his regular write-ups of topical scientific papers.

Branch Activities

This year's winter programme of talks across the country was again wide-ranging, thanks to the support and willingness of members, researchers and professional ornithologists from within the Club or from other organisations who kindly give up their time to share their knowledge and expertise. While some speakers enthused and entertained audiences with their experiences out in the field, others also brought important conservation issues to light. As always, there was a healthy mix of local and Scottish themes, from Curlews in crisis and the changing wildlife of the East Lothian Coast, to Scotland's Bean Geese and Waxwings in the North-East, to cite just a few of the myriad topics covered. Seabirds were the subject of a number of talks, being a topical issue in the midst of the national Seabirds Count: From the RSPB's seabird conservation work on a national and international level to a look at how climate change is affecting breeding cycles. Further insights into the technology behind tagging and tracking birds were presented by BTO Scotland to a number of branches.

For those interested in more exotic species, there were enticing and colourful accounts of the birds and other wildlife of far flung locations such as Svalbard, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Spanish Steppes. Fife branch managed to source a speaker to talk on the fascinating subject of tool use by the Hawaiian and New Caledonian Crows!

Most branches ran a programme of monthly outings throughout the year, usually at the weekend but a few regions also included additional mid-week trips. Excursions generally took the form of day trips to local hotspots or sites in neighbouring regions but some groups also organized longer breaks to locations further afield (see individual branch sections on pp 8-9)

Ayrshire

The branch enjoyed a varied programme of winter talks throughout the year, covering everything from the marine environment of the Isle of May, through to Merlins in the uplands of the Borders and a contemplation of birds' biological clocks. The group's e-newsletter, *The Stonechat*, was emailed to members and was also available to download from the SOC website. Field trips, which are run jointly with Central Ayrshire RSPB, took in a variety of local sites but also included two longer excursions – a fully-booked break in Northern Ireland in May, and a coach trip to RSPB Leighton Moss Reserve and WWT Martin Mere in November. Branch involvement in field work included help with ongoing national studies such as the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) counts, raptor monitoring, and the UK Beached Bird survey. Individual members also continued to work on personal projects: Barn Owls (Jim Thomson and David Gray), Kestrels (Gordon Riddle). Lesser Whitethroat (Tom Byars) and Ravens (Angus Hogg).

Borders

In the summer, branch committee member, Malcolm Ross, organised for the Borders group to fund the construction of a replacement bird hide at Hule Moss, which has been dedicated to Ray Murray. The Discussion Group meetings were held monthly during the winter, after the branch meetings, providing a forum for anyone interested in helping with surveys. The national Seabirds Count census was a key talking point, with Clive Hartley volunteering as Regional Coordinator. *Borders Bird News*, the local Yahoo news group, continues to be well used. Now in its eleventh year, it has around 265 subscribers. During the year, some members of the Borders branch were heavily engaged in the final writing-up stage of the South-East Scotland Bird Atlas.

Caithness

The branch committee held an extraordinary AGM in May to discuss how best to address the issue of an aging local membership and how to encourage greater uptake in branch activities. In a bid to raise the group's profile, committee members organised an SOC stand at Castlehill Heritage Centre (the group's winter talks venue) for an Open Day, celebrating the centre's 10th anniversary. Owing to a marked drop in usage and rising hosting and maintenance costs, the branch website ('Caithness Birds') was decommissioned during the reporting period. The Committee instead resolved to shift its efforts and focus to building a greater presence on social media.

Central Scotland

The group reported a good year of attendance at meetings, with members enjoying talks on a varied range of interesting subjects including Curlew, the South-East Scotland Atlas and the birds of the Laguna de Gallocanta in Spain. Several outings took place in the reporting period, organised by Eilidh McNab and Ben Darvill (BTO Scotland) and led by several local birding experts to locations such as RSPB Black Devon Wetlands and Blair Drummond Pools. These proved popular with members and continued to attract a healthy uptake. However, as with Caithness branch, concerns prevail in terms of the difficulty in attracting younger birdwatchers to attend branch meetings and get involved in the running of the branch.

Clyde

This has been an exciting year for the branch. Having lacked a Chairperson for several years, Zul Bhatia (ex-Site Manager, RSPB Lochwinnoch) stepped forward in the autumn offering to take on the role. Although the appointment required Clyde members' approval via the 2018 AGM (April), Zul wasted no time in getting to work, meeting with Jane Cleaver to discuss branch development ideas and attending Council meetings. Another positive development during the reporting period was the resurrection of branch outings. Sadly, the first of these was to coincide with the 'Beast from the East' and had to be cancelled. However, the following scheduled outing to Ardmore, in conjunction with SWT Glasgow, went ahead on 24 March and attracted over 30 participants (*Scottish Birds* Vol 38, pp161-162). Council thanks Clyde committee member, David Palmar, who has been instrumental in getting this important branch activity up and running so successfully. Next on the group's agenda is developing a Birdwatching for Beginners course. The daily Clyde Grapevine, expertly run by Val Wilson, with assistance from Iain Gibson, continued to prove extremely popular with existing branch members as well as attracting new members to the Club.

Dumfries

Committee member, Lesley Creamer, took up the reins of branch Secretary from Pat Abery, who decided to step down in July after over a decade of service. The primary focus for committee members during the year was the planning of this year's Scottish Birdwatchers Conference (see p15). Along with Stewartry Secretary and Chair and BTO Scotland, the Dumfries branch committee pulled out all the stops to organise a fantastic programme of speakers, which marked the Donald Watson Centenary and celebrated the birds, people and projects of Dumfries and Galloway. As well as three outings throughout the year, the branch also organised a short break to Morecambe for four action-packed days where breeding Black-necked Grebe were a highlight.

Fife

Fife enjoyed another full and successful year. Elizabeth Irwin took over the reins from Paul Taylor who had served as branch Chair for seven years. The branch continued to embrace the Club's mission to 'bring together like-minded individuals with a passion for birds, nature and conservation' and this underlined much of the group's activities during the year. There were ten outings (come rain or shine!) and four issues of the branch e-newsletter, which is circulated by email and available to download on the SOC website. The tradition of arranging a Christmas meal was upheld with the branch holding its seventh annual festive meal at the Fairways Restaurant in Cupar. Healthy raffle ticket sales at local events enabled Fife to donate £200 to Fife Coast and Countryside Trust to support bird-related work in the region, including the provision of birdseed at Guardbridge Hide (*Scottish Birds* Vol 38, p160). Meanwhile, proceeds from the raffle organized by the branch for last year's Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference in Dunfermline were used to purchase a new laptop and PA system for the indoor meetings.

Highland

Highland Branch continued to offer regular weekend and mid-week outings, which resulted in a total of seventeen field trips during the reporting year, with locations ranging from Loch Ness to the Black Isle and beyond. An outing in April to the Glen Brown and Glenlivet area was a joint one with neighbouring Moray branch and was well attended. Similarly, the long weekend in May to the Uists was fully booked. A bird race challenge in early December proved a great success, finishing with a get-together and prize-giving over festive refreshments. Peter Stronach took over from Pete Gordon as the local recorder in April.

Lothian

After dedicating nine years to running branch activities, Branch Secretary, Doreen Main, stepped down in April and was replaced by Morag King. Branch meetings and outings continued to be well attended. As well as visits to well-known birding sites in and around the Lothians, the group organized longer day trips to locations further afield, ranging from Little Glenshee and Loch of the Lowes to Carrifran Wildwood and Lindisfarne. The popular East Coast Migrants outing in September welcomed a visiting birdwatcher from the USA. The branch donated £350 towards the production of a bird ID interpretation board at Dunbar Harbour, which was in place at the time of writing. Two issues of Lothian Bird e-Bulletin were circulated to members, which included extra reminders of upcoming talks and outings as well as trip reports from the outings.

The Lothian Discussion Group met at Waterston House on the first Wednesday of each month during the winter, with the focus on annual surveys such as WeBS and goose counts, breeding bird surveys (BBS) and the local group's own low tide count in mid-winter.

