

ELECTORAL MEETING OF JUNE COUNCIL 2016

The skies were rather grey and gloomy for June and perhaps reflected the mood at the beginning of this Council meeting. It was sad at the beginning of the meeting that so many were on the list for remembrance. It seems to have been a time of passing since February, and many were well known beyond their own breed or judging sphere for the contribution they had given to GCCF over many years.

I'm thinking here, of course, as I expect many will do so, of GCCF's Vice President Anne Gregory. She was well respected as an all breed judge and had given many years of service to a number of clubs and BACs, but her achievements for YES, and in promoting GCCF and cats to the public through the Pet Shows, were above and beyond outstanding.

Many of the names of all those remembered are on the Tributes page of the GCCF website, but as it happened there was one loss that had not been recorded. At the break the Chairman gave news to Council that he had only just received, that Nancy Rolls, a Siamese judge, had passed away in March this year.

However, our President, Grace Denny was well and had sent good wishes for a successful meeting. I noted her name was on the list of judges for the new breed at preliminary level, the Toygers, so she's definitely keeping herself up to date and intending to be out and about at shows. Vice Presidents, Gordon Butler, Eric Wickham-Ruffle and Brenda Wolstenholme had also been in touch to send apologies and greetings.

And so 108 delegates began another Electoral meeting. The results of the voting for the Board and committees make a good place to start. However, so as not to keep anyone on edge, it's best said straight off that if you're scanning this report for news of any major changes you'll be disappointed. Those who like things just as they are can settle back comfortably.

Board of Directors

These are mostly old friends, but some new faces have joined the Board.

Gillian Bennett 68, Doreen Goadby 63, Thomas Goss 63, Shelagh Heavens 62, Jen Lacey 62, Helen Marriott-Power 61, Lynda Ashmore 60, Catherine Kaye 53, Heather McRae 52, Rosemary Fisher 51, Pat Perkins 50, Valerie Anderson 50, Lisa Talboys 50, Sally Rainbow-Ockwell 46, John Robinson 46.

The reserves are Sean Farrell 44, Sandra Woodley 39.

Finance Committee

Little difference here either.

Maria Chapman-Bear 85, Shelagh Heavens 66, Thomas Goss 65, Rosemary Fisher 65, Doreen Goadby 64. Reserve: Helen Marriott-Power 61.

The new system of electing applicants on a rolling change meant that only two needed to be appointed to the Investigations and Disciplinary committees. That was fortunate as there were few applicants for these important positions.

Investigations Committee: John Harrison (79) and Jen Lacey (69) were elected to IC for a three year term

Disciplinary Committee: Maria Bryant (51) and Barbara Prowse (50) were elected to DC for a three-year term

Stephen McConnell and Clive Wicks are reserves for these committees, but it has to be agreed who will substitute on which.

Elections to the Appeals Committee will take place in October as agreed last year, and once again it will be only two (plus reserves) that are needed, as those on the IC/DC committees now serve for a longer time. It certainly seemed to make the electoral process less drawn out, or maybe that was due in part to the efficient team up from Bridgwater who were in the back room doing the counting. They were certainly very busy at times.

SHOW INFORMATION

The Supreme Show

There was plenty of news to be shared on this major feature of the GCCF's calendar. In the Show Manager's absence Chris Wood was able to report positive information on how preparations were going for the 40th Show. Advance ticket sales and trade stand bookings were up on the same point in the previous year, and a new hall layout had been designed to separate out cats from the 'market-place' area.

Now for something completely different! At last negotiations with 10th Planet had come to fruition and some sci-fi celebrity actors were confirmed as visiting in character. Colin Baker (former Dr Who) was probably the most well known, but also Paul Darrow and Michael Keating of Blakes 7, and Peter Purves (Dr Who companion, and of Blue Peter fame) and John Leason (voice of K9). There could be others, but those coming, as well being present for their fans, were also prepared to do some HHP and Best-Dressed Pen judging. Most importantly, perhaps, they, and their promotion company, would be giving news of their attendance via social media and this would spread word of the Supreme as an event to a wider audience.

The Chairman said the cost would be £5000, but this would come from the GCCF marketing budget, rather than the Supreme account. It was a shot at publicising GCCF and our cats to a new audience, and there was no way of knowing how successful it would be until tried. Time and the gate will tell, but there's certainly going to be a window open on a rather different world, and that in itself gives a certain frisson of excitement.

NB A new manager is being sought for the Supreme Show as this will be Celia's last year. Those interested should go to the GCCF website.

There was vigorous applause to thank Celia for all her efforts as Supreme SM over the years.

