

REPORT ON THE GCCF COUNCIL MEETING OF 26 FEBRUARY 2014

HIGH SPOTS

Chairman, Helen Marriott Power had the meeting underway very shortly after 1pm, welcoming delegates on a bright February day. It finished just before 5pm and I'm sure those present will agree there was a good variety of business, with accounts presented, reports given, and a peep at what the new website will be like, mixed with the odd spark of interesting debate and occasional flash of humour.

A VOTE FOR CHANGE

Julie Andrews sang that starting at the beginning was a very good place to start, but just to be different it was near the end of the afternoon that a decision was taken that will probably have the most impact, at least on those who are exhibitors, and that seems worth homing in on. There was a vote that will bring a change to the show structure once again.

The Siamese Cat Club argued that by forcing cats to move on to the next level once they had achieved a title brought two unwanted consequences. There was insufficient competition in some classes, sometimes meaning early awards were achieved quickly, and the owners stopped showing cats who couldn't fly higher. If they had the opportunity to remain static for a period, owners had the chance of additional certificates and so would continue to show. Their presence, it was reasoned, would also ensure a competitive edge for those up and coming.

This view was endorsed by others, but some put the opposite point that exhibitors could be deterred by finding classes blocked with cats who were gathering certificates at a certain level consistently. A big change had taken place not so long ago and this was a step back to a past era that many had worked hard to move away from.

The voting outcome of 61-46 was perhaps closer than expected given that more seemed in favour, but for a change to show rules a simple majority is sufficient and the Board will now draft new wording for show rules for its implantation, and return them to Council in June. What will it mean in practice? If your cat has achieved a title champion/premier/master, grand or imperial s/he can continue to gain certificates at that level by entering the appropriate class **OR** enter to aim for certificates for the next title. Thus the titled have an option. However, it is not a return to the days when such cats could enter for two certificates. The choice is one or the other, whether it depends on what certificate you think is achievable or your choice of judge.

JUDGE AND BREED NEWS

This is the 'bread and butter' information of a Council Meeting, but it's of special significance to those waiting to learn of appointments or breed news.

All judge appointments and promotions were approved, and that includes the final ones taken on the Monday before Council, after BAC meetings the previous weekend. Lynn Fryer, who became a Full Judge of Maine Coons, was the last under the bar. Congratulations!

The Egyptian Maus, Foreign Whites, Oriental SHs & LHs, Asians and British SHs all have revised registration policies. The British had already gone through Council in this form, but various versions had existed on the website and in the office, so the BSGC thought it best to produce a definitive version (V.1.7). Breeders will need to be sure this is the one they rely on for information. The Egyptian Mau BAC has included provision to import 'foundation' cats with consideration being given to future genetic diversity in the breed, and Oriental and Foreign White policies have notes added to allow the inclusion of the non-bicolour progeny of Oriental Bicolours.

The Asian Registration Policy has been completely revised with changed definitions, approved outcrosses, with the progression of progeny from these to become Asian, and the inclusion of a DNA testing scheme for hypokalaemic polymyopathy. However, it should be noted that as the application to show Asian Variants was withdrawn, the paragraph giving them Supplementary Registration was deleted and it is those specifying their Reference Registration that apply.

There was just one change to a Standard of Points at this Council. The BAC representative explained that the SOP for the Oriental Longhair had been amended in three respects. It now included EMS code as well as GCCF breed numbering, the wording for descriptions of caramel and apricot coloured cats had been standardised to conform with other Oriental SOPs and tabby classification with appropriate coding had been inserted.

NEW WEBSITE

Two volunteers had been working on the design of a new website since Christmas and this was given a brief presentation by Mrs Fisher. The clearer and cleaner front page with a lighter background seemed immediately appreciated, as was the focus on breeds. The 'breed hub', as it was described, formed the portal to access lots of different information about each of the breeds from information on appearance and temperament, through the standards and breeding and registration policies, to welfare and health issues. There was some discussion on the last, as there was feeling that currently this came across in a negative manner, rather than being positive about the screening and DNA testing carried out by responsible breeders. Mrs Fisher agreed it was a question of getting the balance right, and gave an assurance that nothing would be published without prior BAC/Club sign off. The intention was to consult them and this was the beginning of that process.

