

The Meeting of Council October 24th 2012

The Autumn Council meeting brought together around 120 delegates, about two thirds of those eligible to attend. As always there was a spread of agenda items from approving judges to the introduction of the revised and innovative GCCF Breeder Scheme. However, although breed and show matters had their place, as they should and always will, I'd say that overall much of the day's information and discussion informed delegates of how GCCF is developing and making future preparations as a progressive business organisation.

The Office Manager talked us through graphic representations of financial trends and core business activity (registrations and transfers) used both to monitor and plan. In the mid-year review we learned whether the company was on target for the aims written into the second business plan. Business competition was acknowledged, as was the need to market the GCCF, educate the public and promote the quality of services offered.

GCCF/AGRIA Partnership

The hour ahead of the Council Meeting was given to Simon Wheeler, the senior manager at Agria, the Swedish pet insurance company that has become GCCF's business partner. Although it has 120 years of experience in Sweden, starting first with horses and then offering insurance to dog owners and later cat owners, it has had a presence in the UK only since 2007, entering a competitive market in which over 500 companies offer some form of pet insurance. Its management team chose to work with the Kennel Club to offer insurance to pedigree dog breeders and owners, and, looking for the same opportunity to promote their policies for cats and kittens, have come into partnership with GCCF exclusively.

We learned that although it's estimated that there are over 8 million cats owned in this country less than 10% have any form of long term cover. The figure has shown little variation in recent years. One reason identified for this is that owners tend to look for and purchase their pet insurance via comparison websites, and although supermarkets and similar non-specialist pet outlets know how to offer a deal, very often the policy fails to live up to expectations and isn't considered worth continuing with over the years.

Working in conjunction GCCF, with breeders insuring kittens going into new homes, it's hoped that owners will be started on the right track and can then be offered specialist packages to suit their particular circumstances. So cats and owners get through life cover, breeders get rewarded with points, and score in terms of positive responsibility, and GCCF should gain financially and through shared promotion and information. We can all benefit in the long term.

The good news to date is that Agria has had 100% policy take up since the September launch. The reason is that many of those taking a policy are insuring more than the new cat and kitten, but additionally covering their household. They hope for 50% in the long term to show a positive position. Breeder Reward Points for those who have activated

and bought policies to date are already being scored.

In the question and answer session delegates were assured that early problems have been dealt with. The exclusion of the breeder sale to another breeder will be removed from the second print of the cover note books. If a policy has to be deactivated because of a kitten return or buyer drop-out, another can be arranged. Various unusual scenarios should be able to be sorted out and covered by phone discussion with Agria representatives, both for GCCF registered kittens and even in rescue circumstances.

It was clear there was determination to promote and sell, but with positive incentives and a quality product offered. Let's hope that positive results are shown this time next year.

Judge, Club, BAC and Breed Business

After the Chairman had welcomed delegates the meeting stood in silence to remember Tony Gillson. Full obituary tributes can be read here:
<http://www.gccfcats.org/obituaryagillson.html>

Breed promotion

Although it came towards the end of the agenda I'd like to highlight in this section the round of spontaneous applause given to the Snowshoe BAC as the breed gained its promotion to Provisional Status. It's been quite some time in coming and perhaps a few wondered if it would ever happen, but recently the BAC has worked hard to plan the future of the breed and received Board commendation for it. So it was a promotion well deserved - onwards and upwards to Championship.

Registration Policies

Several BACs had revised registration policies that received approval. The Oriental Longhair and Bicolour BACs ensured their variants had supplementary registration as these cats can now be shown. The Ocicat Joint BAC now require their imports to be tested for PKdef and two types of PRA. The British revision was far more radical. It was introduced as having the intention of expanding the way cats are bred within the section. On paper it looks complex as all colours and patterns are represented, but the table format should make relatively easy for breeders to consult as it becomes familiar.

Revised Standards of Points

The Tabby Point Siamese SOP was updated to bring it line with other Siamese SOPs, and the Sphynx had a one word change in the description of the legs. 'Muscular' was substituted for 'sturdy'.

New Club

The Norwegian Forest Cat Society was welcomed as a new Provisional Member of

GCCF.

Judge News

All judge promotions on both the agenda and supplementary agenda were approved. Mrs Tonkinson is no longer on the list for Balinese.

Rule Changes

Section 1 1f

If a breeder has sold a cat on the ACTIVE register there can't be one-sided change of mind after the sale. Once money has been accepted, then the buyer is the legal owner (even if transfer is not immediately applied for) and must consent. Anything else would be highly unethical anyway and possibly lead the breeder into the Small Claims Court. The rule change was to clarify this point.

