



WWT Wetlands for life

Minutes of the 69th Annual General Meeting of the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

WWT London Wetland Centre

Thursday 6 October 2016 at 10:30am

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

Peter Day (Chairman), Martin Birch, Sir Graham Fry, Barnaby Briggs, Anna Carragher, Prof Alastair Driver

In attendance: Martin Spray, Chief Executive

The Chairman, Peter Day, welcomed all to the 69th Annual General Meeting of WWT, in the Trust's 70th anniversary year. He extended a special welcome to Vice Presidents Sir George Russell, Tony Thomas and Hugh Mellor.

1. Apologies for absence were received from:

HRH The Prince of Wales KG, KT, GCB (President); Vice-Presidents The Duchess of Norfolk, Mr Tony Pidgley CBE and Dr Dafila Scott; and Trustees Simon Tonge and Pamela Castle OBE.

2. Minutes of the 68th Annual General Meeting

Comments were invited on the minutes of the 68th Annual General Meeting. No comments were received. The minutes were proposed by Peter Wallis, seconded by Tony Thomas and signed by the Chairman.

3. Matters arising from the Minutes

There were no matters arising.

4. Elections to Council

The Chairman reported that Sir Graham Fry was standing down and then thanked him for his tremendous support over the past six years as a Trustee. He then presented Sir Graham with a Peter Scott print.

The Chairman informed the meeting that there were vacancies for trustees and that a skills needs analysis would be conducted and these would be advertised in the near future.

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

a) Chairman's Comments on the Report

The Chairman encouraged members to read the report had they not already done so. He noted that it describes the key areas of what we do and how successful we are, and presents our vision for the future, including key goals.

In 2016, the 70th anniversary year, the Trust remained in a healthy state, with wetland centre visitation increasing by 11.5% over the past year. The Chairman thanked all staff, volunteers and members for their hard work in championing wetland conservation.

Education remained a very high priority for the Trust. In 2016, the HSBC Inspiring Generations Programme enabled 17,000 school children from more deprived areas to visit, bringing the total of those who have visited since the start of the programme to 47,000.

A large grant received from the Heritage Lottery Foundation was to fund significant developments at Slimbridge and enable Peter Scott's House to be opened to the public on a pre-booked basis. The work for the whole project was expected to be completed in 2020.

The Chairman noted the substantial quantity of wetland habitat that had been created at Steart Marshes and recommended the site as a spectacular place to visit.

He commented that it was becoming harder to make headway in the charity sector in the current economic climate and that in order to expand its work WWT needed to continue to inspire people and make nature relevant to their everyday lives. He felt it was necessary to focus strongly on being creative in terms of how the organisation was perceived by the public. The Flight of the Swans expedition was an example of the kind of imaginative thinking which would inspire, both in terms of raising awareness around the plight of the Bewick's swan, and raising the profile of the organisation in the public domain.

The Chair noted that he was very fortunate to be supported by such an excellent team of trustees. He believed that WWT had a thriving future to look forward to.

b) Report of the Hon. Treasurer

Martin Birch, the Hon Treasurer, introduced himself to the meeting, his first as Treasurer. He presented highlights from the financial statements for 2015–16. He echoed the Chairman's remark

that the charity sector was currently a difficult place to be, with uncertainties around funding streams and around the environmental impact of the Brexit decision, and with ever tighter scrutiny.

He was pleased to have such an excellent Council of Trustees and noted the importance of good governance to the financial success of an organisation.

In 2015–16 income had risen by 15%, to almost £24 million, following a pattern of steady growth over the last five years, and this rise had enabled an increase in expenditure. The largest sources of income were Membership, Centre visitation, Trading and Legacies. This was an exciting time for WWT with the growth in funding enabling wider and more ambitious conservation projects and investment in capital projects at some of the wetland centres, including flood alleviation work at WWT Arundel. Visitation had risen by 11.5%, partly driven by new centre developments, including the new discovery hide at Martin Mere and new visitor facilities at Barnes.

