



Minutes of the 74th Annual General Meeting of the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

**Held at the London Wetland Centre, Queen Elizabeth Walk, London SW13
9WT and simultaneously online, on Thursday 25th November 2021, at
2pm**

**113 WWT members and staff were present (68 virtually and 45 in person), including
the following members of the Council:**

Barnaby Briggs (Chair), Martin Birch (Hon Treasurer), Hester Liakos (HL), Andy Beer (AB)
and Alex Mawer (AM) at London, and Alan Law (AL) and Simon Tonge (ST) online.

In attendance: Kevin Peberdy (Chief Operating Officer)

1. Welcome

Barnaby Briggs introduced himself as Chair and gave a warm welcome to the 74th Annual General Meeting of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, taking place in its special 75th anniversary year. It was his privilege to be the Chair of the Council of Trustees for such an extraordinary organisation and to be host for the afternoon.

It was wonderful to have so many people in attendance, both in person at the London Wetland Centre, and online, and he was pleased to be able to facilitate a hybrid AGM, a first for WWT, which enabled even more people to participate in a safe and comfortable way.

The theme of the meeting was 'bigger, better, more connected wetlands' and he was looking forward to sharing many exciting stories of how WWT was achieving this and its plans for the future to do more. Attendees could expect to hear from a number of staff during the course of the afternoon with important news and updates from across the charity.

The Chair introduced WWT's Management Board; Kevin Peberdy (KP), James Robinson (JR), Corinne Pluchino (CP), John Rew (JRew) and Mat Carter (MC), who were all present in the room.

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; and President, Kate Humble.

3. Minutes of the 73rd Annual General Meeting held 26th November 2020

No comments were received on the minutes. Receipt of the minutes was acknowledged by Gwen Alwakeel and John Hook.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes

There were no matters arising.

5. **Vote and Resolution on the amendment of WWT's governing documents**

The Chair explained that it was the duty of the Trustees to ensure that WWT was properly governed and that its governing documents were kept up to date and fit for purpose. WWT was currently governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association, which were last amended in 2010 and needed to be amended for the following key reasons:

- To obtain museum accreditation for the Scott House Museum. This had not proved possible to date as the current Memorandum, whilst giving broad powers, lacked the specific power to run a museum. Museum accreditation would enable WWT to further develop the Museum and to apply for grant funding.
- The Articles currently limited WWT's Council to 10 trustees. We would like this limit removed, as from time to time, it may be in the best interests of the charity to exceed this limit if a number of high quality candidates bringing different areas of expertise become available at the same time. Trustees all become Guarantor Members of the charity and the number of Guarantor Members will remain capped at 20, effectively maintaining an upper limit of 20 to the number of trustees.
- The current Articles did not make provision for a Vice Chair. This was usual practice in most companies and charity boards of trustees, so this had now been included in the proposed new Articles of Association.

Whilst going through the amendment process, it seemed wise to incorporate other minor amendments by updating the language used, the references and the methods of communication with members.

The Chair continued that, on advice from the Trust's solicitors, all the amendments had been included into one new governing document entitled the Articles of Association. This document, the current governing documents and a full guide to all the changes had been available for members to read on the WWT website since 14th October.

A majority vote of members was needed to pass the following Special Resolution to enact the change:

THAT with effect from the conclusion of the meeting the draft Articles of Association produced to the meeting and, for the purposes of identification attached to this Resolution, be adopted as the Articles of Association of the Company in substitution for, and to the exclusion of, the Company's existing Memorandum of Association and Articles of Association.

On behalf of WWT's Council of Trustees and Management Board, the Chair asked that members vote for the Special Resolution in the interests of more effective governance of the charity. Members in favour of the resolution were asked to raise their hands, and for those online, to vote using the electronic means provided. Invited guests and non-members of WWT were not eligible to vote, and were asked to refrain from doing so to keep the process simple.

The Special Resolution was agreed and passed by the members.

6. **Elections to Council**

The Chair announced that Martin Birch, Treasurer, had just completed a second 3 year term on Council and thanked him for this sterling service. He was pleased to say that Martin had agreed to stand for a further 1 year term, and this had been approved by Council. It was confirmed that Martin Birch would continue on Council for a further year.

The Chair was also pleased to announce four new trustees who had been approved by Council:

- **Fraser Montgomery**

Fraser has a finance background with experience working in the public, charity and commercial sectors. Including twenty years in the leisure sector with The Tussauds Group and Merlin Entertainments, performing a variety of senior finance roles working with a range of stakeholders. Fraser was latterly Commercial Director on the Executive Board at Merlin Entertainments with responsibility for leading teams focussed on the food and beverage, retail, and accommodation experiences.

- **Sarah Pearson**

Sarah Pearson is Director of External Relations at the prison charity Unlocked Graduates. They work to break cycles of reoffending by identifying and supporting high-achieving graduates to spend two years working as frontline prison officers.

- **Luminita Holban**

Luminita Holban works as Head of Grants and Trusts for English Heritage and brings over 16 years' experience in fundraising for heritage and nature organisations, in the UK and internationally and in particular in Romania.

- **David Tudor**

David has worked in marine management for over twenty years. His experience includes running environmental campaigns on the beaches of Australia, researching marine plastic pollution in the Pacific, leading on policy advice at a pivotal time for the UK's marine legislation, and working on the world's largest offshore renewable energy programme.

It was confirmed that Fraser Montgomery, Sarah Pearson, Luminita Holban and David Tudor would be formally appointed as trustees on Council for a term of 3 years.