Section 4.28

Because those who need to leave the show hall in a serious emergency can't always find show management quickly, it was agreed that penalties should not be exacted if a cat is removed until there has been an opportunity to investigate the circumstances. Fixed penalties and disqualification will apply in cases where the exhibitor has left without dispensation and/or good reason. There were queries from the floor for clarification of the term 'exhibition' as used in the first sentence of this rule (not proposed for amendment) and it was agreed this should be referred to the Board.

Section 1.7g

This was to agree an implementation date for imports to be accompanied by a certificate of entirety for their sire. It was agreed this should be with immediate effect and so these certificates are now a standard requirement. If there is any reason why an importer cannot acquire a CoE (sire dead or otherwise unavailable) then it's recommended the circumstances are reported to the Board so that dispensation can be considered.

IT Refresh

The Project Manager (Sally Rainbow Ockwell) thanked delegates for their patience in waiting for online registrations to become a reality in GCCF. She acknowledged it had taken longer than hoped, as testing had thrown up more issues than expected, and when a bug was detected the testing process had to halt until it was dealt with before the move to next stage could be made. However, getting it right first time was essential to prevent chaos when it went fully operational.

Phase 1 of the IT system upgrade would enable 4 online uses:-

1. Breeders would be able to access a full list of all the cats they owned and had bred with their pedigree details.
2. Breeders would be able to make transfers from their ownership to a new owner.
3. New owners would be able to transfer a newly purchased kitten or cat into their ownership.
4. Individual cats and litters of kittens would be able to be registered online.

The testing for 2 had been completed. There was just one issue remaining for 1 and a blocking problem on 3 and 4, but it was hoped these would be resolved within the week. Then next stage testing could begin with the Board and a small selected group of breeders involved in the trial. At the same time the office staff would receive training and test their procedures.

IF there were no major problems 1, 2 and 3 would be live to all before Christmas and application for registration online become a reality early in 2013.

Delegates responded with delighted applause

Sally explained that after the launch most teething problems would be dealt with via the integral support offered. There would be help generated on the data entry application pages, a FAQ to refer to and a support group available for contact. It was very much hoped the office wouldn't receive a large number of extra calls as the staff wouldn't necessarily have the knowledge to answer them, and their time would be better spent dealing with the incoming registration applications.

On the day it all sounded so much more of an actuality than an abstract concept, and the accounts reflected the income from club loans and the expenses to date. Lift off isn't quite yet, but the final countdown stage is approaching.

The GCCF Breeder Scheme

The IT information heralds one massive change coming our way soon. Early 2013 will also bring the launch of the GCCF Breeder Scheme. This is the Premier Prefix Scheme revised to incorporate suggestions from June Council, and Board and general discussions. The name change was in response to a number of people feeling that Premier was already a GCCF term in another sense, and to reflect that all prefixes are of equal value.

It was reiterated that the scheme was entirely voluntary and there had been some demand for it to happen. Other organisations already had similar methods which allowed breeders who wanted a means to affirm their responsibility to their cats, kittens and new owners a positive way of doing this, as it would provide a further marker to set them apart from the back street breeder. For GCCF it was a focus on the concern for health and welfare that

was vital to highlight quality. Overall, it was to demonstrate a resolve to drive up standards through breeder responsibility, and a breeder declaration of commitment to ethics. It included breeder consent to a monitoring procedure.

It is now intended to allow breeders to begin making their applications. A website area for the Breeder Scheme is already in preparation. Promotion will be a key element, as it will be vital to inform and educate the kitten buying public, and plans are well advanced for this too. Therefore discussions have begun with Your Cat and Cat World so that articles and adverts will be published as the scheme goes live and these will continue on a rolling programme.

The one objection to the scheme from delegates was that it could be divisive, as all breeders who had a GCCF prefix, and registered, should be committed to high standards and an additional payment wouldn't necessarily distinguish the best. The Vice Chairman, presenting the scheme, agreed that those who didn't wish to join the scheme wouldn't be inferior, but as it was voluntary this was not a reason to prevent those who wished to declare themselves as responsible a method of doing so. Those who remained outside could explain that their standards were high and give reasons to buyers for choosing not to opt in. In any case, all breeders registering with GCCF would benefit from the increased programme of publicity given to the quality of a registered kitten, to be partly funded by the fees charged to scheme participants.

Simon Wheeler (Agria) chipped in at this point to give the benefit of his experience with the Kennel Club. He explained data gathered from its Assured Breeder Scheme showed a 30% uptake of the scheme amongst puppy breeders, and there were indications of significantly fewer complaints from buyers on puppy health and welfare connected with breeders committed to this scheme. It was a proving a positive indicator for higher standards, which was one clear reason why it was sensible for GCCF to adopt its own scheme.

