

# The SOC

## Scotland's Bird Club

### COUNCIL MEETING 80/03

### 14<sup>th</sup> August 2016 Minutes



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

Session 80/03 of Council was held at 10.30 hrs on the 14<sup>th</sup> August 2016 at the RSPB Loch Leven reserve, Kinross.

**Present:** Acting President James Main (Chair), Paul Taylor (Acting Vice President), Alan Fox (Hon Treasurer), David Heeley (Hon Secretary), David Bain, Iain Gibson, Roger Gooch, Alan Knox, Melvin Morrison, Ray Murray and David Rackham.

**In attendance:** Wendy Hicks (SOC HQ), Jane Cleaver (SOC HQ) and Andrew Thorpe (Hon Treasurer Elect).

#### Action

- 1 **Apologies for absence** Apologies were received from Frank Hamilton (Honorary President), Helen Aiton, Alison Creamer, Lesley Creamer, Richard Leslie and Bob McGowan.
- 2 **Absent** John Campbell, Angus McBay, Geoff Packard and Geoff Sheppard were absent.
- 3 **Welcome** The Chair welcomed Iain Gibson (Clyde) on his return to Council as a Branch Representative, and introduced Andrew Thorpe who had agreed to be nominated at the 2016 AGM for the post of Honorary Treasurer.
- 4 **Minutes of Council Meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2016.** The minutes for meeting held on the 12<sup>th</sup> June 2016 were approved.
- 5 **Matters arising**

§6 pp. 3. Research and Surveys Funding. Wendy Hicks confirmed that the Research and Surveys Committee had been informed that the £4k awarded for research funding was a permanent uplift rather than a one off increase.

§10 Birding Committee. Council requested that the item regarding the potential formation of a Birding Committee should be kept as a current action point that should be returned to in the near future. **DH**

§12 Local Bird Recorders Conference. Ray Murray (RM) noted that a Local Bird Recorders Conference would be held some time in early March 2017, and that plans would be developed in November 2016. He stated that at present it was not possible to provide an accurate estimate of costs as that would depend

on who attended. It was agreed that a link with the Spring Conference (to be held in Dunfermline in 2017) had several attractions, and that RM would investigate the possibility of using the same venue on the day after the Spring Conference. **RM**

§12 Ending of LINK subscription. David Rackham (DR) forwarded the concerns of the Ayrshire Branch members over the ending of the SOC subscription to LINK. During discussion it was noted that there was a possibility that individual Branches were eligible to be affiliated and that those interested were encouraged to explore this. The point remained that the Club subscription did not reflect good value for money for the organisation as a whole, that participation was problematic from the perspective of attending meetings and that the SOC was not in a position to develop policies on environmental issues.

It was noted that the remaining Action Points were covered as Agenda items.

**6 Finance**

The Treasurer, Alan Fox (AF) presented a report on the status of the Financial Year to Date. He noted that the Club had a small deficit but the accounts indicated a comparable position to the previous year. He predicted that there would be an overall deficit (income - expenditure) of about £20k at the end of the year. He drew attention to a small number of items where differences existed between the 2015 and 2016 accounts such as Branch Refunds, Legacies, Optics Sales and the Birds of Scotland fund, but concluded that, with an overall reserve of some £270k in unrestricted funds, the Club was in a healthy situation financially. With respect to Branch purchasing, Council noted that there was a considerable advantage to be gained from Branches organising equipment purchases through Waterston House as this allowed recovery of V.A.T. At the same time this had potential implications for insurance and therefore there was a need to monitor equipment that was held by Branches and that had been purchased through this channel.

Moving to the Annual Accounts that had been prepared for the AGM and for submission to the OSCR. He noted that the overall format differed from previous years as it was the first time that the Club had submitted accounts as an SCIO and therefore there was no column with a previous year's figures for comparison. Additionally, the Annual Accounts now included the balances held in Branch Accounts; at the time of preparing the figures this amounted £65k approx. These were not all free funds as a significant proportion related to forthcoming research and survey projects. Finally, he noted that Waterston House was now listed as an asset with the new status of the Club as an SCIO.

The Chair on behalf of Council thanked AF for the hard work that was involved in the preparation of the Accounts. Council concurred that the new format for the Annual Accounts represented a significant improvement in transparency and readability and was to be welcomed.

**7 Appointments:  
Treasurer and  
Finance  
Officer**

The Chair confirmed that Andrew Thorpe (AT) had agreed to be nominated as Treasurer at the 2016 AGM. It was further confirmed that a Finance Committee would be formed and that AT in conjunction with the Committee would devise a Job Description for a Finance Officer to be appointed after August 2017.

