



**Minutes of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting of the  
Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust**

**London Wetland Centre, Queen Elizabeth's Walk, Barnes, SW13 9WT**

**Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2019 at 10:30am**

**The following members of the Council were present, together with more than 90 WWT members and staff:**

Peter Day (Chairman), Martin Birch (Hon Treasurer), Barnaby Briggs and Simon Tonge

In attendance: Martin Spray (Chief Executive)

**1. Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the 72<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting of WWT and remarked how good it was to see so many members and friendly faces in attendance.

It was the Chairman's 5th AGM and he was delighted to extend a warm welcome to Vice Presidents, Dr Dafila Scott, Sir George Russell CBE and Sir Robert Worcester KBE, DL.

**2. Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from the Trust's Patron, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales KG, KT, GCB, OM, AK, CD, QSO, PC; President Kate Humble; Vice Presidents Tony Pidgley CBE and Hugh Mellor CBE; and Trustees Andrew Beer, Simon Henzell-Thomas and Prof. Alastair Driver.

**3. Minutes of the 71st Annual General Meeting held Thursday 11th October 2018**

Comments were invited on the minutes of the 71st Annual General Meeting held Thursday 11th October 2018. No comments were received. The minutes were proposed by Sue Alexander, seconded by Nigel Stevenson and signed by the Chairman.

**4. Matters arising from the Minutes**

There were no matters arising.

**5. Elections to Council**

The Chairman announced that after two years' service as a Trustee on Council, Simon Henzell-Thomas had resigned due to a promotion at work requiring more of his time. Simon had a huge commitment to WWT and the Trust was delighted for him.

Under Article 43a, Barnaby Briggs and Prof. Alastair Driver were re-elected for a

second term of one year following a period of seven years' as Trustees, and three new Trustees would be joining the December Council meeting for the first time.

Sir George Russell CBE, in attendance with his wife Dorothy and daughter Alison, had retired as a Vice President. Sir George was a former Trustee and Chairman, and had made a huge contribution to the success of WWT. The Chairman thanked Sir George for all his hard work over the years and wished him a very happy retirement.

## **6. To receive and consider the Report and Accounts of the Council for the year ending 31st March 2019 and the Report of the Auditors thereon**

### **1 Chairman's Comments on the Report**

The Chairman introduced the Report of Trustees 2018-19 which described the great work carried out by WWT during the last financial year. It had been another good year financially and the organisation found itself in good shape, with strong reserves and legacy income. The management team were committed to the Trusts long term success and the Chairman was delighted to say that over the last few years, some extremely good, high quality executives had joined the team.

The Chairman made reference to the highlights of the year presented on page three and commented that great strides had been made towards the Trust's ambitious twenty five year vision for a world populated with healthy wetlands. Conservation work had been organised into nine Programmes to ensure that the best structure was in place to carry out work over the coming five years, and further details could be read from the report.

With substantial help from the Heritage Lottery Fund, WWT continued to work on Sir Peter Scott's legacy through the Slimbridge 2020 project, opening Scott House to the public to celebrate the life of a great man and placing him firmly in public consciousness.

Pioneering work to save wetland species from extinction continued to create international acclaim, and after many years of hard work, the Trust's incredible scientists made history and international recognition, by successfully releasing 21 Madagascar pochard onto Lake Sofia in Madagascar, ensuring mitigation against the threat of extinction of a highly endangered species.

Work in the Severn and Avon Vale to address the decline of the iconic red listed curlew had begun. The head starting process was underway and aimed to provide an important kick start to the population. Likewise, head starting work continued on the Ouse Washes in Welney, and 23 hand reared black-tailed godwit chicks were released onto the Fens.

Wetland landscape creation continued to be a component of the Trust's strategy and a good example of this could be seen at Enfield Lock in North London, where WWT worked with school children and the local community to design a new wetland and transform a neglected urban space into a new wildlife sanctuary bringing plants, animals, and people together for their mutual benefit.