7. **To receive and consider the Annual Report & Accounts of the Council for the year ending 31st March 2021 and the Report of the Auditors thereon**

a) Chair's Comments on the Report

The Chair opened by reciting a poem called Inversnaid by Gerard Manley Hopkins and remarked that the final verse was clearly written for WWT:

What would the world be, once bereft of wet and of wildness?

Let them be left, O let them be left, wildness and wet:

Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.

Looking back to the last year and WWT's first online AGM, The Chair stated that it was clear many more people were interested in the AGM than could attend in person, and this AGM meeting was therefore in real life and online.

The Chair referred to a trip to Welney in the spring and the noise from godwits competing with warblers, corn buntings and a bittern, and the great egrets and marsh harriers annoying each other. Most of this activity was happening over a wetland that had been a normal farm field the last time he had seen it and he could see for himself the results of WWT's work over the year; more than a hundred avocets in Steart, scoters and a firecrest up close and personal at Arundel, Sprout the pelican, the first returning Bewick's Swan at Slimbridge, absurd numbers of shelduck at Martin Mere, great spotted woodpeckers inches away at Washington, a whitethroat singing in Barnes in the middle of London and curlews at Castle Espie. He stated that if he had managed to get to Caerlaverock and Llanelli too, he would have seen more evidence of what WWT could do.

With the pressures from all sides, it was very clear that the Trust could deliver real progress, which was not only good for wildfowl and wetlands, but also for people, and the key message to all WWT staff and volunteers was "you made a difference".

This was during a year when all ten sites, wider conservation projects in the UK and internationally, and all employees and volunteers were hugely impacted by COVID-19. Other than WWT Steart Marshes, which remained open throughout the pandemic, all sites had closed and re-opened three times and throughout the year, substantial measures were needed to ensure the safety of employees, volunteers and visitors.

Throughout all of this, the response of staff and volunteers had been extraordinary. They had experienced ongoing uncertainty for more than a year but had taken whatever action was needed to enable the Charity to continue vital activities and safeguard its finances, so it could be ready to continue work when restrictions lifted.

Whether maintaining sites, keeping critical wider conservation projects going, ensuring that vital corporate functions kept operating, or by being furloughed to help reduce the enormous financial burden on the Charity, all staff rose to the challenges they faced. He, and everyone on Council, was sincerely grateful to them all.

Volunteers had remained engaged with us even when they could not support or visit sites and projects, and he was delighted that so many of them had returned so quickly to help rebuild after so much activity had to be paused.

WWT was indebted to its supporters who continued their memberships even when sites were closed and to donate exceptionally generously to emergency appeals.

Significant emergency and recovery funding was secured and included some large grants which would enable WWT to deliver wetland conservation projects at scale, helping to address the immense challenges of nature's decline and climate change.

After a rigorous selection process, an announcement was expected to be made very soon on the appointment of a new Chief Executive.

WWT couldn't do what it did without the passion and contribution of its many supporters, and his predecessor as Chair, Dr Peter Day, was one of the most devoted. His death last year had been a huge loss, felt personally by the Chair, and also by the whole of WWT. Peter had been devoted to WWT for many years, first as a volunteer at London Wetland Centre, then as a trustee, and then as Chair. The Chair was so pleased that his widow Kay was able to join the meeting and he was delighted to mark Peter's many achievements with Kay, his family, friends and colleagues, at an event to be held in October.

The strategic review which had begun before the pandemic was completed, and the results of the review, Refocus for the Future, were launched within the organisation in September last year. He went on to introduce some of the highlights and noted that more detail could be heard from the presentations to follow later in the afternoon.

Key project successes thanks to the refocussed approach included the Bridgwater Blue Heritage project in Somerset, which was helping develop bigger, better and more connected wetlands around the reserve at Steart. This was funded by the Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF) and WWT was able to begin work there in September 2020. The results were well worth seeing and he particularly recommended a visit on the highest tides!

Substantial funding was secured to enable WWT to drive its work to create more, healthier wetlands and to develop and demonstrate the value of wetlands, not just for nature, and helping the biodiversity crisis, but as a critical part of the solution to the climate change and poor mental health and wellbeing. In the UK significant progress was made in areas including natural flood management, blue carbon, blue prescribing and water treatment.

Work had begun on a range of projects designed to support wetland species and maintain and develop the unique habitats they relied on at reserves and wider waterscapes. More would be heard from Nigel Jarrett, Conservation Breeding Manager and colleagues, later in the afternoon on how the work on reserves and wider waterscapes was benefitting key species.

The second of the Refocus key ambitions was to get more people in the UK engaged with and inspired to take action. WWT had continued to develop activities to engage people with wetland stories and work in interactive and innovative ways. Once the restrictions eased, it was possible to complete the last two big exhibits of Slimbridge 2020; the Waterscapes Aviary and the Living Wetland Theatre; which were generously funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and other supporters. More would be heard from Jackie Harris, Slimbridge 2020 Project Manager, on approaches to engaging people later in the afternoon.

New exhibits were also completed at WWT Arundel and a positive response was received. Funding was also secured to start work on 'Generation Wild', an exciting and innovative project which would connect 45,000 disadvantaged children and their families with nature. The project would build on the very successful Inspiring Generations work that ran for many years until recently.

Aligned with the third ambition, to deliver community-led and sustainable solutions in countries where WWT worked abroad, significant progress was made in Madagascar and Cambodia. The renewed emphasis on community work in these two countries as an outcome of Refocus had resulted in significant funding which had enabled WWT to continue working closely with local communities and other partners. More about work in Madagascar would be heard from Tomos Avent, Head of International Programmes later in the afternoon.