**8 Branch and  
Membership  
Development**

Membership:

Council welcomed the report on Membership that had been prepared by the Development Officer, Jane Cleaver (JC). It was noted that there had been a modest increase in the number of members that was to be welcomed. Council noted that the new method of presenting the data

in the form of a set of graphical analyses continued to be both helpful and easy to grasp.

Development Projects:

1. JC confirmed that the Club would be supporting the *A Focus on Nature* (AFON) mentoring programme, that AFON would be the linking organisation and that there were no disclosure issues that the Club would need to address.
2. JC noted that the new website for Branch Committee members had been finalised and that the next phase of development would be the launch of an online forum for Branch Committee Members.
3. JC reported on the recent Hen Harrier Day event in early August, noting that the turnout had been somewhat disappointing. Iain Gibson (IG) had attended and informed Council that overall the event should be judged successful and that the petition concerning driven grouse shooting had attracted over 100k signatures.
4. JC noted that she was still researching the most appropriate method of setting up a Direct Debit system for donations to the Club.
5. E-Newsletter: Council welcomed the creation of an E-Newsletter and the review of forthcoming content noting that the first edition was due out in mid-August.
6. Enquiries for bird guides: Council noted that fielding the increasing number of queries had become time consuming, and it was agreed that JC should develop a section of the Club website with links to appropriate external materials and contacts. Council noted that some income might result if the page carried advertising from professional tour companies and guides.
7. Council received the proposed *Photography Guidance Code*, noting that it appeared to be having the desired effect and that it was working well due in no small measure to the help received from Harry Scott in monitoring the materials.
8. *Where to watch birds in Scotland* – mobile app. JC, Alan Knox (AK) and Ray Murray (RM) presented a review of progress to date on the proposal for a digital site guide intended to be delivered as a mobile app. A number of key features had already been considered, such as a content management system that would permit easy updating, integration with Birdtrack and vetting of sites. It was clear that a number of strategic issues remained with decisions yet to be made regarding access by existing members if the app were to be used as a promotional tool, cost to members, and the trade off between functionality and the cost of producing the app itself. There were also some remaining technical issues concerning the platforms on which the app might run, Council noting that this had a significant impact on the development cost. It was noted that an initial approach had been made to the *Birds of Scotland Fund* and that the Chair, David Jardine, enthusiastically supported the proposal and felt that it fell within the funding guidelines for BoS projects. Council thanked the team for developing an interesting and worthwhile project. The app had great potential not only for the Club but also as a business

JC

proposal that could be marketed externally. It was agreed that it was an excellent idea that should be carried forward. Council requested that a more detailed paper be brought to the next meeting that addressed issues linked to membership, cross platform development, a business plan and editorial control.

JC / AK /  
RM

**9 Nominations for Branch Awards** Council received a confidential paper listing the nominations for Branch Awards to be made at the 2016 Conference. Council noted the three nominations made, and observed that the decrease in numbers from the first year was to be predicted.

**10 Conferences update** Annual Conference 2016: The Office Manager, Wendy Hicks (WH) gave a brief verbal update on the Annual Conference. She noted that nearly 90 bookings had been received, that the programme of speakers was now finalised despite some initial hiccoughs and the programme covered most aspects of the conference theme of *Scotland's Seas*. WH was pleased to note that Swarovski had continued its sponsorship of the event with a grant of £1k. On behalf of Council, the Chair thanked WH and Waterston House staff for their efforts in organising what promised to be a highly successful event.

Spring Conference 2017: WH noted that the 2017 Spring Conference organised in conjunction with the BTO would be held in Dunfermline with Fife as the lead branch. A meeting would be held with Ben Darvill of the BTO on August 23<sup>rd</sup> to finalised the programme.

**11 Annual Report and AGM** Council received the first draft of the Annual Report noting that the Accounts would be available on the Club website and that the report was due for printing on September 5<sup>th</sup>.

With respect to the AGM the Secretary, David Heeley (DH) informed Council that no nominations for Elected Members had been received by the due date of July 31<sup>st</sup>, but the Constitution allowed nominations to be received at the AGM itself.

**12 Staff Salaries** Council received a recommendation from the Management Committee that all staff should be awarded a pay increase of 1%, and that this should be back-dated to January 1<sup>st</sup> 2016. A previous decision of Council in November 2014 was that staff pay should increase in line with increases in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). However, at the review date the CPI had in fact been negative. Management Committee had discussed this issue and concluded that awarding no increase would send a negative message to staff, all of whom were clearly working beyond a reasonably expected capacity. Council accepted the recommendation and unanimously agreed that the pay rise should be implemented. It was agreed that staff would be notified by the Secretary in writing.