With regard to the coming year, as well as maintaining lifelong water bird species work both nationally and internationally, Trust activities were encompassing wider landscape scale creation to support wetlands, wildlife, and critically, the provision of benefits to people. This developing approach formed an important part of the Trust's work and aimed to develop wetlands beyond its reserves resulting in a much greater impact on the environment. Steart Marshes at Bridgewater Bay in Somerset, was a great example of this, as was the Trusts involvement in the development of the Severn Vale waterscape, and this was where WWT continued to come into its own.

The Chairman finished by thanking the members, staff, volunteers and the great team of Council of Trustees. WWT had been particularly blessed with the support of its members over many years, for which the organisation was incredibly grateful, and without their dedication, nothing would be possible. WWT's work was becoming ever more relevant, as was member support. The public were becoming increasingly sensitive to the problems which needed to be solved, and there was no better time to address them.

## **2 Hon Treasurer's comments on the Accounts**

Martin Birch introduced himself as the Hon Treasurer and remarked that it was his pleasure to share the financial highlights from the year 2018-19.

Total income had increased to £24.4m, an increase of 2% on the previous year and the Trust's highest ever income.

Membership subscriptions rose by 2% to £7.3m. Trading income generated from the shops and restaurants increased by 5% to £5.2m, and retail and catering together produced approximately £1m of gross profit to help wider conservation objectives.

2017 was an exceptional year for legacies with £3.6m bequeathed, and it was not surprising that it fell back to £2.3m in 2018, but still well ahead of target.

Visitors to centres were up 3% on the previous year at 1.2m and income from admissions at centres increased by 14% to £4m.

Overall, the number of memberships remained static at just over 210,000. The Hon Treasurer stressed that members were the bedrock of the Trust's success, from funding on-the-ground conservation work, to giving voice to campaigns, and that wetlands could not be protected without them. He urged members to tell their friends and family about membership and the work being done with godwits and the iconic curlew.

Support from members made it possible to increase expenditure from £23.7m in 2017-18 to £24.8m in 2018-19; an increase of 5%. Approximately one quarter of income was spent on fundraising and servicing the shops and restaurants, and around three quarters on enhancing the reserves and wider conservation programs, e.g. solar panels at London and Slimbridge, and great progress had been made with the Slimbridge 2020 project to celebrate the life of Sir Peter Scott. Arctic Adventure opened in the summer, the goose house was rebuilt, the old ambulance hide was replaced, and a wonderful new state of the art Estuary Tower was due to open imminently.

Conservation wasn't restricted to the UK and in December 2018, WWT made history with the release of twenty one Madagascar pochard, the world's rarest bird, onto Lake Sofia in Madagascar.

WWT delivered its conservation work mainly through the Trust, but also through WWT Consulting Ltd, and following an independent review, Council took the difficult decision to absorb the consultancy work into the Trust to ensure the work was fully aligned to the Trusts immediate priorities.

The reserves policy required sufficient funds to be set aside for six months as a contingency and was estimated at just over £7m, which had been satisfied. As part of the five year plan, capital and designated funds would be drawn upon to expand and invest in saving more wetlands, and the past trend was likely to moderate in the future.

The reserves not tied up in assets were invested in Rathbone Greenbank, an ethical investment company. Investments generated a return of 14.8% in 2018-19 which equated to a one third carbon reduction on the footsy equivalent. The

Trust's carbon footprint was down 7% on the previous year, and 20% overall since 2013.

The pension salary scheme valuation had increased to just over £2m, the obligations of which could be fulfilled in full. The charity sector had been rocked by scandals in recent years and unsurprisingly donations to charities had been falling. It was testament to the values and behaviours of staff at WWT that it stood apart, with rising income and a real confidence to grow impact.

The Hon Treasurer thanked the Finance team, and John Rew as Director, who brought new perspective and leadership which would serve WWT well into the future. An external audit went well and the Hon Treasurer was grateful for the commitment of Mazars, who would serve again in the coming year subject to member's agreement.

The Hon Treasurer finished by commending the 2018-19 financial statements to the members, on behalf of Council.

Questions are set out below along with their responses.

