

The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales

Minutes of the 19th Annual General Meeting held on Thursday 18th November 2021 at 6.30 pm on Zoom

There were 57 participants all of whom were members including Trustees and staff.

Chair Mike Alexander gave a welcome greeting in Welsh and English. He introduced TV wildlife presenter Iolo Williams who had prepared a pre-recorded video especially recorded for WTSWW for the AGM. Iolo highlighted the plight of nature in Wales and the importance of supporting the Trust and urged members to get behind the staff and trustees in working towards the aims of the new strategy.

Thanks were given to Iolo and Mike would write to thank him for his support. He handed over to Chief Executive Sarah Kessell to give a round up of the work achieved in year 1-4-20 to 31-3-21, and she would also introduce the new WTSWW 10 –year strategy.

In the first of the presentations, Sarah explained that with Covid19 and the lockdowns from March 2020 that this had had a huge impact on the Trust work. She illustrated a time-line of Trust activity whilst adhering to Welsh Government Covid regulations. In July 2020 the Trust had a £700K deficit although ended the year much better due to successful emergency grants and funding. Some major projects and works were completed and Sarah thanked members for supporting the Pencnwc appeal enabling the Trust to buy this piece of woodland adjoining Pengelli Forest in Pembrokeshire, saving it from becoming a pheasant shoot. Caermalwas Farm was also gifted to the Trust after successfully working with the owners on management for several years. The Parc Slip Valleys Regional Park project was completed despite the difficulties of lockdown and many staff on furlough. There was also success with being awarded a Welsh Government N2K grant for work on ponds, trees and for essential kit for Skomer and Skokholm. The Living Seas Roadshows continued after being moved online due to Covid, and Skomer Live, the online broadcast with presenters Iolo Williams and Lizzie Daly, was particularly effective and watched by many viewers across the world with very positive comments. Sarah drew attention to the Trust work in standing up for wildlife in its objection to the Erebus floating windfarm proposal off the coast of Pembrokeshire which would have a devastating effect on seabird populations; Sarah recognised that alternative energy forms are required but it is essential to protect sensitive areas and to have minimum impact. Other conservation work has taken place within the Stand for Nature project and with consultancy, advice and partnership work continuing. Puffin counts were higher than usual so that was also a positive result.

Sarah thanked the Trustees for their support, and members and Local Groups for their support and financial contributions. She also thanked all the staff for adapting to new ways of working and for all those who were on furlough noting that everyone played their part in helping the Trust through a challenging year.

Mike Alexander answered a query on the Manx Shearwater numbers and he noted that the census is only done every few years but the general trend is that the numbers are going up.

Sarah's second presentation was on the new 10-year strategy. She noted that the wider Wildlife Trust movement has developed a strategy and that there was a Wilder Wales plan with the Trusts in Wales and that WTSWW's own strategy flows from both of these. The strategy had been co-produced with staff, trustees, local groups and members and it had been a huge amount of time putting it all together in one document and she thanked Mike Alexander for doing this work. Sarah explained the new conservation staff structure and key aims:

- 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030

- Net Zero Carbon by 2030
- 1 in 4 people taking action by 2030

Members were encouraged to view the strategy in full which is available in Welsh and English on the Trust website <https://www.welshwildlife.org/our-strategy-2020-2030/>

Sarah was thanked for her hard work over the last year and for her excellent and informative presentations.

Mike Alexander introduced the staff giving a presentation on the Stand for Nature project, Megan Howells and Laura Evans, along with Phyllis Davies a member of the Stand for Nature Youth Forum. The project targets young people aged 9-24 to take action. There are 5 key project areas and all the Trusts in Wales are involved.

Megan highlighted the work taking place in Cardiff with young people taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award, Biodiversity Bootcamps, otter holt building and outreach work in Bute Park, and working with Cardiff University on their biodiversity action plan. There was also attendance on the recent Climate Action march in Cardiff. Megan would be moving from her Stand for Nature role to become the new Wilder Engagement Manager.

Laura Evans works on the Cardigan Bay Marine Wildlife Centre (CBMWC) Coastal Ceredigion Project, noting that this is the only marine focused group within the Stand for Nature project. Through this work Laura is working on encouraging people to be interested in the marine environment and there are 10 core members (currently limited by Covid) and they meet online and face to face for monthly beach-cleans and drama workshops and inspiring young people to take action at home.

Phyllis Davies is a 13-year old member of the Living Seas Youth Forum and gave a presentation on the work that she has been involved in. She explained that she had taken part in beach-cleans and a workshop event filming and editing a video to inspire other young people via Rural Futures events through drama. Phyllis said that the Youth Forum had raised awareness of climate change with the local MP in Ceredigion and Phyllis hopes that it will continue to inspire and raise awareness and that she is proud of the work that the Youth Forum has done.

Sarah thanked Phyllis for speaking so well and for her work on the project. Mike said that the presentations were inspirational and that we are hearing the voice of tomorrow. He thanked them all for their presentations and hard work.

The formal business of the AGM started at 7.30 p.m.