A TRIP ABROAD

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman had had an enjoyable weekend in Paris together a few days earlier. No, this is not the latest gossip! They were actually hosted by LOOF (the French registration body). It's akin to GCCF in some respects, registering about the same number of cats and catering for one country only, but in other ways is very different as it is an integral part of the French government's agricultural department. Most probably the two organisations can learn from each other - LOOF are interested in the management of the Supreme, and Helen and Steve found their breeder courses innovative, for example. There's also the possibility that in the future we could do business together, giving recognition of titles and perhaps introducing a further 'international' dimension to showing. It was stressed all is at the very preliminary stage of discussion at present, but it's exciting that there are new avenues to explore to the mutual benefit of both registries.

THE SUPREME

The bad news was that the show lost money again this year and there were fears for its future as its losses are a financial burden for GCCF. However, the good news is that the show management team is so keen to continue to provide a flagship show in a prestigious venue that they're prepared to work their socks off to do an overnight set up, rather than paying to have the hall on the Thursday ahead of the show. Matchsticks will be gratefully received to prop open those weary eyelids, and information will be given in advance if volunteer assistance is required. But in that very grandest of traditions: the show will go on.

GALA DINNER

This event will take place again in mid May at the Cambridge Belfry Hotel, a venue that proved popular. As well a chance to have some good food and fun it's planned that this year some awards will be presented. Watch the website to nominate and vote for a popular show, judge, steward, show management team, club and rescue, as well as for an outstanding contribution to the cat fancy. Something a little different to try.

EARLIER GOOD NEWS

Now to go right back to the beginning. After welcoming delegates the Chairman was able to give a quick update on the health of the GCCF President and one of its Vice Presidents. Christina Dugdale had been very poorly, but was now well on the road to recovery, and Grace Denny as holding her own undergoing hospital treatment. Both ladies had been sent good wishes from the Board and Council's thoughts were with them.

REPORTS

DRAFT ACCOUNTS

Of course, this is the major report to come before this Council meeting, and any delegates who have been regular attendants at Council since GCCF became a company three years ago will know how critical sound financial management became. This year was not as good as others. There wasn't a loss, but a break-even situation, and the reasons centred on the twin factors of income showing some decline while expenses rose.

Until the final month or so when the extent of Supreme losses (£9.5k), coupled with higher bank charges due to online activity, and depreciation was factored in, profits had seemed in line with what had been predicted, but, as was reported for the Supreme, efforts are already underway to mitigate those losses, and GCCF will not be facing in 2014 some of the one off events that occurred in 2013. In spite of these there was no overall loss and there were tight managerial controls in place to monitor day to day financial activity.

BUSINESS PLAN AND 2014 BUDGET

The Vice Chairman explained that the business plan, which had been on the website for the past month, was important as it was the document that governed how GCCF operated as a business. He noted the need to increase income, but gave assurance that there were no price increases planned. Instead there would be diversity in activity to expand profits through an increase in services offered. The economic background was a little improved this year though growth was still slow. However, GCCF was positioned to trade in the online retail sector that was one of the fastest growing areas of the economy generally. There could also be a move to customise and personalise services offered as there was demand for this.

He drew attention to the strategic objectives as these were central to the plan, although having been in place for five year would need revision in 2015. They highlighted necessary goals. There was a need for an increase in team effectiveness, IT development, staff development and retraining, and a marketing reappraisal as well as a continuation of the IC/DC system revision. It was planned to get some government assistance to assist with appraisal for improvement in managerial effectiveness and staff training.

However, he was pleased to note that during the risk assessment element of the plan there had been no need for red to be flagged in any respect, and he considered the financial risk to be greatly reduced, though work was needed to increase turnover. Amber remained in some IT and technical areas, as much rested on the abilities and knowledge a few people, and for staff development. He believed both would be addressed in the coming year.