From Alastair Whitelaw:

**1. Does 'aligning our investments to our charitable objectives' mean that WWT does not hold any oil and gas shares?**

The Hon Treasurer responded that the investment fund manager had moved to Rathbone Greenbank, an ethical investment company. WWT considered excluding all firms that had any significant impact on wetlands, as well as other harmful factors like aviation etc. but concluded to exclude only the worst performers. Rathbone Greenbank were engaging with those they considered to be the best performers in an otherwise harmful sector, and whose relationships would serve well in the long term.

From Alastair Whitelaw:

**2. WWT received £74,000 from the Scottish Government and £16,000 from the Scottish National Heritage. What was this money used for?**

James Robinson, Director of Conservation, explained that although Caerlaverock Wetland Centre was the only centre in Scotland, WWT did a lot of conservation work there, and the money was used to fund goose and swan monitoring, e.g. population trends, and to fund research into barnacle and green and white fronted geese, in line with the Programmes referred to in the Annual Report.

The receipt of the Report and Accounts was proposed by David Milne and seconded by Joan Wheeler-Bennett. Members voted to accept receipt.

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

The Chairman noted that the Trust planned to re tender in 2020 for the year 2021.

**a) Auditor's comments**

The Auditors were not in attendance and no comments were received.

**b) Re-appointment of auditors**

Re-appointment of the auditors was proposed by David Milne, seconded by Robert Falkner, and the vote was carried.

## **8. Questions (raised with the Chairman prior to the meeting)**

No questions were submitted by members in advance.

## **9. Long Service Awards**

The Chairman was delighted to announce that long service awards had been given to the following individuals for 25 years' service:

- Richard Hearn, Policy & Advocacy Manager (International) based at Slimbridge (HQ), started on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1994,
- Robin Jones, Senior Technology Officer in Conservation Evidence, based at Slimbridge (HQ), started on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1994,
- Martin McGill, Senior Reserve Warden at Slimbridge, started on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1994,
- Nigel Williams, Centre Manager at Llanelli, started on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1994, and
- Susan Woodward, Retail and Visitor Services Supervisor at Slimbridge, started on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1994.

The Chairman also recognised two long serving volunteers at London Wetland Centre; Nicholas Hurry and Joan Wheeler-Bennett; who had both retired after 25 years' service.

Members acknowledged these wonderful achievements with a round of applause.

## **10. Chief Executive's address**

The Chief Executive was delighted to welcome everyone to the meeting on what was a beautiful sunny day and thanked everyone for attending.

He started by emphasising the need to put right the increasingly negative impact people were having on the environment. Reports from the UN were talking about environmental crisis, scientists were reporting that the Arctic was warming at twice the rate of other parts of the planet, icebergs were breaking up, ice was melting, and the recent fires in the Amazon, were all huge problems to address. The State of Nature report had once again reported a steady decline of many species in the UK, and as the fifth largest economy in world, it was alarming.

It was also alarming, but encouraging too, to see the sudden campaign brought about by the younger generation, spurred on by what could only be described as fear for their futures, and anger at the lack of attention from politicians. The range of ages and backgrounds in Extinction Rebellion was extraordinary, but all were expressing the same anger and concerns, and it had prompted him to reflect on whether the conservation movement had been part of the problem.

Reflecting on five decades of conservation in the UK, he remarked that the growth of the conservation charity sector had been tremendous, without which the UK would be in a much poorer state, but the declines were continuing, and although some battles were being won, the war was not. The clear message for him, coming from the climate strikes in particular, was that the conservation sector needed to step up, be even more ambitious, shout louder to drive messages home, and give support through its practical work and the power of its advocacy message.

The Chief Executive went on to explain how WWT planned to meet the challenge, by summarising nine conservation Programmes launched earlier in the year, five in the UK and four international, and what he hoped to come from them.

The first two Programmes, wetlands in rural UK catchments, and wetland landscapes at and around WWT sites, were ambitious initiatives to restore or create wetlands of a substantial size. Steart Marshes was an amazing example of this, which opened up a whole new feel for the organisation, and this was the ambition he wanted to see coming through in future projects. A report from the Natural Capital Committee stated that the costs of restoring or creating 100,000 hectares of wetlands in the UK would be repaid threefold through the ecosystem services provided. WWT could not achieve this on its own, but showing how to restore large wetlands would help to encourage others to do the same.

