

SOC Clyde Branch Annual General Meeting, Monday 3rd April 2023

MINUTES

The SOC Clyde Branch AGM was held as an in-person meeting at the Renfield Centre. Twenty six persons were present.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Fiona McLean, Donald Wilson, Toby Wilson, Kevin Sinclair, Dee Gaffney, and Allan Kelly.

2. Minutes of previous AGM

The minutes of the previous AGM had been available on the SOC and on the BirdsinClyde websites for some time. There were no comments made regarding these and no matters arising.

3. Office Bearers' Reports

3.1 Chairperson's Report

Zul Bhatia presented the Chairperson's report. This is attached as Appendix 1.

3.2 Secretary's Report

Ian Fulton presented the Secretary's report. This is attached as Appendix 2.

3.3 Outings Organiser's Report

David Palmar presented the Outings Organiser's report. This is attached as Appendix 3.

3.4 Treasurer's Report

An unaudited summary of the accounts was provided by Liz Parsons. There were some queries on this which are reflected in the updated version of the accounts in Appendix 4.

3.5 Recorder's Report

John Simpson gave a short presentation on some of the important projects in which he was involved. Very briefly, these include monitoring Ravens and the differences between tree nesting, crag nesting and urban birds; monitoring Short-eared Owls; Hen Harrier field work to locate nesting pairs; the Glasgow Peregrine project to locate nesting Peregrines in the city area noting that a pair had returned to a nest in the Glasgow University tower. John outlined the plans that were being developed for the future of Clyde Bird Reports though this was at an early stage.

4. Election of Office Bearers

A notice had been published by the Secretary via the HQ Mailchimp email and the Clyde Branch Grapevine inviting nominations and volunteers to fill the Office Bearer positions. There had been no responses received to this invitation.

Therefore, your committee would like to propose that the following office bearers be elected

Chairperson – Zul Bhatia
Treasurer – Liz Parsons
Secretary – Rebecca Dickson
Branch Representative on SOC Council – Zul Bhatia

This was approved by the meeting.

5. Election of Committee Members

A notice had been published by the Secretary via the HQ Mailchimp email and the Clyde Branch Grapevine inviting nominations and volunteers to join the branch committee. There had been no responses received to this invitation.

Therefore, your committee would like to propose that the following persons be elected as Committee Members

Toby Wilson, David Palmar, Sandy McNeil, Fiona McLean, Kevin Sinclair, Andrew Russell, Donald Wilson, Emma Anderson, Ian Fulton and Kevin McCormick

Additionally, the Recorder and the Assistant Recorders will be Committee Members.

This was approved by the meeting.

6. Evening meetings

The committee sought the views of the members on the future of in-person evening meetings. Since we resumed, post Covid, our evening winter season meetings the number attending has been disappointing. Coinciding with our move to the new venue at the Renfield Centre, this has resulted in a financial loss to the branch.

The average attendance this season was 30 compared to 42 in the pre-Covid 2019-20 season. Charging a £3 admission fee has been insufficient to cover the costs of the room hire and the provision of refreshments. The branch membership now stands at 429 so only about 7% of our members have been coming to meetings.

There was some discussion on various options which included charging a £5 admission fee, attempting somehow to increase numbers attending, and searching for a cheaper venue. The option of moving out of the city centre was discussed.

This was referred back to the Committee for further investigation.

7. Any other business

There being no other business, Ian Fulton thanked all for attending and closed the meeting.

Minutes prepared by Ian Fulton, Secretary (retired), SOC Clyde Branch
Any queries to Rebecca Dickson at email address clydesecretary@the-soc.org.uk

Appendix 1

Chairperson's report for 2022/2023

I have now been in post for just over five years as Chair and I have continued to work closely with our Clyde Branch Committee. The branch continued to input into the running of the SOC nationally with **Fiona McLean** on the Management Committee and myself on Council. I am also involved with the SOC/BTO programme of monthly events for young people.

The monthly Scotland-wide Zoom talks organised by HQ proved quite popular, but we were pleased to start our Face-to-Face meetings again in September 2022. Our Branch Secretary, **Ian Fulton's** report gives more details. Our four Committee meetings held in 2022/23 continued to be held on Zoom.