The Refocus for the Future work was an evolution rather than a revolution and built on the brilliant work WWT had done to date. Whilst it had meant that some work on research and action planning for migratory waterbirds had been concluded, it was important to note that this work had without doubt already secured a future for many species that were previously endangered. It had also been crucial in helping inform and identify the actions needed to save, better manage or increase vital wetland habitats along key flyways, and he formerly recognised the huge contribution that so many conservation staff had made over decades to inform this future direction of conservation actions. It was no understatement to say that their work had left a lasting legacy.

Work would be concentrated around four ambitions, to create a bigger impact for wetlands in the UK and internationally, to adapt to the changing world we live in and to ensure we do this within a sustainable financial framework.

It had only been just over a year since Refocus for the Future was first launched, but it was already proving to be a robust plan. Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic and the resulting reduction in visitation, this strategic refocus had meant that WWT remained on a sound financial footing and continued to be able to fight effectively for the world's wetlands, the wildlife that lives there and the wider benefits they bring, now and over the long term. More details on the financial position would be provided from the Hon Treasurer, Martin Birch.

It was a year of celebration, as January marked the beginning of WWT's 75th anniversary year which was formerly marked on the 10th November and he was greatly reassured that WWT had been able to mark the momentous date from a position of strength.

Celebrating WWT's 75th Anniversary had been a fantastic opportunity to look back to the very beginning and its remarkable founder, Sir Peter Scott, to celebrate many successes. He hoped everyone had enjoyed delving back into the Trusts history and enjoyed reading the memories people had shared over the past year, of wetlands and the people and experiences that had inspired them.

Supporters and members remained at the core of WWT work and would continue to feed the passion for wildlife, while at the same time, demonstrating the myriad ways wetlands help solve many of today's urgent environmental and social crises. He stressed that wetlands mitigate the impact of climate change, store carbon and reduce flooding, and there was increasing evidence that spending time in wetlands enjoying the species that depend on them hugely aided health and feeling of

wellbeing. WWT would communicate in new, imaginative ways with visitors to sites, develop the way in which it engaged with supporters, and take the message of the value of wetlands to wider audiences to encourage them to take action. More details would be heard from Kevin Peberdy.

This past year had perhaps seen the beginnings of a deeper connection with nature and a greater understanding of its importance. As everyone emerged from the Covid catastrophe, there was a growing recognition among policy makers and the public alike of the need for action to value and save nature. WWT had, time and time again, this year as in past years, demonstrated, shown and proved how this could be done.

The Chair finished by saying that he was confident WWT was emerging from the most difficult of times in good financial health, with clear ambitions and priorities, and with the right people and the right skills. WWT looked to the future with confidence and with a renewed excitement to ensure that healthy wetland nature thrived and enriched lives, and would seek to build not just a recovery, not just a green recovery but a blue and wet recovery.

A short celebratory video was played to thank all supporters, volunteers and staff.

b) Treasurer's comments on the Accounts

Martin Birch introduced himself as WWT's Honorary Treasurer and a member of Council for WWT. It was his pleasure to share a few of the financial highlights from the annual report and accounts from the past year.

The year was exceptional in many ways. The Covid-19 pandemic had put the country into lockdown just before the start of the financial year. Centres were closed for 3 months and again later in the year, and therefore the finances for the year were quite different from other years. Despite the pandemic, WWT had strengthened its financial reserves, was again operating at full strength, and had exciting plans for wetlands and people in the year ahead. Although the last year was one in which WWT was not able to undertake as much conservation work, or engage with as many people at sites, there was still much to celebrate.

The Hon Treasurer started by highlighting some of the challenges faced and how WWT had responded.

Traditional sources of income at centres tumbled. Trading income received in the shops and cafes fell significantly from just under £5m to £1.5m. Friends, supporters and other visitors were simply unable to visit centres for large parts of the year and even when the centres opened up again, the safety of visitors was prioritised, by capping the number of tickets sold. This meant that sites did not get too busy; indeed visitors reported how safe they felt; but it also affected the finances and the trading company made a loss over the year of £900k. The shops and cafes were doing much better this year and thankfully clawing back losses with each month that passed. He encouraged attendees to use the restaurant and reminded everyone that every penny spent in centres stayed in WWT.

Another casualty of site closures and capping of tickets was admissions income; the income generated from visitors who were yet to commit to a membership was £3.6m the year before but had halved to £1.8m last year.

Away from centres, other income fared a little better but was still affected by the pandemic. Gifts that people make in their wills to WWT form a significant and essential part of income. WWT would usually receive between £2 and £3 million each year but last year received the lowest amount of the last 10 years, at £1.5m. This was partly due to the administration of estates being slowed down by the effects of the pandemic, but a bounce back was starting to be seen.

The Hon Treasurer expressed gratitude to those that remember WWT in their wills, which made such a difference to what could be achieved. Many significant capital improvements to centres had been funded by very generous legacies, and the Trust was delighted by, and enormously grateful for, the very warm response received to

letters sent to some members to ask if they would like more information about leaving a gift in their wills.

Membership income also fell in the year, but only by 4%, which was greatly encouraging given the circumstances. Some members understandably cancelled their membership when the country was locked down, but the vast majority of members stayed and the Trust was very grateful.

The commitment shown to WWT's cause was essential to continue vital conservation work, across the UK and overseas, and with lockdowns lifting, people were joining again and membership numbers were increasing.