Moray

Moray Branch maintained a high level of attendance across six evening meetings featuring talks ranging from Seabirds on Canna to Ring Ouzel Conservation and Scottish Wildcats. Several popular weekend outings took place to sites such as Lossie Forest, Loch Spynie and the Buckie coast. Also in the branch events calendar this year was a dawn chorus outing to Loch na Bo and a Bird Race followed by an enjoyable social evening at Dunphail. Two trips aboard the boat, Gemini Explorer, to look for White-billed Divers off Portsoy were organised, but only one went ahead due to poor weather conditions.

North-east Scotland

It was a big year for the branch as it celebrated its 70th anniversary on the 17 November, marking the milestone with a beach walk and lunch (*Scottish Birds*, Vol 38, p59). At the same time, the branch also featured as 'Bird Club of the Month' in *British Birds*, appearing in the journal's e-newsletter. Meanwhile, two issues of the branch's own newsletter were emailed out to members during the year. A £1000 donation from the local Atlas Fund supported the development of the new Dunbar Hide at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg. A successful raffle held at the December meeting raised £143 for the branch. A small group of members enjoyed an excursion in June to Isle of May. Other activities in the field included the branch's local survey of singing Chiffchaffs and an ongoing call for members' records of Stonechats and Whinchats.

Orkney

The branch hosted four talks during the year, which were well attended. The focus was on tagging/tracking and remote sensing technologies (BTO Scotland and RSPB Scotland respectively) and threats to Scotland's Curlews (RSPB Scotland) and breeding seabirds (PhD student, Kat Keogan). In January, long-standing local bird recorder, Jim Williams, handed over the reins to Russ Neave and Emma Neave-Webb.

Stewartry

Jeremy Brock replaced Geoff Packard as branch Chair and actively participated in Council meetings as branch representative. Jeremy, along with branch Secretary, Joan Howie, were heavily involved in the organisation of this year's Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference (see *Scottish Birds* 38:2, p146-154), with members, Chris Rollie and Mark Pollitt contributing to the programme as guest speakers and Pam Pumphrey among the session chairs. Joan organized a sell-out raffle at the event, which raised over £500, split between Stewartry and Dumfries branches. The branch continues to support LIPU, the Italian society for the protection of birds, raising funds through second hand book sales and a raffle at the branch AGM.

Tayside

Talks hosted by the branch ranged from a study of local sites (SWT Balgavies Loch) to the state of Scotland's urban raptors, the birds of South-East Scotland, and species to be found in the Spanish Steppes. The group continues to operate on skeleton committee, with Secretary/Treasurer, Brian Brocklehurst, always keen to hear from any local members interested in getting involved in helping to organise branch activities.

West Galloway

There was one change in the committee, with David McGie stepping up from Vice Chair to Chair, taking over from Alan Johnstone who had given many years of service to the group. In spite of bad weather, branch member Jeni Grover led a successful spring walk through Aldouran gardens, wetland and woodland and the branch's own organised talks proved especially popular, with members given the opportunity to tailor presentations to local interests.

CORRECTION: We apologise for the error in last year's report (pp8-9) where details reported for Orkney meeting attendance and a Bird ID session/Members' evening in fact pertained to Moray branch. Attendance at Orkney meetings should have read 5-25.

Waterston House

The number of visitors passing through headquarters during the year was 10,277, slightly up on the previous year. The art programme saw the return of a number of popular exhibitors – Darren Woodhead, Keith Brockie, Lucy Newton, Paul Bartlett, Robert Greenhalf and Textile Group, Kalamkari – for what proved a successful year for the gallery. In addition, the Club hosted work by well-known printmaker, John Hatton, and a mixed show by the Society of Wildlife Artists. The SWLA represents some of the top wildlife artists in the UK, with its aim being to generate an appreciation of the natural world through art – an objective it shares with the SOC. This exhibition facilitated contact with several new artists and it is hoped that the Club will build on these

relationships in the future. Some of the exhibitions gave rise to painting demonstrations and workshops: Darren Woodhead delivered a talk and a Watercolour Day, and Kittie Jones and John Threlfall led a joint one-day workshop. Top wildlife photographer, Laurie Campbell, gave an illustrated talk in May, presenting the highlights of his work over the past year.

Regular events at HQ included two Optics demo days (May and October) and two evening Goose Watches (preceded by an illustrated talk by local Aberlady Bay warden, John Harrison). The gallery continued to be used on a weekly basis by Aberlady Craft Group and monthly during the winter by the Lothian SOC Discussion Group. The library was hired by East Lothian Council for its bi-annual meeting of Aberlady Bay Advisory Group as well as providing a space for SOC committee/focus group (Management, Finance, Library and Strategy) meetings. A first for Waterston House was hosting a small funeral wake in January, organised by the daughter of the deceased – an elderly lady from Edinburgh who had been a nature lover and had greatly enjoyed visits to the centre.

The much-admired garden continued to wow visitors and inspire local naturalists. In July, the local primary school children won an award from Scottish Natural Heritage for their innovative wildlife project, which involved using the garden at Waterston House to capture infra-red footage of wildlife, as reported in last year's Annual Report. SOC Honorary Member and plant specialist, Stan da Prato, who has previously provided the children with a guided tour of the garden, was himself the recipient of an award in March, receiving the Dr Andrew Duncan Medal from the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society for his work as an educator. In August, East Lothian Council Countryside Ranger, John Harrison, led a free mothing event, 'Discover Moths', looking at the amazing variety of species caught in the overnight moth trap.

As well as being a venue for meetings and events, Waterston House of course serves as the administrative base for the Club and this past year saw staff face some significant challenges: Three members of the team retired (see p17), the SOC website suffered sustained technical issues, and new data protection legislation ('GDPR') was looming (see Management Committee below). These factors resulted in some other important projects being put on hold, namely the planned upgrade of the Club's subscriptions database and work on the mobile app. As reported in the Club Development section, work on the latter has resumed, and research into a suitable replacement database is ongoing.

Management Committee

The Committee met four times during the reporting year, taking advantage of the meeting space at Waterston House. A key focus for the committee was staffing matters: A review of staff remuneration, which started in the previous financial year, was completed in June, with a more formal approach to the pay scale and recruitment structure put in place. During the year, two members of staff retired (Karen Bidgood and Jean Torrance) and a third (Dave Allan) gave his notice that he would be retiring in April 2018. As such, much of the year was given over to the important task of recruitment. Fortunately, the Club found an excellent set of candidates for the various vacancies, who all took up post in the reporting period (see p17).

As mentioned in the Waterston House section above, another pressing item of discussion was GDPR, which was due to come into effect on 23 May 2018. Club Secretary, David Heeley, worked closely with staff over several months to devise a compliance strategy. A detailed flier explaining the implications of GDPR on Club communications was included with the March issue of *Scottish Birds*. The Committee is particularly grateful to former SOC bookkeeper and current HQ volunteer, Jean Torrance, for her invaluable help in preparing HQ's membership database for the exercise.

A valuation of Waterston House, which hadn't been done since the building was opened in 2005, was carried out in November and this resulted in a saving on the Club's insurance premium.

George Waterston Library

Members, researchers, visitors and staff continue to use the library and archives for a range of purposes. Of the 58 who registered their visit this year, the feedback was both positive and complimentary. The number of books borrowed fell to 39, from 61 last year, perhaps reflecting the general trend by research users moving to online access. However, libraries such as the SOC continue to provide an important function with regard to recent publications and journals not yet available for free online. Moreover, the library's 5,000 ornithological titles offer a wide spectrum of publications to meet members' needs and, with its focus on Scotland and Scottish material, offers a unique resource. The book reviews in *Scottish Birds* showcase some recent acquisitions, which are available for borrowing by members. Generous donations of second hand books continue to enhance the collection or raise funds for the SOC through the Club's second-hand bookshop.

To meet growing demand by users to access collections online, the library continues to improve the quality of the catalogue, including through our inclusion in the national database, COPAC. Enhancement of the archive listing continues, paving the way for a more complete catalogue to be accessed online. The library is participating in the National Library of Scotland's project, 'Unlocking Scotland's Sounds', which will be digitising many of the sound recordings in the SOC collection and making these available online.

