

The General Meeting of Council, October 22nd 2014

A Report of the Proceedings

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

GCCF has a new President, Mrs Grace Denny. Warm applause greeted the announcement of the election result. Grace was just ahead of Gordon Butler, who was the other contender in the final contest. The votes split 58/56. I'm sure our new President will have received the news by now and will be delighted. It's a fitting tribute to the many years of service she's given to GCCF in a variety of roles. On a personal note I remember her as one of my breed's first judges (and she has always had an eye for a good Korat), and the excellent lunches at the Suffolk & Norfolk Show when it was held in Norwich, and much of the food came direct from her farmhouse kitchen. Mmm, the aroma of those warm crusty rolls drifts down the decades!

FINANCIAL REPORT

If the election was one early high spot of the day I'm pleased to say we soon passed another. I'll use Mark's (Office Manager) own words for this as they convey the good news with far more impact than a summary can.

"The financial picture for the GCCF has improved significantly in the second third of the year with income now very close to the equivalent period in 2013.

Even better is that savings procured by the management have meant a notable 5% drop in expenditure resulting in a healthy surplus to date.

Further good news not shown in the reports of this meeting is that registration and all transaction volumes were at their highest level for 2014 in September. The financial trend is therefore likely to continue to be very positive when we complete the September accounts."

CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

After welcoming delegates for attending, and remembering in a few moments of silence those who were no longer with us, the new Chairman, Steve Crow, gave his first address to delegates. He explained his intention was to summarise key issues, and keep Council informed of the work of the Officers and Board in the intervals between Councils, as not all business arrived on the agenda as reports or proposals. He first laid out his management style, which was to delegate discussion and review to small working groups, giving them remits of purpose and scope with a timeline for bringing proposals to the Board for the development of their particular projects.

To date there were the:

- Show Structure Review Group (making a first report to Council later in the afternoon)
- HR Group considering future staffing requirements, and the roles and responsibilities of Board members
- IT Group, responsible for delivering Project Phoenix
- and the Marketing Strategy Group.

By November it was planned the remits for groups to review judge training and the BAC system, and the disciplinary process, would be ready.

The aim of this restructuring was to reduce the number of Board meetings from 11 to 7, thus saving costs, but also to help the Board operate more effectively. Members had to become a team with a clear common purpose. It was hoped that the Board coaching that was going to be delivered as part of the Growth Accelerator Programme (government aided scheme to assist the development small/medium sized businesses) would also help with this.

The Chairman then touched on events that had occurred at the June Council meeting, summarising actions that had been taken by those most concerned. He had already reminded all at the beginning of the meeting that those present should address one another considerately and without personal abuse. Going forward, the resolve was that there should be no reoccurrence of such events, and assessment of the GCCF processes concerning elections, codes of conduct and disciplinary procedures would result in changes that would be brought to Council as proposals once completed.

Then Steve moved on to giving delegates an update on the Cat Welfare Bill. After several meetings and discussion in which Cats Protection, International Cat Care and DEFRA were involved, he was able to give assurance that the general view was the bill had no chance of becoming law. There was no parliamentary desire to give it any time, and even Cats Protection, who sponsored it, had agreed that it was a poorly constructed piece of legislation.

However, CP's original intention was one that we could all share, concern for the welfare of cats and kittens. They did not have pedigree breeders in mind when putting it together, but those who allowed moggies and cross breeds to have kittens to advertise them on the internet when very young for quite high prices. CP are having to pick up the pieces when new owners no longer want to keep the kittens when they have become ill, and from the breeders dumping those they were unable to sell as cute babies, before moving on to offering their next batch for sale. A Working Party is now looking at ways to address these problems of exploitation through commercial breeding by self-regulation and existing legislation, and the Chair's intention is to ensure GCCF has a key role.

BREED BUSINESS

There were no controversial issues and delegates approved all items unanimously. These were:

- The Ocicat Registration Policy was revised to bring it line with that of the Ocicat Classic.
- The Russian Standard of Points was comprehensively revised and
- the Egyptian Mau SOP had small changes agreed concerning eye colour and profile description.
- The Ticked British Shorthair gained Championship Status.

Two new breed clubs: the Australian Mist Cat Society and the Burmese Cat Association were welcomed as full Members of GCCF, and it was noted that the Ocicat and Ocicat Classic Association, and the Egyptian Mau Society had Provisional Membership.