For all those reasons, the total income of WWT fell from £26m to £21m. This could have severely depleted the operating reserves of WWT but action was taken quickly to reduce expenditure wherever possible and to apply for various funds that were being made available in the UK.

The Hon Treasurer expressed his gratitude to the large number of WWT staff who agreed to go on furlough, in most cases only receiving 80% of their normal pay. WWT received £2.6m in Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme grants over the lifetime of the scheme.

In addition to the furlough scheme, WWT applied for extra funding from many trusts and foundations as well as government departments. Grant income increased as a result, from £0.7m the year before to £2.6m last year. WWT was extremely grateful to the People's Postcode Lottery, to DEFRA, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and the Green Recovery Challenge Fund that made substantial contributions to WWT.

Donations from individuals were the highest they had been for many years, at £1.7m, compared to £1.3m the year before. This included supporters giving to appeals and those who chose to give a bit extra when renewing their memberships. Over £400,000 was received in response to the emergency appeal; the largest response ever to a WWT appeal; and the Trust was hugely grateful to everyone who supported so generously at such an uncertain time.

These grants and donations went some way to cover lost income at centres.

WWT managed spend very carefully, generating savings against the previous year of more than 20%, equivalent to almost £4m of savings. Although this meant some conservation projects were put on hold, it ensured a robust financial position to start work again when the pandemic restrictions began to ease.

The final piece of the jigsaw, that meant the year ended with higher operating reserves than at the start, was the investment portfolio. These are the reserves WWT hold to protect the charity against financial risks such as a pandemic, and are held in a mix of investments, some as land and property but also some in the stock market, and equity-based investments grew in value by 20% over the year. The stock market could go up and down, but WWT had been very pleased with the performance of the ethical investment managers, Rathbone Greenbank.

Not only had the investments performed well financially but the companies that WWT invest in were chosen according to their approach to the environment. WWT had been investing with ESG principles for a number of years, and was benefiting from the alignment of WWT's mission and purpose with investment principles; put simply companies that preserve and protect natural habitats, better preserve and protect their own intrinsic value. Over the last few months, the investment policy had been reviewed to make sure it supported the move to net zero.

The Hon Treasurer drew attention to two key performance indicators and how they had changed in the year to March 2021.

One of the key aims of WWT was to encourage and enable people to visit wetlands. Due to the Covid restrictions the number of visits made to reserves sadly fell, but in the six months since the end of March, WWT had achieved 450k visits; more than the whole of last year.

Memberships fell in the year, but most members stayed, and it was pleasing to have recovered more than 5,000 members since April; currently more members than the same time the year before and a trend WWT wanted to see continue. A large and active supporter base was vital to longer-term ambitions for wetland recovery.

2021 marked WWT's 75th year. 75 remarkable, ground-breaking years spear-headed by founder, Sir Peter Scott. His legacy lived on through conservation work, the ten inspirational wetland sites and ambitions for the future, which drew on over seven decades of experience in wetland conservation and would ensure wetlands were centre stage in the fight to meet global challenges.

Amidst the climate crisis and the collapse of biodiversity, the need to inspire the next generation of wetland advocates grew more urgent by the day. The financial decisions made today would have a real, tangible impact on the wildlife and communities of tomorrow.

As already mentioned, WWT aimed to raise around £2-3million each year from supporters leaving gifts of all sizes in their Wills. This equated to 1 in every £8 donated to WWT – vital support which impacts every aspect of the Trusts work.

Donations from gifts in Wills had enabled projects like the new Pelican Cove aviary exhibit at Arundel centre and the 'Swan Champions' project, working to educate communities in Russia about the impact of shooting along the migration pathway of the Bewick's Swan.

All those in attendance were already supporters of WWT, and he thanked everyone for their contributions and desire to play a part in the work of WWT and its future. Attendees were directed to their welcome packs which contained a 'guide to Gifts in Wills' with further information and contact details for Lucy England, Legacy Manager, and encouraged getting in touch for more information on how easy it was to leave a gift to WWT.

As WWT emerged from the pandemic, it had ambitious plans for the future to expand work, increase impact, and reach out to more supporters to ensure that wetlands were recognised as part of the solution to the urgent challenges faced, including the climate crisis, the collapse of biodiversity, and health and wellbeing.

It was an exciting time for WWT, and he thanked the members for their vital support which was valued greatly and made all the work possible.

The Hon Treasurer finished by commending the 2020-21 financial statements to the members, on behalf of Council.

Receipt of the Annual Report was acknowledged by Susan Froude and Roy Osborne.

8. To appoint Crowe UK LLP of St James House, St James Square, Cheltenham, Glos GL50 3PR, as auditors and to authorise Council to agree their remuneration

a) Auditor's comments

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

b) Appointment of auditors

The Chair explained that WWT had tendered for its audit services. Mazars, who had been auditors for over 15 years, declined to bid for the work, as they felt it was best practice for WWT to have fresh auditors after so long a tenure. The Chair thanked them for their long service to WWT.

The tender bids were considered and four firms interviewed by the Director of Finance and Support Services, the Head of Finance and Martin Birch, the Hon Treasurer. The Finance Audit and Risk Committee then reviewed the process and agreed the appointment of Crowe UK LLP.

It was confirmed that Crowe UK LLP of St James House, St James Square, Cheltenham Glos GL50 3PR would be formally appointed as auditors to WWT.