The Hon Treasurer commented that the members are the bedrock of the organisation. There had been a 1% growth during 2015–16 but it was getting more difficult to recruit.

The Hon Treasurer noted that the growth in income also ensures that WWT can continue to set aside funds for six months' contingency.

In terms of pension liabilities, after a one-off payment into the pension fund, it now has a small surplus.

The Hon Treasurer thanked his Council colleagues, WWT Management Board, staff and volunteers, and above all the members. He noted that thanks to the support of all we are custodians of thriving wetlands.

There were no questions.

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

6. To re-appoint Messrs. Mazars of 90 Victoria Street, Bristol BS1 6DP, as auditors and to authorise Council to agree their remuneration.

Re-appointment of the auditors was proposed by Roy Osborne, seconded by John Nigel Stevenson and the vote was carried.

7. Questions raised prior to the meeting.

Members had been requested to submit questions before the AGM, two 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?**

The Westminster Government continues to provide support for projects that contribute to the achievement of the UK's international treaty obligations through the DfID Darwin Initiative. Darwin funding has supported work on spoon-billed sandpipers, Madagascar pochard and sarus cranes. The next round of Darwin funding supports projects from April 2017 and lasts up to four years. In previous rounds awards have ranged from £80,000 to £310,000 for a three year project. This funding is aimed at obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity and other multilateral treaties and is unlikely to be affected by the UK's decision to leave the EU.

Other work is supported by EU funding, such as LIFE+ which has supported our partnership species work, including conservation of red breasted geese in Bulgaria and the upcoming project to boost the black-tailed godwit breeding population in East Anglia. Funding for the BTG project was approved after the Brexit vote.

WWT also benefits from payments for environmental land management provided by the Common Agricultural Policy. The Chancellor has guaranteed these payments until 2020, but the future of funding that has hitherto relied on the EU remains in doubt.

From Elizabeth Gordon:

- **What is WWT's long term outlook, position near Hammersmith and property value, in future years.**

WWT does not actually own the freehold of the centre at London, it is on a long-term lease with Thames Water so the property values should not affect WWT.

However, there is investment taking place in the infrastructure for example the planned refurbishment of the shop facilities.

With regards the financial stability, WWT holds a sustainable level of reserves and there is a 5-year financial model to ensure that they remain sustainable for the future.

WWT also holds a contingency reserve set aside containing sufficient funds to cover the essential expenditure for a period of 6-months.

A question was received from the floor, from Mr John Crawford:

- **What is WWT's view of the various tidal power schemes, including the Severn, Swansea Bay, and what is WWT's opinion on Hinkley point?**

The Chief Executive responded that WWT has been in conversation with Tidal Lagoons, who are to build a tidal lagoon in Swansea Bay, and have shown interest in the Severn. He noted that the River Severn has the second highest tidal range in the world and is therefore the obvious target for power generation. He stressed that it was important to find the most sustainable solution, as any such project would have an impact on the river, and that a tidal lagoon would have much less impact than the previously proposed barrage. He noted that WWT has supported the Swansea lagoon, believing it to be feasible, on the understanding that it will be closely monitored for impact.

He noted that WWT does not have an official position on Hinkley Point but felt that due to the very slow pace of addressing climate change it could be that nuclear power is a short-term solution.

8. Long Service Awards

The Chairman noted that Steven Hyndman, Centre Warden at WWT Llanelli, was to be awarded a gift of his choice in recognition of his 25 years' service with the Trust. He did not wish for a formal presentation at this meeting and arrangements are being made for him to receive his gift in due course.

9. Chief Executive's address

The Chief Executive reiterated the Chairman's opening remarks, that this was the 70th anniversary year of the Trust, the actual date being 10 November. The past 70 years had seen the organisation make ground-breaking achievements, building on the great legacy of our founder. Sir Peter Scott had positively affected the lives of many, and WWT's achievements were continuing year on year.

