

Minutes of the 128th Annual General Meeting held on 26th October 2019

The 128th Annual General Meeting of the RSPB was held at the Queen Elizabeth II Centre, London SW1P 3EE on Saturday 26th October 2018.

In attendance:

Ms Miranda Krestovnikoff (RSPB President & Chair), Mr Kevin Cox (Chairman of Council), Mr Robert Cubbage (Treasurer), Ms Beccy Speight (Chief Executive) and 366 members.

Mr Cox opened the meeting and welcomed members and guests to the meeting.

- 1. NOTICE** of the meeting had been published in the autumn issue of the members' magazine, along with a summary of the annual accounts. This notice was taken as read. Members were advised that a copy of the agenda, plus the latest annual review containing the summarised accounts, could be found in their delegate pack.

It was noted that a quorum was present, and the meeting would accordingly proceed to business.

2. ELECTION OF PRESIDENT

Mr Cox informed the meeting that the term of Miranda Krestovnikoff's presidency was coming to an end and that Council wished to nominate her to serve a further term of 3 years as President.

This was seconded by Judith Woodman and carried on a show of hands. Mr Cox declared that Ms Krestovnikoff would continue as President until October 2022 and handed over the Chair to her for the rest of the meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE 127th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The minutes of the 127th Annual General Meeting held on 20th October 2018 were confirmed by Council as an accurate reflection of the proceedings and made available prior to the meeting.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- Further to the resolution carried at AGM last year, the new RSPB Charter and Statutes were submitted to the Privy Council and approved by Her Majesty The Queen in February 2019. The Byelaws were approved by Council in March 2019. The amended document is available on the RSPB website.
- The question from Mr Andrew Coles regarding meat consumption had triggered a review of RSPB policy and practice on climate change. Mr Harper thanked Mr Coles for the challenge and confirmed that the organisation was investigating a number of areas including promotion of meat-free days. Further work was being done to test the best ways to influence changes in behaviour to reduce meat consumption.
- Mr Cox informed members that, due to increasing public concern, RSPB Council had agreed to review the RSPB policy on intensive game bird shooting and associated land management. Details of the process and timeline were to be shared in due course with the intention to complete the review as soon as possible.

- d. Mr Clive Cohen referred to his question about creating a digest of previous questions to avoid repetition, and also to the question about the stocking of cat collars in RSPB shops. He was referred to the answer given in the previous year, which had not changed.

5. PRESENTATION OF THE ANNUAL REPORT AND ADOPTION OF THE ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2018

5.1 Annual Report

The Chairman of Council, Mr Kevin Cox gave his annual report, the full transcript of which is available on the RSPB website.

5.2 Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2019

The Treasurer, Mr Robert Cabbage gave his annual report, the full transcript of which is available on the RSPB website

5.3 Questions

The Chair invited questions, first on the Annual Report and Accounts and then on the work of the RSPB more generally.

5.3.1 Jonathan Manley asked about the level of membership retention and current membership numbers.

Rebecca Munro answered that the retention rate was strong at over 90%. She said that membership numbers had reduced slightly in the last two years due to changes in membership recruitment operations. She said that she was confident that this would reverse in the next 12 to 18 months and the figure would start to rise again.

5.3.2 David Glover asked about pension liability and whether the rate of repayment would stay constant.

Robert Cabbage said that the amount was based on the triennial evaluation conducted every three years. The number has risen due to fluctuations in bond rate and equity markets over the three years.

5.3.3 Alan Parfitt commented that, given all the external hurdles and current uncertainties, the financial statements were very good and that, in his opinion the RSPB had done a tremendous job in maintaining the financial situation in the current climate.

5.3.4 John Davis commented on the continuing slaughter of migrant birds on the UK's sovereign base in Cyprus.

Kevin Cox said that it was something everyone agreed on and that work was being done but we still need to do more.

5.3.5 David Killon asked whether RSPB could offer more education to the public regarding gulls to counter the 'annual hysterical nonsense' news headlines rather than just to state that they are a protected species.

Martin Harper said it is the case that gulls are nesting around cities because of loss of habitat and we try to put the wider issue across but don't always win that line. It is an indicator of a wider issue about how we live in harmony with species like gulls and we will keep trying to make sure their voices are heard.

5.3.6 Philip Astor commented on the recent launch of the Lake Vrynwy appeal. Given the disappointing results for curlew from the previous recovery project there, he asked what would be done differently this time and what targets would be set.