Rule change proposals from the Show Structure Review Group and Veterinary Advisory Committee

Talking of excitement, the hubbub of today was generated around the proposed show changes. The proposals were introduced calmly enough by Chairman of the Show Review Group, Catherine Kaye, going through some of the reasons why change could be a positive force, and it was something GCCF shows had been largely untouched by over the past forty or so years. However, once points came in from the floor people had concerns about how their own breed would be affected by altering the sections, which was very understandable, and mixed into this were remarks on how it could all be done differently, judging eligibility, and the future training of judges, all with a good dash of repetition and people discussing things with each other at the same time, so that it became very difficult to follow. As one delegate remarked, 'when it comes to cats we're all passionate'. However, the concern that change would discourage exhibitors, was perhaps the one that emerged most clearly and explains the outcome.

The result of the vote was that the first proposal was lost. There will be no change to the sections in the form that it was proposed on the day, though there was some indication that the Board could go away and try again. Also there was failure on the second change that allowed titled cats to have a choice of classes. The other five changes were approved.

I think the most interesting are around the intention to enhance the Best of Variety and Best In Show Awards. Those who win OVERALL BIS will achieve an additional certificate, and rule changes should ensure show management provides greater clarity on how the selection for the awards is made and clearly published results. Those aiming for Olympian will also be better informed of just how their cat is doing as the classes will be placed to 5th position.

Other rules changes that exhibitors should familiarise themselves with are the need to clip claws as they will be sent away from vetting-in to do it, if necessary. Also to understand that cats will be withdrawn and possibly excluded from being shown for a time if they display extremely threatening behaviour that indicates biting or deliberate scratching could happen, as well as for carrying out those actions.

To prevent over-handling there will be a limit of six classes at back-to back shows, which for titled cats includes the BOB entry. Also exhibitors should not enter a breed in the pedigree pet section that is accepted by other organisations, but not a pedigree breed recognised by GCCF. It could be rejected at vetting-in or not judged in its certificate class. The intention is that breeds based upon physical anomalies or species outcrosses do not inadvertently turn up on the show bench when there is little chance that they would ever be recognised GCCF breeds.

There was no actual start date for the new rules. Some preparation will have to be made for wording to be inserted into schedules for some of them, so it's something the Board will have to discuss at its next meeting. This will give a chance for them to be more fully publicised as although it was day of no big changes, as I said, there were certainly plenty of medium and small ones as far as show rules were concerned!

To cover everything, I should also say that one delegate made an issue of not being able to have the extra breeds requested on her club's show licence. It was explained that this was a Board rather than a Council matter, and the delegate of a small breed club added that her club's numbers would probably be reduced as a consequence. However, it was reiterated as a grievance that a right to speak on the matter at Council had been denied.

The Chairman pointed out that if clubs would like this to happen a Byelaw change would be required to remove the decision making process on licences from the Board to Council. I'm aware of how difficult it is to cater for what clubs need, given that geographical area, impact on other clubs, and many date and venue changes have to be considered alongside whether enough judges would be available on any given day, so I think a session of Council to deal with licences would last at least three days, and possibly end in tears if not torn hair, but it's up to a club to make a positive case and get it put to the vote. On the bottom line all matters can come to Council, but there are varying routes of procedure with some that can't be short cut.

BREED NEWS

The Toyger gained preliminary recognition and owners can now enjoy competitive showing and be aiming to collect the merit certificates. They join the ever-expanding Foreign Section. (No prizes for guessing where my sympathies lie on the need for change, but the question is how to make those who would gain competition rather than have it reduced agree).

Thai Lilac Points join the Blue Points and Lilacs in the Thai classes and the Thai SOP and registration policies were revised to include them. I suppose the only surprise about this is that they have been so long in making a debut. I saw Blue-Points when I collected my first Korat kitten in 1978 and the first Thai Lilac in the UK was born in a litter I had in 1989, so it has taken a long, long time in breed terms for the two to be combined, but when it happened those on exhibition certainly attracted attention.

There is a revised registration policy for Bengals that includes a new genetic testing regime, and amendments to the Tonkinese policy that clarifies the use of the registers for progression after the use of a Siamese or Burmese outcross. The Suffolk SOP was returned to Council with the changes made that were requested in February, plus some additional minor amendments.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

With all of the registration policy and SOP changes being approved unanimously breed specific matters of this type were mentioned in the discussion of using the website for publication with acceptance if no objection is lodged, and as it happened notice was given of intention to do this in respect of minor changes to the policies of the breeds represented by the Joint Rex BAC.

Another example given was small rule changes that altered a specific detail. There seemed general acceptance that there should be provision for this to happen, with the proviso that if any change was considered too detailed, and so merited discussion, that would count as a reason for the matter to be brought to Council as well as an objection to the actual content.