The SOC archive is used in many ways and amongst the enquiries this year have been those relating to Donald Watson, in the lead-up to the centenary of his birth, and supplying photographic material relating to George Waterston for RSPB information panels at Loch Garten.

Susan Horne was appointed part-time librarian in September 2017 (*Scottish Birds* Vol 37, p236) following the departure of Karen Bidgood. The members of the Library Committee and dedicated volunteers continued to make an essential contribution to the management of the facility, especially David Clugston (second hand book donations), Lesley Creamer (library catalogue), Dr John Law (journals), Ian Elfick (archives) and Jean and Bill Torrance.

Alan Knox, Chair

Research & Surveys Committee

During the year under review, all of the R&S Committee's business was conducted by e-mail. In 2017, the SOC's Endowment Fund, through its Research Grants, supported seven studies of Scottish birds. These were all good quality applications and Council felt that, rather than reduce funding to some of them, supplementary funds would be made available from the Endowment Fund for this year to provide for them (£3650 in total). The Committee is grateful to Council for this generosity.

The projects supported this year were as follows: £480 to David Thorne (Breeding Manx Shearwaters, Isle of May), £500 to Colin Corse (Sanderling numbers and ecology, Sanday, Orkney), £300 to David & Helen Aiton (Quandale skuas, Rousay, Orkney), £500 to Central Scotland Honey Buzzard Study Group (study of Breeding Honey Buzzards in Central Scotland), £1220 to Lothian Ringing Group (Shag colour-ringing on Forth islands), £150 to Hayley Douglas (Darvic colour-ringing of Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park), £500 to Stuart Murray (aerial survey of Guillemot and Fulmar on Sula Sgeir) seabirds aerial survey (Sula Sgeir) £500, totalling £3650.

The R&S Committee has been getting increasingly frustrated over recent years by late applications for funding. As such, it has reluctantly decided that from 2019 no late applications will be considered (see *Scottish Birds* 38:2, 158 for more details).

Tom Dougall, Chair

Scottish Birds Records Committee

The committee continued in its role assessing the records of rare birds in Scotland, and managing the Scottish List for the SOC. SBRC welcomed Jim Dickson, representing Argyll, as a new member in November 2017, replacing John Bowler, who retired from the committee. SBRC would like to acknowledge and thank John for his hard work and contribution to SBRC work during his tenure.

During the year, SBRC processed 104 records, consisting of 28 different species. In total, 89 records were found acceptable, giving an overall acceptance rate of around 86%, which is fairly typical of recent years. All batches were circulated electronically using Dropbox technology. This allows the circulation process to be completed quickly, and avoids postage costs and the potential loss of records when using surface mail. Accepted records were immediately posted on the SOC website, with all outcomes passed on to local recorders, who in turn informed observers. As a new initiative during the year, SBRC began providing explanations behind the decision making process for not proven records, when requested by the observer. In this way, it is hoped that the work of SBRC will become more accountable and transparent.

A continuing venture for SBRC is the publication of annual summaries of SBRC adjudicated species in *Scottish Birds*, in a format that follows reports published by BBRC in *British Birds*. These publications highlight the work of the committee and the SOC, and encourage the submission of bird records to local recorders. The 2016 SBRC report was published in 2018, being co-authored by Bob McGowan and Chris McInerney.

SBRC continued to appreciate a warm and constructive working relationship with local recorders and observers, without whom the committee could not catalogue the incidence of rarer birds in Scotland. Council thanks all members of SBRC for their hard work during the year.

Mark Wilkinson, Chair

The Birds of Scotland Fund

Three new applications were received to The Birds of Scotland (BS3) Fund this year. One of these was referred to the Research & Surveys Committee and the other two were approved; the first was a request for SOC sponsorship of the European Breeding Bird Atlas (EBBA) entry for Crested Tit, and the other was to assist a musical theatre project, 'Northern Flyway', which is helping to interpret birds through music at a series of performances around Scotland.

Nature of Manor: Natural History of a Valley in SE Scotland (Graham Pyatt) was published early in the new year. An initial application for assistance had been submitted in 2010, with a Stage 2 application approved in August 2017. Meanwhile, an earlier beneficiary of the Fund, *The Breeding and Wintering Birds of Fife*, sold sufficiently well for the Fife Ornithological Atlas Group to repay its loan from the Fund. Details of the BS3 Fund and how to apply can be found on the SOC website: www.the-soc.org.uk/about-us/publications/the-birds-of-scotland-fund .

Towards the end of the year, the BS3 editors and SOC Council carried out a review of the Fund, which had utilized around half of the original sum available. A total of 36 applications had been received to the scheme, 23 of which were for assistance with publications, in line with one of the primary objectives of the Fund as recommended at its inception. A total of 17 Grants have been provided, along with five grant and loan packages and one loan. Grants ranged in value between £453 and £15,000. Council and the editors agreed to continue the Fund and to review its future in a further ten years, or earlier if the remaining funds fall below £5000. It was also agreed to review the membership of the group, which comprises editors of the *Birds of Scotland* and members of SOC Council, which administers the Fund.

David Jardine, Chair

Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme (SRMS)

The SOC is one of eight partner conservation organisations that oversee raptor conservation in Scotland and provide accurate data for the Scottish Government to deal with the range of current issues in this area. Production of the 2017 annual raptor report, which received financial assistance from the SOC's Birds of Scotland Fund, was well underway, with much of the data cleaning finalized and the report due to be published by the August 2018 Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group meeting. The report can be accessed at : www.raptormonitoring.org Other developments include the new SRM Scheme online recording system, which was at testing stage at the time of writing. The final proofs of the SRMS paper for the *Bird Study* Special Issue were also nearing completion.

A draft Privacy policy for the scheme and a summary of suggested action will be circulated to member organisations. It was agreed that data sharing issues would be discussed in depth at the next meeting once there was a clearer view of the implications of the Strathbaan licensing decision on a Raven cull. There are ongoing discussions regarding the possibility of Scottish Natural Heritage issuing a Raven cull licence at Strathbaan and the SRSG is seeking a judicial review of the matter.

Gordon Riddle, SRMS SOC representative

Bird Recording in Scotland

The network of over 20 Local Bird Recorders plays a vital role in collating data, which are used for feeding in to BirdTrack, compiling the regional bird reports, and informing development and planning applications affecting bird habitat. In September, Graham Sparshott replaced Malcolm Ware, who stepped down as recorder in September, after dedicating six years to the role.

Following a communication to recorders in March 2017 from the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) regarding the planned digitization of its paper archive of accepted records, SOC HQ coordinated a central response from 15 recorders to arrange for the return, or otherwise, of paper records. The Club funded the return of records to nine recorders, the majority of whom opted to receive only those paper records that were not scheduled to be digitized and would therefore be lost forever once destroyed i.e. species/taxa that have been off and remained off the BBRC list since before 2013.

At its March 2017 meeting, Council gave its support for a Bird Recorders Conference, an idea that had originally been proposed by the late Ray Murray, given that several years had passed since the previous recorders meeting, which took place in 2009. A weekend event was scheduled for July 2018 and by the end of the reporting year, preparations were well under way, thanks to Stuart Rivers who had kindly agreed to be the lead organizer, and to Ben Darvill and Chris Wernham of BTO Scotland for their help in identifying a suitable venue in the form of Stirling University.

Stuart also continued to represent the SOC on the BirdTrack Steering Group. Three meetings were held during the year at BTO headquarters in Thetford. Following Nick Moran's move to a new role at BTO, Scott Mayson was recruited to the group in August, joining Stephen McAvoy.

A small increase in user sighting submissions was observed during the year, and the BirdTrack newsletter was circulated to 35,000 recipients, an increase of 6,000 in two years. The creation of a single, unified entry portal for users was instigated and improvements were made to the 'Explore Data' section and to the records verification tool used by Local Bird Recorders.

The second phase of the BirdTrack app for Android phones was introduced, and steps taken to be GDPR compliant, and to make the most used data recording sections more user-friendly.

