

## THE GENERAL MEETING OF GCCF COUNCIL, OCTOBER 2016

It was a bright cheerful morning when delegates gathered once again at the Conway Hall, a little earlier in the month than usual, to avoid being too close to the Supreme, but it was difficult to know if this made a difference to delegate numbers. It may have been a meeting that wasn't well attended, but possibly that delegates were seated more widely spaced around the room. The official tally of signatures will be in the minutes. For now it can be observed that the queue to reach the midway refreshments never seems to be a lot shorter.

Of course, one of the first things we did was remember the loss of our President, Grace Denny, that indomitable lady who was still judging for some months after her 100th birthday, to the point of her final illness. Sadly there were seven other GCCF stalwarts who had also passed on since June, all recalled in the moment of silence; so many have been lost this year.

### **REPORTS**

One of these was a key item of the afternoon, but others weren't particularly lengthy or detailed this time. In fact the Chairman began his by announcing he hadn't got anything to say that wasn't going to be covered by agenda items, which perhaps was a first.

#### Chairman

However, he did go on to tell the meeting that it was possible he would represent GCCF at a meeting at Westminster with the minister (DEFRA) to discuss the advertising of kittens for sale on internet sites. Cats Protection and International Cat Care were attending and asked that Steve should also be there, but the formal invitation had not yet been received.

A delegate queried whether BREXIT would make a difference to GCCF's business. The Chairman replied that it had been discussed within the Canine and Feline Sector Group, but it would be a matter of meeting change when plans were announced. It was highly unlikely that any revision in the regulations around travel for pets would be a priority, and there had been absolutely no mention of a return to the quarantine system. The one certainty was that if the European Parliament progressed with plans to ban certain breeds of cat or dog for any reason, we would not be subject to any such legislation. We only had to be concerned with what our own politicians were planning, and their focus was firmly fixed elsewhere for the foreseeable future.

#### Finance

The usual pages of figures and graphs weren't available for this meeting, so this was another report that was far shorter than usual. The Office Manager, Mark Goadby, apologised to delegates for the lack of detail, but he had not yet been able to extract the information from the new system in presentational form. The priorities in the Office had been ensuring the registration and transfer processes were working properly, and that the Supreme entries and paperwork were dealt with. The additional pressures caused by the system changeover and staff holidays were now beginning to ease, and he was sure he would be in a position to put together the paperwork and statistics for the end of the year financial report as usual.

It was good to learn that in Mark's opinion, based on the amount of work the staff were dealing with, and the cash flow at the bank, business was at least as good over the summer months in 2016 as in the same period last year. It was possible there was a slight increase. There had been some large purchases of office equipment to support the business, and this, together with additional support for computer development, had been paid for without drawing on the reserves. £175,000 was held on deposit, and it was from one these accounts that the club loans would be paid in the spring of next year.

### Partnerships

Delegates were told the relationship with Agria had been a little fraught during the period when they could not access the computer to draw the information required for their business, but now the link was re-established and working smoothly it was returning to normal. The Agria team was keen to discover why around 50% of breeders did not issue any free cover note with their kittens, neither through Agria nor Pet Plan, as it didn't seem to make sense to pass up on the offer. Therefore there would be a simple survey sent out to breeders shortly to try and gain some insight. GCCF breeders should watch for it arriving, and then complete and return it, as it was brief and to the point so would take very little time.

There had been very little change in the business dealings with Royal Canin. Some issues remained with the redemption of the vouchers and this was always stressed in the quarterly meetings held with them. Mark believed that the growth in transfers brought by the incentive had now plateaued, but he didn't think it was falling away. RC remained the biggest sponsor of the Supreme and had been particularly helpful in assisting with advertising. Their initiative to get advertising onto trains over the next two weeks would bring the event to the attention of around 2 million people. They were also encouraging gently the Junior Classes to get youngsters interested in shows, and, as the Show Manager of the GCCF pet shows at the National Pet Shows reminded Council, they sponsored these which enabled them to take place and bring GCCF shows to attention of the public at these prestigious events.

