

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

I'd like to start by once again thanking Daisy for her presentation – the SIMMER DIM series of expeditions has made a significant contribution to seabird monitoring and is a first class example of where we as a group can add real value to citizen science. All the more impressive given the average age of the participants! And age has caught up with a few members this year and it is sad to record the death of some absolute stalwarts including Val Kersley who, along with her husband Reg were, we believe, founder members of RAFOS and earlier in the year we lost John Orme and Frank Smith; and most recently John Stewart-Smith. Many of you will have memories of some or all of these adventurous birders so take a moment to reflect and smile at the memories.

As most will know, the position of President of the Society remains vacant so it falls to me once again as a life vice-president and a serving member, for another week, to say a few general words about the RAF and what we've been up to this year.

Our engagement in more operational activities has not let up one iota. Despite what the press and that nice Mr Trump might think about operations in Syria and Iraq (dare I say Mesopotamia) the war against Daesh continues as does all the other bits of unpleasantness around that troubled region. We've folk in Cyprus, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Gulf States all playing a part in those activities and we're about to exercise in UAE so our involvement in the Middle East is far from over. We've supported NATO with the deployment of Typhoons to Estonia for Air Policing over the Baltics and are about to do the same from Iceland – the new Cold War is as alive as ever! I was quite surprised by how keen the Regular RAF were to head for Iceland in winter but then I realised none of the current Typhoon Force had ever been there before. Some in this room will remember Northern QRA on Phantoms, the Black Knights of Keflavik and chasing Russians in the Iceland-Faeroes Gap. Indeed, the resurgence of Russia as a bit of a pest has seen our Typhoons on UK Air Policing tasks more heavily used than at any time since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The Chinook force have continued to support the French efforts in Mali, and at home played a fundamental role in propping up the Derbyshire Dam earlier in the year and we've training teams in Nigeria and Jordan. At the same time, we've supported some major exercises around the world from the Flag series in Nevada, through a major Five Powers exercise in the Far East, to the much acclaimed Red Arrows tour of the US. On top of all this our newest beast, the F35 Lightning II, has bloodied itself over Syria and is now deployed on HMS Queen Elizabeth II as part of her initial outing. I'm tempted to say 'cruise' but with some Dark Blue in the room I'll stick with 'deployment'.

I've mentioned before that in such a busy Service, which is also undermanned by about 2000, it is perhaps not surprising that few have time for birding or to join a Society such as ours but we keep plugging our message (very successfully) and try to recruit more serving members where we can - indeed we've more Serving members this year than last and I'm pleased to say they're already showing an interest in joining in with expeditions, This leads nicely in to my task as Chairman.

First of all, let me thank you again for coming – it really is good to see the stalwart support we enjoy. Many of you will have responded to my Survey Monkey survey about the AGM so now would be a good moment to bring you up to date with the responses.

The survey went to 70 e-mail addresses that the Secretary Bird provided; of these 6 turned out to be no longer in use and bounced straight back. Another couple also missed their targets so in effect there were 62 valid surveys landing on electronic doormats. So far the response rate has been 38 which is actually pretty good. Some analysis:

Most respondents (58%) were either fairly frequent flyers or occasional attendees at the AGM – you are probably all in the room and regardless of the format or location you're the ones who are always going to turn up if you can. Thank you for your support.

The target for change are that group who rarely or never make it. About 39% so we need to understand this group and see what we can do to encourage them more – obviously some of this is down to geography as there is a fairly solid group in Scotland and the far north who might attend if the venue were closer to them.

On the whole a spring or autumn event seems to work for most, travelling up to a couple of hundred miles seems acceptable and there is strong support for the external speaker format. Indeed, of the majority frequent attenders the view was that nothing significant needs to change in the format although as always different folk appreciate different bits more. There was also good support for having a field outing on the Sunday but this is slightly at odds with current experience – perhaps this would go hand in glove with rotating the venue and potentially the season – a spring AGM in a birding hot-spot might be one option.

So nothing definitive as yet – I'll close the whole thing down soon and then do a full report for the next Newsletter. Then your exceptionally good committee will put their thinking caps on.

Which brings me to handing out the bouquets. Your Committee have worked hard this year and deserve your thanks as usual. While it is slightly invidious to single out any member, I must thank Team Knight for once again keeping us all under control and I must note Colin Wearn's hand in sorting today's venue and catering out with the Mess Manager and his staff. Without all this support the AGM would not take place. The FALO will of course cover himself in glory in a moment but frankly they all do a grand job and even let me think I'm in charge from time to time.

I've said before that the Society thrives on the activities of the Members every bit as much as the attention of the Committee. We've had a busy year with WINTER DUCK, ISLAY MIST, and SIMMER DIM all being major expeditions contributing to the Society's aims and objectives. But there is a diverse array of activities out there such as our trip to the Somerset Levels so please feel free to set up other events as your busy lives permit. Keith has some other exciting opportunities to share for next year's plan but remember anyone, and I mean anyone, can propose, plan and run an event or expedition - variety is the spice of life.

And on that note, I'll hand over to the Secretary Bird to get on with business.