



WWT Wetlands for life

Minutes of the 68th Annual General Meeting of the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

WWT Slimbridge Wetland Centre

Thursday 1 October 2015 at 10:30am

The following members of the Council were present, together with more than 70 WWT members and staff:

Peter Day (Chairman), Leslie Jones OBE, Sir Graham Fry, Barnaby Briggs, Anna Carragher, Simon Tonge, Martin Birch, Pamela Castle

In attendance: Martin Spray, Chief Executive

The Chairman, Peter Day, welcomed all to the 68th Annual General Meeting of WWT, his first as Chairman. He extended a special welcome to Vice Presidents Dafila Scott, Sir George Russell, Tony Thomas and Mark Carwardine.

1. Apologies for absence were received from:

HRH The Prince of Wales KG, KT, GCB (President); Vice-Presidents The Duchess of Norfolk and Tony Pidgley; and Trustees Philip Duncan, Alastair Driver, and Dr Andy Brown.

2. Minutes of the 67th Annual General Meeting

Comments were invited on the minutes of the 67th Annual General Meeting. No comments were received. The minutes were proposed by Tony Thomas, seconded by Mark Carwardine and signed by the Chairman.

3. Matters arising from the Minutes

There were no matters arising.

4. Elections to Council

The Chairman reported that three Trustees were standing down -- Les Jones, Treasurer, and Dr Andy Brown and Philip Duncan, and he thanked them all, Andy Brown and Phil Duncan in their absence, for their great contribution to WWT over the years.

Under article 43a, Sir Graham Fry, Simon Tonge, Anna Carragher, Alastair Driver and Barnaby Briggs had all been re-elected. Two new trustees had been elected, Martin Birch as Treasurer, and Pamela Castle, an environmental lawyer.

The Chairman thanked Les Jones for his tremendous support over the past 10 years as a Trustee, of which the past nine years he had served as Treasurer, and he then introduced Dafila Scott who presented Les with a limited signed Peter Scott print. The Chairman then thanked Sir George Russell, who had stepped down as Chairman in March 2015, for his stalwart support to the Trust since 2002, and his continuing support as a Vice President. Dafila Scott then also presented Sir George with a limited signed Peter Scott print.

5. To receive and consider the Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31st March 2015 and the Report of the Auditors thereon.

Chairman's Comments on the Report

The Chairman noted that the report can only include highlights of the organisation's work over the past year but he found it very readable and encouraged members to read it had they not already done so. He commended the highly talented and professional staff on their efforts. He also commended the work of the Trust's 850+ volunteers and thanked all for their hard work and loyalty over the past year. He noted the ongoing developments and improvements being implemented at our visitor centres to ensure they provide the most engaging experience for visitors, and the often ground-breaking and innovative conservation and research work which continues in the tradition of Sir Peter Scott. He referred to the previous day's official opening of Steart Marshes in Bridgwater Bay, a major coastal realignment project and one of the largest salt-marsh and freshwater habitat creation projects in the UK.

The Chairman noted the education aspect of the Trust's work and the continuing generosity of HSBC in funding the Inspiring Generations project which has enabled 30,000 schoolchildren from disadvantaged areas to engage with nature at our centres. He looked forward to the forthcoming 70th anniversary of the Trust and noted the initiation of the Scott Heritage project at Slimbridge to bring Sir Peter Scott's story to life. The project will be a major development incorporating much of Sir Peter's legacy, and will involve a big fundraising effort.

The Chairman noted that he was very fortunate to be supported by such an excellent group of Council members.

Report of the Hon. Treasurer

The Hon Treasurer referred to the Consolidated Statement of Financial Activities, SOFA, contained in the Annual Report for the 12-month period ending 31 March 2015. He noted that it had been a challenging year weather-wise but income streams had stood up quite well. Total income had been £20.8m, of which £17.8m was unrestricted. Whilst apparently not comparing favourably with the total

income £24.4m the previous year, he noted that 2014 had been an exceptional year with two windfall legacies and a large VAT refund from HMRC.

Expenditure was £18.4m, giving a £600k deficit, but he noted that the Trust's reserves meant that it was well funded. The year had seen a continuing programme of improvements to centres, a continuation of the Conservation programmes, and business as usual across the range of Trust activities. He was also pleased to note further investment in Fundraising.

He noted that the Auditors had given a clean set of accounts for the tenth year running.

He noted that the FRS17 evaluation had gone in the Trust's favour over the past year and therefore, in theory, the deficit on the pension scheme had gone down.

The Hon Treasurer extended his thanks to all his fellow trustees, Martin Spray and his team, in particular Nicola Spencer, Finance Director. He also thanked all the Chairmen he had served under, and all members and supporters.

A gentleman from the floor extended thanks from the members to the Hon Treasurer for all the sterling work he had done for the Trust.

The receipt of the Annual Report and Financial Statements was proposed by Mr Peter Wallis and seconded by Mr Mike Breward. Members voted to accept receipt.

6. To re-appoint Messrs. Mazars of Beaufort Buildings, Clifton, Bristol BS8 4AN, as auditors and to authorise Council to agree their remuneration.

Re-appointment of the auditors was proposed by Les Jones, seconded by Tony Thomas and the vote was carried.

7. Questions raised prior to the meeting.

Members had been requested to submit questions before the AGM, three had been received and these appear below, together with the responses:

From Mr John Bryant:

Conservation - are the various governments pro active regarding finance & support or is it a lone battle? Especially regarding Bewick's, red breast and spoonbills?

