

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Hilton Hotel, Cobham on Saturday 14th November 2015

Present

There were approximately 230 members present

Chair's introductory remarks

Jim Asher, Chair of Butterfly Conservation welcomed everyone to the AGM. He gave thanks to the Surrey Branch Committee, Julie Williams and the staff from Head Office for the continued success with organising the event.

The Chair explained that before lunch, awards would be presented to this year's Outstanding Volunteers and that members would be able to enjoy talks on conservation topics. The first talk would be by Richard Fox, BC's Head of Recording on 'The State of Butterflies in the UK 2015' and the second by Paul Kirkland, Director of BC Scotland on 'Our Precious Peatlands'. Kate Merry, BC's Munching Caterpillars Project Officer would begin after lunch with a talk on 'Inspiring the next generation to save butterflies and moths', followed by Michal Blencowe, BC Sussex Branch on 'Engaging People in Recording'. The drawing of the NFU Mutual Raffle and the Branch Raffle would precede the presentation of the Marsh Awards. Lastly, Kate Bradbury, Author and Wildlife Editor of Gardeners' World Magazine would conclude the afternoon's talks with a talk on 'Gardening for Butterflies and Moths'.

The Chair then opened the formal AGM.

1 Apologies

Apologies had been received from Outstanding Volunteer Award winners Ian Findlay, Clem Shaw and Keith Warmington and members Andrew Hickson, Sir Christopher Lever and Chris Piper.

2 Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Stoneleigh Park, Warwick, on Saturday 15th November 2014

The Minutes of the meeting had been published on the website and made available on request. They were proposed by Andrew Brown and seconded by Andrew Barker, and approved.

3 Matter Arising

The Chair asked all present if there were any matters arising to discuss. Nothing was raised.

4 Annual Report - Chair's Report to Members

The Chair opened his speech with the sad news that Harold Hughes, previous Chair of Butterfly Conservation from 1991-1999 and also the main architect driving Butterfly Conservation into the professional era, had sadly passed away. The Chair continued that Harold brought a passion for Butterfly Conservation and a commitment to grow it into an organisation big enough and respected enough to make a difference. Harold felt that it had stagnated up to then, resembling more of an 'old boys' club than a serious conservation organisation. Harold brought a steely determination and apparent limitless energy to bring about that change.

The Chair continued to say how Harold took BC's failings personally, sometimes to the extent of digging into his own pocket, for example, to bail out the then sales company. The Chair explained that the anguish at the lack of financial control, likened to 'flying in fog', directly led to Harold setting the priority of the transition to a semi-professional organisation, with a Director and staff to take some of the load. He led the transformation and birth of what we have today.

The Chair informed the audience that Harold helped raise funds to appoint BC's first staff member (Andrew Phillips) in 1990 and was responsible for bringing in major sponsorship from BP which helped launch an advertising campaign, which quickly took membership from under 3,000 in 1991 to 10,000 by 1999.

The Chair stated that Butterfly Conservation owes him a massive debt, as one of the true shapers of the Organisation that is achieving so much today.

Harold and his wife, Elizabeth, have remained keen supporters of various BC events after he stepped down. Harold will be sadly missed by all and the Chair offered condolences and sympathy to Elizabeth, along with grateful thanks for lending Harold to BC and supporting him in that critical role.

The Chair recapped how last year has been another great year of progress and achievement for Butterfly Conservation and that our mission remains strong – saving butterflies and moths, in a healthy environment.

Butterfly Conservation will continue to make progress in conserving threatened species on the ground at key sites and landscapes across the UK and have the ability to demonstrate success if an ambitious approach is taken.

At the same time, BC is building the evidence and science base to underpin its successes.

- UKBMS
- Distribution recording: completion of another 5-year cycle
- State of Butterflies in UK – due out in December
- Wider Countryside Monitoring
- Working towards an urban species indicator
- Moth recording
- Research collaborations

BC is active across Europe – top-down through Butterfly Conservation Europe and from the roots, through European Interests Group.

The Chair described how the International Symposium held in April 2014 was a great success, with some 200 delegates from about 28 countries – the best turn-out thus far.

Jim told how the successful building of BC's portfolio of Nature Reserve has now reached 35, officially opening the Rough Bank reserve in Gloucestershire. This year saw the acquisition of Westbury Beacon, in Somerset, adding another landscape piece to our Stoke Camp reserve on the Mendips. The Chair gave thanks to everyone who contributed to the appeal, which resulted in raising enough money to buy this important reserve.

The Chair advised that the Chief Executive will speak later about the importance of the advocacy work through the Nature Partnership following up on the State of Nature report.

The Chair went on to explain that one of BC's priorities is to engage supporters, the most successful way so far was the Big Butterfly Count – a massive success in the summer, despite the weather – over 50,000 people took part! As a result of running this over the past four years the e-mail supporter list is now just a shade off 100,000.