All judge appointments and list removals were agreed unanimously.

The Ocicat and Ocicat Classic lists are now combined into a single list for all new candidates, and for existing judges and candidates on one list only, transitional arrangements were approved for those who wish to cover both.

The update to the BAC Philosophy and Principles and Jude Appointment Scheme was accepted, with a promise given that the correct version would be uploaded to the website, and circulated to BAC Secretaries. The major change related to veterinary assessments and the opportunity had been taken to modernize terminology used.

SHOW MATTERS

In my estimation these provoked the most interesting discussion and delegate contributions of the day. They began with a continuation of the good news theme as the Supreme Show Manager was able to announce an increase in cats present for day, (now 894), the number of stalls booked, and the advance gate takings. All were up for 2014, as was the amount of sponsorship secured. Celia thanked all those who were bringing cats, and praised the efforts that had been made to secure exhibits, saying the negative comments on low numbers on Facebook had made her smile when she was faced with entries stacking up to be dealt with.

It was exciting that there was going to be a TV appearance (Sunday Brunch-Channel 4) to be filmed on 12 November to go out the following week just ahead of the show, and it was possible that the 'Dog World' channel would be filming on the day. Both Your Cat and Cat World magazines were doing promotions to give advance publicity, so the chances of a good gate for the event were very promising.

Most intriguingly, those planning to come were promised surprises on the day, but the SM was keeping these as a treat up her sleeve, not to be spoiled by advance social media dissection.

Perhaps the positive forecast for this year's show was in mind collectively when delegates discussed proposals put forward by the National Cat Club. There was concern expressed that hall hire costs and falling exhibit numbers had lead to losses being made in the previous years, but a counter argument was put forward that the show was GCCF's

flagship event and only attracted the sort of publicity and sponsorship outlined earlier because of the prestigious location that brought in high numbers of visiting public. The outcome by vote was to reject the proposal that put a 2015 Supreme on hold, by making it difficult to arrange. Around 100 of 116 delegates agreed that this was a show that must go on.

Of course, there was interest too in the findings and first recommendations of the Show Structure Review Group. The Vice Chairman, Keith Scruton, thanked the volunteers who had constituted the group, and all those who had contributed indirectly by email and on the dedicated Facebook page. He promised that nothing was set in stone, and all ideas were open for consideration. New ideas, or fresh comment on those already put forward, were still very welcome.

Keith explained how the group had deliberated, starting by examining what happened at shows held by other organisations. Some of what they did was liked and could be adapted but other practices could not; though Show Managers were reminded that they didn't need a change in rules to experiment with different formats if they so wished. It was believed that non-GCCF exhibitors should be made welcome, and allowed a taster of a GCCF event by not having to register initially. However, to claim titles registration would be a requirement though it could be backdated to permit certificates gained to count.

A fair amount of discussion focussed on making more of Best of Breed. It was generally accepted that this could be an area in which a new award for achievement could be developed, though there was less certainty that BOBs should be more limited than they are currently. It was thought this could lead to judging difficulties in some sections, and a few clubs had already decided that no change would be good. The next group meeting was planned for mid December, and although one delegate requested the focus should be on the structure of the breed/certificate classes, overall it was considered that the purpose of change had to be defined, and some measure of where we were now had to be taken to provide a benchmark to assess the effectiveness of any changes.

DISCUSSIONS

There was a vote of thanks on behalf of the HHP exhibitors to the Office for their very attractive registration certificates. Delegates went on to approve in principle that HHPs should be registered if the exhibitors wished to claim titles, with re-registration as pedigree pets being required for those already registered in the pedigree section, as a different identity had to be created. There was no start date for this as it would not be possible until the new computer system was in operation, but acceptance of the idea meant that there could be plans for its implementation.

There was time for the two final discussions of the day. Most delegates welcomed the

idea of making it a rule that kittens are sold fully vaccinated (FPV, FH and FCV) rather than a strong recommendation. They accepted the arguments from IC that breeder and owner would know what to expect more clearly, and anything that reduced risk to kittens becoming ill shortly after leaving home was worthwhile.