It's a complex picture due to the various levels of government – EU, UK and regional.

In terms of general support for conservation, we're fortunate there are strong wildlife laws at the top – the EU habitats and birds directives – which have shaped our national laws. However the EU is reviewing these directives at the moment and they may be weakened.

In terms of funding for conservation, these are straitened times. However, WWT has still managed to secure some significant support for our work because we have well designed projects.

From national government, the Darwin funding is the biggest source. This has been moved from Defra to DFID, and the focus has moved from species conservation to funding to develop sustainable livelihoods. WWT has secured funding for spoon-billed sandpipers, Madagascar pochard and Sarus cranes. And our success reflects our long history of addressing the conservation challenges for local people, as well as wildlife.

At the EU level, the LIFE + fund has supported our work on red breasted geese in Bulgaria for five years. At regional level, we are also successful in securing funding from SNH for education work at Caerlaverock and from Environment Wales for tackling invasive plants at Llanelli.

Statutory funds rarely if ever pay for the full project, so there is always a balance to make up. However, their funding makes it much easier to attract funds from appeals, sponsors and charitable trusts.

From Mrs D. Austin

What is the WWT position on illegal bird hunting in Malta? Are you liaising closely with the RSPB?

We work closely with the RSPB and other wildlife charities directly and through coalition groups such as Wildlife and Countryside Link. The situation with illegal bird hunting in the Mediterranean is alarming and as nature lovers and conservationists we are really pleased that it is being tackled by the various NGOs and Chris Packham, who's one of WWT's Vice Presidents. WWT hasn't developed a detailed position on the issue, as it's not a priority for wetland or waterbird conservation, unlike for instance the illegal shooting of Bewick's swans.

From Mr Hibbs

To help save the environment does WWT have plans for solar PV panels &/or charging points for electric vehicles?

We carefully monitor the carbon impact of our business so we can identify where we can invest to make the most impact for conservation. We are focussing on reducing our energy use where we can, most recently putting in a biomass boiler for Slimbridge which has replaced oil-powered heating, and will save 230 tonnes of carbon per year.

We are currently auditing four of the centres under the ESOS (Energy Saving Opportunities Scheme) which will make recommendations including investments in renewable energy sources, more energy efficient buildings and changes in working practices to not only reduce our carbon footprint further, but also save WWT money to spend on conservation instead of heating!

8. Long Service Awards

The Chairman noted that Peter Cranswick – Conservation Head of Planning and Advisory, WWT Slimbridge; and Duane Green – Deputy Aviculture Manager WWT Slimbridge Wetland Centre are to be awarded gifts of their choice in recognition of their 25 years' service with the Trust. Neither wished for a formal presentation at this meeting and arrangements are being made for them to receive their gifts in due course.

The Chairman noted that more than 15% of staff had over 15 years' service.

9. Chief Executive's address and staff presentations

The Chief Executive referred to the diversity of work that has been going on over the year, not all of which has been possible to include in the annual report. He recalled the four pillars on which Sir Peter Scott founded the organisation: Conservation, Research, Education and Recreation, and in particular the education aspect and the vitally important work of engaging children, which has been supported over the past year by HSBC whose funding has enabled thousands of schoolchildren from deprived areas to visit the WWT centres and experience nature close at hand.

He referred to the Spoon-billed Sandpiper project, and the headstarting work which has been done in the Russian tundra which has increased the population along the flyway to the extent that there are signs that the population is stabilising.

He noted the formal opening of Steart Marshes in Bridgwater Bay, and how successfully Trust staff had engaged with local people which had helped ensure the success of the project.

He reported that WWT had been elected as the Ramsar Convention's sixth International Organisation Partner. The Convention was conceived at Slimbridge in the 1960s, initially with 18 countries signing up, the figure now having risen to 169.

He looked forward to the 70th anniversary year, and noted the many achievements over the years which had garnered widespread respect for the organisation. He referred to the many challenges facing the natural environment, the increasing world population, the many pressures on resources and ensuing biodiversity loss. He stressed that the Trust's experience and expertise is more important than ever, and means needed to be found to broaden our sphere of engagement and reach people who do not visit our centres. The Working Wetlands programme and Sustainable Drainage Systems work were taking our work in new directions and helping address local flooding and loss of biodiversity. The Farm Treatment Wetlands Guidance document had recently been launched and this was reaching new audiences.

He stressed the need to increase the Trust's political advocacy work, on both a national and international scale, and reflected that the 70th anniversary will be a great celebration of 70 years but will also be about looking to the future.

A question was received from the floor from a member welcoming greater political advocacy and asking whether the Trust had any information available for members to send to their MPs. The Chief Executive responded that WWT wants to encourage members to write to their MPs with their concerns and would be looking to how we can help them to do so.

Staff then gave presentations as follows:

- Ann Nicol, Head of Engagement and Learning, on People Engagement at Centres, looking at the different ways of reaching the segments of visitors who come to our centres.
- Dr Geoff Hilton, Head of Research and Chief Scientist, with an overview of the Great Crane Project, with 94 birds reared at Slimbridge and released onto the Somerset Levels

over the past 5 years with a 75% survival rate

- Peter Cranswick, Conservation's Head of Planning and Advisory, on Mission Madagascar, a project to save the Madagascar pochard from extinction, working with local communities so that the lake chosen as the release site for the captive-reared ducks provides sustainable livelihoods for all.

Vice President Mark Carwardine commended the Trust for its work in Madagascar.

10. The Chairman officially closed the meeting at 13.10.