



Society of Canadian Ornithologists

Société des ornithologistes du Canada

REPORT ON MEMBERSHIP – 2019

with interim information up to August 8, 2020

Darroch Whitaker
Membership Secretary

This report summarises SCO membership from January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019. Following a recommendation from our auditor membership is summarised based on the SCO's fiscal year (January 1 - December 31). I have also included interim data and information through August 8, 2020, as an indicator of where we are right now, and have also included an update on some new membership initiatives at the end of this report.

Since memberships expire on December 31 there is always a large drop in numbers on January 1 of each year. To mitigate this, we have been distributing renewal reminders to individuals whose membership is about to lapse. These are sent on November 15 and December 15 each year, and then, for those who still let their membership lapse, again on January 15. As a final reminder I also distribute the first of these reminders to individuals who let their membership lapse the year before.

Table 1. Total SCO membership, 2006-2019.

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Members	393	410	357	381	336	346	343	255	?	?	261	266	261	258

*Reports were not prepared in 2014 and 2015 so year-end membership is not known.

The number of members has been quite stable since 2013 (Tables 1 and 2), ranging from 255-266 individuals. Membership levels at the end of 2019 included 256 individuals, one organisation and one library, which was similar to the previous year (257 individuals, 3 organisations and 1 library). However, comparing these numbers to historical membership reports reveals a large decline in membership since between 2007 and 2013 (Table 1). This has been discussed among the council and, while precise reasons for this are not known it is suspected to relate in part to the dramatic increase in accessibility of online information, which may have reduced the importance professional societies in information dissemination and professional engagement. Note that three new membership categories have been added in 2020 (Table 2), and a preliminary report on enrollment in those categories appears at the end of this report.

Table 2. Breakdown of SCO year-end membership by categories, 2017-2019, and through August 8, 2020.

Membership Category	Dec 31 2017	%	Dec 31 2018	%	Dec 31 2019	%	Aug. 8 2020	%
Regular (\$35)	126	47.4%	128	49.4%	135	52.3%	106	41.1%
Sustaining (\$70)	8	3.0%	8	3.1%	5	1.9%	5	1.9%
Student (\$15)	93	35.0%	86	33.0%	75	29.1%	61	23.6%
Life (\$500)	35	13.2%	36	13.8%	41	15.9%	42	16.3%
Complimentary (\$0)	4	1.5%	3	1.1%	2	0.8%	2	0.8%
Early Career (\$25)*	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	5.0%
Retired (\$25)*	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	1.6%
BIPOC / LGBTQ+ / Disabled (\$0)*	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	4.7%
TOTAL	266		261		258		245	

* New membership category in 2020

Table 3. Summary of SCO year-end membership by affiliation from 2017 to 2019, and through August 8, 2020.

Affiliation (Category)	Dec. 31 2017		Dec. 31 2018		Dec. 31 2019		Aug. 8, 2020	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
None	9	3.4%	7	2.7%	10	3.9%	19	7.8%
University	158	59.4%	159	60.9%	146	56.6%	127	51.8%
Environment Canada/CWS	31	11.7%	33	12.6%	35	13.6%	38	15.5%
Other Fed. Gov. Agencies	5	1.9%	5	1.9%	6	2.3%	6	2.4%
Museum	4	1.5%	4	1.5%	3	1.2%	4	1.6%
Non Gov. Agencies	21	7.9%	15	5.7%	19	7.4%	11	4.5%
Prov. Gov. and Agencies	7	2.6%	6	2.3%	7	2.7%	4	1.6%
Clubs, Societies	4	1.5%	6	2.3%	7	2.7%	9	3.7%
Private Consultants	26	9.8%	24	9.2%	24	9.3%	26	10.6%
Libraries	1	0.4%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%
TOTAL	266		261		258		245	

The SOC attracted 52 new members in 2019, which is consistent with the 51-67 new members that enrolled each year from 2016-2018. Since membership is relatively stable this suggests that ~20% members are not returning each year (Table 3). Of the 182 individuals who let their membership lapse at the end of 2017, 2018, or 2019, 108 (59%) were student members, which is approximately twice the proportion that would be expected based on the representation of students in overall membership. Also, of the 182 individuals who let their membership lapse, 71 (39%) had only been members for one year, while 40 (22%) had been members for two years, indicating relatively low retention of new members. Of these “transient” members, 53% were students, again reflecting low retention of students. While this may reflect the fact that not all students continue on to pursue a career in ornithology, it may also indicate that many students are joining for “reasons of convenience”, such as reduced conference fees or eligibility for student awards or travel grants, and are not subsequently renewing their membership. However, this should not be interpreted as a failure of those incentives, as presumably some students who do initially enroll because of these opportunities do become long-term members, while even those who do not renew have likely become more aware of the society’s work and the profession in general.