The suggestion put forward in the other discussion item reducing the number of members a club required to ensure delegate representation also found favour, with 40 for a breed club and 80 for an all-breed club put forward for Board consideration.

CLUB NEWS

However, as it happened just eight clubs needed dispensation to retain their delegate this time, and there was some thought that clubs should be attempting to attract new membership. In addition seven clubs had not completed returns, but had given valid reasons and so their delegates were permitted to stay.

One new club was welcomed to full membership: the Household Cat Club of Great Britain. This has been classed as Specialist Club and so will not be eligible for any BAC membership, but can make an application for a show licence.

A byelaw change that will affect all clubs is that the treasurer will have to make a note in the annual returns to state when, and in what form, the club and show accounts will be available to club membership. This should ensure that clubs are following their own rules in this respect, and that information is available if club members prefer to make an enquiry to the GCCF Office should a response not be available from the club.

Byelaw 11 (6) gives the Appeals Committee the power to act as Arbitrator in disputes between individuals and/or organisations within GCCF. Its decision is final and binding upon all parties concerned. That has been a right that has existed for a very long time and remains unchanged, thankfully. Therefore I found it extremely disappointing that changes to establish a formal procedure for an individual if s/he so wished to access Appeals if excluded from a club or show, and to give Appeals the right to fix a term of exclusion, did not have sufficient support.

REPORTS

THE CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

After thanking the Board, the volunteers on various committees and working groups and the staff in the GCCF Office at Bridgwater, Steve Crow concentrated mainly on welfare, one of his particular areas of expertise, and on giving news of the World Cat Congress in Bangkok in April, and finished with a few quick updates on business generally.

There will be no specialised Cat Welfare Bill in the foreseeable future. The peer who introduced it in the last session of parliament has no access to parliamentary time in this one. The Sale of Cats Group of the Canine and Feline Sector Group had produced a report that had been finalised, approved by the C&FSG and sent on to DEFRA. As a member of this he had ensured there was no adverse comment on any particular breed, or that any matter relating only to pedigree breeding was singled out.

However, of more concern was the fact that neither GCCF, nor any other registry was invited to give evidence to the Parliamentary Select Committee charged with updating the Animal Welfare Act. They had heard from the Cats Protection, who were concerned with the control of sales of kittens, and therefore also of breeders, and ICC which was able to give

some information on the nature of cats, but who had no specialist knowledge of breeding. Steve informed delegates that Dr Moreland, the GCCF's Veterinary Officer (and a breeder), had made a response on GCCF's behalf. The good news was that it had been very well received and so would be accepted as evidence and published. It will be on the GCCF website shortly, if it's not there already.

The Chairman described how he had an opportunity at WCC to discuss with TICA the conflict of dates of some TICA shows with those of GCCF and GCCFI in Ireland. It was an object of the WCC that members should co-operate rather than in be in competition so he was able to point out this objective and extract a promise that action would be taken. As well as the Congress itself there had been a show of 130 cats, won by a beautiful white Exotic, a seminar in which Prof Leslie Lyons gave the latest feline genetic updates and various site-seeing trips.

The single item of genetic news that stood out for me was the one that wasn't there. The I (silver) gene continues to be elusive, and there is some thinking now that it's perhaps not a single gene involved, but polygenic factors that inhibit pigment in hair. So the one we've all been waiting for is a no-show once again.

Next year there will be the WCC event held in Las Vegas, and a Royal Canin Breeders Congress in June in Montpelier that will take delegates at RC's expense, but welcomes participation from other breeders. However, the one date to note for the future is 2021. That will be 150th anniversary of the first cat show as we know them, held at Crystal Palace in London in the summer of 1871. GCCF has been invited to host WCC that year and make a special event of the occasion. We have time to save for cost, prepare ideas and mobilise publicity so plenty to aim for.

The one new item of business information was that there had been successful negotiations with GCCFI, so that a heads of agreement had been signed, and preparations could begin to take over providing a registration service for GCCFI. It was emphasised that this was not a take over, nor any form of combining the registries. GCCF would provide a service and earn from it. Reassurance was given that it would not be affected any change in the UK relationship with the EU.

The Business Plan, as on the website, was ratified after questions on international links. Mrs Rainbow-Rockwell confirmed that it remained the intention to look for other registries abroad to work with, and it was hoped that if everything went well with GCCFI it would provide a model for the future.

PROJECT PHOENIX REPORT

Hallelujah, praise Bastet (or whatever your chosen expression of immense appreciation is) the end is in sight as Phoenix will rise on weekend of 16 & 17 July. The first effect this will have on us that use it though is that there will be no online registration and transfer service for the following week as the Office changeover happens. That will not affect the website in any way, and from 25 July we all should be able to see what we have been waiting for.