BREEDER SCHEME

This had proved to be one of the successes of 2013 with a greater than anticipated take up. There were 170 BS members, enough people to make it worthwhile publicising the scheme to the general public, both to inform and assist in educating them. Subscriptions were coming up for renewal and it was hoped to attract the majority of members back as well as incentivising new ones in the future via discounts and/or rewards. It was noted 'Your Cat' was supportive with a feature included in March, and this would be followed by planned advertising. The aim was to embed the message of the scheme's existence with kitten buyers, and every opportunity had to be taken to work with the Kennel Club and others to promote it by bringing it to the attention of the general public.

IT REFRESH PROJECT

Mrs Rainbow-Ockwell said the really good news to report was just how readily many people had taken to the online services. There were now over 5000 registered users. The office staff had adapted to working with it, and were now able to answer most queries, only occasionally having to seek technical support. She had hoped to be able to announce two new releases were ready by the Council meeting, but adjustments were still being made to the Household Pet Registration Scheme and Breeder Pedigrees for purchase. They would be available in the next week or so and an announcement would appear on the website. Breeder Pedigrees would be similar to those generated by software programs and would be able to be customised with logos and pictures. They would be an optional extra for those who wanted them, with reductions for multiple purchase, and would be able to be generated for each kitten once the registration process was complete.

In June and July there would be some new features to existing services and that would finalise phase one of the refresh scheme. As much as could be done using the existing computer system would have been completed. Then the major change would have to be made of replacing that completely and bringing GCCF into 21st century. Sally warned this would be the expensive phase and people wouldn't initially be aware of what was happening, but it was the driving force behind the scenes. The business would not be able to develop further without the functionality it would provide. At present planning was at the scoping and design stage so that an initial report could be made to the Board in March.

In the final section of her presentation Sally was able to report that the problems encountered with

introducing EMS had been solved and that it was now suitable for GCCF purposes, while remaining compatible with FIFe. Tabby pattern distinction and high white could both be used at BAC request. Problems with designating variants eligible to be shown had been solved with the introduction of a show code to go alongside the breed code on registration certificates, though the breed code only would appear on pedigrees. The Board had agreed that EMS would be used for show paperwork from June 1st, though some show managers expressed concern that exhibitors would be resistant, and trepidation that they would be faced with a lot more work. It was acknowledged there would have to be period of education, and the office would have to be forgiving of mistakes occurring through a transition phase.

DISCIPLINARY REVIEW

A brief synopsis of what had been planned so far was given by Mrs Chapman-Beer, Chairman of the Working Group. Additional fixed penalties were planned and a list had been prepared to present to the Board. It was the intention to introduce an arbitration system (operated electronically, so no expensive meetings) to resolve disputes and so avoid cases coming into the IC/DC system. A panel would consist of three people, but these would be drawn from a larger pool of suitably skilled people recruited not only from delegates. It was the intention that the Judges' Panel would remain. Proposals would be put to the Board in April, but the subject of health and welfare had yet to be tackled and recommendations made for this. Maria and the group were thanked for their efforts.

FELINE AND CANINE SECTOR GROUP (DEFRA)

Steve Crow said that the group had now established itself under a respected chairman (Prof Steve Dean, also Chair of the Kennel Club) and was actively feeding information into government that could have an impact on future legislation. He commented a few times during the meeting that the UK government was not bothered with cats, but said it could well be in breeders' own interests to follow what was being legislated for in dogs. For example, microchipping would not become compulsory as was planned for dogs, but could prove of great benefit to establish identity compatible with medical records if punitive action should happen in the event of a rabies scare. He was thanked for his work with the FCSG and it was observed by delegates that it was useful to gain the knowledge provided by the organisation and satisfying to have some influence.

RULES AND BYELAWS

There were several rule changes and one byelaw amendment yesterday. For breeders and exhibitors they are not going to mean significant change in the immediate future, and perhaps only those showing Somalis Shorthairs will think they're worth much of mention. What most had in common was that they regularised and confirmed as legitimate what is actually already happening in practice, a sort of catch up exercise.