Conferences

SOC Annual Conference and AGM, 20-22 October 2017, Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry

The 2017 conference was all about 'Movements & Migration' and was attended by 150 members (excluding staff and speakers). The uptake of the Club's continuing student/young person's special discount rate was slightly disappointing this year, with only six students applying.

The programme began with an interview with WWT's Sacha Dench, conducted by Ian Bainbridge (SOC Stewartry), to hear of her epic migratory flight with Bewick Swans. The Saturday and Sunday heard fascinating talks on Arctic Terns (Chris Redfern, Newcastle University), Cuckoos, Swifts & Nightingales (Chris Hewson, BTO), Ospreys (Roy Dennis MBE), African migrant birds (Catriona Morrison, University of East Anglia), Cyprus Wheatears (Rob Patchett, St Andrews University), Seabird tracking and marine conservation (Linda Wilson, RSPB Scotland) and Sanderling (Jeroen Reneerkens, University of Groningen). The weekend's social activities comprised the usual Friday night quiz (Edmund Fellowes), group excursions on the Saturday morning and a dinner & celidh on the Saturday evening. For a full conference report, see *Scottish Birds*, Vol 37, p323-330.

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, 17 March 2018, SRUC, Barony Campus, Parkgate, Dumfries

This year's conference, organized by the Dumfries and Stewartry SOC branches and BTO Scotland had an excellent turnout of over 200 people and many have hailed the event as one of the best spring conferences yet. Dumfries was chosen specifically for this year's event to coincide with the centenary of the birth of Donald Watson (1918-2005) – renowned Scottish ornithologist, wildlife artist and author who had lived in Dumfries & Galloway (D&G) for over 50 years.

As well as looking back at Donald's life and work (John Threlfall, wildlife artist), the programme of talks also celebrated the region's varied birdlife, with talks on Pied Flycatchers (Brian Smith, SOC Dumfries & North Solway Ringing Group), Little Egrets (Brian Morrell, WWT Caerlaverock) and Golden Eagles (Cat Barlow, South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project). The challenges and importance of bird recording in the region was the theme of talks by Mark Pollitt (SW Scotland Environmental Information Centre) and Chris Rollie (RSPB Scotland and D&G Raptor Study Group). The joy of bird watching in D&G was depicted by Edmund Fellowes in his presentation of stunning images and entertaining anecdotes. Some delegates joined the conference organisers for an early evening meal at the Barony after the conference and there were a number of group excursions organized for delegates on the Sunday. For a full conference report, see *Scottish Birds*, Vol 38, pp146-154

Other events

Scottish Ringers Conference, 10-12 November 2017, Carrbridge

A Club promo display was kindly facilitated by SOC members Alan Knox and Bob McGowan who were attending the event.

Hen Harrier Days, 5-6 August 2017, Loch Leven and Boat of Garten

The SOC was represented with a stand at both venues, thanks to help from volunteers from Central Scotland (Eilidh McNab) and Highland branches (Kathy Bonniface, Carol James and Carol Miller) respectively.

Spurn Migration Festival, 8-10 September 2017

Thanks to SOC member and exhibiting artist, Darren Woodhead, the Club was able to display promotional literature including membership leaflets, sample issues of *Scottish Birds* and annual conference brochures.

Raptor Science Supports Conservation, 22-23 Sept 2017, Edinburgh & St John's Town of Dalry

This event was organized by Watson Birds, with the support of a number of organisations, including the SOC. The Club's contribution to the programme was a talk on Merlins in the Lammermuirs, presented by Ian Poxton.

TWIC Autumn Conference, 25 November 2017, Stow

The Wildlife Information Centre for the South-east hosted its annual meeting in the Scottish Borders. Entry was free and aimed at encouraging anyone interested in wildlife recording and conservation from across the region. SOC had a presence via Mark Holling, who gave a presentation on changes in status of breeding birds in Lothian & Borders, ahead of the forthcoming atlas, and some SOC promotional literature was on display.

BTO Annual Conference, 8-10 December 2017, Swanwick

A Club promo display was kindly facilitated by SOC members Alan Knox, Melvin Morrison and Norman Elkins who were attending the event.

Publications

Scottish Birds

Four issues of *Scottish Birds* were published during the year on schedule, with the editors succeeding in pulling together an excellent mix of research papers, short notes and general articles. The photography accompanying the rarities accounts continued to provide a feast for the eye, as did the PhotoSpot on the back cover, where an image from the SOC website photo gallery is selected and put under the spotlight. Regular round-up features included ringing and bird observatory activities, and rarity sightings, and coverage of the Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference and the SOC Annual Conference & AGM occupied their usual spot in the June and December issues respectively.

No editorial meetings were held in the reporting year, with any pressing issues dealt with by email. The back catalogue of the journal is available on the SOC website as well as via the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) online facility: www.biodiversitylibrary.org

Online Scottish Bird Report (OSBR)

Hosted on the SOC website, the OSBR contains searchable data from 687 local bird report issues. The current policy is that data is uploaded to the site after a period of three years following the publication of a local bird report. A digital archive of the print version of *Scottish Bird Report* is available via BHL (see *Scottish Birds* above)

Local bird atlases

By the end of the reporting year, the writing of the South-east Scotland Atlas, dedicated to the late Ray Murray, was complete and a pre-publication offer was circulated to members with the March issue of *Scottish Birds*. The publication itself is due to be available by the autumn of 2018.

Regional bird reports

In the reporting year, the following reports were published: Argyll 2016, Arran 2017, Ayrshire 2014, Borders 2015 & 2016, Dumfries & Galloway 2016, Fife 2014 (digital), Highland 2015, Isle of May 2016, Moray & Nairn 2016 (digital) and North-East Scotland 2014.

Following an appeal from the branch Chair to Borders members in spring 2017, Tom Brewis came forward to take up the role of Editor for the local bird report, carrying on the good work of former editor, Ray Murray, who passed away in September 2016.

Birdline Scotland

Birdline Scotland provides comprehensive and up-to-the-minute information on bird sightings in Scotland. It is run by Angus Murray in collaboration with the SOC and takes the form of regularly recorded updates accessed via a premium telephone number 09068 700234 (calls are charged at 60p per minute). The success of Birdline Scotland relies on birdwatchers reporting their sightings and details of how observers can do this can be found on the SOC website under the Bird Recording tab. Visitors to this area of the website will also find the popular Spring Migrant Arrival tables, kindly compiled by Angus exclusively for the SOC.

Staff

Dave Allan, part-time Events Coordinator, organised an excellent series of art exhibitions and continued to coordinate and lead the popular Birdwatching for Beginners guided walks from spring until early autumn. In October, the Club was saddened to receive notice of Dave's retirement. Dave was due to leave at the end of March 2018 but kindly agreed to stay on until first week of April to see through the hanging of John Threlfall's exhibition. The preview of John's show doubled up as a surprise leaving party for Dave and the evening was well attended (see *Scottish Birds* Vol 38, p155). Council is grateful to Dave for facilitating a hand-over period with his two successors, Laura Gressani (Art Exhibitions Coordinator) and Stuart Rivers (Birding Officer).

Jane Cleaver, full-time Development Officer, focuses on growing Club membership, supporting the branch network and raising the SOC's public profile, not least through securing a presence at key bird events, forging partnerships and seeking opportunities with like-minded organisations and target audiences, and steering new Club projects such as the *Where to Birdwatch in Scotland* app (see p6). Jane also keeps the SOC website and social media pages up to date, assists branches with the promotion of local talks and outings, and produces the e-digest, *The Hoot*.

Kathryn Cox, part-time Membership Officer, does a sterling job of keeping on top of the Club's subscriptions. She continues to organise the programme of branch talks and liaises with branch representatives to put together the programme of local excursions. As database manager, much of Kathryn's focus in the last quarter of the reporting year was preparing the membership database for the new data protection legislation ('GDPR').

Laura Gressani, part-time Art Exhibitions Coordinator, was appointed in February (see *Scottish Birds*, Vol 38, p156). Fortunately, Laura was available to take up post from mid-March in order to shadow Dave Allan for the final few weeks prior to his retirement. Laura is an artist herself and has many years' experience working in an exhibitions environment, both with Edinburgh Art Fair and Scottish Art Club.