Completion had been hampered in the early part of this year by the computer company's staff problems. It was noted just how grateful GCCF should be to those who had volunteered a huge amount of expertise and time at a fraction of the professional cost for their services.

Mrs Rainbow-Ockwell observed in conclusion that going live was not the end of the project. There were a number of tasks the new system could do, as well as new ones that would be added as it developed in the future. So we have a new beginning here rather than an end.

FIRST BONUS FROM PHOENIX - 4 additional letters

Sally had asked for an extra item to be added to the agenda alongside the Phoenix report. The system was flexible enough to cater for registered names that were longer than the 26 letters, symbols and spaces that were the current limit. She proposed a change to 30 as this was the amount allowed for in the names of imports and so it was known show certificate writers could cope. This was unanimously approved.

And NEW CERTIFICATES

Samples of these had been brought to Council and taken to shows and now the new designs were ready to go out to all. The format of the certificates dovetailed nicely with the additional length names could have, as there was more space to insert the exhibit's name with any titles, and without the need to run into a large coloured bar that didn't take ink particularly well. I'm sure table workers doing the scribing will have an easier time.

AGRIA news

The Chairman didn't have a lot of new information to give on this particular partnership. It was four years since the contract linking the two companies had been signed, and, as was noted in the financial report, GCCF had earned over £43,000 in 2015 and he commented that commission continued to come in at approximately the same rate in 2016. There was some concern about the loss of this lucrative business relationship, but the Chairman took a fairly robust view, He reminded delegates that Agria were partners and would also be benefitting. There was no reason why concerns GCCF breeders and owners had about policies, in terms of cost and cover, should not be addressed and these were discussed at the regular meetings that took place.

ROYAL CANIN TRANSFER INCENTIVE

The percentage of transfers continued to grow, but the class for Junior Owners was the news item here. RC were prepared to sponsor three classes at a show for cats in the registered ownership of, and shown by, those who were 16 and under. There would cash prizes and awards, but not rosettes on the day. Show managers who put on the classes would have to decide on whether to give a card or rosette. The three classes would be 'pedigree cat', 'pedigree pet cat' and 'household pet cat', but all would be judged by pet section criteria - temperament, presentation and condition. RC recognised there would only be a slow start, but were willing to give it a try. It was hoped show managers who were interested would be in touch.

CAT WELFARE TRUST

Rosemary Fisher had some very positive news. The genetic study on behalf of the Russian BAC had been completed and there were results. It was encouraging that UK GCCF Russians, a breed that makes little to no use of its outcross, had been found to have genetic diversity that was commensurate with Siberians and Norwegian Forest Cats world wide. (These were the two groups that were closest to the diversity found in random-bred (household) cats). There was apparently much more information to come from the report, some of it thought to be unexpected, so publication is keenly awaited by those interested in this field. For now it suffices to show what can be done with BAC and charity co-operation and may well provide a pattern for other breeds who want the information and advice of experts in this particular field.

Unfortunately, the news of the major study the CWT was currently supporting was not so good. It was hoped that genetic study would be able to provide more information on feline immunity, and perhaps lead to knowledge that would help prevent FIP in the future. However, finding new information based on what had already been learned from other breeds had not proved successful. Also different researchers were not obtaining the same results in some areas, which was a complication, and (human) ill health had caused delays. So there were no breakthroughs to report at present.

As always Rosemary reminded delegates that with the CWT every penny donated went to welfare. It was a charity without expenses and well deserving of support.

FINANCE

I'm not quite sure why I leave this until last. Figures don't frighten me particularly, but neither do I find them terribly exciting either, give me the printed word over symbols any day. However, I can give assurance that I'm not burying bad news. In fact the opposite, we can sit back and feel a warm glow of satisfaction.

Laura Green, a partner in O'Hara Wood, presented our accounts after the sad loss of Adrian Wood, who had come to so many Councils and seen us approaching the edge of insolvency. Those dark days are shadows of the past, which we mustn't forget, but we're on safer ground now. Laura was actually enthusiastic. We'd made £12,000 more in profits than in the previous year, an excellent position for a not for profit company. The reserves (which include the club loans) had risen by just over £30,000.

Delegates had some questions, on the nature of the miscellaneous income (printing and breeder scheme mostly), whether the hall expenses for the Supreme this year were in the accounts of 2015 (no) and on capital costs and depreciation, but the purpose was for clarification rather than to express concern. There was almost unanimous approval that the accounts should now be sent on to Companies House, just the one abstention. The overall conclusion was that GCCF is in a strong position, ready to repay the loans, and with a good reserve should there be a downturn to weather.

That strikes me as a good note on which to conclude this report. Jen Lacey 16.6.2016