9. Marsh Awards

The Chair stated that for many years WWT had been very grateful to The Marsh Charitable Trust for supporting awards for outstanding contributions to Wetlands. This had been to recognise the people, who had excelled in supporting wetland restoration, management, wildlife, community involvement on a local, national and international scale. Each year WWT had run a nominations process to identify those very special people, and in 2021, its 75th year, with support from the Marsh Charitable Trust, nominations were sought internally for the first time.

Nominations were entirely for the amazing work that WWT staff and volunteers had delivered to support wetlands, wetland wildlife and community involvement in wetlands. Nominations were also sought for international as well as UK work. We also looked back over our long history and sought nominations for volunteers and staff who are now retired from WWT.

The calibre of nomination was incredibly high, and the three winners really were the crème-de-la-crème who had made the most incredible impacts on wetlands at home and abroad.

The Chair introduced Oliver Bogue, Ambassador for the Marsh Charitable Trust (MCT), to present the awards.

Oliver explained that the MCT was founded in 1981 by Brian Marsh OBE, and over the past 30 years, had developed the Marsh Award scheme. Those who received an award were people who made a difference by selflessly contributing their efforts to causes they were passionate about. The MCT worked in partnership with many organisations and its partnership with WWT went back to 2010. He was delighted to help mark its 75th birthday by celebrating the winners.

Videos were played of the winners; Dave Paynter, Ruth Cromie and David Cowmeadow, followed by presentation of their awards by Oliver.

10. Long Service Awards

The Chair was delighted to recognise the following individuals for 25 years long service or more:

- **Louise Bamber**, Retail, Admissions and Membership Supervisor at Martin Mere, for 25 years' service,
- **Steven Hyndman**, Visitor Centre Warden at Llanelli, for 30 years, and,
- **Dave Paynter**, Reserve Manager at Slimbridge, for 40 years' service this year.

The Chair also acknowledged and commended the amazing contribution of the following individuals who left WWT this year with 25 years long service or more;

- **Richard Bullock**, Biodiversity Manager at London, for 25 years,
- **Robin Jones**, Senior Technology Officer in Conservation for 26 years,
- **Brian Morrell**, Centre Manager at Caerlaverock, for 28 years,
- **Duane Green**, Living Collection Warden at Slimbridge, for 31 years,
- **Karen Bamber**, Central Buyer at Martin Mere, for 34 years,
- **Eileen Rees**, Species Science Manager in Conservation, for 43 years, and
- **Robert Burroughs**, Pest Control Warden at Slimbridge, for 50 years' service.

11. Chief Operating Officer's address

The Chief Operating Officer started his address by saying that one of the best things about his job was the opportunity to visit WWT sites and conservation projects on the ground. It was one of the things he had missed during the long lockdowns and he wanted to begin with two stories of recent visits.

The first was a visit to the new Waterscapes aviary at Slimbridge. This ground breaking space for WWT housed not just a range of wetland habitats but, some really hard to spot, elusive, wetland birds, and he had watched fascinated as a mixed group of avocets, redshank and ruff fed naturally just a few feet away.

A visitor was standing close by, seemingly upset, but was quick to reassure him that her tears were simply because she was overwhelmed by the experience. Following a further conversation, she was equally excited to know that she might be able to spot thousands of wading birds on the reserve if she returned in the winter.

Seeing her emotional reaction reminded him of the old adage that people would only support what they loved and only loved what they could understand or experience. It was part of the Peter Scott philosophy that remained so important to him and WWT.

The second was a much welcomed visit to Steart Marshes, standing just metres from the breach point of the vast restored wetlands. He was lucky enough to be standing at this point in 2014, on the first occasion that a major Severn tide flooded the marshes for over 100 years following the epic amount of work completed by WWT in partnership with the Environment Agency.

The marshes looked very different to 2014, and the same point was now 7 meters down in the bottom of the grand canyon of the breach, but all around him were vast swards of saltmarsh plants as far as he could see; samphire, sea aster, sea blite, and saltmarsh grasses; and suddenly four spoonbills flew overhead.

The wildlife value was clear to see, but what was less clear, but equally as exciting, was what Steart was revealing about the multiple values of wetlands that made them essential for dealing with many environmental crises. Beneath his feet, Steart was storing vast amounts of carbon, far more than the equivalent area of planted woodland, and would hold it forever if protected.

It was helping to prevent local flooding and coastal erosion, and it had become a really important fish nursery for the estuary, including some species of commercial stocks. Over 50,000 people now walked, cycled, horse-rode, nature watched or just got lost in the landscape every year, feeling a little bit better with themselves and their world. Here was absolute proof that wetlands were most definitely a solution.

Both these experiences linked nicely to WWT ambitions for 100,000 hectares of created wetlands and 1 million more people supporting wetlands and taking action. In 2022, WWT would be developing its next 5-year strategic plan that would set out exactly how it would continue to deliver against its ambitions and amplify its impact, and whilst the structure of work may change, those ambitions would remain central and the lens through which WWT would make ongoing decisions.

The Chief Operating Officer went on to highlight what needed to be done to secure 100,000 ha of bigger better and more connected wetlands. It was necessary to understand where it was feasible to re-create or restore wetlands, 90% of which had been lost, both coastal wetlands and inland freshwater, and to reconnect flood plains and restore critical hydrology.

A policy framework supporting wetland restoration and its funding was needed, and WWT would continue to build on its blue recovery policy work to make sure wetlands were considered in government decision making. Maximising opportunities through the 25-year plan for the environment, the new ELMs programme, which would be the future of agriculture, and through biodiversity net gain was essential and it needed to support alternative thinking on translating public services provided by nature into investment.

