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## Student initiatives: the Zoological and Exploration Societies

J.R. Downie\*, C. Whitehead & L. Munro

Graham Kerr Building, University of Glasgow,  
Glasgow G12 8QQ

\*E-mail: [roger.downie@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:roger.downie@glasgow.ac.uk)

### THE ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY (ZooSoc)

As described in *Gallery of Memories*, JGK became Regius Professor of Natural History in 1902, before the title was altered to Zoology in 1903. The University's archives hold the minute book and a membership card (Fig. 1) of a student Natural History Society for the years 1892-4. Any student, past or present, could join for one shilling. The minutes record lectures by Professor Young (on parasite development) and Professor Bower (on coal plants). As the latter was honorary president, the student society included botany as part of natural history, even though the University's departmental structure did not. The society's secretary regrets poor attendance at excursions (to Possil Marsh, Arran, Ardrossan and West Kilbride) but notes better attendances at lectures, especially those involving kindred groups such as the Natural History Society of Glasgow and the Andersonian Naturalists, with over 100 attending Bower's talk. We do not know if this student society continued into the 20th century, since no records are available. However, Sister Monica Taylor, a pre-World War 1 student, recalls that JGK gave the inaugural lecture to the Zoological Society soon after his arrival in Glasgow. It is likely, therefore, that the student society split when the separate chairs in Zoology and Geology were inaugurated and that ZooSoc dates from 1903.

The first ZooSoc archives record is the minute book covering sessions 1926-7 to 1935-6. This notes that the "new" ZooSoc was established on 21st May 1926. However, the accounts show a carry-over of £2 from 1924-5. The most obvious interpretation is that ZooSoc temporarily collapsed in 1925, and was resurrected in 1926: with student numbers small, and the traumas of World War 1 only recently over, running a student society may well have been difficult. Irrespective, it is clear that ZooSoc has continued since the 1926 re-birth (although actual archives are sparse; note to the present Society: please keep minute books and other records!). By 1926, the membership cost had risen to two shillings and sixpence. ZooSoc's aims were "to promote interest in zoology by discussions, papers on zoology and excursions to places of zoological interest". The Society met on Friday afternoons at 4.00, with tea followed by a lecture or other activity. Reflecting the preponderance of medical students among the membership, lectures were often on biomedical topics. For example, the inaugural

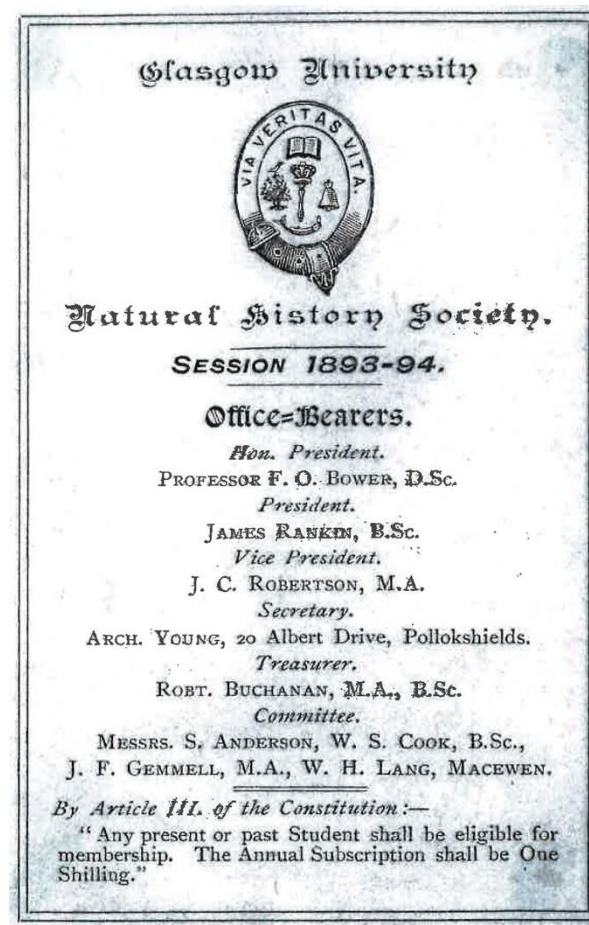
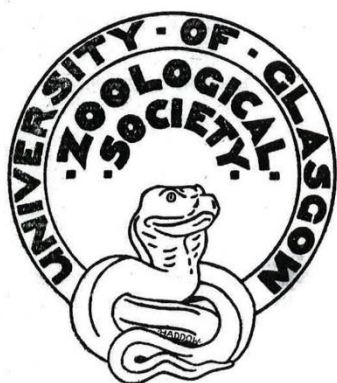


Fig. 1. Membership card for the Glasgow University Natural History Society, 1893-94, listing the office-bearers.