Outings continued to be very popular and we held one in every month in 2022/23. So far just over 100 different people have attended at least one outing in the last 12 months and we have recorded 146 species on them. **David Palmar**, our Outings Organiser has produced a report for the AGM with more details. **Donald Wilson** and **Sandy McNeil** have also contributed greatly to the programme.

We continued to promote **Recording and Reporting** birds and it was very pleasing to see increasing number of people reporting birds regularly. In 2021, BirdTrack received well over 100,000 records for the first time in any year. In 2022, this increased by 27% and 146,274 records were received. Sadly, our long-time Recorder, **Iain Gibson**, passed away in October 2022. He had been recorder continuously since 1975 – the longest of any Recorder in Scotland. An Obituary appeared in the March 2023 issue of the SOC Journal, *Scottish Birds*. Our Assistant Recorder, **Val Wilson** continued to do an excellent job in the various tasks Recorders have to do as well as producing the popular daily Grapevine, etc. In November 2022, our recording team was strengthened by the appointment of **John Simpson** as Recorder with **John Sweeney** becoming an additional Assistant Recorder. Both have been involved with the Clyde branch for a very long time.

Fieldwork is a very significant activity for many of our members. Activities undertaken include many national surveys such as various BTO ones including Wetland Bird Surveys (WeBS), RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch, raptor monitoring, etc. Some members were also leading / volunteering with the nest box projects at various sites throughout the Clyde. Private projects (sometimes extending beyond the Clyde area) included winter gull monitoring in some of Glasgow's parks. Lesser Whitethroat habitat restoration and post-moult Eider counts in the Firth of Clyde. As usual, the **Clyde Ringing Group** continued to be very active in many different projects. A list of all the active projects known to us in the Clyde is available via our branch website.

Social media: **Andrew Russell** who leads for us on Twitter has done an excellent job in keeping a high profile for @Clydebirding and we have 40% more followers than at this time last year. The Twitter feed that appears on our website home page has proved very popular. We continued to have excellent relations with the Clydebirds Facebook group. The group owner, **John Molloy**, was very happy for us to use the site to promote the Clyde SOC's activities. This is much appreciated.

Clyde Bird Reports

Volunteers continued to convert records received in Word format for past years in to Excel for uploading to the SOC database. The total number of records in the database is now nearing 1 million. We continued on clearing the backlog of 'missing' Clyde Bird Reports. With a new recorder team now in place, we will visit this huge task again and are likely to tackle a recent year whilst mindful of filling the gaps too.

Branch website

The branch website is a fantastic resource for showcasing the branch with information about all our activities, a repository for articles and publications, etc. The website continues to be increasingly used with 100-130 users per week. There were over 17 thousand page views in the last year with the most popular pages being the Home, Outings and Recent Sightings pages. It continues to be the case that Twitter / Facebook posts play an important role in driving visitors to the site for new content. Peaks in website use are more frequent when new content, updates on outings, branch meetings/talks and rarities/ unusual sightings in Clyde bring visitors to the website. The success of the website is in no small part due to our Webmaster, **Kevin McCormick** who put a huge amount of effort into this and acted quickly on our suggestions and submission of new content.

Venue for indoor meetings

All our Face to Face meetings in the last 12 months were held at Renfield St Stephens Centre on Bath Street and this proved to be an excellent venue except for the fact that we rarely covered the costs of the room hire.

Clyde Big Birding Day

This was held on 14th May 2022 as part of the Global event. It was very well supported and 129 species of birds were recorded that day including specially-sought ones such as Black & Red Grouse, Ring-necked Duck, Golden & Little Ringed Plover, Woodcock, Red Kite and Short-eared & Long-eared Owl. Just over 50 observers submitted 1,711 records to BirdTrack that day.

Clyde Atlas

Basic maps for all species were produced from the tetrad data collected for the 1985-91 atlas but unfortunately, the detailed data which would have enable us to produce better maps in terms of the information presented could not be located. Some maps were produced from the data collected for the 2011-2017 BTO Atlas to assist discussion on how we want to proceed, but these are very much work in progress and not ready for wider sharing.

Crops for Wildlife

We have been talking about this for some time, but unfortunately continue to find it difficult to find a suitable location for this, so little progress has been made. We have input in to the plans for a Solar Farm at Inchinan which incorporate some planting for wildlife.