The third Programme was about restoring wetland species in the UK. As with most of the conservation movement, WWT had always tended to focus on rare or immediately threatened species, but there were other species that had been lost and had the ability to connect people. Following the successful reintroduction of the crane into West Country and black-tailed godwits in East Anglia, WWT were doing the same with the curlew. It was essential to connect people back with their landscapes, which didn't necessarily have to be through birds, but could be done through other species too e.g. natterjack toads at Caerlaverock.

Programme four was about engaging people at WWT sites, which the organisation already did fantastically well, but it was even more important to get messages across, very subtly, about the value of wetlands, and WWT were looking at new ways of doing this.

The fifth UK Programme was about urban and community wetlands. By 2050, it was predicted that over 70% of the world's population would be living in towns and cities and it was essential to connect with those people. Referring to London Wetland Centre as an example, one hundred and twenty different species of bird had been recorded there, but only fifty had been seen in Oxford, and it was important to involve and empower people. WWT had already started to embark on a whole new work area around health, wellbeing and connection with nature, to engage people and help Governments understand and see the value in it.

Moving on to international work, he explained that Programme six was about community based wetlands; a whole new area of work which had changed WWT's entire approach to international wetland conservation. In Cambodia and Madagascar, projects with flagship birds like the Sarus Crane and the Madagascar Pochard, had led to work with local communities to achieve more sustainable livelihoods, improved agricultural processes and production of high quality food, and this was where WWT's work would focus.

The next international Programme was about global wetland support and more involvement with policy making at a higher level. WWT was already involved with the Ramsar Convention, one of six international organisation partners, and planned to be a lot more ambitious to have wider influence and find resolutions. Wetland Link International also provided a great opportunity to share best practice and engage with people in other parts of the world.

Finally, Programmes eight and nine focused on two migratory flyways; the East Asian Australasian Flyway and the North-west European flyway. Many millions of birds migrated along the East Asian Australasian Flyway, but there were problems, and WWT were working closely with, and as a member of, the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) to address those. The spoon-billed sandpiper had

become a flagship bird for the whole problem of coastal development and coastal habitat loss, and likewise, the Baer's Pochard for inland freshwater systems. China had changed its policies, Korea were starting to change how they treated coastal wetlands, and WWT would continue to work on the state of wetlands in China and how they could be improved.

WWT had been working on the North-west European flyway since it was first established in 1946, covering eleven countries from the Arctic to the UK. Traditionally, WWT had studied the Bewick's swan and other species along this flyway and recently had even spoken to Russian hunters about the need to conserve certain species and remove lead ammunition from the shooting process, which had received a positive response, but it was now essential to start talking to Governments and decision makers, big corporations, major businesses etc. to make further improvements.

The Chief Executive finished by stating that WWT had done some really incredible work and was clearly capable of doing all the things he had previously mentioned, but the organisation had to have a stronger voice. The launch of the Government's 25 Year Plan for the Environment at London Wetland Centre was just the start, and it was essential to get through to Governments and support those passionate campaigners that were becoming so dramatically powerful.

Questions were raised as follows:

From Jonathan Manley:

**1. How do you choose the Madagascar pochard or spoon-billed sandpiper etc. against all the other well deserving species?**

The Chief Executive remarked that it was an incredibly valid question, and as much as WWT would like to save every species, strategic choices needed to be made. Decisions were based around how a species could highlight much bigger issues, e.g. the spoon-billed sandpiper in China had helped to change international policies. Likewise, the Madagascar pochard enabled WWT to access communities and improve a lake, and this pragmatic approach was important.

From Alastair Whitelaw:

**2. Looking at the longer term and the expected global sea level rises risking increased flooding in land, how will that affect our footprint given the Trust has leases that may be under water in 70 years?**

The Chief Executive responded that it was a very real issue not just facing WWT, but also organisations like The National Trust and some of their heritage sites. James Robinson confirmed that the Trust's national planning process was reviewed annually and mitigations would be built in to understand levels of flood risk at the reserves and how they would be effected.