lecture in 1926 was given by J.S. Dunkerley on protozoans: Dunkerley moved to Manchester as professor around that time, and was a specialist on flagellate protozoans, including trypanosomes. A highlight each year was the Inter-University Biological Conference, first recorded from February 1927 and held that year over two days in St. Andrews. Glasgow sent 14 delegates. Professor D'Arcy Thomson chaired the lecture sessions and there was a dinner dance on the Friday night. Joint meetings with other societies often featured, sometimes including a debate: in December 1932, ZooSoc, the Botanical Society and the Physical Society debated the proposition "That scientific progress in the future will be biological rather than physical": the biologists won (were they right?). During the 1930s, the programme included several meetings each year devoted to student papers (six in 1934-5). These were intended to encourage research by students (the Honours curriculum at that time did not include a research project), but turned out to be unpopular, since the students lacked facilities, resources, time and supervision, making it hard for them to do any worthwhile research. The ZooSoc logo (Fig. 2) appeared in the 1930s, designed by A.J. Haddow: he was Society secretary 1932 to 1934, when he graduated, progressing to a distinguished career in African sleeping sickness research. He was also a skilled artist: his drawings of



### SESSION 1934-1935.

**Fig. 2.** Zoological Society logo from the 1934-35 membership card, incorporating a representation of the Graham Kerr Building's front-door knocker's snake, drawn by A.J. Haddow.

African primates are displayed in the GKB's upper corridor. After World War 2, as zoology student numbers increased, so did ZooSoc membership. In 1967-8, it was 493, making it one of the largest student societies in the University. After the creation of Biology-1, with first year students taught in the Boyd Orr Building, it was hard to attract junior students to ZooSoc and numbers did not reach those heights again. The Inter-University Biological Conferences continued until the late 1960s but became too difficult to organise, once student numbers had mushroomed, the subject had diversified, and new universities had joined the original four "ancients". Another joint enterprise was the Scottish Universities touring speaker in biology, where a distinguished scientist addressed the students of each of the four ancient universities over a single year. Speakers included Sir Alister Hardy, Sir Peter Medawar and John Maynard Smith, but this scheme too became difficult to organise and was discontinued in 1969.

In its 98th year, the Society continues to bring together students with a shared enthusiasm for the natural world. In 2023-4, ZooSoc boasts a membership of 150 and recently hosted the University of Galway ZooSoc, and introduced them to the GKB. Over recent years, ZooSoc has welcomed a range of speakers such as Helen Taylor of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, Francesca Trotman of the not-for-profit organisation *Love the Oceans*, and Jill Mackay, author of *Animal Personalities*. In this session, there has been an increase in conservation efforts involving ZooSoc, including close collaboration with the Glasgow University Environmental Sustainability Team on beach cleans, litter picks, Bioblitz events, and rewilding sessions at the University's wildlife garden.

### THE EXPLORATION SOCIETY (ExSoc)

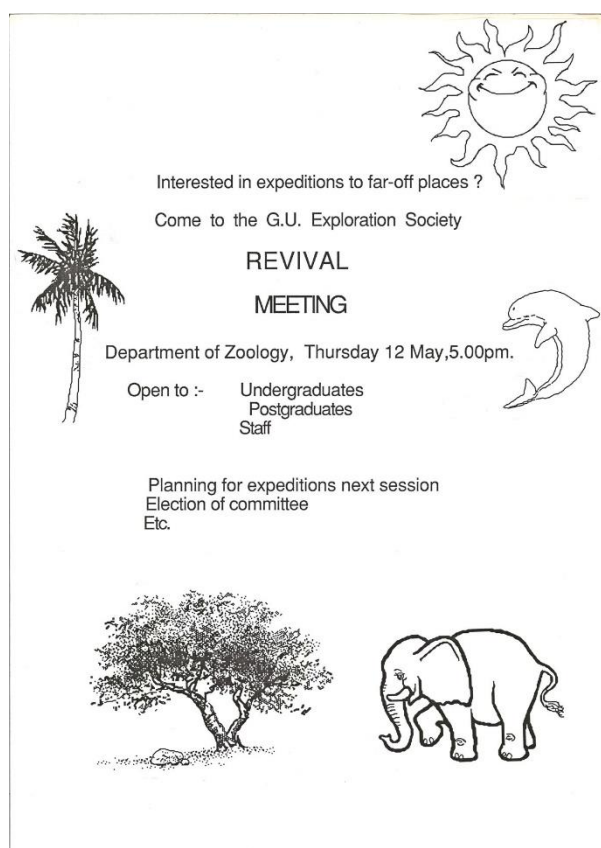
As recounted in *Gallery of Memories*, JGK's interest in remote field research stemmed from his time as a naturalist on a river-mapping expedition in the Gran Chaco region of South America, and his follow-up five years later to collect lungfish embryos in the company of his colleague Budgett who was researching amphibians. Once he became Regius Professor at Glasgow, JGK made no further overseas expeditions himself, although colleagues pursued related work in west Africa and South America. There is no evidence that JGK encouraged students to undertake expeditions themselves, although he was keen to enthuse them with accounts of his own adventures.

The first student-run biology-based field expedition from the University of Glasgow that we know of was to the Inner Hebridean island of Canna in 1936, followed by a repeat in 1937, with the expressed intention that more would follow. World War 2 then intervened, and the next expeditions were to the Garvellach Islands in 1949 and St. Kilda in 1956. There does not appear to have been any established society organising these expeditions. Instead, interested students with the help of staff devised a plan, then applied for support from the University Court.