Martin Harper said that curlew is a species we are most concerned about and have been doing a huge amount of work on reserves and in partnership with others to improve land management for them. The reason for this appeal is to gather support for a big joint venture to improve habitat management and prospect for species like curlew, black grouse with partners including the water company Hafren Dyfrdwy. As well as habitat creation, the partnership will also be looking at improving predator control and are asking for support to access £3m from the Heritage Lottery Fund. As well as the Curlew Trial Management project, RSPB is also starting to look at some of the drivers behind the rise in predators that also need to be addressed.

5.3.7 Val Shawcross commented that access to reserves was currently very car dependant and asked what was proposed to make this more sustainable in future, perhaps in partnership with other organisations such as National Trust for example, although she appreciated it was a difficult issue. Rebecca Munro said that it is a big dilemma – how to open up and give people access to nature while at the same time minimising our carbon footprint. We are very conscious of the issue and working hard to make sure we're doing what we can, such as providing charging for electric cars. In other places we are working in partnership with other sites in the area and organise a private round trip bus service. We are also looking at working with local areas to bring public transport to some locations, eg at Lakenheath. We are also investing in more renewable energy for reserve operations and installing solar panels and led lighting

5.3.8 John Wallington commented on a leaflet he had received on his way to the meeting questioning the RSPB policy on offshore windfarms. He asked whether the balance was right in how we objecting and were we communicating the policy adequately to the public?

Martin Harper said that he agreed with Extinction Rebellion that this should be framed as both a climate and ecological emergency and the challenge is how we wean ourselves off fossil fuels while at the same time looking after the habitats and species with which we coexist. Specifically regarding renewable energy, we absolutely do need more renewable energy and to meet the carbon targets while using less. RSPB has said for many years that the renewable energy revolution needs to take place in harmony with nature, so when it comes to the conflict between seabirds and offshore wind turbines we try to work very hard with the industry to find a way forward to avoid going to court, and are keen to try and support developments where possible. There are impacts on certain species however, such as kittiwake in existing developments in the North Sea, where RSPB predicts c25% mortality of birds that are already in decline. In those cases we are talking with government, crown estates and industry, who we believe now respect our concerns, to find mitigating measures such as floating turbines that are in deeper water and therefore less of a threat to seabirds.

5.3.9 Peter Jones asked whether the RSPB would consider a “Children in Need” type fundraising event eg “Nature in Need”?

Rebecca Munro said that RSPB would love to do a big public telethon and that looking at how we engage the public in putting nature and climate emergency at the top of their agenda when they think about which charities they are going to donate to is a big part of our work over the next year or so. Part of that is about how we communicate the message, such as through the Nature Recovery Campaign, that nature is in crisis and does need help, including financial help. There are different fundraising tactics we use, including support from our members which is crucial so we pay attention to keeping that retention rate at over 90%; appeals such as the Lake Vrynwy appeal mentioned earlier, which are very successful; and supporter marketing to encourage people to support over time by contributing and donating eg by direct debit . How RSPB would do that through a major public campaign would depend on how well we get the message across that nature is crisis and you can help by donating.

5.3.10 Clare Carter asked why Christmas stock was appearing so early in RSPB shops, especially at Minsmere.

Rebecca Munro said that Christmas stock appears as soon as we think is appropriate and also beneficial in terms of generating income. Each shop manages it's stock according to what is appropriate to the local customers so this will vary but she said she would check on the specific practice at Minsmere.

5.3.11 Jenny (surname not given) asked about collaboration and specifically in relation to RSPB Mersehead and the nearby WWT site, whether there could be more collaboration on different levels as well as the political level.

Beccy Speight fully agreed that collaboration was key in dealing given the scale of issues we are facing and said that that we are already doing a lot and trying to work more with a lot of large land managing organisations such as the Wildlife Trust, National Trust and Woodland Trust to look at where we can do more to work together on a grand scale. She agreed that the more collaboration the better and recognised that RSPB members are often members of other organisations too so it should be talked about more and reflect that they are part of an environmental movement.

5.3.12 John Kent asked about the age demographic and diversity of the organisation.

Rebecca Munro said that the demographics are staying about the same – ie at a 55+ age profile but that we also have the world's largest youth conservation organisation with 400,000 youth members of the RSPB. The ambition is to engage more young people, not just in the RSPB but in our cause, and potentially that engagement may not be through membership, but also, as one example, through full and extensive support of the recent Youth Climate Strike. The hope is that in a couple of years we will have a lot more engagement with young people both in the RSPB but also in the cause.