### Website

Mrs Fisher said once the computer system change was complete there had had been no issues with the website. She believed it to be functioning satisfactorily as there had been no complaints. The latest breed to be added was the Toyger. There were some new items of general interest and the next project was to upload pages of information produced by the Genetics Committee.

### Project Phoenix

This was the report that was the feature of the afternoon and the one that provoked the most questions and discussion. Mrs Rainbow-Ockwell, project manager, said as the system was now live she wanted to include the good news, the bad, the progress she expected in the immediate future and plans for longer term development. She would begin with the worst that can be summarised as 'computer project - think project time and budget overrunning'. Unfortunately, this one had not proved to be the exception.

She could attribute much of the extra cost and weeks needed to the failures of the computer development company. It had not fulfilled its contractual obligations after the end of March, as it had run out of the time costed and allocated to GCCF on the fixed term contract, mutually agreed. It had also given only partial support to bug fixing after the launch. For both there was a clear breach of contract, but taking legal action was expensive and it was doubtful the small company would have the resources to pay damages and costs. Its bankruptcy would not assist GCCF. The reason it was in this position, which had caused difficulties for GCCF was an initial under-estimation of the complexity of the old system and its functions. This was not entirely their fault as it had been a difficult analysis to make in the absence of meaningful records.

After the failure of the partnership there had been help in finding a programmer, but GCCF had to pay for his time and work. On the plus side Leon had proved invaluable. He understood Phoenix and was committed to getting it operating smoothly. The decision had been taken to secure him on a full time contract to the end of November to get the final procedures (IC/DC and prefixes) onto the new system, and deal with problems that were highlighted through operational use.

The other major asset GCCF had was Ian Macro. He had given much of his free time to Phoenix and all involved were absolutely sure that the new system just wouldn't be functioning without all the time and expertise he had so generously given. Delegates asked about some way of thanking him for this, as well as some payment, and were assured this would be done. Mark explained that one job Ian had taken on was the transfer of data from the old to the new system. In the past people and cats had not had a single definite link. 45,000 users where Ian was 90% sure of the accuracy of their details had been transferred. However 137,000 remained outstanding as there was not this level of certainty that they existed as clear separate entities. The new system matched people and cats and in future would offer enhanced services to them.

In addition to system support, to ensure services were delivered (and registrations were now being sent out on a daily basis) two other issues were currently under discussion. Expertise would have to be bought in for the future to provide both maintenance and development. Also possible enhancements were being listed and batched to present to the Board for priority to be determined within the constriction of future budget planning. In response to a delegate query Sally confirmed show services were high on the list. There was also commitment to online services for GCCFI early in 2017.

Most of the questions centred on cost and the assurance of performance. On cost the original total was given as £90,000. In addition £30,00 allocated in the 2016 budget had been spent and a further £30,000 had been required to secure Leon's services. For comparison it had been established that the original computer costs had been £50,000, and some expert opinion passed was that £150,000 spent GCCF had a system that would have cost around £250,000 at a full commercial price. In recent weeks the old system was showing signs of failure, so there was an absolute certainty that a replacement had been a necessity.

Already the new system had handled 8,000-9,000 registrations, and most were going through without problems. There were several complaints voiced of long delays (six weeks) and lack of Office response. Both Sally and Mark gave apologies to those who had experienced particular problems and lengthy waits, but were confident that they should be a thing of past.

At the end of the report two commitments were given. There was a promise of a full project report to be presented at the next Council meeting with all facts and figures included, and a commitment to respond to enquiries.

It should be noted that In the first place the GGCF info email address should be used for all online problems. Mark gave assurance that was checked every day and all queries would be dealt with. If it failed users were urged not to fume over it, venting on social media, but use Sally's personal address to shout for help.

NOTE:

<[info@gccfcats.org](mailto:info@gccfcats.org)> and Sally Rainbow-Ockwell <[sally@aspirata.com](mailto:sally@aspirata.com)>

Pass these on to anyone in need.

