



**Plate 37.** The first meeting of the young birders (pictured) and project facilitators at The Hidden Lane Tearoom in Glasgow, November 2018. © *Chloe Rossi*

## Engaging Young Birders Project

J. ALLISON

How can SOC reach more young birders? How can we help you to develop? These were just two of the topics being brainstormed when a group of enthusiastic and inspiring youths kindly volunteered their time to meet with project facilitators Zul Bhatia, Kevin Sinclair (both Clyde Branch) and myself, late last year at The Hidden Lane Tearoom in Glasgow.

With the Young Birders' Training Course now firmly established and a growing number of students and juniors attending Conference, SOC is eager to build on these strong foundations and attract more young people to become involved in the Club's work and activities locally. Despite this promising upward trend however, it is fair to say that in general, this audience is under-represented at branch talks, outings and meetings. SOC is certainly not unique in this respect, with many clubs and societies facing the same challenge. However, the project facilitators (as above, but with the addition of Fiona Mclean, Clyde) are in the fortunate position of having established links with a number of

dedicated and capable young birders, of varied ages and experience, having crossed paths through volunteering roles, internships or via their existing involvement with SOC.

Eleven of them were able to join us in late November 2018 for the first of the project's meetings. After a brief introduction to the Club, time was spent detailing the many ways SOC could help develop and upskill young birdwatchers, highlighting some of the existing opportunities available to them. The group was then encouraged to share feedback on why, for example, they rarely attended branch talks or outings. Following on from this discussion, they were asked 'What can SOC do to support you?'. A number of key themes emerged from this post-it based exercise, including: offering mentoring and networking opportunities, presentation slots at local branch meetings and conferences, research and survey training, as well as the chance to contribute to SOC publications. Plenty of food for thought in planning subsequent sessions! One broad

'want' from the group that consistently emerged throughout the evening, was the desire to interact with other like-minded individuals in an informal and friendly way. Thanks to the ease and simplicity of setting up social media accounts, this is one action point from the meeting that we can tick off as complete. In the days following the meeting, several attendees set up and 'launched' a new Facebook group called 'SOC Youth Connect'.

For any young birders looking to join the group, all you need to do is type 'SOC Youth Connect' into your Facebook search bar and request to join, subject to admin approval. We hope this will provide a platform for group members to organise attending local branch activities together, to share details of their own areas of expertise that fellow members might be able to benefit from and for facilitators to be able to share opportunities, job and volunteer positions that could be of interest.

It is hoped that what we learn from the 'Engaging Young Birders Project' in Clyde will have much wider application across the Club and branch network and we look for sharing the insights we glean in due course.

*Jane Allison, Development Officer*

### **British Birds Charitable Trust to provide travel assistance to Young Birders' Training Course training course participants in 2019**

The Club and Isle of May Bird Observatory are pleased to announce that *British Birds* Charitable Trust have been in touch and will be able to offer assistance with the cost of travelling to Anstruther, Fife (the departure point for the Isle of May, where the course takes place) for participants attending the 2019 Young Birders' Training Course.

"The *British Birds* Charitable Trust is delighted to be associated with the SOC/Isle of May Bird Observatory 'Young Birders' Training Course'. We hope that by helping participants with the potentially prohibitive cost of travelling to the course, those young birders who've been put off applying may now be in a position to do so." **John Eyre, *British Birds* Charitable Trust**

In addition, participants will receive a free year's membership to the SOC, the latest *Isle of May Bird Report* and a year's free subscription to *British Birds*.

The Nature of Scotland award-nominated training course will take place on 6–13 July 2019. For more information and for how to apply, visit: [www.the-soc.org.uk/get-involved/young-birders/young-birders-training-course](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/get-involved/young-birders/young-birders-training-course)