DH

**13 Appointment of Elected Members** Council received a discussion document from Management Committee concerning the forthcoming situation regarding Elected Members of Council. Due to a combination of events, all three (Alison Creamer, Richard Leslie and Bob McGowan) were due to demit office at the 2016 AGM. Council noted that Richard Leslie would continue on Council as the Branch Representative for Lothian following his election as Branch Chair. The Constitution stated that Elected Members should stand down on the basis of annual rotation, but the current situation clearly did not permit this, and that if all three vacancies were to be filled at the AGM then the difficulty would simply recur in 2019.

The Chair (JM) noted that he would approach Chris Wernham of the BTO staff

to see if she could be persuaded to join Council. He agreed to report back on this. He informed Council that Dr. Jeremy Wilson (Head of Research RSPB) had agreed to be nominated as Vice-President and that this proposal would be put to members for approval at the AGM.

**JM**

Council agreed that it was necessary to have some form of strategy for staggering the dates when Elected Members demitted office. It was agreed that the Chair (JM) would approach Bob McGowan to see if he would be willing to continue as an Elected Member for a further two years. This would then permit a new appointee to come forward at the AGM to serve for the usual period of three years.

**JM**

**14 Birdtrack**

The Chair (JM) briefed Council on the latest developments in the Birdtrack Agreement. He noted that it was now in its final phase of development and that although there were still elements of the Agreement that would not please everyone the broader view was that it did not contain anything that would compromise the Club. He had agreed that the Agreement would be signed on behalf of the SOC when the final version was received.

Council noted with gratitude the sterling efforts of Stuart Rivers who had served on the Birdtrack Steering Group on behalf of SOC through a complex and controversial set of negotiations.

**15 AOCB**

- Honoraria levels for 2017: The Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer left the room for this item. There was agreement that the maximum level should remain at £1k for this year's honoraria to the Hon. Treasurer and Hon. Secretary. The actual amounts that would be awarded for the period AGM 2015 – AGM 2016 to both trustees, along with the honoraria to Editors will be decided at the December meeting [This Minute was taken by the Office Manager, Wendy Hicks].
- BTO Publication: Council noted the forthcoming BTO Publication on the *Status of Scotland's Birds*. Former President Chris McInerney (CMcI) would be liaising with the BTO on behalf of SOC. JM agreed to distribute the discussion document inviting individuals to contact CMcI with any comments.
- Grouse Moor petitions: Council noted the ongoing national petitions regarding grouse moors and driven grouse shooting. It re-confirmed that SOC was not a campaigning organisation and should not participate as an organisation. Nevertheless, it would appropriate for Branches to use the website for information purposes to notify members of the existence of campaigns such as these and other environmental matters and that it was up to individuals to sign the petitions if they wished.
- North Sea Bird Club: Council was informed that the NSBC was an organisation that was funded by an operating grant from the oil companies and had in the past had office space at Aberdeen University. This arrangement was due to end on September 2016 when the overheads charged would be increased. It noted that Andrew Thorpe (AT) was the Bird Recorder for the NSBC and produced the Bird Report. AT noted that the NSBC were likely to lose their Aberdeen accommodation in any case due to the probable closure of the lab space that they currently occupied. Council was requested to consider whether the SOC might be able to find desk space at Waterston House and provide underpinnings such as payment of

**JM**

salaries. It was emphasised that the NSBC would underwrite the salary costs for AT and a data entry assistant by a grant of funds to SOC.

The Treasurer, Alan Fox (AF) pointed out that the proposal raised a number of issues regarding the charitable status of the SOC, as it was not permitted as an SCIO to employ Trustees, noting that AT would shortly be taking over as Treasurer and thus he would automatically become a Trustee. Council had reservations over the practical issues involved, but at the same time noted that there was some clear financial gain for the Club.

**AT / AF /  
Management  
Committee**

It was agreed that the issue should be devolved to Management Committee to decide. It was agreed further that AT and AF would prepare a briefing note for Management Committee.

- The Chair noted that this would be the last meeting of Council attended by Alan Fox in his role as Honorary Treasurer. On behalf of Council he offered thanks for the diligence and commitment that AF had shown over many years, noting in particular the leadership offered during the complex process of conversion to an SCIO.

On a personal note, the Chair thanked Paul Taylor for standing in as Acting Vice-President and for his contributions in particular to the work of the Management Committee.

**16 Next Meeting** 4<sup>th</sup> December 2016: 10.30 at RSPB Loch Leven

Signed:



Date: 4<sup>th</sup> December 2016

James Main, President