Table 4. Renewal status of SCO-SOC members

Paid through:	Dec 31 2017	%	Dec 31 2018	%	Dec 31 2019	%
2016	<i>55</i>	<i>expired</i>				
2017	112	42.1%	<i>61</i>	<i>expired</i>		
2018	73	27.4%	101	38.7%	<i>51</i>	<i>expired</i>
2019	27	10.2%	76	29.1%	110	42.6%
2020	10	3.8%	29	11.1%	65	25.2%
2021	5	1.9%	12	4.6%	30	11.6%
2022	2	0.8%	2	0.8%	5	1.9%
2023	1	0.4%	1	0.4%	3	1.2%
2024	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.4%
2025	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.4%
2026	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
2027	1	0.4%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%
2028	0	0.0%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%
LIFE	35	13.2%	38	14.6%	41	15.9%
TOTAL	266	100%	261	100%	258	100%

Not surprisingly 95% of SCO members reside in Canada (Table 5), and indeed some international members are also Canadians living outside of the country. However, note that international students at Canadian universities typically enroll using Canadian addresses, so in that regard international membership may be somewhat under-represented. The distribution of members within Canada is approximately proportional to the geographic distribution of the population. However, Québec (14.0% of members vs. 22.5% of population) and Ontario (28.3% of members vs. 38.8% of population) are under-represented, while the Atlantic provinces (12.0% of members vs. 6.4% of population) and the Yukon (2.3% of members vs. 0.1% of population) are somewhat over-represented.

Table 5. Geographic distribution of SCO membership

Geographical area*	Dec 31 2017	%	Dec 31 2018	%	Dec 31 2019	%
Newfoundland	11	4.1%	9	3.4%	8	3.1%
Nova Scotia	6	2.3%	7	2.7%	11	4.3%
New Brunswick	9	3.4%	8	3.1%	11	4.3%
Prince Edward Island	0	0.0%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%
Québec	27	10.2%	29	11.1%	36	14.0%
Ontario	85	32.0%	74	28.4%	73	28.3%
Manitoba	13	4.9%	13	5.0%	10	3.9%
Saskatchewan	17	6.4%	17	6.5%	15	5.8%
Alberta	31	11.7%	37	14.2%	30	11.6%
British Columbia	47	17.7%	47	18.0%	42	16.3%
Yukon	5	1.9%	4	1.5%	6	2.3%
Northwest Territories	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	0.8%
Nunavut	0	0.0%	1	0.4%	0	0.0%
United States	13	4.9%	13	5.0%	9	3.5%
Australia / New Zealand	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.4%
Europe	2	0.8%	1	0.4%	3	1.2%
TOTAL	266	100%	261	100%	258	

Interim update on new membership initiatives in 2020

New membership categories for early career and retired ornithologists were introduced at the start of 2020. The primary intention of this change was to offer reduced membership rates to qualifying individuals, so both are priced \$10 below the rate for regular members. To date 17 individuals have enrolled under one of these categories. It should be noted that many individuals who may qualify for one of these categories would already have renewed their membership before the start of the new year, so it is likely that participation will increase in future years. Also, to keep pace with inflation membership pricing was updated in 2020 with the cost of a regular membership increasing from \$25 to \$35, sustaining memberships increasing from \$50 to \$70, and student memberships increasing from \$10 to \$15; the new early career and retired member categories are both priced at \$25.

On another note, national and international social movements including *Idle No More* and *Black Lives Matter* have shone a light on issues of racism and inequality in society, including in terms of pervasive problems such as institutional barriers, implicit bias, and social privilege. During 2020 an incident of overt racism towards a black birdwatcher in New York City also drew attention to the fact that ornithology is not immune these problems. This led to *Black Birders Week* and a general recognition of the lack of

representation of traditionally marginalized groups in ornithology. In an effort to address this, during June 2020 the SCO-SOC launched a new initiative offering free memberships to individuals who identify as BIPOC, LGBTQ+, or disabled. To date 12 people have enrolled through this program, of whom 11 are new to the society, suggesting that the initiative is making a positive step towards increasing representation these groups. While there is no requirement that applicants indicate why they feel that qualify, several have done so and self-identified as being indigenous, persons of colour, or gay. The council has not yet discussed the future status of this initiative, though no fixed end-date has been identified.

Table 6. Enrollment in new membership categories through August 8, 2020.

Membership Category	Members Aug. 8 2020	New to SCO	% of total membership
Early Career	13	5/13	5.0%
Retired	4	0/4	1.6%
BIPOC / LGBTQ+ / Disabled	12	11/12	4.7%
	29	16	11.8%