



Society of Canadian Ornithologists

Société des ornithologistes du Canada

REPORT ON MEMBERSHIP – 2020

with interim information up to July 24, 2021

Darroch Whitaker
Membership Secretary

This report summarises SCO membership from January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020, as membership is based on the SCO's fiscal year (January 1 - December 31). I have also included interim data and information through July 24, 2021, as an indicator of where we are right now.

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, 2006-2020.

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Members	393	410	357	381	336	346	343	255	?	?	261	266	261	258	265

*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 2020 included 263 individuals, one organisation and one library, which was similar to the previous year (256 individuals, 1 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 increased accessibility of online information, which may have reduced the importance professional societies in information dissemination and professional engagement. Note that three new membership categories were added in 2020 (Table 2), and a report on enrollment in those categories appears at the end of this report.

Table 2. SCO year-end membership by categories, 2018-2020, and through July 24, 2021.

Membership Category	Dec 31 2018	%	Dec 31 2019	%	Dec 31 2020	%	July 24 2021	%
Regular (\$35)	128	49.4%	135	52.3%	104	39.2%	94	36.7%
Sustaining (\$70)	8	3.1%	5	1.9%	2	0.8%	2	0.8%
Student (\$15)	86	33.0%	75	29.1%	66	24.9%	51	19.9%
Life (\$500)	36	13.8%	41	15.9%	46	17.4%	49	19.1%
Complimentary (\$0)	3	1.1%	2	0.8%	1	0.4%	0	0%
Early Career (\$25)*	-	-	-	-	17	6.4%	18	7.0%
Retired (\$25)*	-	-	-	-	12	4.5%	13	5.1%
BIPOC / LGBTQ+ / Disabled (\$0)*	-	-	-	-	17	6.4%	29**	11.3%
TOTAL	261		258		265		256	

* New membership category in 2020

** Three other individuals self-identified as qualifying but also paid for memberships

Table 3. Summary of SCO year-end membership by affiliation from 2017 to 2020.

	2017		2018		2019		2020	
Affiliation (Category)	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
None	9	3.4%	7	2.7%	10	3.9%	23	8.7%
University	158	59.4%	159	60.9%	146	56.6%	139	52.5%
Environment Canada/CWS	31	11.7%	33	12.6%	35	13.6%	39	14.7%
Other Fed. Gov. Agencies	5	1.9%	5	1.9%	6	2.3%	6	2.3%
Museums & zoos	4	1.5%	4	1.5%	3	1.2%	6	2.3%
Non Gov. Agencies	21	7.9%	15	5.7%	19	7.4%	12	4.6%
Prov. Gov. and Agencies	7	2.6%	6	2.3%	7	2.7%	4	1.5%
Clubs, Societies	4	1.5%	6	2.3%	7	2.7%	9	3.4%
Private Consultants	26	9.8%	24	9.2%	24	9.3%	27	10.2%
Libraries	1	0.4%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%	1	
TOTAL	266		261		258		265	

The SOC attracted 59 new members in 2020, which is consistent with the 51-67 new members that enrolled each year from 2016-2019. Since membership is relatively stable this suggests that ~20%

members are not returning each year (Table 4). Of the 236 individuals who let their membership lapse between 2017 and 2020, 137 (58%) were student members, which is more than twice the proportion that would be expected based on the representation of students in overall membership. Also, of the 236 individuals who let their membership lapse, 94 (40%) had only been members for one year, while 50 (21%) had been members for two years, indicating relatively low retention of new members. Of these “transient” members, 55% 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	%	Dec 31 2020	%
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%	<i>58</i>	<i>expired</i>
2020	10	3.8%	29	11.1%	65	25.2%	86	32.5%
2021	5	1.9%	12	4.6%	30	11.6%	94	35.5%
2022	2	0.8%	2	0.8%	5	1.9%	26	9.8%
2023	1	0.4%	1	0.4%	3	1.2%	6	2.3%
2024	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.4%	4	1.5%
2025	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%
2026	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0%
2027	1	0.4%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%
2028	0	0.0%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%
LIFE	35	13.2%	38	14.6%	41	15.9%	46	17.4%
TOTAL	266		261		258		265	

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 (12.1% of members vs. 22.5% of population) and Ontario (32.5% of members vs. 38.8% of population) are under-represented.

Table 5. Geographic distribution of SCO membership

Geographical area*	2017	%	2018	%	2019	%	2020	%
Newfoundland	11	4.1%	9	3.4%	8	3.1%	8	3.0%
Nova Scotia	6	2.3%	7	2.7%	11	4.3%	11	4.2%
New Brunswick	9	3.4%	8	3.1%	11	4.3%	8	3.0%
Prince Edward Island	0	0.0%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%	0	0.0%
Québec	27	10.2%	29	11.1%	36	14.0%	32	12.1%
Ontario	85	32.0%	74	28.4%	73	28.3%	86	32.5%
Manitoba	13	4.9%	13	5.0%	10	3.9%	9	3.4%
Saskatchewan	17	6.4%	17	6.5%	15	5.8%	14	5.3%
Alberta	31	11.7%	37	14.2%	30	11.6%	30	11.3%
British Columbia	47	17.7%	47	18.0%	42	16.3%	48	18.1%
Yukon	5	1.9%	4	1.5%	6	2.3%	4	1.5%
Northwest Territories	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	0.8%	2	0.8%
Nunavut	0	0.0%	1	0.4%	0	0.0%	1	0.4%
United States	13	4.9%	13	5.0%	9	3.5%	9	3.4%
Australia / New Zealand	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%
Europe	2	0.8%	1	0.4%	3	1.2%	2	0.8%
TOTAL	266		261		258		265	

New membership initiatives introduced in 2020

Three new membership categories were introduced in 2020, and already account for more than 20% of membership, proving their popularity with members (Table 6).

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. During 2020 29 individuals (10.9% of members) enrolled under one of these categories. Not surprisingly there was a corresponding drop in enrollment of regular members (Table 2), the category in which virtually all of these individuals would have otherwise enrolled. 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.

During 2020 national and international social movements including *Idle No More* and *Black Lives Matter* 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 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. In the remaining 6 months of 2020 seventeen individuals enrolled through this program, of whom 14 were new to the society, while through late July 2021 twenty-nine people had enrolled under this category, of whom 80% were new to the SCO-SOC. This suggests that the initiative is making a positive step towards increasing representation and is being successful in attracting new members from these traditionally marginalized groups, which is consistent with the intention of the initiative.

Donation options were also restructured in 2020 to reduce the somewhat confusing array of choices presented to members and reduce bookkeeping burden on the membership secretary and treasurer. The seven existing categories were combined into three categories, while a new fourth category was added to solicit donations in support in the aforementioned diversity initiative.

Table 6. Enrollment in new membership categories through July 24, 2021.

Membership Category	Members July 24, 2021	New to SCO	% of total membership
Early Career	18	5/18	6.8%
Retired	13	2/13	4.9%
BIPOC / LGBTQ+ / Disabled	29	23/29	10.9%
	60	30/60	22.6%