



**WWT** Wetlands for life

## **Minutes of the 66<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust**

**WWT London Wetland Centre, Barnes, London SW13 9WT**

**12 September 2013 at 10:30am**

**The following members of the Council were present, together with more than 80 WWT members and staff:**

Sir George Russell CBE (Chairman), Leslie Jones OBE, Peter Day, Barnaby Briggs, Dr Andy Brown

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

HRH The Prince of Wales KG, KT, GCB (President), Dafila Scott, Sir Graham Fry, Alastair Driver, Philip Duncan, Anna Carragher and Simon Tonge.

The Chairman, Sir George Russell CBE, welcomed everyone to the 66th Annual General Meeting of WWT.

### **2. Minutes of the 65th Annual General Meeting**

Comments were invited on the minutes of the 65th Annual General Meeting. No comments were received and the minutes were proposed by Tony Thomas, 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 Leslie Jones had been re-elected for a further period of one year to serve as Treasurer.

**5. To receive and consider the Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 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 2013. The Statement follows the format laid down by SORP 2005 [Statement of Recommended Practice: 'Accounting and Reporting by Charities'], which is currently under review.

The Treasurer reminded members that the accounts are a public document available on the Charity Commission website to be scrutinised by members, donors and any other interested party. They have been audited by Mazars on an unqualified basis, ie they are a clean set of accounts.

Total income for the year was £17.2 m, compared with £16.9m the previous year. Total expenditure was £17.9m compared with £17.8 the previous year. There was a deficit of £725k compared to £839k the previous year. This is a second year of deficit and the situation is likely to continue for a couple of years due to a number of factors. The Trust is investing in Centres to make for a better visitor experience. Investment is also being made in increasing fundraising capacity: a new customer relations management system is being introduced which is expected to improve performance considerably. The past few summers have been quite bad and with the recession people have not had as much disposable income. All these factors have contributed to the deficit. However, offsetting this has been the great generosity of people who have left legacies to the Trust. We do believe that investment is necessary to help us develop as we want to. And we hope to be in a more robust position. We are investing in conservation much more and hope that will broaden our appeal to a wider audience.

The Hon Treasurer made mention of the FRS17 £.2.1 million deficit on the pension scheme, referred to in the report. This scheme is now closed to employees and the quoted sum is based on actuarial assumptions which change from year to year, and is not deemed to be a matter of concern.

It was noted that despite the deficit the Trust is meeting the financial reserves target.

**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 question as to insurance cover for employees and volunteers, following an accident to a senior reserve warden at Slimbridge, the Treasurer replied that the Trust has comprehensive cover, and risk assessments are carried out annually. The insurance cover is also reviewed annually.

In response to a question as to whether there is a maximum age for insurance cover for volunteers, the Hon Treasurer confirmed that the Trust gives the insurance company details of the age range of our volunteers.

In response to a question as to the 'Activities for generating funds' figure, quoted in the report in the Consolidated statement of financial activities, which gone down since last year, the Hon Treasurer replied that this was due in part to a reorganisation of teams and various staff vacancies and also lower visitation figures. The Trust's trading operation had been affected by the recession and a new

trading strategy is being introduced to address this.

In response to a question on WWTC profits, the Hon Treasurer replied that they are included in the Grants and Services section.

In response to a question on plans to increase membership and visitation income, the Chief Executive replied that membership and visitation are top priorities for the next 5 years, with measures being put in place to improve visitor engagement, and in terms of membership, to raise the Trust's profile and attract new members who may not live near to a Centre, but have an interest in supporting the boarder work of the Trust.

The Hon Treasurer stressed that the Trust is very grateful for the loyal support of all its members and extended his thanks for their ongoing support.

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

**The receipt of the Annual Report and Financial Statements was proposed by Mr Hugh Mellor 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 Tony Thomas, seconded by Robin Cornell and the vote was carried.