1) To receive apologies for absence

No apologies had been received.

2) To approve the minutes of the 18th AGM held on 14th January 2021

These were proposed by Mark Brian and seconded by Jon Cooper, and approved by all members present.

3) Chairperson's Report

Mike Alexander said that he would do his report at the end of the formal business of the AGM.

4) Finance Report and presentation

Mike handed over to Stuart Bain, Treasurer and Chair of the Finance Committee to give a presentation on the year.

Stuart said that the Finance Committee usually meets quarterly but had met more often as items arose during Covid. He paid thanks to Sarah and her team for steering the Trust through such a difficult period. Stuart showed a graph to highlight where the money had come from in 2021 noting that most of it had come in later in the year. He also illustrated that there were big changes in the sources of operating income due to Covid: landing fee income was down 96% and income from trading (at Lockley Lodge, Parc Slip and Welsh Wildlife Centre) which traditionally is the second highest source dropped by 2/3rds. Stuart said this was compensated by Sarah and her team bringing in other emergency income; creating a big turnaround and doubling the usual income in this very different year. He noted that the Job Retention Scheme (furlough) came through just in time to save the majority of jobs. Stuart added that as well as emergency grants he is grateful to private foundations who helped out early with donations.

Stuart showed another graph illustrating how Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are failing the Trust with their reduced funding. NRW was just 3% of income in 2020 and 6% in 2021 with a huge drop in income since 2005 to 2021.

Trading over the 15-year period has increased year on year although there was a significant drop last year. It highlighted that the Trust cannot rely on high grant income and needs to target a balance between trading, grants and donations.

Stuart moved on to expenditure for 2021 and noted that spending on Support and Governance is less than 10% of income, which is very low. The Trust staff numbers fell in 2021 and there was a loss of valued colleagues and an inability to fill vacancies e.g not able to recruit to replace staff at Parc Slip resulted in changing operations. Stuart noted that the Trust's challenge is to keep staff but not for staff to make sacrifices in pay and pension and that staff should not be asked to be the charity. The key aim is to keep staff and the challenge is to fund this.

Stuart summarised the way in which the Trust had made a surplus through the pandemic noting that although there had been dramatic changes in islands and trading income, and membership subscriptions that the JRS/furlough scheme had helped immensely and that the massive increase in grants which had been received late in the year had all resulted in the surplus. He thanked Sarah and her team for their great work and without their efforts the impact of Covid on the Trust's finances would have been far worse.

4 a) To receive the annual audited accounts and reports for the financial year ended 31st March 2021 These had been available to members to download from the website or as hard copy upon request. Stuart said that the accounts had been approved and signed off by the Board of Trustees. It was proposed by Jon Cooper that the accounts be received and this was seconded by Maggie Thomas.

Thanks were given to Stuart for his presentation.

5) To confirm the re-appointment to the Board of the following: Mike Alexander, Stuart Bain, Mark Brian, Rosey Grandage, Shirley Matthews, Richard Payne and Sally Weale (personal statements had been available to download from the Trust website or as hard copy upon request) These would be confirmed *en bloc* and this was proposed by Jon Cooper and seconded by Gill Barter. All members present were in approval.

6) To confirm the appointment to the Board of the following: Mike Davies and Catrin Evans (personal statement had been available to download from the Trust website or as hard copy upon request). It was proposed by Maggie Thomas that these be confirmed *en bloc* and seconded by Jon Cooper. All members present were in approval.

7) To confirm the re-appointment of the auditors Azets.

This was proposed by Rob Pickford and seconded by Stuart Bain. All members present were in approval.

Chair's Report

Before bringing the meeting to the close Mike Alexander gave a report to the members and the following are his written notes.

'We have survived what has probably been the most extraordinary and challenging time that our Trust has ever had to endure. We only survived because of the remarkable commitment and dedication of our staff. It was extremely distressing that there were inevitable redundancies and regrettable that two thirds of our staff were furloughed for most of the year. In the first few months of Covid-19 it was very difficult to imagine how we might survive. We accurately predicted a huge loss of income, and the inevitable consequences. However, we did not predict the outstanding ability of our staff to respond to the emergency.

They achieved the seemingly impossible by raising funds to recover our losses and, almost more amazingly, to provide for our post-Covid recovery. We have received so much help from both individuals and donor organisations, all that I need to do is to thank them all for their generosity and support. We are extremely grateful.

We all, trustees, and members, owe our Chief Executive, Sarah Kessell, and her management team, together with all our staff and volunteers, a huge vote of gratitude for everything that they have achieved. They have endured so much on our behalf.

Moving on

COP 26

So world leaders are beginning to take climate change seriously, perhaps they are slowly realising that human life on this planet is threatened.

I guess that everyone should applaud their promises to do something, and the fact that they have identified a whole raft of measures aimed at slowing down the rate of climate change.

I actually feel all copped out, and if I am honest, I really don't know how to greet the results.

Optimism and hope, or despair and pessimism.

It was so very sad when right at the last moment India intervened, just one word changed the PHASING OUT OF COAL to PHASING DOWN.