### **BREEDER & EXHIBITOR NOTES**

#### Breed News

The Joint Rex BAC outlined details of changes to four registration policies in June, (Cornish, Devon, & Selkirk Rex and LaPerm). It was expected that they would go to the Board in July, return to the BAC for any necessary correction and revisions then be published on the GCCF website. It went to plan until the final step. They were dispatched for the website just as Phoenix was centre stage with every bit of attention on it with the outcome of no website publication and the need for a return to Council.

However at long last approval has been obtained. If you are a breeder of one of these breeds and unaware of the changes then do go to the Council area of the website and read the policies. There is a new DNA testing requirement in the Devon policy, which is perhaps the major change, and all have some minor revision of testing regimes, and registration requirements for generations after any outcross. Two additional breeds feature in the list of suitable outcrosses.

Maine Coon breeders and exhibitors have a very small change to their SOP. The description of the coat as 'virtually self maintaining' has gone as it was misleading novice owners and exhibitors into thinking they didn't have to groom Maine Coons, and was meaningless for judging purposes anyway.

Website publication for minor changes to registration policies and SOPs has been discussed in at least two previous Council meetings, and permission was given to some BACs to allow for it as with the Joint Rex. At this meeting it was confirmed by a rule change that this was acceptable. There will be postings on the website in the same way judges are put up for approval. If a delegate objects, and a legitimate objection will be that a revision is too complex to go through on the nod, then the policy or SOP will have to come to Council for approval. The bottom line is that Council is where discussion on these matters is taken if questions are raised.

#### **REGISTRATION POLICIES - BOARD PROPOSALS**

This rule change that went through after some discussion is something of a procedural shift. When the BACs were formed each was given the sole responsibility for the presentation to Council of a registration policy for their breed and subsequent changes to it.

Since then, during the 21st century, there have been some major changes in scientific knowledge, particularly from genetic and behavioural studies, and marked shifts in public attitude to welfare issues in the breeding of pedigree animals brought about by media focus. There are times that BACs fail to function and are unable or unwilling to react to new information.

If such exceptional circumstances exist the Board can now present expert evidence to Council on welfare matters and propose registration policy changes that take action on it. The BACs retain the right to be informed, and present evidence of their own if they have it. Council remains the forum for discussion and the decision is made with a vote taken in the usual way.

It is expected that such action will be very rare, but hoped that GCCF will not find itself in the situation where it Council is unable to take action to deal with a serious health and/or welfare problems if the need should arise. This will be reassuring to individuals and organisations who have been supportive to pedigree breeders, such as Prof Tim Gruffydd-Jones, who don't want us to be in a situation similar to that the Kennel Club found itself in a few years ago.

### Club News

The Kernow and Croydon were given dispensation at the beginning of the meeting to retain delegate representation although they did not have the required number of members. Later the Chairman informed Council that the Board had discussed changing the number requirement, but if dispensation was always to be granted if there were no exceptional circumstances, then the actual numbers required were not relevant. Council agreed, so this issue will not be pursued further at present.

### BACs and the Breeder Scheme.

There were three small changes to the Judge Appointment Procedure. The first gave greater flexibility to clubs in their choice of representative, ensuring that experienced people who were no longer actively involved in breeding, judging or exhibiting could be considered. The second added reference to the Board being able to make proposal on registration policies in exceptional circumstances, as agreed, and the final note reminded any candidate excluded from the only breed club that a right of appeal and procedure for it existed.

This last was also included in the Breeder Scheme Code of Ethics together with a reminder for the necessity of maintaining membership of a relevant breed club whilst a member of the scheme.

## **SHOW MATTERS**

### The Supreme show

Chris Wood gave a total of 773 cats attending. These included 9 on exhibition and about 60 on Club Row. It would have been good to have more, but otherwise the news was very positive. All the stall positions were booked and if any had to pull out there were some waiting to know if a slot became available. This year there will be a special marketplace area, so if cat shopping is your thing this should be an absolute delight. Also, advance ticket sales were markedly higher than at the same point in 2016.