## **11. Marsh Awards for Wetland Conservation 2019**

The Chief Executive introduced Peter Titley, Ambassador for the Marsh Christian Trust, to present the awards.

Peter noted that it was the second time he had attended an AGM and commended the Hon Treasurer for his presentation of the accounts. He stated that it was an absolute pleasure to be representing the Marsh Christian Trust, and that the founder, Brian Marsh, took a keen interest in the awards and a shared desire to recognise unsung heroes who had done so much to make an impact.

- **Mary Colwell – Marsh Award for Wetland Conservation**

The Chief Executive introduced the first award for wetland conservation, to recognise the work of Mary Colwell, a producer, writer and campaigner, interested in all aspects of the natural world. Mary was the energy behind curlew recovery activities in the UK, bringing a variety of people together, and it was unusual for an individual to create so much enthusiasm and public interest. Mary's book, *Curlew Moon*, was a wonderful dedication to such an iconic bird, and her interventions had led to a meeting at 10 Downing Street, which was attended by key politicians and people across the UK. It was thanks to her passionate and persuasive manner that her voice had been heard.

Peter presented the award to Mary who thanked The Marsh Christian Trust, and also WWT for stepping up and taking the curlew to the heart of its work.

- **David Hindle – Marsh Award for Community Wetland Conservation Champion**

The Chief Executive explained that David had collated years of wildlife monitoring of Grimsargh Reservoirs into a biodiversity report, which culminated in the reservoir being designated as a biological heritage site. David was a Grimsargh Parish Councillor and had been instrumental in forming the Grimsargh Wetlands Trust and recruitment of volunteers, who ran the community based wetland reserve which played an important role for students of all ages.

Peter commented that it was a joy to have a glimpse into David's work, and proceeded to present him with the award for Community Wetland Conservation Champion.

David remarked how wonderful it was to receive the award and what a great privilege it was to be recognised. He had met Sir Peter Scott in the field at Martin Mere, and had great respect for him. Preservation of wetlands was important and the Grimsargh Reservoirs had gone from strength to strength due to the wonderful team of volunteers there.

- **Dr Llewellyn Young – Marsh Award for International Conservation**

The Chief Executive explained that sadly, the recipient of the award, Dr Llewellyn Young, had passed away in March 2019 at the age of sixty, and the award was being given as a celebration of his life to conservation.

He first met Lew in Hong Kong in 2006 when Lew was running the Mai Po nature reserve, which became legendary in the flyway for its exemplary management of migratory water birds, and ultimately a globally significant Ramsar site. Lew had a great vision for the whole of the Deep Bay area, and was working on this very strongly before moving to the Ramsar secretariat in Switzerland. He was an outstanding member of the team there, who stood out for his diplomacy, knowledge and passion, and for how he treated others. When he left Ramsar to join the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) as its CEO, it was a huge loss to the convention but a massive gain to the flyway and he did a huge amount to take the partnership to another level. Lew was a gentle, incredibly nice, highly passionate individual who went about his work in an inspirational way.

Lew's wife Deborah and daughter Naomi were in attendance to receive the award on his behalf and it was the Chief Executives privilege to be able to present it.

Peter remarked that it was a sad but joyous occasion, to be able to recognise the work of Lew, a great leader in his field, and long may his memory live on.



## 12. Staff presentations

Staff gave presentations as follows:

- Ruth Cromie, Health & Wellbeing
- Geoff Hilton, Curlew

Questions were raised as follows:

### 1. **The Health & Wellbeing work demonstrates a reduction in people's anxiety levels, but are the benefits ongoing and being measured?**

Ruth responded that it was a really important question, and it was realised early on in the research that people needed to have membership, but long term studies would add extra value to this.

### 2. **Have you found similar benefits across an age range?**

Ruth confirmed that the ethics of doing this were complex so work had only concentrated on adults, but there was a possibility of focusing on young people in the future.

The Chairman noted what a privilege it was to have two wonderful people working on such important work, and asked that any further questions be directed over lunch.

## 13. Chairman closes the meeting

The Chairman thanked the speakers for their excellent talks and officially closed the meeting at 13:11.