The Chief Executive reflected that the world in 2016 is very different to that of 1946, and that the anniversary presented a good opportunity to look back, but also to look towards the future. There had been a huge growth in awareness of environmental issues. WWT had undertaken major projects at home and abroad, not least the coastal re-alignment at Steart and saving the Madagascar pochard, the World's rarest duck. There were also some positive indications overseas, with a large number of wetland parks being constructed in China. Not so positive was the situation in S Korea, which now had the largest coastal barrage in the world. Birds Australia had already recorded a 50% decline in great knot population in the 3 years after construction. Coastal development was taking place for short term gains and this is something which needed to be addressed. Climate change was of growing concern, and little was being done to counteract this. The UK government was absent from the largest wetland conference in the world, and this had been noticed by other government representatives.

The Chief Executive noted that the environment had not featured in the referendum debate, that there was no general sense of the immediate impact of habitat destruction and species decline, and that environmental NGOs were not getting the message across in the way that they should be. He stressed that the natural environment is our life support system and that we have to engage with people more proactively – we do this at our centres, we need to make sure we do it even better there and outside our wetland centres. However, with annual visitation to WWT centres of around one million, and with a population exceeding 64 million in the UK, it was necessary to reach a much wider audience. He felt that the challenge was to be much more pragmatic and opportunistic. Our language and communication had to change. NGOs needed to understand the world we live in and engage with other sectors in more realistic and pragmatic ways. We needed to present solutions.

He spoke of natural capital, the concept of putting value on nature. He said that when he was first confronted with this concept he felt that it was so typical of human society to regard nature as a commodity. But it was clear that this was perhaps becoming a way of approaching the natural environment to reach those who otherwise would not appreciate its value. He had recently spoken at a debate on this subject and of the benefits of applying natural capital principles to wetlands, which provide a wealth of benefits to people and wildlife. For example wetland treatment systems were extremely beneficial. He cited, as an example, the Madagascar Pochard project, to save the world's rarest duck, which had now morphed into a much broader programme working with local communities

to provide more sustainable livelihoods and ultimately a more sustainable future for the whole environment.

WWT Consulting, our wholly owned company had also completed many wetland projects worldwide providing benefits to wildlife and local communities, for example in Sri Lanka.

Looking forward to the next 70 years he believed that WWT will need to look more ambitiously and relate our work to people and people's lives more strongly.

Marsh Award for Wetland Conservation

The Chief Executive introduced Dr Carl Sayer, Senior Lecturer at UCL.

Dr Sayer gave an introduction to the work of Richard Waddingham, a Norfolk farmer, with whom he has worked for 10 years. Mr Waddingham's farm is a commercially successful business. Its 243 hectares are intensively farmed, yet within this acreage, inspired by his grandfather and by Sir Peter Scott, he has created a vibrant wetland with 40 spring-fed ponds providing the habitat for many species, showing that it is possible for healthy wetlands and intensive farming to co-exist. Dr Sayer described Mr Waddingham as a 'conservation stalwart of the very best kind'.

The Chief Executive then presented Mr Waddingham with the Marsh Award for Wetland Conservation. The award, run in partnership by the Marsh Christian Trust and WWT, honours exceptional individual achievement in local wetland conservation.

10. Staff presentations

Staff gave presentations as follows:

- Tim McGrath, Working Wetlands Manager on Working Wetlands and the award-winning WWT-HSBC garden at the Royal Hampton Court Flower Show.
- Richard Benwell, WWT's new Head of Government Affairs, on WWT work to inform and influence government policy for the benefit of wetlands and the environment.
- Ruth Seymour, on the Flight of the Swans expedition – WWT's Sacha Dench's audacious undertaking to fly a paramotor the entire migration route of the Bewick's swan, to highlight their plight along the flyway and galvanise conservation efforts in the 11 countries en-route from the Arctic summer grazing areas to their UK winter base.

11. The Chairman thanked the speakers for their excellent talks. He officially closed the meeting at 13.10.