5.3.13 Jennifer Jones asked what could be done about a particularly difficult access road to a site on the Orkney Islands, Noup Head.

Shaun Thomas said that Orkney is very important to RSPB, hence, for example, a major project to eradicate non-native stoat on the island. He said that he would be very happy to talk with Mrs Jones in the break, with the Director of Scotland who was also present, to see what can be done to help regarding this particular site

5.3.14 Clive Cohen asked again about a digest of issues and also commented that woodcock was still on schedule 2 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, despite being on the red list.

Mr Harper said that it was felt that the minutes were sufficient record of questions at AGM.

Regarding woodcock, Mr Harper said that unfortunately being on the red list did not automatically remove species from schedule 2 and that this also applies to Pochard, for example. It was something that the RSPB was pushing to be changed.

6. ADOPTION OF THE ACCOUNTS

The Chair proposed the adoption of the Annual Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2019. This was seconded by Humphrey Norrington and duly carried on a show of hands. The Annual Accounts were declared duly adopted.

7. ELECTION OF CHAIR OF COUNTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND

Council nominates for election Ms Victoria Chester to serve as Chair of the Country Advisory Committee for England. This was seconded by Judith Woodman and carried by a show of hands.

8. ELECTION OF ORDINARY COUNCIL MEMBERS

In accordance with the requirements of the Statutes, applications had been sought through an announcement in *Nature's Home* and on the website. Three candidates who met the desired requirements were identified and Council therefore nominated Vick Nash, Debbie Pain and Veronica Pickering as Ordinary Council members. No further nominations had been received and, since the number of nominations did not exceed the number of vacancies, the Chair declared them elected.

9. ELECTION OF AUDITORS

The Finance and Audit Committee and Council recommended the re-appointment of the current auditors, Crowe UK, (previously Crowe, Clark, Whitehill) being satisfied that the firm offered the best service for the RSPB. The proposition was seconded by Peter Martin and carried on a show of hands.

10. PRESENTATION OF THE PRESIDENT'S AWARDS

The Chief Executive introduced the President's Awards recognising the tremendous contribution made to the RSPB by its volunteers. The citations were read by the Chief Executive and the President, Miranda Krestovnikoff, presented awards to: Jane Taylor, James Minchin, the Groves family – Colin, Jake and Hannah, Neville Jones, Roy Attree, David Hampson.

11. PRESENTATION OF RSPB MEDAL

Beccy Speight introduced medal recipient Dara McAnulty who she said, "describes himself as 'a 15-year-old autistic naturalist, conservationist, writer and environmental activist'. Writer of the blog "Young Fermanagh Naturalist", Dara has inspired and engaged thousands of children and adults and says that his connection with nature and wildlife has helped him to live with Asperger's syndrome. He said that he became an activist because he recognised that he needed to raise his voice to support nature and has been involved with several campaigns and recognised with many awards. He represents a new movement amongst youth which recognises that nature, mental health and similar key issues are a priority now. Last year he did a 30 mile walk to raise over £6000 to tag and record threatened birds of prey and is about to publish a book called *Diary of a Young Naturalist* based on his award-winning blog. He has worked recently with Chris Packham on Walk for Wildlife, with the BBC on Tweet of the Day, and has spoken at the British Ecological Society. He was one of several young people who fronted the launch of the State of Nature report and reminded us that "nature is our life-support system". Dara may be young, but he has already shown that he has a powerful voice that he's prepared to use."

Dara thanked the Council warmly and said he was humbled and deeply grateful to receive the award. He said that it meant a lot to be recognised in this way and that it sent a message that what young people do is important and should be taken seriously. He recognised the importance of the support and encouragement he had received from his family, community and organisations he had volunteered with. He said that it was important that young people are supported in a meaningful way and for organisations to find places for them – not only for the fresh perspective they can give but also so they can learn from mentors, be inspired and motivated.

Dara said that he hoped that receiving the award would encourage and inspire other young people to be the change they wish to see in the world. He stressed that young people could make things happen and contribute to science and conservation regardless of age and experience. He urged the RSPB to be bold and brave, from land management to lobbying, to raising voices so loud that people would have no choice but to act.

12. PHOENIX FORUM REPORT

The Chair welcomed James Miller to the stage to report on the work of the Phoenix Forum, the youth arm of the RSPB.

13. DATE OF THE NEXT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Ms Krestovnikoff said that the next Annual General Meeting of the RSPB would be held on Saturday 10th October 2020 at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London.