WWT had been instrumental in setting up a new all-party parliamentary group specifically on wetlands to support a blue recovery for the UK, and James Robinson

and the comms team had placed blue carbon firmly on the agenda at the Climate Change conference COP26.

The cost was large but only a fraction of the true value of the services that wetlands provided and WWT would continue to work with specialist consultants and partners to find new and innovative funding mechanisms. Some of this would be based on the value of coastal wetlands to store carbon and WWT were working on the critical codes that could translate stored carbon into a monetary value to help build wetlands.

The Chief Operating Officer continued by stating that he had always been an advocate of demonstration sites. WWT would use all of its sites and 75 years' experience to demonstrate how to build more Stearts and freshwater wetlands, to show their value for wildlife and other benefits, and to show how to overcome technical, planning and management headaches which can appear as barriers.

Some projects needed to put new funding ideas into practice and others would focus on habitat creation and restoration as part of plans to introduce flagship species like cranes, godwits, curlew, corncrake, beavers or even pelicans. More would be heard from Nigel Jarett later in the afternoon.

WWT would need partners and others to take up the mantle and could not do all of it alone. Part of WWT's role was to inspire and inform others to create wetlands and much progress had been made, but it was important to maintain those dialogues that were refreshingly more open during the pandemic, and to continue building private and public sector partnerships, which would be a major objective going forward.

WWT had always been a research organisation, putting sound evidence forward for all its work, and would continue to show how created and restored wetlands support wildlife, but also provide the evidence for how much carbon they store, how many homes can be saved from flooding, and how water quality improves.

WWT would continue to work on engaging supporters that share its passion and concern for wetlands. This would be at WWT sites and in the communities where WWT are working, but also in the wider public.

Sites remained critical, not least as brilliant places to invoke those emotional experiences to inspire connection and support for wetlands and wetland wildlife.

More stories would be told to more people, of not just how amazing and important wetlands are for wildlife, but for people too. Stories of doom and gloom for wetland biodiversity would be balanced with good news stories of what WWT was doing and what everyone could do.

Work was planned in the short term for London and for Arundel, and would include a look at all of the living collections and how WWT engages with its nature reserves and wildlife. More would be heard later in the meeting about how that was working at Slimbridge and WWT would also deliver its Generation Wild project which the Chair had mentioned earlier.

Hopefully there would be end to the problems of recruitment and supply to WWT cafes and a focus on all those things which could make or break that experience, e.g. welcome, how things are presented, shops, cafes and menus. Little did he imagine when he signed agreements around a 25 year life for some of the structures at London that he would be signing off the plan for their replacements.

The Chief Operating Officer was excited to share that WWT wanted to increase projects that would engage with local communities, and were part of a partnership that had secured substantial funding through the UK governments innovation and resilience fund for two huge urban wetland projects.

One of those was very close to London Wetland centre, looking at how heavily modified and culverted Beverley brook could be improved for wildlife and people while reducing flood risk, and the other to develop Slough as a "sponge city" using wetlands to mop up excess water and reduce flooding in the urban centre.

WWT were in negotiation with two major developers interested in incorporating surface water wetlands into new developments at an early master planning stage.

All these amazing projects had four things in common; they would result in more wildlife-friendly wetlands in the middle of urban areas; they would all be developed collaboratively with local communities; they would all show the importance of finding a place for water in our increasingly developed and surfaced towns and cities; and they would all result in wetland sanctuary for people, reduce urban temperatures, clean up water and most crucially help stop flooding of houses and streets.

A major thread of Refocus ambitions introduced at the last AGM, was to raise the profile of wetlands, making them more relevant and increasing understanding of their vital role for wildlife and for people, and in response, Wetlands Can! the first major public facing campaign was launched.

Its ultimate aim was to build support for the creation of 100,000 hectares of healthy wetlands in the UK. Focussing on 'blue recovery' framework, which was going from strength to strength with national media coverage, high profile support including from our President Kate Humble, and Vice President, Chris Packham, and nearly 4,000 members of the public pledging their support via the website. Recently, the campaign had focussed on the ability of wetlands to store huge amounts of 'blue carbon' but going forward it would encourage people to write to their MP, call on the government to prioritise wetlands, and by growing partnerships to help deliver the 100,000 ha of wetlands in the UK. He encouraged everyone to sign the Wetlands Can! pledge if they had not done so already.

The Chief Operating Officer was delighted to let everyone know that WWT would be one of three charities supported by The Times and Sunday Times for their annual Christmas Appeal. Through this major national appeal, 15 articles would be published in The Times throughout December championing the multiple benefits of wetlands and the importance of WWT's work, and calling on the public to support. It was hugely exciting for WWT and would both shine a light on its work and hopefully raise hundreds of thousands of pounds.

WWT would continue to develop community-based projects in Madagascar and Cambodia, building on significant success where work had already resulted in over 60,000 hectares of wetland catchments being managed better for wildlife while maintaining or improving livelihoods of thousands of local families.

The approach had been rewarded by large grants, including a Darwin award to work on a second lake after Lake Sofia, and WWT would continue to influence wetland policy generally in Madagascar. More would be heard from Tomos Avent later in the afternoon.

Although limited to virtual meetings, WWT continued to influence wetland policy and greater recognition of global wetlands amongst decision makers, through its work with Wetland Link International and Ramsar, and through international conventions.

WWT would push for the increased recognition internationally of the wider benefits of wetlands for life on Earth, and the work on blue carbon and coastal wetlands was resulting in more and more interest in places like China and South Korea.