Wendy Hicks, full-time Club Administrator, oversees the day-to-day running of Waterston House as well as providing support to the office bearers and Development Officer and dealing with wider SOC business including conference organisation, fielding funding applications and content submissions to *Scottish Birds*, coordinating the quarterly mailings, compiling the Annual Report and attending Council and Management Committee meetings.

Susan Horne, part-time Librarian, took up post in September, following the departure of Karen Bidgood in May (see p12). Susan was already an enthusiastic supporter of the SOC collection, having volunteered for several years and sat on the Library Committee. She holds a Masters degree in Book History and has introduced some positive changes to the library space and operating systems.

Mairead Lyons, part-time Finance Officer, took up her appointment in November. In addition to excellent bookkeeping skills, Mairead brings many years of experience in finance management to the Club's newly formed Finance Committee (see p4 and *Scottish Birds*, Vol 38, p57)

Dr Stuart L Rivers, part-time Birding Officer, was appointed in February to replace Dave Allan as HQ's resident bird expert and weekend staff (*Scottish Birds*, Vol 38, p156). As with Laura, Stuart was also able to take up post during Dave's last few weeks in order to facilitate a hand-over period.

Jean Torrance, part-time Bookkeeping Clerk, retired at the end of December (*Scottish Birds* Vol 38, p56). Council is grateful to Jean for offering to extend her original retirement date (August) in order to facilitate a hand-over period with her successor, Mairead. No sooner retired, Jean returned to Waterston House as a volunteer in the library while also continuing to provide invaluable assistance with GDPR preparations.

Volunteers

The running of the Club relies heavily on volunteer support – from the trustees themselves to the various Council sub-committees, *Scottish Birds* editors, local branch representatives, and members who help the SOC have a presence at local birding and wildlife events (see pp15-16).

On a country-wide scale, volunteers provide the main input to the SOC's branch activities and local bird recording effort. Much of the latter is of significant national importance to conservation bodies and government. Some contributors have carried out regular surveys on the same sites for many years, providing invaluable long-term datasets. Council wishes to acknowledge the tremendous work that goes into such fieldwork and congratulates all those volunteers who give their time to compile and contribute to local bird reports and atlases.

Waterston House is very fortunate to have a dedicated core of volunteers who give up their time to provide invaluable support to staff on a regular basis, meeting and greeting visitors and assisting in areas such as running the shop, office admin, maintaining the library and archives, exhibitions and events and DIY. A small lively team of volunteers continues to work hard come rain or shine each Wednesday morning throughout the year to maintain HQ's beautiful wildlife garden.

Council wishes to thank everybody who supports the SOC through their voluntary efforts, without which the Club could not function.

Finance

The details presented here are a summary only; the full accounts are available via the Annual Report button on the SOC website, which can be accessed under the About Us/Staff, Committees & Office Bearers tab. Alternatively, a hard copy can be requested from Waterston House.

Personnel

During the financial year 2017 -2018, Jean Torrance who worked as the Club's book-keeper announced her retirement, after over 13 years in that role. She carried out the duties with care and diligence, working with three different Treasurers. We thank her sincerely for the part she played as the Club's finances grew and became more complex. In replacing Jean, the opportunity was taken to appoint an individual within an expanded role and in December 2017, Mairead Lyons was appointed as Finance Officer, who will continue with the book-keeping duties but will also be involved in reviewing our current accounting system, potentially introducing a budgeting system, and working in liaison with the newly-formed Finance Committee.

200 Club Accounts

During the year the decision was reached to wind up the Club's monthly prize draw, the 200 Club. Over the 28 years that the scheme existed, some £66,000 was generated (including prize monies), much of which was used to purchase furniture and fixtures and fittings for Waterston House. A massive debt of gratitude is owed to Daphne Peirse-Duncombe for her long-standing commitment to the 200 Club, and more recently to Vicky McLellan who assisted her. It was agreed that the closing balance of £1,605 be transferred to the Club's general account.

Digitisation of historical financial records

During the past year, a sustained effort was put into the digitization of SOC's financial records, held in paper form. The process was duly completed in December for a series of years for which the Club is not legally bound to keep hard copies. The process will, in future, take place on a rolling basis and thereby free up much-needed space whilst allowing us to comply with legal obligations.

Accounts Summary

In the year to 31 March 2018, the SOC recorded a deficit of £25,903 (2017: surplus of £48,874) on a total income of £295,530 (2017: £266,295) (Figure 1). Our total assets, including branch funds, fell from £1,598,227 to £1,572,324.

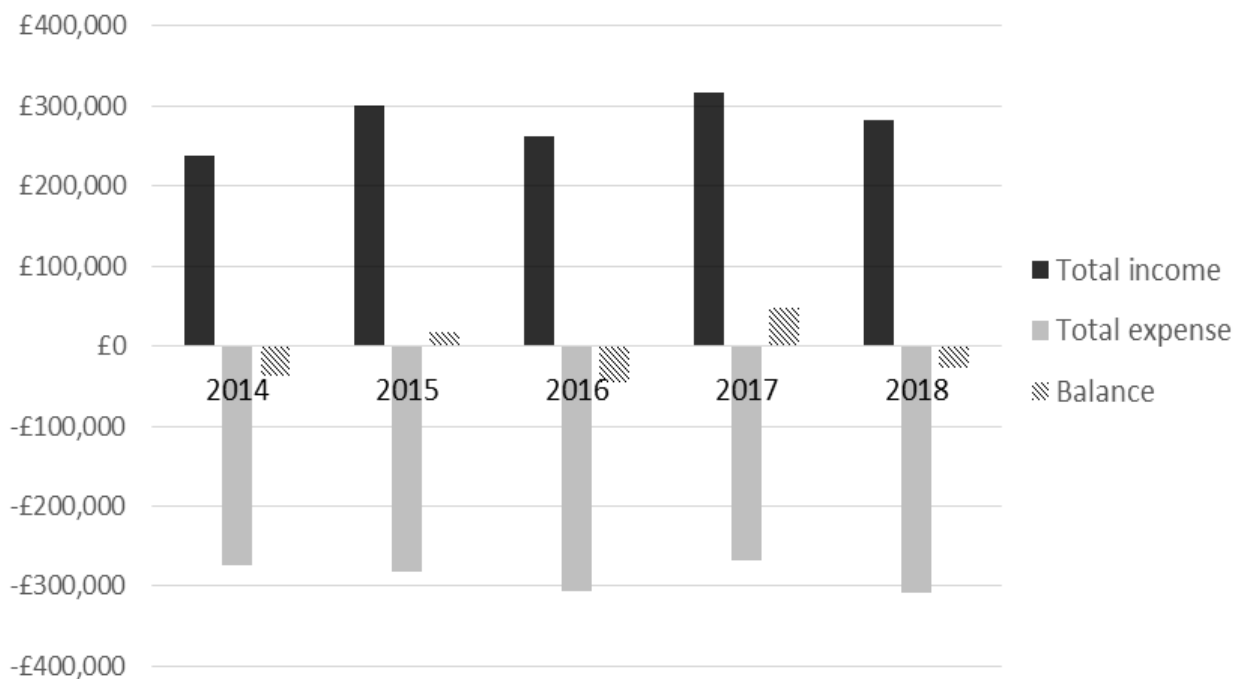


Figure 1. Income and expense summary

Valuation of fixed assets

Waterston house depreciation was calculated at £8724 for 2017-18 (2017: £8724). SOC made new investments (£14,923) and did not dispose of any investments. Losses on revaluation of these investments during the year were £13,683 (2017: gains £50,418). At the end of the year the value of SOC investments was up slightly at £376,657 (2017: £375,417).

The Birds of Scotland Fund

Sales of the digital format of the Club's celebrated 2007 publication, *The Birds of Scotland* (BS3) continued slowly. As a result of the grants awarded, the BS3 Fund recorded a deficit of £1,675 for the year. At the year end, the assets stood at £77,024. The BS3 Fund was reviewed during the past year and a presentation made to Council (see p13).