Boxes for Barnies project

Three boxes put up by the project were occupied and each fledged three young. Seven sites monitored by the project produced fledged young. I continue to be the Barn Owl co-ordinator for the South Strathclyde Raptor Study Group.

SOC Clyde Discussion Group

I am delighted to say that this was launched in February 2023. Two meetings have been held with another planned for late April. 38 people have expressed an interest in being involved with it. 27 have attended at least one meeting. A wide variety of topics have been discussed and we are probably going to take forward promoting eight species both to fill in knowledge gaps and encourage others to record birds, particularly in poorly reported areas.

The Future

Outings will continue to feature in our programme. Apart from the wildlife we see, they are an excellent resource for some informal mentoring.

We are also likely to continue with at least some **online meetings** as they attract people who otherwise would not have attended a physical meeting. We will continue to support and be involved with the club-wide Zoom meetings organised by HQ.

Continue to promote the study, enjoyment and conservation of wild birds and their habitats across the Clyde area making use of the considerable bird data we hold. Encourage more recording and reporting of birds and other wildlife. Make more progress on using the 2007-2011 Atlas data.

Develop the **Discussion Group** further including having an informal mentoring scheme and 'impromptu outings' by facilitating people to meet each other for bird watching. Consider running another Clyde Big Birding Day in May 2023 and using this for mentoring too.

Whilst the **venue** we used for Face to Face meetings since we resumed them in September 2022 is very good, it is expensive and even though we have installed a charge of £3 a head, we have only covered our costs at one meeting so far. We will have to look at alternatives.

Challenges still remain, of course. Little further progress has been made with developing Paisley Moss LNR as a reserve in co-operation with Glasgow Airport. No proper contact has been made with other organisations (eg Scottish Wildlife Trust, Glasgow Council, etc) over the management of sites important for birds in the Clyde.

Acknowledgements

Many people's contributions have already been acknowledged in the relevant section above, but for the branch to operate as successfully as it has, there are so many more people involved. I would particularly like to thank **Ian Fulton** who is standing down as our Secretary after 10 years in the post and to **Rebecca Dickson** who has agreed to take on that role. We are proposing to bring **Kevin McCormick** who has done such a great job on the website onto the Committee and I'd like to welcome him. Thank you to all of you who have supported the Clyde Branch in one way or another this year. If you have any feedback or suggestions, please let me or any of the Committee members have them.

Zul Bhatia

Chair, Clyde Branch of the SOC
April 2023

Appendix 2

Secretary's Report

Clyde Branch membership now stands at 370 memberships or 429 persons, counting joint memberships as two persons. This is a slight net increase from the previous year's total of 420.

The distribution list for the daily Clyde Grapevine news message now stands at 258. Many thanks to Val Wilson for all her efforts in maintaining such a high standard of service. On a few occasions Ian Fulton has deputised for Val, hopefully you did not spot the difference!

We were hit by an unexpected problem this year when we had to give up using Mailchimp service to send out our grapevines. We had been using Mailchimp as a free service since 2014 but they introduced severe limitations on the number of messages which could be sent monthly free of charge. With our number of subscribers and sending out a message every day we would have required a licence costing about £25 per month.

An alternative system called EmailOctopus was found which is now operating well after some initial authentication issues which were causing messages to be blocked as junk. Many thanks to Kevin McCormick for all his help with this.

Social media continues to become an increasingly popular medium for information sharing and recording.

The 'WhatsApp' group called 'Clyde SOC Bird News' has been well used. This now has a count of 119 participants and is proving to be a popular way of reporting sightings, and even photographs, when out in the field. Reports will be picked up from here by the Assistant Recorder for the daily Grapevine and for the Clyde database.

Other social media initiatives which are public rather than SOC specific are

- the Facebook 'Clydebirds' group administered by Clyde SOC member John Molloy now has 990 members, up from 928 last year.
- the Facebook 'Baron's Haugh Wildlife Sightings' group administered by Jason Newton now has 1163 members, up from 849 last year.
- a Twitter account '@clydebirding' managed by the Clyde SOC member Andrew Russell now has 949 followers, up from 676 last year.

Please note that sighting reports shared on Facebook and on Twitter are not picked up for the Grapevine or the Clyde database.