The Chair was delighted to announce that BC membership has continued to grow impressively and is now 28,000.

The Chair explained that BC is strongly focusing on engaging young people, utilising the wider use of social media and pro-active youth involvement, for example, the youth engagement volunteer in East Scotland Branch, has been carrying out a great job, as well as the flagship project, Munching Caterpillars, which has reached tens of thousands of school children and their parents.

The Chair advised that David Hanson, BC's Honorary Treasurer would provide more details shortly but that BC's finances remain in good shape.

The Chair continued that during his three year tenure a priority is to visit as many branches as possible. This year, visiting AGMs and/or regional events, involving nine branches:

- SW Scotland field trip to Mabie Forest, Cumbria AGM, Warks Open Day, Scottish Members Day (three branches), Wilts, Hampshire, Upper Thames AGMs, and Surrey later this month.

The Chair found it a pleasure to attend these events, and celebrated?? the enthusiasm, active engagement, knowledge and sheer joyful passion of so many willing volunteers. The work done by BC volunteers is equivalent in value to over £10m per year. BC owes them a huge thank-you.

In addition the Chair went onto thank:

- The Trustees on Council for doing a great job
- Martin, Julie, the senior management team and all staff at Lulworth and the national/regional offices
- Branch Chairs and committees for their key role at the local level recruiting and motivating volunteers

- BC's most prominent volunteer, and President, Sir David Attenborough
- Support from Surrey Branch at today's event
- The many organisations and donors for their generous support
- Those who leave us legacies, which are now one of BC's main sources of income and underpin much of our work
- ...and of course BC's passionate and dedicated membership...thanks was given to all!

5 Treasurer's report to members and adoption of the Annual Report & Consolidated Accounts and Balance Sheet for the year ended 31 March 2015

The Treasurer advised that he would be giving some background and context to the figures in the Annual Review.

The Treasurer advised that BC's Chief Executive, the conservation staff and all BC's conservation volunteers are an excellent team with a strong reputation and this matters financially.

David described how the coalition government in power until May, (which covered the financial year to March on which BC are reporting) had priorities for Health, Education, Overseas Aid and Pensioners; the impact of this was no let-up in the pressure on other departments to make savings. Everything else was, by definition, a non-priority and subjected to cuts in order to reduce the government's borrowing – for BC crucially DEFRA.

David continued to describe how the current government's leaders had added Defence as a fifth protected area, requiring more action on the deficit and then the House of Lords voted down £4 billion of welfare cuts. The full picture will become clear when the Chancellor reveals his spending review on 25th November.

The Treasurer advised that redefining things is a key art of government and that unless promises to the aforementioned five areas are to be broken; the money available on average to all other areas will be halved in real terms in this decade. To get any money out of government and its agencies has become a difficult endeavour.

The Treasurer continued that BC's conservation reputation is extremely critical. Whilst Natural England and its sister agencies love and admire BC for the work it does, their grants are becoming smaller in size, smaller as a proportion of a project's cost, fragmented, shorter term, containing no-notice break clauses and so on. When a pot of money becomes available, BC needs to apply at speed in order to be successful in securing Government funds.

David informed that at Head Office, Julie Williams and the finance and admin team do a great job in controlling BC's expenditure and keeping staff and trustees fully aware of all relevant news. BC have very good news in that there was a 100% clean audit report this year. Buzzacott, BC's auditors spent a week at BC Head Office in Lulworth and found nothing problematic; this is a wonderful record and huge comfort to Trustees and members.

BC can spend effectively and control and account for spending efficiently. The key challenge will be to raise more resources. BC have a strong fundraising team addressing all known sources of funds, charitable trusts, legacies, landfill operators, wealthy individuals and many more. David explained that a flavour of this can be seen in the ring chart on page 15 of the Annual Review.

The effect on all other sources from the reduction in public sector support is severe. Charities, previously supported by government grants, must look elsewhere, or worse. Aggressive telephone agencies used by several major charities and the bombarding of sensitive and vulnerable people with mail shots have attracted hostile public attention.

The Treasurer continued that coupling this with the hostility of politicians towards charities who lobby and campaign, and up goes the level of legislation and regulation and, down goes the level of public trust in charities as a whole. The Charity Commission promises, “stronger and more impactful” guidance on fundraising and “sharper guidance” on financial reserve planning. The latest survey on public trust shows that trust in charities is down several places to below 50% and below the level of trust in supermarkets.

The Hon Treasurer proposed the adoption of the Annual Report and Accounts, which was seconded by Kathryn Dawson. The Annual Report and Accounts were unanimously approved by the members.