BYELAW 8

This one is to do with the number of years the GCCF Chairman and Vice-Chairman are in office. For decades the officers have had to put themselves forward for election each June, but have been allowed to stand for three consecutive years. In practice, each Chairman has always been re-elected for the full term, though there was one change of Vice-Chairman in the not too distant past.

The subject was presented for a discussion topic at the June Council Meeting, and raised some questions about procedure that were addressed this time in a lengthier rationale. Mr Scruton, presenting the change on behalf of the Central Longhair Cat Club, reiterated the purpose was guarantee to stability as the GCCF had moved from governing body to public company. An additional clause ensured those that served as officers could return to Council for one year upon completion of their term without having to be a delegate of a member club.

The change was approved by a large majority, as were the RULE CHANGES.

Section 1: 10e) 11b) 11f) Section 4:8a

These amendments all concerned the operation of joint ownership by anyone of the owners. One signature will do, as has been the practice since the concept was approved in Council on 22nd February 2012. There was a query concerning what happened in the case a dispute between the owners, and the response was that was for them to sort out, taking legal advice if necessary. Delegates were mildly amused by the thought of the office having to offer marriage guidance type counselling, or arbitrating in civil disputes, though the Office Manager said this was not infrequently requested.

Section 1:18 and Section 4:1

The rules were brought up to date in respect of what was already happening when BACs put their variants forward to be shown, as was permitted by the Variant Policy (October 2011). Changes to the registration policy were required to remove them from the Reference Register to the Supplementary to enable them to be shown and BACs had to take responsibility for that. It was noted that had already been done in respect of the variant Exotic LH and Oriental cats currently shown in existing breed classes according to phenotype. Cats already registered would not have their registration changed, but would be accepted as having moved register in exactly the same way as the move to the Experimental Register is acknowledged when a breed gains preliminary recognition.

Section 1:22-34 (23-29 unchanged)

These changes treated coat length in the same way as colour and pattern when recognition was sought for existing breeds, making it distinct from hair type. It made it a swifter process to take those of an existing breed with this attribute from preliminary recognition to championship status. Rejoice Somali Shorthairs, and possibly British Longhairs and any others of this ilk who may be waiting in the wings.

Section 2: 7j) 14e) 15d) Section 4:8a

These all clarified that the Household pet title equivalent to Champion and Premier is Master and not Mastercat, by separating the words where they had been combined. Coventry and Leicester CC's title was also integrated into the rules. It had already been approved in recognition of the club's role in developing the HHP title award scheme.

Section 4: 1d) & 4:16 & 4:18

A note was added to say these rules did not apply to cats on exhibition who are not being judged with reference to their SOP. This regularised 'fun' classes, recognising that they have been traditionally offered, particularly at smaller shows.

Section 4:3

This was perhaps the most far reaching change as it enabled online entry to shows to be offered by all clubs. The Office Manager gave assurance that legal advice was that acceptance of terms and conditions by checking a box was as valid as a signature. Clubs would have the same link to an address provided and method of payment as they did with paper entry, and fraudulent information invalidated the entry in exactly the same way. There would be no compulsion to operate an online entry system. It would be entirely up to clubs, and scanned entry forms could continue to be taken, though advice was that in that case the paper copy should be collected as well.

DISPENSATION FROM THE 13 DAY RULE

This was asked for in respect of events such as the London Pet Show, the National Pet Show and the Pet Show (Stoneleigh). The Veterinary Officers had concluded that risk of infection was low in the case of a household bringing a different cat on consecutive days. However, the argument was put forward that granting dispensation opened the door to those who would argue the 13 day rule should be disposed of altogether, and the majority of delegates did not want to take this risk. The vote showed 39 in favour, 52 against and 9 abstaining.

Final thought: **If you breed please encourage transfers, either include the price in the cost of the kitten and do them yourself, or push the new owners to make the effort.** It's a core service that has plenty of room for expansion, and income generated by this procedure can go to provide additional services for all in future.