Our winter indoor meetings programme for the 2022-2023 started to return to something like pre Covid arrangements but with some significant challenges.

Pre Covid, our SOC HQ would arrange speakers to visit the branch for our October, November, February and March meetings whilst the branch committee would organise speakers for September, December, January and April. The HQ staff have been struggling to find suitable speakers who are willing to visit branch locations for in-person meetings. Also, pressure from other tasks is impacting on the time which they can devote to searching for such speakers. Thus, HQ provided only one speaker for in-person meetings this winter. As an alternative, HQ organised a number of online

Zoom meetings which were available countrywide to all members. Whilst many of these were interesting and informative, they lacked the social interaction of an in-person meeting.

Also, very significantly, after many years of holding our meetings in the Zoology Department at Glasgow University we needed to move our venue. After some research we chose the Renfield Centre in Bath Street. This meant that we had to pay commercial hire charges for the use of the venue and equipment whereas before we had made a small donation to the Zoology Department. Reluctantly, we needed to impose an entrance charge of £3 to try to cover the costs of the venue hire and the provided refreshments.

However, it is fair to say that the number of persons attending the in-person meetings this season has been quite disappointing. Even with the £3 entry fee we failed to cover our costs on all but one occasion. The average attendances over the past years were 40 in 2018/19, 42 in 2019/2020 but only 30 in last 2022/23 season. This is probably unsustainable and will require some difficult decisions to be made.

The in-person meetings which were held over the winter were

- September: 'Clyde Ringing Group Update' by Iain Livingstone
- December: 'RSPB Baron's Haugh: A Wetter, Better Future' by David Anderson
- January: 'Visible Migration' by Clive McKay
- February: 'Black Guillemot foraging and diving behaviour' by Daniel Johnston
- March: 'Introduction and Allegro' by Ruth Briggs SOC President

The online Zoom meetings organised by HQ were

- September: 'RSPB Insh Marshes' by Pete Moore
- October: 'The Gannet' by Ciaran Hatsell and Jude Lane
- November: 'Birds and us, a 12,000-year history' by Tim Birkhead
- December: 'The Curlew' by Mary Colwell and Dave Parrish
- January: 'A beginner's guide to moult' by Stephen Menzie
- February: 'Great Northern Divers' by David Jardine
- March: 'My Shetland bird photography year' by Rebecca Nason
- April: 'Trends in some uncommon Scottish birds' by Mark Lewis

At some of the in-person meetings, Ian Fulton gave a presentation of recent sightings in the Clyde area illustrated with some of the many excellent photographs taken in the area.

Ian Fulton – Secretary, Clyde Branch SOC

Appendix 3

SOC Clyde - Outings Report

A full programme of outings – one a month – has taken place during 2022 and the first part of 2023, with outings planned until July 2023. The aim is to put the next three outings on to the birdsincl Clyde website.

Outings 2022-23

2022 -

April 27th – Inchcailloch
May 1st – Inversnaid
June 18th – Great Cumbrae
July 30th – Newshot Island
September 11th – Torness and Musselburgh
October 15th and 23rd – Ardmore
November 20th – RSPB Loch Leven
December 10th – Castle Semple and RSPB Lochwinnoch

2023 -

January 21st – RSPB Loch Lomond
February 11th - North Ayrshire - Clyde Coast – Fairlie and Hunterston
March 25/26th Caerlaverock and Mersehead

The average number of participants per outing was 16.

The most popular was North Ayrshire coast with 26, closely followed by Inchcailloch with 24.

Planned for next few months of 2023 –

April 29th - Ian Fulton – Cashel
May 6th – Lang Stewart – Baron's Haugh and Perchy Pond, Wishaw
June 17th – Scott Black - South Lanarkshire
July 22nd – Allan Russell – Newshot Island and Boden Boo

Provisional ideas:

August – John Simpson – West Loch Lomond – raptors
Any other ideas welcome – where would you like to go?

Leaders

Thanks go to everyone who has led or has volunteered to lead an outing. Without leaders, it would not be possible to implement such a varied and interesting programme.

Allan Russell
Donald Wilson
Lang Stewart
Eddie Williams
Ian Fulton
Marco McGinty
Sandy McNeil
Scott Black
Zul Bhatia