This could be because of the sci-fi side of the event. Steve commented that fans of the 5 actors and Dr Who creations (a dalek and K9) relished opportunities to meet them. It was true that sci-fi and cats seemed a way apart, but if the gate was substantially increased and it drew people to look at the exhibits who would never have come otherwise then it was successful. It was an experiment to promote GCCF to a wider audience and was to be hoped that there would be positive benefit. The celebrities were involved in the show by doing some judging and/or giving special individual prizes.

It was confirmed that the Supreme for 2017 would be on the same Saturday at the end of October and at the NEC again. Alternatives had been checked out (Manchester and Telford) and Telford in particular was offering a good deal. On the plus side the venue was a good deal cheaper (60% approximately). However, the sponsors were not at all enthusiastic about a change, the gate would be considerably less, and if this was the case the number of stalls would decline sharply. There was discussion on the time of year, with May seeming most preferred alternative to the autumn. It was promised this would be given consideration, and there was also a commitment to let clubs know as soon as possible if there was to be a change of date.

### Show Rule Changes

There were only three of these, and one was only a matter of tidying up wording to ensure no conflict in allowing the Olympian classes to be placed to 5th. The others provoked quite a lot of discussion for clarification on wording, but were amendments to existing rules rather than the introduction of anything new.

The Veterinary Advisory Committee has clarified the wording of the vaccination rule because some vaccines have an allowance of up to three years between boosters. The important fact for exhibitors to know is where there is a variable interval, cats attending shows must receive an annual booster against the two flu viruses (FCV & FHV). These can be given separately to the combination vaccine that includes protection against feline panleukopenia (FPV) because that may be given with a three yearly interval regardless of the cat's lifestyle.

The other amendment permitted greater flexibility, allowing for forgetfulness, as it advised rather than made it an absolute necessity for boosters to be administered at least seven days before a show. If you forget and take your cat in the week before the show day there should be a reminder rather than a rejection at vetting-in. It's intended that vets and show managers should have the same information on this from the Veterinary Officer.

The other amendment was an addition to the wording of the rule allowing cats on exhibition to gain a critique. The intention was to allow greater flexibility with the choice of judge (any full judge of the breed listed in the schedule) and for the exhibitor to be present at the assessment so that the report given is mainly verbal. The purpose of this class is so that breeders who are developing a breeding line, most probably after an outcross, can have an assessment of the cat as it would most likely not meet the SOP for the breed, or be unable to enter competition because of reference registration. There was some concern that the rule did not define this sufficiently, but the amendment was passed and the entire wording may be considered at another time.

## Show Change discussion

The changes to show structure were rejected at the last meeting, but Catherine Kaye, Chairman of the Show Review Group, reminded Council that more judges were needed and the present system of training was no longer effective. It was certainly not attractive to new people, and other organisations were more successful in this respect. For some sections there was particular difficulty that meant that consideration had to be given to show structure along with any revision of the training procedures.

There seemed some agreement that judge training should be centred on a group rather than a breed by breed basis in the mixed breed sections, but constructing those groups to be fair and give some parity across the sections was something of a sticking point. There was a suggestion that all that was necessary was an extra grand group in the foreign section, although that would retain the privilege of smaller numbers elsewhere. It was clear that in an attempt to even out numbers some breeds could be losers while others would gain. Those who perceived their breed as losing an award or gaining competition were naturally unhappy about this. So the debate continues. As previously, clubs and individuals are invited to feed in ideas via the relevant Facebook sites.

### **AND FINALLY**

That would seem to cover all the business of the day. There is now an HCM policy that was produced by the VAC, but this is for use by BACs who want to take action against a defined problem in their breed rather than for individual breeders.

Also it was formalised by a note in the rules that minor changes to registration policies and Standards of Points can be approved via website publication. This could be useful to BACs who want to fast track a small amendment, and it cuts down on paperwork for Council. It had been previously discussed on two occasions so was approved without comment.

The conclusion comes full circle back to the GCCF President. The Chairman announced that elections for a new president and Vice President would take place at the Electoral meeting in June 2017. These were important life-long positions and it would give clubs time to consider whether they wished to make a nomination and who would be a suitable nominee.

Jen Lacey 6.10.2016