I guess that I am tending towards despair.

In Britain and Wales our governments are focussing on tree planting as their primary solution to meeting the climate crisis. Tree planting everywhere, seemingly regardless of the simple concept 'that we should be planting the right tree in the right place.

Trees will be planted as a means of reducing CO2, but also for the generation of Carbon Credits that can be used for meeting net-zero targets. The whole idea of offsetting and trading carbon troubles me.

I also despair because of the seriously false assertion that if an ecosystem or a habitat is delivering ecosystem goods, for example carbon sequestration, that by default it is also providing for wildlife.

Nothing could be further from the truth, let me share just one simple reason for my concern. The tree species most favoured by NRW, among other non-native exotics is Sitka.

Why is this such an important issue.

2,300 species not including bacteria and other microorganisms use oak trees. 326 species are completely dependent, 299 relied highly on oak.

Oak has 284 associated insect species, Sitka has 37.

I suggest that our government's approaches to dealing with climate change can not be relied on to safeguard our precious wildlife.

So if we cannot rely on government, who do we turn to who can we rely on to protect Welsh Nature.

We must look to ourselves, look to our prime purpose, which is to cherish, care for and conserve our Welsh nature.

This is why our new strategy is so different to anything from our past, why it is so bold and uncompromising.

During the immediate post war years, an almost forgotten hero Sir Julian Huxley, one of the most eminent zoologists and philosophers of his time was the president of the West Wales Field Society.

Huxley led the development of (Cmd. Paper 7122) on the 'Conservation of Nature in England and Wales 1947'. This eventually led to the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

The Government accepted the principles of the Huxley report and, in 1948, set up a Nature Conservancy, late NCC then CCW and today we have NRW.

In 1946 Huxley challenged the members of the then Field Society to be adventurous and enterprising in creating nature reserves on the Pembrokeshire Islands.

The Society responded to the challenge, establishing a temporary base on Skomer in 1946 to conduct a field survey of the island. They also intended to use Skomer as the main base for re-establishing the post-war bird observatory on Skokholm. The rest is history and an outstanding achievement that all trust members should be proud of.

Today I am going to follow in Sir Julian Huxley's footsteps and challenge you to take a much more active role in the protection our wildlife.

Wildlife in Wales desperately need your help. We are standing on the very edge of a precipice and beginning to fall in the wrong direction.

Earlier Sarah introduced our strategy and highlighted our three key themes.

1. Key Goal: 30% of land and sea managed for nature by 2030

We need healthy functioning habitats that are robust enough to cope with the inevitable and inescapable impact of the impending changes to our climate. A simple ecological fact is that the smaller an ecosystem and the more remote an ecosystem the greater the chance that species will become extinct.

We will devote substantial staff time to seeking new opportunities to extend our existing sites and to discover new opportunities for bringing land under conservation management.

But our strategy 30% of land managed for nature by 2030, can only be met with your help. You can work directly with us as volunteers, your involvement is essential. There is so much that we need to do to maintain our sites so that we can always demonstrate that they are indeed managed for nature.

But you can also take things much further, by working in your local area, independently of the Trust, but with our support and guidance when you need it. Please become involved, actively seek opportunities for wildlife, and then help organise or lead local action. There is no lower limit on the size or condition of the land that can be brought under control for nature. There is potential everywhere, and so much information to guide you, perhaps you could begin by looking to your own garden, perhaps communal land, parks, road verges, as I said there is so much opportunity and potential.

2. Key Goal: One in four people taking action for nature by 2030

You will realise that our key targets are linked, people taking action for nature will help us meet our first target. There is of course so much that you can do to help us meet this target. Indeed we can only get there with your help.

Let me offer another challenge, one of the most obvious ways in which people can take action for nature is to join and take an active role in our Trust. I challenge each of you and all of our members to do your very best to recruit at least one new member for the trust. You could talk to family, friends, acquaintances, even your enemies. Just think of the impact of a doubled membership would have on our ability to protect our precious wildlife.

3. Key Goal: Achievement of Net Carbon Zero by 2030

Despite everything that we know, we continue to recklessly squander our life support system; this must come to an end. We must reverse the direction of change and we must begin today.

I mentioned COP earlier, yes with a degree of Cynicism, I can't help reflecting on Greta Thunberg and her BLA BLA BLA verdict. Please don't allow our strategy to become just another example of BLA BLA BLA, we know that we cannot rely on others to do anything, and we must recognise that we all have a role to play. Trust staff will work toward managing our carbon footprint, and each of you must recognise a personal obligation, I urge you examine your own lifestyle and do everything that you can do to reduce your carbon footprint, and of course try to influence others to do the same.'

Mike invited questions or comments.

Sarah responded to a query from Stuart Bain on the Carbon Net Zero work and why the Trust's benchmark is below other Trusts. She thought that this was likely to be because for equivalent size we have less staff resulting in less travelling, and also fewer grazing animals.

Mike thanked everyone who gave presentations and thanked all of the members, staff and trustees for attending.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm