



Minutes of the 65th Annual General Meeting of the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

WWT Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, GL2 7BT

19 September 2012 at 10:30am

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

Sir George Russell CBE (Chairman), Anna Carragher, Peter Day, Sir Graham Fry, Les Jones OBE, Alastair Driver, Philip Duncan

1. Apologies for absence were received from:

HRH The Prince of Wales KG, KT, GCB (President), Barnaby Briggs, Simon Tonge and Dr Andy Brown.

Dr Dafila Scott and Sir Richard Gaskell (Hon), LLM (Hon), also sent their apologies.

The Chairman, Sir George Russell CBE, welcomed everyone to the 65th Annual General Meeting of WWT, his first as Chairman.

2. Minutes of the 64rd Annual General Meeting

Comments were invited on the minutes of the 64th Annual General Meeting. No comments were received and the minutes were proposed by Sir Robert Worcester, seconded by Peter Wallis and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

There were no matters arising.

4. Elections to Council

The chairman reported that, under Article 43(a), Anna Carragher, Sir Graham Fry and Les Jones had been re-elected for another three-year term. Mr Barnaby Briggs who has served as a co-opted trustee was elected as a member of Council earlier this year.

5. To receive and consider the Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31st March 2012 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 12 month period ending 31 March 2012. The Statement follows the format laid down by SORP 2005 [Statement of Recommended Practice: 'Accounting and Reporting by Charities'], which is currently under review.

Total income over the period was £16.9m, expenditure was £17.7m. The deficit is slightly larger than anticipated due to a combination of the current poor economic climate, and a downturn in attendance as a result of adverse weather conditions. Overall, the financial results for the year were encouraging but it was acknowledged that WWT still faces a financial headwind and there are challenges ahead. Legacies continued to be buoyant.

The Hon. Treasurer thanked the Finance team for their work in producing very good final and ongoing accounts.

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

In response to a query as to whether there are likely to be any redundancies or asset stripping the Hon. Treasurer stated that none was being envisaged, and that financial reserves were currently above Council's target. It was incumbent on the Executive Team to be creative and ensure a high degree of efficiency.

In response to a query that there had been no mention of reserves in the Financial Statement the Hon. Treasurer referred the enquirer to page 20 and note 27. It was also pointed out that on a number of occasions in the document 'reserves' are referred to as 'funds'.

In response to a query as to whether the poorer than anticipated performance and the challenges ahead posed any threat to the investment programme, the Hon. Treasurer replied that it was important to continue investing and improving facilities and that there were no plans to reduce the investment programme. The Chairman informed the meeting that a decision had been taken some years ago to build up reserves for a situation such as the one currently faced.

The receipt of the Annual Report and Financial Statements was proposed by Mr Tony Thomas and seconded by Peter Wallis. 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 Mr Leslie Jones, seconded by Anna Harrison and the vote was carried.

7. Questions raised prior to the meeting.

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

From Mr Joseph Robert Foster, Preston

Q. How long will it be before farmland wildlife will die out with the large amounts of herbicide, insecticide and fungicide now used on farmland which destroys all insects and herbs? No food for bees and young birds. When the ground is sprayed there is just a monocrop left.

A. We understand that farming is not only a threat to wildlife but also an opportunity to increase biodiversity. There are many things that can be done on farms for wildlife. For instance, WWT is looking to create more wetland treatment systems on farms, in order to benefit wildlife and demonstrate their value in improving water quality. However, this exact question relates to an area that WWT doesn't actively research. If you would like to find out more, I would direct you to the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, which is part of the Natural Environment Research Council.

Q. Are highways high on the list for killing wildlife off where County Councils plant wild flowers, all other flowers, food for bank voles, mice etc. which attract barn owl, sparrowhawk, little owl, which are killed by cars when they are foraging along the grass verges.

A. Again, we understand that road verges can offer an opportunity for conservation; although of course roads themselves can have many ecological impacts, such as fragmenting habitats, and light and noise pollution. However, the question of whether there is a population level impact on birds of prey from collisions with cars, is not an area that WWT is actively researching. If you would like to find out more it might be best to contact the Highways Agency or your local wildlife trust.

Q. Could the WWT buy more land off Fish Lane Tarlscough Moss and possible re-flood it for the Environment Agency (they are just re-flooding one area in Sefton on the River Alt moving the river bank back)?

A. We always seriously consider any opportunities to extend our wetland reserves and you will be aware that we have recently acquired a further 72 acres to the south west of the Martin Mere reserve to help reduce disturbance and with the potential of creating further wet grassland. The area Mr Foster refers to is to the north of the reserve and could be of interest. The main barrier these days is funding, with many of the larger funding bodies more and more reluctant to support land purchase. However we are in conversation with the Environment Agency in relation to

significant proposals to reduce the costs of flood protection and pumping in the Lower Alt and Crossens catchments near Martin Mere. Wetland creation can have benefits for wildlife as well as reducing flood risks for people and we will continue to look for opportunities to demonstrate this - possibly close to Martin Mere.

Q. Could you plant five acres of sugar beet for the pink-footed geese at Martin Mere to check if the numbers go up or more stay local?

A. Geese do feed in crop fields and, in certain areas, they can cause damage through eating grass and puddling the earth, bringing them into conflict with farmers. It is particularly an issue in parts of Scotland and WWT plays an active role in advising the government as part of the National Goose Management Review Group and Goose Science Advisory Group. Some of the land at Martin Mere is currently rented to farmers, however there will be the possibility of planting some acreage with sacrificial crops in the future.

Q. How does the release of tens of thousands of game birds each year affect the wild birds, with the amount of wild seed they eat in competition with wild birds (red-legged partridge, pheasant and mallard)?

A. WWT is concerned about the impact of spent lead shot used in shooting game. Wildfowl ingest it, mistaking it for grit and it causes much suffering and even death. However, this precise question relates to an area we don't actively research. If you would like to find out more, the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust or the British Association for Shooting & Conservation should be able to help.

Q. Could the WWT start a captive breeding enclosure pen for corn bunting and song thrush?

A. This is certainly an area which WWT is experienced in. We currently run conservation breeding programmes for spoon-billed sandpiper, Madagascar pochard and the Eurasian crane. However, with our limited resources we have to focus on the greatest priorities. That said, we are regularly in contact with our colleagues at other conservation organisations and if there were to be any way we could share our expertise effectively, we will.

From Mr John Bryant

Q. Was the London Wild Bird Watch a financial success? If so, will you be having further ones?

A. Thank you to all WWT members who attended the inaugural London Wild Bird Watch event in April 2012. We were delighted by the positive feedback we received from members and visitors, who commented on the wide variety of wildlife and optics exhibitors on offer, the excellent talks by Simon King and Kate Humble, and the friendliness of WWT staff and volunteers.

London Wild Bird Watch was made possible due to a collaboration between WWT and Upper Street Events, and while WWT London was delighted to host such a large scale event it did not come about without considerable impact on the centre's operations, including limiting access to the site for members and visitors during a two week period surrounding the show.

Following a thorough review of the event by WWT and the organisers, and taking into account the logistical and financial implications of staging this event over future years, we have taken the decision not to host London Wild Bird Watch in 2013. WWT would like to thank all members who attended the event in April.

From Mrs A Baker

Q. What are the Trust's long-term plans for the Scott House and studio at Slimbridge?

A. The Scott house will always be important to WWT and a great deal of effort has been made, alongside the Scott family, to preserve the Scott studio and its important records, papers, books and artworks. Unfortunately the rest of the house still requires considerable funds to repair roofs, ceilings and to improve insulation, heating and decoration. The pool area is also in a state of disrepair. We are investigating a number of mechanisms to secure financial support for the basic restoration of the house and outhouses. Once the fabric of the building is secure its future function is not finalised, but it has been successfully used over the last few years as an important reception area for visiting dignitaries and supporters – the amazing aura of the building and its fascinating heritage is very effective at re-enforcing WWT's conservation credentials. We will certainly preserve this role for at least part of the building in the future.

Additional questions raised at the meeting:

Q. What is WWT's attitude to the proposed badger cull?

A. WWT is working closely with other agencies on the question of the badger cull. It is the attitude of the organisation that science does not favour culling and we are in agreement with the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. We are looking at a vaccination programme for our reserves.

Q. Is there any problem with regard to ownership of the land on which the Scott House is situated?

A. No, WWT owns the property and the land.

8. Long Service Awards

Geraint Walters, Senior Warden at Llanelli, and Pat Fryer, Cleaner at Slimbridge, 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 they will receive their gifts privately from the Chief Executive in due course.

9. Chief Executive's address and staff presentations

The Chief Executive summarised the achievements of the year for WWT. It was encouraging that despite the current economic climate membership retention has remained high.

Staff then gave presentations as follows:

Geoff Hilton, on the Great Crane Project;

Kevin Peberdy, on plans to create one the UK's largest areas of new wildlife habitat on the Steart Peninsula in Somerset;

Marie Banks, on WWT Consultancy's work on water treatment systems; and

Carolyn Robertson, on Education, with particular reference to the Inspiring Generations fundraising initiative.

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

10. Chairman's address – end of formal meeting

S. Turner. 12/9/13.

The Chairman officially closed the meeting at 1.10.