However, there was rather a neat end to the second discussion. After hearing that some in other businesses, and the business coach, had commented unfavourably on the name GCCF and remarked on it being more applicable to Edwardian times than the 21st century, it was concluded the problem was in the message rather than the name, a problem that could be solved by more effective marketing. It was at this moment one delegate pointed out that the Chairman was sitting beneath one of Shakespeare's most famous lines, adopted by the Conway Hall; *'to thine own self be true'* and there was general agreement this accurately reflected the feeling in the room about rebranding.

RULE CHANGES

One rule change was not approved. The intention of this was to permit a little trimming and tidying as it was acknowledged this was done discreetly, but it was thought that removing the rule that forbade it could result in more dramatic cutting and styling, such as was known to happen in the shows of other organisations, and it was believed wrong to encourage this. However, the welfare aspect of the proposed change concerning trimming of eyebrows and eyelashes was liked, and it was concluded to be more sensible to return the whole matter to the Board for fresh wording rather than have voting on parts of it.

Three of the other amendments were directed to the welfare of cats, with two proposed by the Veterinary Advisory Committee, relating to rejection at shows. Now exhibitors will no longer have to take their entire household for a veterinary check if a cat is rejected under section C as long as by the time the exhibit is seen by its own vet it's free from symptoms of infectious disease, as the Veterinary Officer had explained is most frequently the case. That saves exhibitors an unwarranted expense, and their healthy cats the stress of a trip to the vet, so no surprise it gained unanimous approval.

The other veterinary change, making it mandatory to declare to the Duty Vet if other cats are present at shows elsewhere at the time one cat is rejected, was welcomed too, though there was some discussion on whether it should be left to the exhibitor to follow through on making contact. With assurance that updated veterinary forms meant that declaration would be requested, and a fixed penalty would be applied if show paperwork later revealed information had been withheld, the change was passed by a majority.

A Board refresh to the age limit rule (1:4) now means that any cat over two years old can be registered on the non-active register. This saves Board and office time in not having to deal with a special application for each, and the person wishing to register therefore has only to pay the standard fee. However, when registration on the active register is required for an older cat, with welfare in mind, a brief explanation is requested for why the cat is

now required for breeding to accompany the application to the Board.

The other rule changes reworded or deleted existing rules for clarification, and ensured that new breeds eligible for the show-bench, or with upgraded status, could be at shows that were still open for entries, at the discretion of the show manager. No more waiting for a fixed term of four months to elapse, or having to apply for special dispensation.

GCCF BUSINESS PROGRESS

Unfortunately, a planned presentation of the new website couldn't take place as Mrs Fisher had to be at home with an injured kitten, but the Chairman announced the launch was due to take place at the Supreme. Professional help had been called in to complete the structure and ensure its future integration with the new computer system, and the site was now being populated with the breed information. The intention was to give a fresh look and make it a lot easier to navigate, therefore welcoming to first time visitors as well as those seeking more in depth information.

Eventually the Breeder Scheme website would also be integrated and the plan was that those who wished to make use of it to advertise would be able to upload and update their own litter information and advertise stud services.

Mrs Rainbow-Ockwell was able to give a progress report on the new system as the contract had been signed and work had begun in September. She anticipated a development stage of about nine months as it was such a large and complex project to include people and cat data, plus integrating the genetic principles governing feline coat colour and pattern and ensuring these were applied to the existing registration policies. The last would be the most complicated as these policies had developed over years in various ways, and a standardised template to suit all had to be crafted.

As the existing online system was planned to be redundant in a matter of months only one major development remained outstanding, and this was enable breeders to produce their own pedigrees. It was hoped that this service would be offered by the end of November, but other than that it was a matter of bug fixing and trouble-shooting until the Phoenix rose in all its glory.

The Chairman gave updates on other business matters, observing that the 2015 Business Plan would be put together in a different way than those from the previous years, to enable the projection of realistic targets and the commitment of the Board, as all members would be involved to some extent in its development.

He also informed Council on the outcome of meetings with commercial partners, with the intent to promote GCCF and gain financial incentives when possible. The contract with Agria had secure £15,500 of income in this year to date, and it was planned to enter a contract with Royal Canin to benefit breeders via the registration and transfer process. Relationships with cat magazines had remained positive, and a new link with

International Cat Care was being forged, with the charity supporting publication of the updated GCCF Breeding Policy.

As you may have concluded if you stayed with me and read through this, there are a number of plans for the future development of the company backed by an improving financial outlook.

Great to have so much that is positive to report!

Jen Lacey 23 October 2014