Branch Accounts

The financial year 2015-2016 was the first year that SOC accounts included full details of branch accounts, previously considered not to be material compared to general Club accounts. At the end of the year, funds held by Branches stood at £65,270 (2017: £64,515), a surplus of £755 on turnover of £16,207.

Highlights of the financial year 2017/18

- Membership fees were increased from September. As such, while the number of supporters dipped slightly, subscriptions income was up to £105,154 (2017, £98,095). Crucially, this included Gift Aid recovery of £16,043, thanks to members gift aiding their annual fees.
- Profits from sales rose to £54,976 (2017: £46,521) including £33,438 commission on art sales at Waterston House (2017: £22,573)
- Legacy income was up by almost 40% on the previous year at £35,000, thanks to generous legacies from the estates of Margaret Templeton (£15,000) and Audrey James (£20,000)
- A closing balance of £1,605 was transferred from the 200 Club to the General Account.
- A sum of £14,865 was paid from the General Account to cover the cost of the design and publication of the Club's new website.

- As the result of the implementation of salary scales, redefinition of staff roles and overdue back-dated pay increases for Waterston House staff in 2017-18, the cost of wages and salaries rose to £99,362 (2017: 83,720).

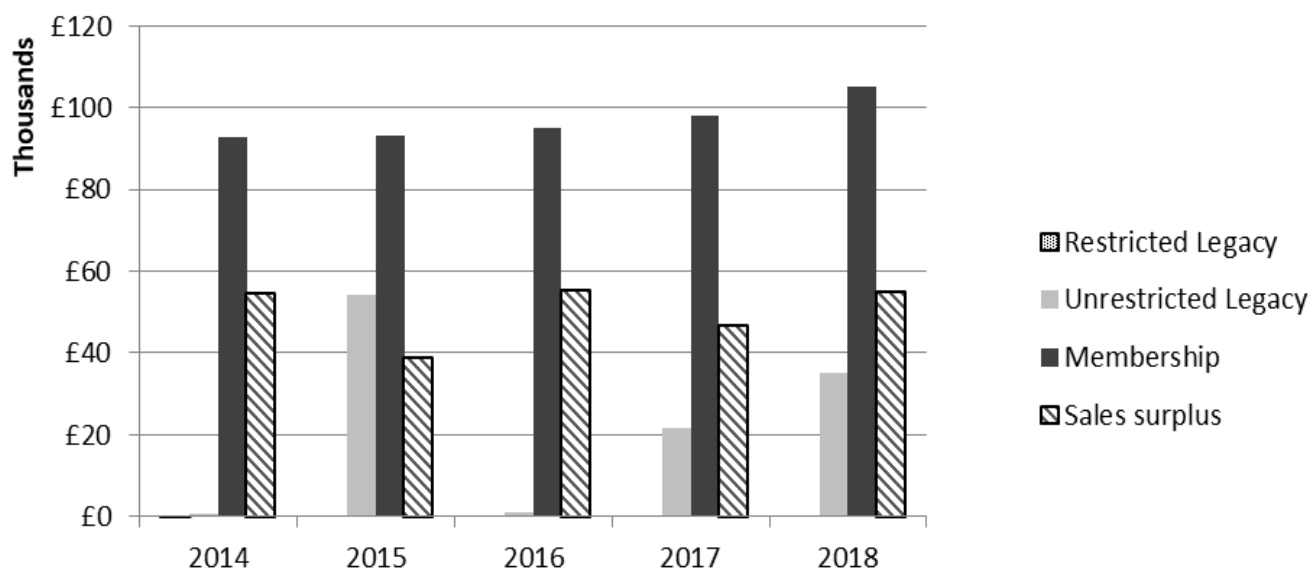


Figure 2. Income highlights

In summary, while the deficit of £25,903 is perhaps disappointing, the Club is in a process of developing certain aspects of its core activities (such as a much improved and updated website launched in the final quarter). In the years ahead, this process will continue and the associated finance will need to be made available. Nevertheless, the SOC is in a healthy financial position overall, albeit largely dependent on generous legacies, donations and commission on art sales.

Report of the Trustees of the Property Endowment Fund of the SOC

At 31 March 2015, the Property Endowment Trust was wound up and its assets transferred to the new SOC SCIO. The PEF trustees considered that the transfer would continue to meet the requirement to fund the provision and maintenance of a Scottish Centre for Ornithology, and that The Property Endowment Fund will continue to be reported in SOC accounts as a Restricted Fund. The Fund assets at 31 March 2017 were £336,280 (2017: £336,496), with expenditure during the year of £216 (2017:£4,625) on maintenance of Waterston House.

Financial Reserves policy

The new SCIO adopted the SOC reserves policy. This policy is for the charity to maintain a level of financial reserves of at least £130,000, representing about six months' income. This level allows the SOC to maintain its regular charitable activities despite potential large inter-annual variability in income. The Club Reserves Policy is currently being reviewed by the Finance Committee, as part of the review of the Club Investment Policy. At 31 March 2018, Club reserves stood at £177,970.

Investment policy

In 2014, the Club appointed Brewin Dolphin as investment managers under its discretionary managed scheme, whereby Brewin Dolphin is responsible for the investment decisions guided by SOC's investment policy. There were no sales this year and £14,923 of purchases were made. Capital depreciation of £13,683 was recorded and dividend income of £13,066 was received. This represents a total return after fees of -0.27%, which compares to a return on the linked benchmark (Risk Category 6 – Balanced Benchmark) of 1.9% and 0.22% on the FTSE 100 Total Return Index.

Of the total investments, 68% is capital endowment with attached conditions so is listed as restricted funds. The remaining 32% has been reserved by Council to be used at its discretion and forms part of the Club's reserves and is listed in unrestricted funds.

Risk Management

During 2015/16, the Management Committee assessed the major risks to which the charity is exposed and produced a risk management report. Council and Management continue to manage these risks.

Taxation

The SOC is a charity and is recognised as such by the HM Revenue and Customs for taxation purposes. As a result there is no liability to taxation on any of its income.

Council's responsibilities

Charity law requires the Council to prepare financial statements for each financial year, which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the Charity and of the surplus or deficit of the Charity for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the Council members are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the accounts
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the Charity will continue in business.

The Council is responsible for keeping proper accounting records, which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the Charity and ensures that the financial statements comply with the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006. It is also responsible for safeguarding the Charity's assets and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Independent Financial Examination

AW Scotland C.A. was appointed as Independent Examiner to the Charity and he carried out the independent examination required under the Charities and Trustees Investment (Scotland) Act 2005.

Council would like to thank Waterston House staff and the various committee officials and Club representatives for their assistance with compiling this Annual Report.

Approved by Council on 9 September 2018

and signed on their behalf by **James Main** (President)



STAFF

Club Administrator: Wendy Hicks

Development Officer: Jane Cleaver

Bookkeeping Clerk: Jean Torrance (to December)

Finance Officer: Mairead Lyons (from November)

Membership Officer: Kathryn Cox

Events Coordinator: Dave Allan

Librarian: Karen Bidgood (to May), Susan Horne (from September)

CLUB COMMITTEES

Management committee

James Main (President), Jeremy Wilson (Vice-President), David Heeley (Hon. Secretary), Andrew Thorpe (Hon. Treasurer), Doreen Main, Mike Martin, Paul Taylor

Finance Committee

Andrew Thorpe (Hon Treasurer & Chair), Doreen Main, Melvin Morrison

Publications committee

Ian Andrews (Acting Chair & Coordinating Editor, *Scottish Birds*; Editor, *Online Scottish Bird Report*); Stan da Prato (Editor: Peer-reviewed papers, *Scottish Birds*), assisted by Ian Bainbridge, Mick Marquiss, Clive McKay, Will Miles and Bob Swann; Jimmy Maxwell, Harry Scott and Stuart Rivers (Editors: Articles, News & Views, *Scottish Birds*)

Library Committee

Alan Knox (Chair), Bob McGowan, David Clugston (Hon Librarian), Lesley Creamer, John Davies, Ian Elfick (Archivist), Norman Elkins, John Law, John Savory