The delegate who made the point in June that the scheme was a matter for Council to vote on, rather than for the Board to progress, repeated this opinion. In response it was pointed out that there were no Rule or Bye-Law changes involved, and it made no difference at all to showing or registering. Therefore it was a business decision to offer a further service in response to demand, and an opportunity to bring GCCF to public attention by promotion of a credible quality service. It would be successful only if there was satisfactory response from breeders and this would be reviewed after a year of operation. A delegate with experience of the private business sector and Mr Wheeler both supported that it should be considered as a marketing strategy that would bring benefits, and my impression was that Council very much agreed. There was no call for a vote as a seal of approval. The scheme would be judged on its results.

So the GCCF Breeder Scheme will begin. Look out for further announcements and go to the website to read the detailed information published at the beginning of this month if you are interested in exactly what it will mean for you if you plan to join, or want to make a decision on whether to do so.

IF YOU ARE READING THIS AT, OR IN ADVANCE OF, THE SUPREME SHOW INFORMATION WILL BE AVAILABE AT THE GCCF STAND

Finance

The Office Manager made the following comments:

- Income was slightly up, with the exception of that from printing which was vastly increased. Printing in the office was a real growth area, and thanks were given to clubs for their support.
- Except for meetings (as there have been more) expenditure has been reduced.
- Although printing and medal costs showed as increased they were balanced by the respective addition in income for these services.
- Registrations and transfers were roughly comparable to the previous year, and although prefix applications had dropped slightly earlier than usual there was a steady demand in applications to import onto the register.
- Although careful monitoring was in place to watch trends, the economic outlook for the company was positive set against general financial climate of the country.

Mid-year Review of the Business Plan

The Vice Chairman reminded delegates that the detailed review was available on the GCCF website. It demonstrated success within 4 key areas.

1. The Finance Committee was meeting every other month to review an increasingly sophisticated set of information key to monitoring the business. It enabled forward plans to be made and maintained financial viability.
2. Health and Welfare aims were on target via the Genetics and Veterinary Sub-Committees. The clubs and BACs were thanked for the comprehensive breeding policies that had already been produced, which promoted promoting responsible breeding. The focus on H & W would continue via the GCCF Breeder Scheme.
3. There had been a significant upgrade in GCCF leaflets and stationery during 2012, all with the intention of producing a corporate image and improving the quality of the product. The new registration cards had been welcomed, as had the accompanying kitten leaflets aimed at new owners. There would be a new GCCF stand at the Supreme, which could then go to other shows, to showcase leaflets and small sales items carrying the GCCF name and logo. Presentation would be vastly improved.
4. Staff training was continuing, with customer service improvement as one element. Efficiency and service had been identified as key.

In conclusion Steve commented that GCCF was changing the way it was operating quite significantly and feedback from users was both welcome and important.

World Cat Congress

This item was presented by Alan Wells of the P R & Media Group. He was able to inform delegates of the fliers that will be circulated at shows, and remind us that there will be regular updates on the website. Central to the occasion is the show at Wood Green on 18th May which will give an opportunity for two certificates, as it will be both the Suffolk and Norfolk and an International Show in GCCF format ,with many of the visiting overseas delegates judging (if so qualified). There's the possibility of a public event outside the main show hall as it is at Wood Green, and that has engaged the interest of the BBC.

The show will be followed by the Gala Dinner at the Belfrey Hotel in Cambridge where delegates will be staying and the seminar will take place there on Sunday. Again Alan urged website watching, as in addition to news there will be an opportunity to input ideas and clubs will be welcome to participate.

BAC Review

It may be that I've left this until last as it's a now a frequently trodden, rather than new and exciting, path. A suggestion from one delegate was for small BACs to combine and I remember passing that way before, probably over a year ago now. The reason it was not one of the ideas to be progressed was the reluctance of some BACs to make changes, and financing. However, it was suggested that area clubs should put into a BAC pot and that may be explored further. If additional meetings could be held because of new funding, and by BACs working in combination, then judges could progress across the multi breed sections more quickly and that seemed an agreed aim.

Parallel judging seemed to gain approval, as did the idea of an Arbitration Panel to replace lengthy and costly disciplinary proceedings. There was some negative feeling about the requirement for a BAC Chairman to be independent rather than involved with the breed(s), but those who already used commented on the usefulness of this. The BAC was responsible for assessing the breed input, while the Chairman ensured they played fair.

There were various questions and on detail, and some assurance that parts of the scheme not changed remained in place as they were. It was left that clubs and BACS had one more opportunity to input before actual proposals were brought to Council in February.

And finally

Anni Ray (GCCF Committee Secretary) gave birth to a baby boy in October. He will be keeping her busy for some months to come and I am covering some of her work from home as a volunteer while she's on maternity leave.

Jen Lacey