The concept of a Wetland School for Conservation was in early stages of development, designed to help develop practical conservation skills. The most effective way to take forward conservation work across flyways for migratory birds and their habitats was to give key local people the skills to do it and that was where 75 years of experience could be made effective on the ground.

On the operations side, WWT was maintaining its Refocus targets to reduce carbon and costs of travel and meetings, and had invested in sustainable features including solar panels and leak detection.

Staff had been asked about how they would like to work in the future and a policy and plan around more flexible working was being developed.

An important Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging policy had been introduced and an action plan would focus on areas where WWT felt it could make a real and meaningful difference to ensure equality of opportunity throughout work and to ensure everyone could engage with wetlands. This would be shared as it developed.

The Chief Operating Officer had been utterly humbled by the incredible dedication of staff and volunteers that had worked so hard, many of whom had worked throughout the pandemic, the restructuring, and a critical summer where re-opening and welcoming supporters was paramount, as was re-building conservation, fundraising, marketing and communication work and all the support work needed to maintain the charity in the UK and internationally.

He thanked this amazing team of people, the Chair, Treasurer and members, for their support, without which, nothing would be possible. Memberships, donations and valued legacy gifts all kept the charity afloat through some of the most difficult times in 75 years, and were helping to maintain and develop sites for wildlife, visitors, and the support needed to function. Securing large restricted grants themselves was only possible with support which meant people could be employed to develop projects and write critical applications, and in this way, support could be multiplied up substantially.

It had been tough, probably the toughest of his own 32 years in WWT, but it had been his privilege to steer WWT through some of its most difficult times, which had only reinforced his belief that wetlands were a solution. Now was the time to scale up and bring 75 years of experience and knowledge to find unique ways to make many more, bigger and more connected wetlands.

He finished by stressing the need to ensure leaders were listening; that where it mattered most, wildlife and people's livelihoods could be preserved and improved; and to build a connection with amazing places for visitors, communities and with everyone whose lives are improved by wetlands, even if they don't know it.

Whether it was having an emotional moment at one of WWT's sites, watching spectacular wildlife while walking over new carbon storing wetlands, building a pond connected to a downpipe, releasing godwits and corncrakes into a restored fenland reserve; the future was exciting, and most definitely blue.

12. Questions raised with the Chair prior to the meeting

The Chair thanked members for submitting questions ahead of the AGM and welcomed any further questions from the floor or online. Questions were raised as follows:

Questions submitted in advance

From Gabriel West:

1. The choice and quality of food (not cakes!!) at the London Wetlands has deteriorated since reopening after Covid. Is this common throughout all your centers? When can we expect a better menu?"

MC responded that it was a really important question and provided some context for why changes had been made to the café.

As part of the Refocus restructure, catering operations were reviewed across all sites as they were not covering costs to be able to re-invest money back into the organisation, and avoid the risk of the charitable part of the organisation supporting the Trading part.

Consequently, the catering offer was changed to three models; a 'kiosk' offer at sites with the lowest visitation; a 'coffee shop' offer at sites with medium visitation and a full restaurant offer at London, Martin Mere and Slimbridge.

The menus were reviewed to make sure labour and wastage costs were minimised, which had been successful, and catering was on a sound financial

footing and making a profit, but it was recognised that there were concerns around having a more limited menu. The Kiosk and coffee shop models seemed to be working well, but the restaurant menus were missing the range that visitors liked. More items were starting to be introduced, and feedback was continuously reviewed. Retaining the catering in-house, rather than franchising, would help keep the cafes aligned to the overall wetland experience of sites, and to ensure profits were reinvested into the charity.

Time had been taken to make sure changes were sustainable and ethically sourced. There had been real challenges around recruitment, which were sector wide, as well as challenges with the supply chain, but the organisation was committed to providing a strong offer, with more home-made quality products, and he welcomed feedback to help with improvements going forward.

From Roland Clausen-Thue:

2. What can the Trust do to improve access by public transport, to help those who cannot reach the more remote sites like Slimbridge and Welney by car or bike, and to encourage travel by more sustainable means than the car?

MC replied that this was something that WWT was constantly challenging itself on. A quarter of all households didn't have access to a car, and provision of a local bus services to Welney and Slimbridge hadn't worked due to the level of take-up needed to keep them going. A shuttle bus to Slimbridge had also been provided when recruiting volunteers, but again didn't receive any take-up.

Electric vehicles were being trialled as part of the Blue Prescriptions work at Steart Marshes, and options would continue to be monitored to minimise the barriers to people visiting sites. WWT would keep working on facilities for cyclists, walkers, and others ways of getting to sites, and welcomed ideas to test.

From David Cianfarani:

3. From previous Minutes I was pleased to note that the rebranding of our Title name is still on the agenda. The present two W's in our WWT title may be known but are confusing and why can't the word 'Wildlife' be used?

CP gave thanks for the question and explained that the branding project was put on hold at the outbreak of the pandemic and it was decided to keep it in suspense until the second half of the year, to re-collaborate after the pandemic, and importantly to celebrate WWT's 75th anniversary. The file had recently been reopened to look back at the work done previously and to look at it afresh.

Two of the core objectives of this piece of work are firstly to ensure broader audiences can be reached to encourage them to take action for wetlands, and secondly to increase support for WWT, both financially and otherwise for the charity's work. Members would be kept aware of significant developments as they emerged and she had made a note of the suggestion for the file.

From Sue Cresswell

4. I am concerned that conservation organisations begin to compete against each other for grants and other resources. So what degree have WWT begun/increased collaboration with other agencies such as Wildlife or Woodland Trust to put forward a consolidated and consistent message towards government and avoid 'competition'?