In the late 1950s, with overseas travel becoming easier and cheaper, the Royal Geographical Society introduced an expedition grant scheme (1956), and the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland (1959) brought in a similar scheme for Scottish University expeditions. In the 1960s, ten expeditions took place, two in Scotland, and eight elsewhere in Europe. We do not have records of when the University of Glasgow ExSoc was founded but we know that it supported three expeditions in 1970 (Finland, Calabria - both geographical; and Morocco - mainly zoological), with Morocco being the first outside Europe. During the 1970s, 20 expeditions were organised, five to Scottish locations, 15 elsewhere, including one to the Seychelles, the most distant location so far.

During this period, the ExSoc committee was mostly composed of Zoology or Earth Science students, with expeditions focused on one or other discipline, although Iceland 1972 was a good example of an interdisciplinary expedition, being undertaken by geologists and zoologists. Topographic science expeditions were essentially fieldtrips aimed at providing final year students with opportunities to collect data for their dissertations. The Carnegie Trust eventually made clear that this was not what their support was for: data for a dissertation could be collected on an expedition, but that was not to be the sole aim. Only seven expeditions (three in Scotland; four elsewhere) ran in the early 1980s, and ExSoc seemed to have run out of steam. However, in March 1988, a group of staff and students held a preliminary discussion about resurrecting ExSoc and this was achieved at a revival meeting on 12th May (Fig. 3), leading to the writing of a constitution and the establishment of an Exploration Council (a group of experienced academics, initially chaired by Professor





**Fig. 3.** Poster used to attract interested people to the Exploration Society revival meeting in 1988.

Ian Thomson of Geography), whose role was to oversee the activities of the Society. A key part of this was the allocation of University grants to approved expeditions: approval and funding by the University was crucial in applying for grants from organisations like the Carnegie Trust. The revival of ExSoc was helped by the fact that the Principal of the University, Sir Alwyn Williams, was a field geologist who strongly believed in the importance of fieldwork for student development. The first expeditions under the new system were in summer 1989 to Trinidad and Tobago, and to the Azores. Both were biological in their aims, mostly zoological but with some botany.

In the 36 years since ExSoc's revival there have been 199 expeditions, 5.5 per year, including the hiatus years of the COVID-19 pandemic: there were no expeditions in 2020, and a very limited set in 2021 - Iceland and a set of Scottish locations. However, 2023 saw a full return to ExSoc activity with expeditions to Harris, Egypt, Iceland (Fig. 4), Guyana, Thailand and Tobago (Fig. 5). Table 1 shows the locations of expeditions by world region.

ExSoc's website holds the reports of a large number of expeditions. The University Library also holds many pre-digital reports, and there is a plan to store other ExSoc documents in the University's archives. Several papers have been published on the achievements of UG ExSoc: Downie *et al.* (2008) discuss the potential for expeditions to provide opportunities for final year research projects; Downie *et al.* (2016) analyse the



**Fig. 4.** Arctic fox den surveying on the Iceland expedition, 2023. (Photo: ExSoc)



**Fig. 5.** Bat surveying on the Tobago expedition, 2023. (Photo: ExSoc)

natural history contributions of expeditions, up to 2016; and Harper *et al.* (2017) discuss the impacts of expeditions on student development. ExSoc is a University-wide institution, open to all: recent expeditions have included students of Psychology, Geology, Geography, Mathematics and Immunology. However, the biggest contributions to its activities have been by zoologists and marine/freshwater biologists, both staff and students, and ExSoc has close interactions with ZooSoc.

As the expeditions are student-led with minimal staff supervision, they require students to gain and develop a wide variety of skills: fund-raising, grant writing,

Location	Number (%)	Notes
Scotland	9 (4.5)	Mainly Islay, Harris
Europe	53 (26.6)	Mainly Cyprus, Iceland
Africa	32 (16.1)	Mainly Egypt
Asia	13 (6.5)	Thailand, Sri Lanka, Malaysia etc.
Australasia	2 (1.0)	
North America	1 (0.5)	Canada only
South America/Caribbean	89 (44.7)	Mainly Trinidad, Tobago and Guyana

**Table 1.** Principal locations of University of Glasgow Exploration Society expeditions, 1989- 2024.

organisation and teamwork. Successful grant applications have gained funds from The Explorer's Club, Glasgow Natural History Society, the Lord Mayor's Trust, the Fisheries Society of the British Isles and many others. Students have also won awards for the work done on expeditions: in 2023, a student on the Egypt expedition won the Guild of Freeman's Prize from the Lord Mayor's Trust; in 2024, an Iceland expedition student was selected to give a research presentation at the Explorer's Club headquarters in New York. The Society provides expedition leaders with training, and all those selected to join an expedition take part in training of various sorts, especially on fieldwork health and safety. In 2024, ExSoc had 137 members and a record number of applications to join expeditions, a sign of excellent health.

Many former ExSoc members have progressed to masters and PhD degrees, and then to field, ecological and conservation research and activity. They look back fondly to their time in the Society, and regard the expedition experience as influential in guiding them towards their current careers.

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