Research and Surveys Committee

Tom Dougall (Chair), Michael Bell, Colin Corse, Raymond Duncan, Les Hatton

Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC)

Mark Wilkinson (Chair), Chris McInerny (Secretary), Jim Dickson, David Parnaby, John Nadin, David Pullan, Martin Scott, Mark Warren, Bob McGowan (Museum Consultant)

SBRC Scottish List subcommittee

David Clugston, Ron Forrester, Angus Hogg, Bob McGowan, Chris McInerny, Roger Riddington

The Birds of Scotland Fund Committee

David Jardine (Chair), Mike Martin, Chris McInerny, Bob McGowan, Paul Taylor

BRANCH COMMITTEES

Ayrshire Chair – Pat Gibbs, Secretary – Anne Dick, Treasurer – Ian Clark, Members – Brian Dodson, John Drummond, Roger Hissett, Norman Lawrie, David Rackham, Brian Lennox, Tony Scott, Jim Thomson

Borders Chair – David Parkinson, Secretary – Neil Stratton, Treasurer – Martin Moncrieff, Member – Malcolm Ross

Caithness Chair – Julian Smith, Secretary – Angus McBay, Treasurer – Eric Maughan

Central Scotland Chair – Roger Gooch, Vice-Chair – John Crook, Treasurer/Secretary – Neil Bielby, Members – Rick Goater (from Oct), Eilidh McNab, Ken Wilkinson

Clyde Chair – Zul Bhatia, Vice-Chair – Bernie Zonfrillo, Secretary – Ian Fulton, Treasurer – Liz Parsons, Members – Iain Gibson, Sandra Hutchinson, Fiona McLean, Sandy McNeil, David Palmar, Toby Wilson

Dumfries Chair – Brian Smith, Secretary – Lesley Creamer, Treasurer – Alex Banwell, Members – Drew Davidson, Christine Dudgeon, Edmund Fellowes, Bobby Smith, Robin Thomson

Fife Chair – Elizabeth Irwin, Treasurer – John Irwin, Secretary – Caroline Gordon, Members – Elizabeth Adams, Rob Armstrong, Norman Elkins, Andrew Riches, Paul Taylor

Highland Chair – David Bain, Secretary – Kathy Bonniface, Treasurer – Lynda Graham, Members – David Galloway, Peter Gordon, Alex Joss, Al McNee, Carol Miller, Susan Seright, Peter Stronach

Lothian Chair – Richard Leslie, Secretary – Morag King, Treasurer – Stephen Hunter, Members – Marjorie Adams, Alison Creamer, Gillian Herbert, John MacLean, Hilary Maxfield, Cherle Smith

Moray Chair – Roy Dennis, Secretary – Martin Cook, Treasurer – Melvin Morrison, Members – David Law, Sheena Nicolson, Richard Somers Cocks, Alastair Young

North-East Scotland Chair – Jenny Weston, Secretary – John Wills, Treasurer – Paddy Grant, Members – Hugh Addlesee, Graham Cooper, Alan Knox, Nick Littlewood, Brian Pirie

Orkney Chair/Treasurer – Peter Slater, Secretary – Helen Aiton

Stewartry Chair – Jeremy Brock, Vice-chair/Joint Treasurer – Peter Swan, Secretary/Joint Treasurer – Joan Howie, Members – Ian Bainbridge, Andrew Bielinski, Mark Pollitt, Graham Smith

Tayside Chair – John Campbell, Secretary/Treasurer – Brian Brocklehurst, Members – Ron Downing, Jon Cook

West Galloway Chair – Alan Johnstone, Vice-Chair – David McGhie, Secretary/Treasurer – Geoff Sheppard, Members – Sandra Alder, Jean Sheppard

SOC RECORDERS

Angus & Dundee – Jon Cook

Argyll – Jim Dickson, Assistant – Malcolm Chattwood

Ayrshire – Fraser Simpson, Assistant – Angus Hogg

Borders – David Parkinson & Martin Moncrieff

Caithness – Sinclair Manson

Clyde – Iain Gibson, Assistant – Val Wilson

Clyde Islands – Bernard Zonfrillo

Dumfries & Galloway – Paul N Collin

Fair Isle – David Parnaby

Fife – Graham Sparshott

Forth (Upper) – Chris Pendlebury, Assistant – Neil Bielby

Highland – Peter Stronach

Isle of May – Iain English

Lothian – Stephen Welch

Moray & Nairn – Martin Cook

NE Scotland – Nick Littlewood

Orkney – Russ Neave & Emma Neave-Webb

Outer Hebrides – Yvonne Benting

Perth & Kinross – Scott Paterson

Shetland – Rob Fray

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MINUTES OF THE 81st AGM OF THE SOC

5.00pm, 21 October 2017, Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry

- 1 Present** James Main (President), David Heeley (Hon. Secretary), Andrew Thorpe (Hon. Treasurer), c64 Members.
- 2 Apologies for absence** Apologies were received from Jeremy Wilson (Vice-President), Mark Holling, Geraldine Mercer, David Jenkins and Margaret Jenkins.
- 3 Minutes of the 80th AGM, 24th September 2016** The Minutes for meeting 24th September 2016 were approved subject to a minor correction. There were no matters arising.

Adoption of the Minutes:

Proposed: Norman Elkins

Seconded: Stephen Hunter

Approved without dissent.
- 4 Annual Report 2016-2017** The Chair, James Main. presented the Annual Report for 2016 – 2017. He thanked all who had contributed to the production of the report, including staff at Waterston House and the Committee Chairs. No questions or queries were forthcoming from the Meeting.

Adoption of the Annual Report:

Proposed: Alison Creamer

Seconded: Vicky McLellan

Approved without dissent.
- 5 Annual Accounts 2016 -2017** The Hon. Treasurer, Andrew Thorpe (AT), presented the Accounts. This being his first year in post, he expressed particular thanks to his predecessor, Alan Fox, and SOC bookkeeper, Jean Torrance, for their help and guidance. He also paid tribute to Sandy Scotland, the Independent Financial Examiner. He noted that the Annual Report, of necessity, contained a synoptic view of the financial state of the Club, and indicated that he would be happy to provide a more detailed spreadsheet available to any member who requested one.

The Club showed a surplus of some £45k at the end of the financial year, which compared extremely favourably with a deficit of £25k in 2015- 2016. He cautioned that this must be seen in a wider context as the figures are heavily influenced by legacy income, and his analysis had shown that income and expenditure virtually balanced out over a seven-year period. Overall, the Club held some £1.5m in assets at the present time and was in sound financial state.

Considering investments, he noted that Brewin Dolphin continued as SOC investment managers and the unit trusts that they manage had produced a healthy surplus, largely due to positive movements in the Stock Exchange. This surplus was an invaluable source of income for the Club. Other items of note included the extremely generous legacy of £20k from the estate of the late Duncan Watt, the winding up of the 200 Club prize draw scheme, which had produced a welcome and steady stream of income over many years, and the increase in the Annual Subscription for members, being the first for four years.

AT informed the meeting that Council had formed a Finance Committee, which would oversee investments, budgeting, capital projects and income streams. He noted that Jean Torrance would be retiring and that Council had agreed to appoint a Finance

Officer with a broader remit that would encompass financial planning, budgeting and investment advice. This would provide the underpinnings of the work of the Finance Committee. There were no questions from the floor.

Adoption of the Accounts:

Proposed: Lesley Creamer

Seconded: David Jardine

Approved without dissent.

6 Election of Council Members

The Chair, James Main, noted that Alison Creamer was demitting office after four years as an Elected Member of Council. On behalf of the meeting, he expressed thanks for her valuable contributions to the work of Council throughout this period.

The Chair noted that Prof. Will Cresswell had been nominated as a replacement Elected Member and invited any further nominations from the floor. None were forthcoming.

Election of Prof. Cresswell as Elected Member:

Nominated: Chris Wernham

Seconded: Richard Leslie

Elected unopposed.

