

## **Minutes of the 64<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust**

WWT Martin Mere, Fish Lane, Burscough, Lancashire, L40 0TA

15 September 2011 at 10:30am

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

Tony Thomas OBE (Chairman), Barnaby Briggs, Anna Carragher, Peter Day, Sir Graham Fry, Les Jones OBE, David Milne QC, Sir George Russell CBE and Simon Tonge.

### **1. Apologies for absence were received from:**

HRH The Prince of Wales KG, KT, GCB (President), Dr Andy Brown, Mike Dearden, Alastair Driver and Philip Duncan.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the 64<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of WWT, which he referred to as a leading UK conservation organisation which works to save wetland for wildlife and people worldwide, based on the four fundamental pillars identified by our founder, Sir Peter Scott: research, on the ground conservation action, education and recreation.

### **2. Minutes of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Annual General Meeting**

Comments were invited on the minutes of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Annual General Meeting. No comments were received and the minutes were proposed by Simon Tonge, seconded by Anna Carragher and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

### **3. Matters arising from the minutes.**

There were no matters arising.

### **4. Re-election of the President, HRH The Prince of Wales, and Vice-Presidents.**

The President and Vice Presidents were re-elected in 2010 for a five year period. Sir David Attenborough was also elected as Vice President following the 2010 AGM.

### **5. To receive the results of the election of members of Council.**

The chairman announced that sadly, after 9 years, he is stepping down and that Sir George Russell, CBE, has kindly agreed to take over the chair later this year. David Milne QC will also step down from Council in December 2011, but will continue to be a much valued member of the Finance and General Purposes committee. The chairman reported that, under Article 43(a), Dr Andy Brown, Simon Tonge and Peter Day were eligible for re-election at this meeting. These trustees were duly elected for another 3 year term. Mr Alastair Driver and Mr Philip Duncan will continue to serve as co-opted trustees until the December Council meeting when they will become elected members. Mr Barnaby Briggs was introduced to the meeting as a co-opted trustee.

The following are members of WWT Council from July 2011:

Anthony Thomas	Alastair Driver (co-opted)
Leslie Jones	Philip Duncan (co-opted)
Barnaby Briggs (co-opted)	Sir Graham Fry
Dr Andy Brown	David Milne QC
Anna Carragher	Sir George Russell
Peter Day	Simon Tonge
Mike Dearden	

The following are WWT Vice-Presidents from July 2011:

Sir David Attenborough, OM, CH, CVO, CBE, FRS	Her Grace The Duchess of Norfolk
John Berkeley TD, JP, DL	Chris Packham
Mark Carwardine	Tony Pidgley
Sir Richard Gaskell LLD (Hon), LLM (Hon)	Sir George Russell CBE
Sir Jack Hayward OBE	Dr Dafila Scott
Kate Humble	Keith Shackleton RSMA, SWLA
Hugh Mellor CBE	Professor Sir Robert Worcester

**6. To receive and consider the Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011 and the Report of the Auditors thereon.**

#### **Report of the Hon. Treasurer**

The Hon. Treasurer referred the meeting to the Consolidated Statement of Financial Activities, contained in the Annual Report for the 15 month period ending 31 March 2011. He explained that in common with many charities, the decision had been taken to move to an end of March end date for the financial year to better reflect the flow of income and to mirror the fiscal year. The Finance team was thanked for their significant achievements during this period of change.

Total income over the period was £25.9m, which included unusually high legacies received at £4.5m. However, it is recognised that the current economic climate is challenging and prudent measures to monitor and contain costs will need to be maintained by the Executive team. £6.2m will continue to be maintained in the reserves as 6 months' operating requirement. £1.7m of the surplus in unrestricted funds will be designated for investment in projects.

**The Chairman thanked Hon. Treasurer for his report and asked if there were any questions on the Annual Report and Financial Statements.**

Dr Douglas Buchanan, a life member, asked whether there are any long term liabilities under the now closed defined benefit pension scheme.

The Hon. Treasurer confirmed that the scheme was closed in 1997, however, it is still in deficit (£2.5 - £2.6m at the last triangulation) and continues to be closely monitored by the actuary who agrees the deficit with the Regulator every 3 years.

Mr David Wilkins asked whether each visitor centre is independently accountable.

The Chairman confirmed that each visitor centre is its own cost centre and the Centre Manager is accountable for the control of budgets and achievement of targets.

Mr Robert Fisher asked if Martin Mere is a viable centre

The Hon Treasurer and the Chief Executive confirmed that Martin Mere is a viable centre, however it should be remembered that all centres receive additional support and funding from the teams based at HQ in Slimbridge.

Mr Peter Wallis queried whether the positive cash position of £6m was due to prudent accounting or taking a firmer line with debtors.

Stuart Leed responded that it reflected receiving some funding for projects early.

The Hon. Treasurer added that all the financial activities and results of WWT are fully and independently audited and reported upon to Council, and the auditors had given the Trust a clean bill of health. The Hon. Treasurer commended the accounts to the meeting.

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

**7. 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 Mr David Milne, seconded by Sir Graham Fry and the vote was carried.

**8. Questions raised prior to the meeting.**

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

**Q. From: Mr and Mrs Green – When the application form for the AGM is incorporated into a page, and cut out to reply, the literature on the reverse of the page is lost. How can you get around this?**

A. This is done to minimise costs and printing, but you can always call the number for the membership office given on the form to book your place instead. We will mention this facility next year on the invitation itself.