JR responded that WWT should be very proud of its fundraising successes as an organisation, and a huge amount of work that goes on in the conservation directorate and the fundraising team was enormous, and had resulted in some

very big successes. Every single success is a fundraising package that isn't just exclusive to WWT, and other organisations were working with WWT.

Project Godwit had been done in association with the RSPB, some of the work in Somerset to create new farm ponds had been done with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), and a saltmarsh carbon code to release resources for habitat creation in the future was being developed with a range of organisations.

Most of the projects WWT did were with other organisations who all brought various skills and capabilities to make sure the projects were strong. He finished by saying that competition was not necessarily a bad thing and drove achievement of funding for projects which was a good thing.

From Alison White:

5. How is WWT safeguarding its captive collections and wild migrating birds with the recent outbreaks of bird flu?

KP responded that WWT had become very well versed in the detailed procedures of dealing with Avian Influenza and worked in collaboration with Government agencies, including the Animal Plant & Health Agency (APHA).

An expert team of people, including WWT vets, were meeting every few days to decide what actions and procedures to undertake, as unfortunately Avian Influenza was back in the UK again and appearing in a large number of places.

A number of procedures had already been implemented across sites, including the use of disinfection mats and putting vulnerable birds undercover wherever possible in what was known as arcing. The level of bio security work behind the scenes with all staff had been increased, and monitoring of birds had been stepped up to make sure that any birds found to have succumbed to AI were tested as soon as possible.

It was a very unfortunate situation and WWT was doing everything it could to try and minimise the risk of the disease getting into sites but also leaving sites.

APHA and the Health Security Agency had provided reassurance that there was no risk to human health but Avian Influenza did represent quite a significant risk to UK birds and remained a concern.

Questions from the floor & online

From the floor:

6. I commend the Treasurer for keeping the ship on an even keel and suggest that we are not maximising our non-core income and has every centre got meeting rooms and facilities to attract people who wouldn't normally visit? Are our rooms fit for purpose? I hope the board will concentrate on upgrading facilities so that people who wouldn't normally visit will do so in future.

The Chair summarised the question for the benefit of those online and at the back of the room; are we using our commercial expertise and making full use of our facilities so that everyone can use them?

MC answered that WWT was trying to diversify its income and had tried to build a more robust income model, which included looking at diversifying facilities and providing more resilient accommodation. In terms of meeting rooms, some sites were strong at this, London in particular, and recruitment to the events function at London was a real opportunity to strengthen the offer. Martin Mere had developed meeting room spaces that were used regularly, but a number of other sites were more challenging because of their location, and any commercial opportunity need to go through a business plan and appraisal. WWT had a strategy for investment to diversify and was doing a lot of planning around accommodation to engage people in a whole range of activities and experiences like guided tours and

experiences and to bring in income. All of this was part of a commercial strategy being pulled together and works were being prioritised but all needed investment.

From Gail Verdy (online):

7. How can WWT influence commercial compost mixes to emit peat in order to preserve the vital carbon stocks which are our peatlands especially in Ireland?

MC confirmed that from a commercial operations point of view, WWT did not use peat in any of the plants it grew or sold.

JR added that efforts had gone into trying to get peat out of compost for many decades. It was environmental destruction at a massive scale, and some of the peat destruction that had happened in Ireland was truly extraordinary. Part of WWT's job was to make sure that wetlands, including peatlands, were high on the agenda, and that all the decisions taken were to keep wetlands wet and secure. He referred to the climate change conference in Glasgow where he had spent a huge amount of time talking about these sorts of issues with key decision makers, and was pretty sure the removal of peat from horticultural materials was just around the corner.

From the floor:

8. Do all captive birds have to be kept inside from Monday 29th November and does this mean that centres have to close?

KP answered that WWT had a very good relationship with the APHA who took a different view to zoo collections as they did to poultry farming and other farming applications, so the housing order would apply to some extent but not necessarily in the same way. There was a risk that a centre may have to close, and particularly if Avian Influenza was found within collection birds, but the situation was being monitored every day and closure would always try to be avoided.

From John Harris (online)

9. What is WWT doing to encourage the active involvement of young people in WWT activities throughout the organisation?

KP responded that a Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging policy was being developed, which identified four main areas where WWT wanted to make a meaningful difference, and one of those was with the youth group. Family members tended to stop their memberships once children reached teenage years and WWT wanted to focus on engaging with this group in particular. Part of the next stage of the work was to talk to experts and learn from them.

From the floor:

10. I've heard from the Board members about recruitment challenges and difficulties. Could you give views on the value of apprenticeship programmes and are they part of a solution?

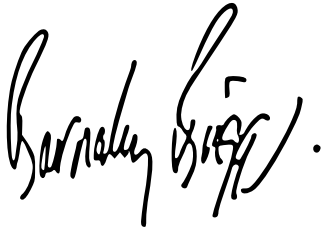
JR confirmed that apprenticeship programmes were being considered but the apprenticeship levy meant they really needed to be done at scale and WWT didn't have many areas of the organisation where it could have a large number of apprentices. It had been considered in the IT department for example, and the team were looking to see whether it could be implemented in the next year or so.

13. Chair closes the meeting

The Chair thanked everyone for joining the 74th AGM, and also the technical team for their support to stream the event online. He invited attendees to feedback on the new

hybrid format and directed online attendees to pre-recorded presentations from Jackie Harris, Tomos Avent, and Nigel Jarrett, available to view online.

The Chair officially closed the meeting at 15:42.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barnaby Rudge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.