

# The SOC Scotland's Bird Club



## COUNCIL MEETING 80/04 4<sup>th</sup> December 2016 Minutes

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

Session 80/04 of Council was held at 10.30 hrs on the 4<sup>th</sup> December 2016 at the RSPB Loch Leven reserve, Kinross.

**Present:** President James Main (Chair), Jeremy Wilson (Vice President), David Heeley (Hon Secretary), Andrew Thorpe (Hon Treasurer), David Bain, Alison Creamer, Lesley Creamer, Roger Gooch, Richard Leslie, Bob McGowan, David Rackham, Neil Stratton and Paul Taylor.

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

### Action

1. **Welcome to new members** The Chair, James Main (JM) welcomed Jeremy Wilson as the newly elected Vice President, Andrew Thorpe as the newly elected Honorary Treasurer, Neil Stratton (Branch representative for Borders), and Chris Wernham (Elected Representative, *in absentia*). He welcomed back Alison Creamer and Bob McGowan as Elected Representatives. Both had agreed to serve additional terms of one and two years respectively.
2. **Apologies for absence** Apologies were received from Frank Hamilton (Honorary President), Helen Aiton, Iain Gibson, Alan Knox, Melvin Morrison and Chris Wernham
3. **Absent** John Campbell, Angus McBay and Geoff Sheppard were absent.
4. **Minutes of Council Meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2016** The minutes for meeting 80/03 held on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2016 were approved without amendment.
5. **Matters arising** The majority of items arising from previous meetings were on the agenda.
  - 14<sup>th</sup> August 2016 §15 – *Status of Scotland's Birds*. The Chair (JM) informed Council that he had contacted former President Chris McNerny in order to clarify the situation regarding the proposed publication. He noted that the publication would be in the form of a small pamphlet with limited content. He informed Council that Chris McNerny was the SOC representative on the project.
6. **Finance** The Treasurer, Andrew Thorpe (AT) opened his presentation to Council with a

verbal briefing regarding the various activities in which he had been engaged on behalf of the Club since taking on his new role. He had reviewed the registers of authorised signatories and had identified a number of entries that were out of date and thus redundant. He had further noted some omissions. He reassured Council that these problems were in the process of being rectified.

The official Club Accounts had been submitted as required to OSCR, and he had contacted Sandy Scotland (the Independent Financial Advisor) to arrange a meeting in March 2017.

An important meeting had been held with the investment advisors, Brewin Dolphin where he had received a comprehensive update on the Club's portfolio. A number of new Risk Categories had been devised, but he informed Council that overall the Club's investments fell within the middle of the range of risk which, in his judgement was appropriate. The investment portfolio amounted to c£325k. In the past year he noted that the best performing elements had yielded some 30%. A few elements were down, but overall the portfolio was performing well above average. In his view there were no concerns about the performance and he advised Council that there was no reason to consider changes to the portfolio. Some questions were raised about the ethical status of the investments portfolio. It was recognised that this is an extremely diffuse and difficult issue. AT agreed to consult Brewin Dolphin and report back at a future meeting on their ethical policy as applied to the SOC investments. AT

With the President (JM) he had participated in a well-attended seminar for those involved in managing charities. He considered that it had been a useful event with an emphasis on good practice and the roles and responsibilities of Trustees in particular. There had been much advice that could be usefully applied within the SOC. At Council's request AT agreed to circulate a short written briefing note to members outlining the main points arising from the meeting at Brewin Dolphin and the Seminar. AT

Council received a summary of the Income and Expenditure from the Accounts for the period April – December 2016. After some discussion it was noted that there were difficulties segregating VAT and non-VAT sales in particular with respect to those associated with art exhibitions that had accompanying book promotions. AT would be seeking clarification regarding this and proposed the introduction of some new categories to the Income and Expenditure narrative so that these issues can be scrutinised. AT

The Chair thanked AT for the financial analysis and his detailed summary of events.

**7. Branch and Membership Development**

Council received the report of the Development Officer, Jane Cleaver (JC).

- Membership: The synopsis of current trends in membership status and recruitment showed that there were c46 new memberships and c82 cancellations. It was noted that the 'cancellations' figure was, to a certain extent, misleading as cancellations were retained on the database until the August issue of *Scottish Birds*. JC informed Council that overall there were c2757 subscriptions at October 2016, which would imply a total membership of c3289 individuals. Overall the trend was one of modest increase. The difficulties of determining why people chose to cancel was again noted. JC emphasised that those who leave are not necessarily or generally dissatisfied. She pointed out that there was a general pattern to club memberships and subscriptions where an individual might join for a period of time, and then review

their memberships, cancelling a number and retaining others. JC noted that, in her view, the critical issue was one of communication and staying in touch, and highlighted a number of initiatives that had been taken in this regard (such as follow up emails when a direct debit cancellation notice was received). She informed Council that SOC membership retention was high compared to other comparable organisations, but that there was action to be taken in following up Lapsed Members, and that Branches have had a role to play in contacting those who leave. Concern was expressed about forthcoming changes to the data protection legislation due in 2018 which would require members to opt in for communications from the Club. Council was advised that, to date, SOC had performed well on data protection issues and that appropriate steps would be taken to ensure continued compliance.