7 Election of Hon Secretary

The Chair, James Main, noted that the period of office of the Hon. Secretary (David Heeley) was due to end. He informed the meeting that David had indicated that he was willing to continue serving and that he was willing to stand for election. Further nominations were invited from the floor, and none were forthcoming.

Election of David Heeley as Hon. Secretary

Nominated: Melvin Morrison

Seconded: David Rackham

Elected unopposed

The Chair thanked David Heeley for his contributions to date and congratulated him on his appointment, which was met with acclamation by the Meeting.

8 Appointment of an Independent Financial Examiner

The Chair noted that it was formally necessary for the Club to approve the appointment of an Independent Financial Examiner on an annual basis. The present Examiner, Sandy Scotland, had indicated that he was willing to continue in this role, and the Chair, noting his effectiveness, recommended that he be re-appointed.

Approval that Sandy Scotland continue as the Independent Financial Examiner to the Club

Proposed: Melvin Morrison

Seconded: Joan Howie

Approved without dissent.

9 AOCB

There was no other competent business

10 Date and place of next meeting

The Chair announced that the next Annual General Meeting of the Club would be held on the Saturday evening of the next Annual Conference in 2018. The venue and date had yet to be confirmed.

The meeting closed at approximately 17:30.

82nd SOC Annual General Meeting

5.00pm, 27 October 2018
Conference Centre, Macdonald Aviemore Resort



AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the 81st AGM, 21 October 2017
3. Annual Report 2017-2018
4. Annual Accounts 2017-2018
5. Temporary amendments to the Constitution*
6. Election of Council Member
7. Election of Office Bearers:
 - a. President
 - b. Vice-President *Birding and Science*
 - c. Vice-President *Management and Infrastructure*
8. Appointment of an Independent Financial Examiner
9. AOCB
10. Date and Place of next meeting

***Temporary Amendments to the SOC Constitution – 2018**

Introduction

SOC Council, as part of a wider strategic review of the Club's activities and ways of operating, has agreed to implement changes to its structures for governance. In particular, it has decided to spread the managerial and developmental responsibilities currently carried by the President by appointing two Vice-Presidents. One will have responsibility for the management, operation and staffing of Waterston House (Vice-President *Management and Infrastructure*) and the other will develop the ornithological and scientific aspects of the Club (Vice-President *Birding and Science*). This will enable the newly appointed President to focus on strategic and outward-facing activities, building the Club's external reputation and communications. Council also agreed that it should no longer be presumed that a Vice-President would automatically succeed the President, and that appointments should be made on the recommendation of an Appointing Panel of Trustees.

Changes to the Constitution

To enable these initiatives to be implemented, Council invites the Annual General Meeting to approve temporary alterations to the SOC Constitution:

Section 25.1 to read:

25 Office Bearers

- 25.1 The office bearers of the Club shall be:
 - 25.1.1 the President
 - 25.1.2 the Vice-President (*Birding and Science*)
 - 25.1.3 the Vice-President (*Management and Infrastructure*)
 - 25.1.4 the Honorary Secretary
 - 25.1.5 the Honorary Treasurer and
 - 25.1.5 one or more Honorary Presidents nominated by the Council in recognition of services to Scottish ornithology, (together the "**Office Bearers**").

Section 26.4 to read:

- 26.4 The President and Vice-Presidents shall each hold office for two years and shall be eligible for re-election.

Additionally, Council recommends that the restriction on eligibility for re-election for a period of one year of an Elected Member after their three-year term of office should be set aside. Branch Committee members are not currently restricted in this way (Constitution §37.2) nor are Trustees who are Branch Representatives (Constitution §37.10).

Section 27.4 to read:

- 27.4 Elected Members will normally retire annually by rotation, and shall be eligible for re-election.

For reference, the current Constitution, approved at the 2014 AGM, reads:

25 Office Bearers

- 25.1 The office bearers of the Club shall be:
 - 25.1.1 the President;
 - 25.1.2 the Vice-President;
 - 25.1.4 the Honorary Secretary;
 - 25.1.5 the Honorary Treasurer; and
 - 25.1.5 one or more Honorary Presidents nominated by the Council in recognition of services to Scottish ornithology, (together the "**Office Bearers**").
- 26.4 The President and the Vice-President shall each hold office for two years and shall be eligible for re-election for one further term of two years.
- 27.4 One of the Elected Members shall retire annually by rotation, except so far as vacancies arise in their number, and shall not be eligible for re-election.

The Constitution can be accessed via the SOC website: <https://www.the-soc.org.uk/about-us/constitution>
Alternatively, a hard copy version can be obtained from Waterston House, on request.

PRESIDENT: Remit

The President is one of five post-holders, elected by the membership at an AGM on the recommendation of SOC Council and is responsible for ensuring the effective operation of the Club in the conduct of its affairs as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO), in alignment with the provisions of its Constitution. The initial period of appointment is normally for four years from the date of the AGM at which the election was held. On appointment, the President becomes one of the Trustees and is expected to be aware of the legal responsibilities that this entails and to exercise these to the benefit of the Club as a charity. The President oversees the public face of the SOC, acting in an ambassadorial role whenever this is required, monitoring outreach and communications with members and the general public, and promoting the sustainability and continuing development of the SOC as an organisation. It is anticipated that the President will develop these activities in a structured and coherent manner, providing quarterly reports to Council. The President is Chair of the Board of Trustees (Council) of the Club, and is expected to Chair the AGM held during the Annual Conference.

VICE-PRESIDENT *Birding and Science*: Remit

The Vice-President *Birding and Science* (provisional title) is one of five post-holders, elected by the membership at an AGM on the recommendation of SOC Council and is responsible for ensuring the effective operation of the Club in the conduct of its affairs as a SCIO, in alignment with the provisions of its Constitution. The initial period of appointment is normally for four years from the date of the AGM at which the election was held. On appointment, the VP becomes one of the Trustees and is expected to be aware of the legal responsibilities that this entails and to exercise these to the benefit of the Charity.

Primary Responsibilities

The Vice-President *Birding and Science* has responsibility for developing the research, birding and ornithological activities of the SOC. This includes coordinating and promoting local and national bird recording, advising on and taking forward the Scottish avifaunal list, collaborating with the Scottish Birds Records Committee, and having oversight of and guiding the scientific content of *Scottish Birds*. The Vice-President is expected to provide quarterly reports to SOC Council. If required, the Vice-President can be called upon to deputise for the President, including acting as Chair at meetings of SOC Council and the AGM.

VICE-PRESIDENT *Management and Infrastructure*

The Vice-President (VP) *Management and Infrastructure* (provisional title) is one of five post-holders, elected by the membership at an Annual General Meeting on the recommendation of the SOC Council. The VP *Management and Infrastructure* is responsible for ensuring the effective operation of the Club in the conduct of its affairs as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, in alignment with the provisions of its Constitution. The initial period of appointment is normally for four years from the date of the AGM at which the election was held. On appointment the Vice-President *Management and Infrastructure* becomes one of the Trustees of the Club and is expected to be aware of the legal responsibilities that this entails and to exercise these to the benefit of the Club as a charity.

Primary Responsibilities

The VP *Management and Infrastructure* has responsibility for overseeing the effective operation of Waterston House as the administrative focus of the Club. This is primarily through the operation of the Management Committee of SOC Council where the VP acts as Committee Chair. Working closely with the Club Administrator, the VP holds responsibility for ensuring the integrity of the physical fabric, the information technology infrastructure, and all matters relating to staffing. It is expected that the VP has an awareness of the legal responsibilities of the Club as an employer, and the implications of any changes in legislation relating to data privacy and the use of digital technology. The VP is expected to provide quarterly reports to SOC Council through the Minutes of Management Committee. If required, the VP can be called upon to deputise for the President, including acting as Chair at meetings of SOC Council and the Annual General Meeting.

Note on Approval of Revised Constitution

The strategic review currently in progress has identified a number of inconsistencies in the current Constitution, and elements whose historical antecedents can no longer be identified and which do not align with current practice. Council intends to review and revise the Constitution, the revised version being brought to the membership for adoption at the 2019 Annual General Meeting, following which it will be submitted to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator for formal approval.