**Q. From Miss H Stebbings – What further development sites (if any) are there in the United Kingdom?**

A. Our main priority in recent years has been on improving and extending all our existing nine centres – with major developments at Welney and Castle Espie which included extensive habitat restoration and creation. We are also working closely with the Environment Agency on one of the largest intertidal habitat creation projects in the UK at Bridgewater. In the future we will continue to look at opportunities to enhance our current centres, both in terms of improving visitor engagement with wildlife and in extending and improving our reserves.

We will also be seeking to develop a series of sites, sometimes with partners, outside our current nine centres which are good examples of multi-function wetlands – those which combine high wildlife value with other wetland benefits such as flood control and water quality improvement.

**Q. From Mr Reuben B Girling – At Welney, would it be possible to have a pontoon, or three, tethered and aligned for viewing during the winter months from the heated observatory, and accessible hides so that at times of high water-levels the waterfowl have additional “dry land” on which to rest?**

**A.** We wouldn't really expect birds to use pontoons. When the water levels on the Ouse Washes are exceptionally high, birds tend to use the high areas, where there is plenty of food. WWT works with the Environment Agency to keep water levels as low as possible, but essentially the Ouse Washes is used as a reservoir.

Over the last few years we have invested in converting arable land around WWT Welney to wet grassland. The new areas – Bank Farm and Lady Fen – have been hugely successful both in terms of breeding waders in the spring, and also for wintering wildfowl such as widgeon. The birds on those areas are easily viewed from the cafeteria. We very much aim to provide a bird spectacle, whatever the situation on the Washes.

**Q. From Mrs Q and Mr R Richard – By what means do migratory birds find their whereabouts?**

**A.** Migratory birds usually find their way in one of two main ways – either through the learnt recognition of landscape features or, more typically, through an innate genetic predisposition to move certain distances and directions at certain times of the year.

Geese and swans, and other large waterbirds such as cranes, migrate as young birds with their parents, and learn migratory routes from them that they will repeat as independent adults, thus establishing very traditional flyways. Other wildfowl, i.e. ducks, and most other birds do not migrate with experienced family members, so cannot necessarily learn migratory routes from relatives. However, some species join flocks and so the experience of older birds may be one way in which migratory routes are learnt. Nevertheless, most birds have an element of genetic predisposition to move certain distances and directions, though this may be modified over time by environmental changes, and exact stop over and final destination locations are more likely to be determined by the individual bird rather than genetic make-up.

Species use a variety of cues to help identify and remember the correct migratory route, and these will vary in importance depending on whether the species is a day or night time migrant, and the conditions experienced at the time.

Birds also need to be flexible when migrating, in order to respond to unfavourable conditions that may be unexpectedly encountered. For example, a WWT telemetry study of migrating Barnacle Geese showed that when birds encountered dense fog in the North Sea during migration from Scotland to Norway they did one of two things to avoid flying through the fog – they either carried on flying south to get around it, or they climbed over it at altitudes much higher than they would normally choose to fly. This shows that the birds changing their migratory plans, and that avoiding the fog must have carried significant advantages because the birds were willing to expend valuable energy reserves doing so.

Much has been written about bird migration, and much remains to be learnt, but a great way to explore this subject in more detail is by delving into Peter Berthold's 'Bird Migration: A General Survey'.]

**Q. From Brian Bertram – At a recent AGM, I asked why WWT London Wetland Centre was not a member of BIAZA. Almost all the significant zoos in Britain are members of this important organisation, including as one would expect WWT Slimbridge, WWT Martin Mere, WWT Arundel, WWT Washington, WWT Castle Espie, and WWT National Wetland Centre Wales. The meeting was told that the London Wetland Centre’s non-membership was an oversight, and that it would be joining. It has not done so. Is it expected to be a very long-lasting oversight?**

**A. London Wetland Centre’s application has now been submitted to BIAZA and we expect to have membership confirmed in November 2011.**

**Q. From Mr Sean Sweeney – What new technologies are you intending to bring in to aid bird monitoring on the reserves i.e. any new IT software or new IT tools?**

**A. We are just about to start using Recorder 6 as the Trust wide method of recording species data for our reserves (replaces an outdated system of note books, tables in Word or Excel) which will help us monitor the biodiversity of our reserves. We will also be upgrading to CMSi from CMS for creating and managing management plans.**

**Q. From Trevor Roberts – What are the consequences of a spillage from the gas well drilling on the Ribble Outmarsh? To what extent has the WWT brought home this reality to government and – in publicity – to the general public?**

**A. The regulation of groundwater, quality and quantity, is the role of the Environment Agency and they inform us they are monitoring the site carefully. We understand that at this stage the work is exploratory, and that any permanent undertaking would undergo a further consultation stage. The process involved is called ‘fracking’, with the main risk being the creation of minor earthquake-like disturbances. For such disturbances to lead to pollution they would need to somehow cause the mobilisation of chemicals underground in such a way that they entered the aquifers and eventually appeared above ground. WWT is liaising with the EA and Natural England to ensure we are kept up to date with any changes in the situation and that we understand the work taking place.**

**9. The Chairman and Chief Executive summarised the achievements of the year for WWT.**

**Mr Pater Wallis proposed a vote of thanks to the Chairman for his dedicated service to the Trust over the last nine years. The Chief Executive echoed the sentiments and announced that Council had unanimously voted to elect the Chairman as a Vice President of the Trust.**

**After lunch members were invited to take part in talks and walks around centre.**

 19-9-12