- Development Projects: Council was disappointed to learn that the application to the *Nature of Scotland* awards for the *Innovation Award* for the Isle of May Young Birders Training project (YBTC) in conjunction with the Isle of May Bird Observatory had ultimately proved unsuccessful and had not been shortlisted. Council congratulated JC on the high quality of the submission, noting that the Innovation Award category was the most competitive and the Club were therefore against very strong competition. It was agreed that it would be well worthwhile to try again in future in a different category. A new e-mail digest had been published (*The Hoot*) and very encouraging feedback had been received concerning the first issue.
- Council noted that the RSPB would not be running a Scotland's Big Nature Festival in 2017, and that the Club would not be attending the Rutland Bird Fair 2017. Thanks were expressed to Alan Knox and Bob McGowan for promoting the Club at the November Ringers' Conference in Carrbridge.
- JC concluded with a brief synopsis of progress with developing a mobile app. The project continued to move forwards and a number of key issues had been identified such as budgeting, licensing, functionality and editorial control. Alan Knox (AK) had indicated that he wished to step back a bit from the project and that it would be timely to have a firmer view of the best way to manage the project in the longer term. JC indicated that a formal Proposal would be presented at the March 2017 meeting of Council.

**8. Report on Annual Conference 2016.**

Council received a comprehensive report from the Office Manager, Wendy Hicks (WH) on the 2016 Annual Conference in Pitlochry. The venue had again proved popular with attendees, with extremely encouraging feedback. Overall the conference operated at a very modest financial loss (c£220) which was comparable with the previous year. Council concluded that this was appropriate given the importance of the event in the annual calendar.

**9. Conferences: Update and report.**

- Annual Conference 2017:

It was agreed that the venue should remain the Atholl Palace Hotel and noted that a provisional booking had been made for the second last weekend in October.

**WH**

Possible themes were discussed and it was agreed that a general theme of *Migration and Tracking* should be adopted. A good range of potential speakers were available and it was noted that these topics were receiving a

**WH**

- lot of media interest. Council welcomed the offer by Jeremy Wilson and Andrew Thorpe to assist JM in identifying potential speakers who might be approached. It was agreed that a draft programme would be presented at the March 2017 meeting. **JW / AT / JM**
- It was agreed further that the Atholl Palace Hotel should again be the venue for the Annual Conference in 2018. WH noted that the hotel might increase its charges. Council agreed that there could be a modest increase in the conference fee (c£10.00 per head) to defray costs but that the Student Fee should remain unchanged. **JM / WH**
- Council received a brief verbal update on progress with the Spring Conferences, noting that the BTO would be the lead organisation in 2018 (Dumfries) and that Oban had been identified as the venue for 2019.
- 10. Formation of a Birding Committee.** The concept of an SOC Birding Committee that would bring a focus to a number of issues such as the development of Birdtrack and better integration of the activities of the community of Local Bird Recorders had been discussed in outline at previous meetings. It was agreed that this should be carried forward to the next meeting, and that the Chair (JM) would discuss the proposal with the Vice President, Jeremy Wilson (JW), to assess the feasibility of the proposal and report back. **JM / JW**
- 11. Bird Recorders Conference.** Council noted that the putative Bird Recorders Conference was a project that was due to be developed by Ray Murray. With his passing it was clear that it would not be realistic to attempt to mount a conference in parallel with the Spring 2017 Birdwatchers' Conference in Dunfermline. In any case it was unclear what level of interest there might be from potential participants. The Chair (JM) agreed to circulate Local Bird Recorders in order to gauge interest, and would investigate the financial and organisational implications. **JM**
- 12. Honoraria**
1. The Secretary (DH) and Treasurer (AT) withdrew for this item. It was agreed that the maximum Honoraria for the Secretary and Treasurer would be £1k for the period AGM 2016 – AGM 2017. [this Minute was taken by the Office Manager, Wendy Hicks].
  2. Council approved by circulation on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2016 the payment of Honoraria of £1k for the period AGM 2015 – AGM 2016 to the Secretary (David Heeley) and the former Treasurer (Alan Fox) for services to the Club during that period. **WH**
  3. Council noted that the Honoraria paid to the *Scottish Birds* editorial committee had not been reviewed for some time. It was agreed that an uplift of 10% should be applied and that the Honoraria offered for the period AGM 2015 – AGM 2016 would be:
    - Ian Andrews: £550
    - Jimmy Maxwell: £220
    - Stan da Prato: £220
    - Harry Scott: £220
    - Stuart Rivers: £220**WH**
- 13. Dates of future meetings.** Council considered possible dates for its meetings in 2017. There were a number of complicating factors hampering the finalising of the calendar and it was agreed that the Secretary would consult with the Chair and notify members of the final dates by circulation. **DH**

[Secretary's note: Council was circulated on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2016 with the forward dates for 2017 which are March 12<sup>th</sup> 2017, June 18<sup>th</sup> 2017, August 13<sup>th</sup> 2017 and December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017.]

- 14. Matters for approval.**
- Council formally approved the Committee remits and memberships for 2017. It noted that there had been a number of changes in the operation of the Library Committee and its membership, and that the Chair of this committee (Alan Knox) would be submitting a brief paper to Council at its next meeting for approval of these changes.
  - Council approved the appointment of:  
Lesley Creamer (Member of Council) and  
Susan Horne  
to the Library Committee.
- 15. AOCB.** There were no other items of Competent Business.
- 16. Next Meeting** March 12<sup>th</sup> 2017: 10.30 at RSPB Loch Leven

**AK**

Signed:



Date: 12<sup>th</sup> March 2017

James Main, President