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

Members had been requested to submit questions before the AGM, one had been received and this appears below, together with the response:

**From Diane Austin**                                  "

**What are WWT's three main international priorities at present?"**

WWT has, since its formation, been known for its work saving wildfowl species in decline or threatened with extinction.

But, as we know, to conserve and save species we need to protect, restore and re-create vital habitats. This is important in the UK but in many parts of the world the degradation and loss of habitats is an even more pressing issue.

Our founder Peter Scott was ahead of many others in knowing back in the 1940s that conservation can only work if the natural world is relevant to people's everyday lives. This is even more important today in this fast developing and increasingly populated world.

So WWT's priorities internationally are:

1.        We have highly respected skills and expertise in the management, restoration and creation of

wetland habitats with a variety of functions to benefit both wildlife and people, and in sharing our knowledge and experience to build the capacity of others.

e.g. Our work in Cambodia and Sri Lanka.

2. We work to save threatened waterbirds, especially where they are flagship species for wider conservation issues, through providing practical, on the ground, solutions and conservation effort.

e.g. Spoon-billed sandpiper - the plight of the East Asian Australasian Flyway  
Madagascar pochard – environmental degradation in Madagascar

3. We have expertise in the design and management of wetland centres to engage people and help them to enjoy, appreciate and value the wonders of wetlands and their wildlife.

e.g. Our work in China.

#### **Additional questions raised at the AGM:**

**Q Could the 'Future plans' section of the Annual Report include mention of enlarging and creating new wetlands?**

The Chief Executive gave assurance that such work forms part of the Trust's future plans.

**Q Would there be a case for grades of membership?**

We are currently diversifying ways we fundraise, Membership is a complex area, and is going to be looked at in detail over the coming year.

**Q Increasing numbers of children are coming to the Centres, on a family ticket, to make use of Welly Boot Land. Is it possible to encourage them to commit to join for a year?**

We do try to encourage people to join on direct debit. Some people will come just for the play area, but it is our hope that they will still engage as a family, although that won't always be the case, but we do want children to come to our Centres. We do have formal learning systems in place, and engage many children this way.

#### **8. Long Service Awards**

Kevin Peberdy, Director of Centre Developments, and Paul Crew-Smith, Craftsman 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 highlighted the broad scope of work in which the Trust is involved, from visitor engagement at Centres and the learning programme to engage children, to wetland creation, conservation, and policy work. WWT has received a very generous donation from HSBC to be spent over four years on providing a day at our Centres for schoolchildren from deprived areas. WWT is leading a project on the Steart Peninsula in Bridgwater Bay, to open up, design and

manage a coastal area of 477ha, where the seawall will be breached and large areas of inter-tidal habitat created. In terms of policy work, WWT played a role in the process which has led to the ban on the sale of five species of invasive non-native plants. WWT formed part of a group of NGOs opposed to plans for a Severn Barrage, giving evidence to a Parliamentary Committee on the likely adverse environmental impact – the proposal has now been shelved. The Chief Executive also spoke of WWT's international species monitoring work and conservation breeding programmes..

Debbie Pain, Director of Conservation, spoke about the Madagascar pochard project, which is working to bring the species back from the brink of extinction. WWT mounted an emergency expedition to collect eggs from the very few pairs remaining, and in partnership with the Durrell Wildlife, have succeeded in building a captive population of 60 birds. There are plans to work with the local community to restore wetlands and improve livelihoods with a view to reintroducing the species in the long term.

Staff then gave presentations as follows:

- Andy Graham, Head of Wetlands for People, on Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDs) for Schools
- Matthew Simpson, Associate Director WWTC, on the WWTC project in Colombo, Sri Lanka
- Nigel Jarrett, Head of Conservation Breeding, on the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Project


The Chairman gave a special thank you to the volunteers who have played such an important role in the organisation over the past 60 years and continue to do so today.

After lunch members were invited to take part in activities around the centre.

#### **10. Chairman's address – end of formal meeting**

The Chairman officially closed the meeting at 1.10.

**Minutes agreed and signed 02.10.14**



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**Sir George Russell, Chairman**