6 Appointment of Auditors and authorisation to fix their remuneration for the coming year

David Dennis proposed the reappointment of Buzzacott LLP with Alan Martin seconding this. The appointment was approved and Council was authorised to fix their remuneration for the ensuing year.

7 Chief Executive Officer’s (CEO) Report

The CEO explained that the Chair had given an excellent summary of last year’s achievements; and explained he would bring these up to date with some comments about this year and a quick look ahead to the future

Firstly the CEO added his own personal tribute to Harold Hughes, who sadly died two weeks ago. Harold was a visionary leader of Butterfly Conservation and was Chair when the CEO was appointed as Conservation Officer back in 1993. Harold was extremely passionate about BC’s work and drove the charity into the professional era.

The CEO reminisced that Harold was always warm with praise but could also be a hard task master when needed, and was an important mentor to the CEO in the early years when BC were wrestling with the challenges of becoming a far more effective organisation. Harold and Elizabeth were regular attenders of BC events all around the country and the CEO and BC were delighted that Elizabeth could attend the AGM to hear the tributes. BC owes Harold a great deal and he will be very sadly missed by us all.

The CEO continued, that as the Chair had mentioned, Branches are the bedrock of Butterfly Conservation and carry out a fantastic amount of work around the UK, ranging from direct action for sites and species, running events to engage the public, and caring for BC’s members and supporters. During the last year it has been discussed as to how BC’s Branches and volunteers can best work with staff to help deliver the 2020 vision to save butterflies and moths. In March and April, the CEO had detailed conversations with every Branch Chair about the role of Branches in general and the strengths and needs of their own Branch, also identifying issues that need to be addressed by Susan Anders, BC’s Branch Support Officer.

The results have been extremely positive and highlighted the massive strength and depth of the Branches. It also underlined the critical role that Branch Chairs play in Butterfly

Conservation, by ensuring Branches are well run and ensuring that the time given by wonderful volunteers is used as effectively as possible.

The CEO set on record that BC is extremely lucky and gave thanks to have such a skilled and dedicated group of Branch Chairs and how enormously grateful BC is for their hard work, and the work of all Branch Committee members.

During the last year, BC strengthened the England Regional Team by promoting Dan Hoare to Head of Regions and promoting Sam Ellis to become Director of Conservation and Regions. BC are also gradually freeing up time of the National and Regional Officers to work more closely with Branches and address local issues.

At the same time, BC have strengthened its science work by moving Dr. Nigel Bourn to become Director of Science and Policy to ensure continued efforts to be at the forefront of research on butterflies and moths. BC know it's a period of great change so it is vital that actions are based on sound research and evidence.

Martin recalled that over the last two years, BC has also developed another major partnership initiative to work more closely with other wildlife NGOs, particularly those who focus on species conservation such as RSPB, Plantlife and Buglife. The Chief Executives of seven such Species NGOs now meet every quarter and have developed a suite of projects believed to be more effective by acting together. These include pooling information on the State of Nature in the UK (which has led to two major reports), giving advice to farmers, and lobbying MPs. The CEO's also worked together on a major bid to Heritage Lottery Fund, which if successful could bring over £7m to save some of BC's most threatened species.

The CEO explained that BC is continuing to run many amazing and successful projects, some of which will be discussed in the covered in talks later in the day. Many other vital projects were also in the pipeline. The CEO thanked everyone involved, all of BC's staff who work tirelessly for Butterfly Conservation and to all volunteers and Branches who add so much work on the ground.

The CEO expressed that there are exciting times ahead, but the external situation in which we work gets harsher each year. As stated by the BC Treasurer, the economic crisis will bite even harder in coming years as Government funding continues to decline, making it more important that BC develop alternative income streams. BC faces the increasing threats to important sites from development as well as threats to water down legislation that protects nature.

The CEO enthused how important it is to work together to face the threats and take every opportunity to achieve conservation on the ground. BC has made giant strides as an organisation in the last decade and, with continued support can make a massive difference in coming years.

The CEO thanked everyone for all the hard work to help Butterfly Conservation be the thriving organisation it is today.

8 Council Elections

Mike Dean, David Hanson and Nigel Symington stood down by rotation, but all were entitled and willing to offer themselves for re-election. In addition, Neil Thompson and Mark Young have stood down and were not entitled to seek re-election, which left two vacancies on Council. Two new candidates stood for election: Ilija Vukomanovic and Chris Winnick who have both submitted Election Addresses (sent to all members). They were nominated,

eligible and had made declarations. As there were sufficient vacancies, the election of all five candidates was proposed by Roger Dobbs and seconded by Sue Smith. After checking that no member present objected to the election being carried out enbloc, they were approved by a unanimous show of hands.

Mike Dean, David Hanson, Nigel Symington, Ilija Vukomanovic and Chris Winnick were duly declared to have been duly elected as Trustees.

The Chair expressed his thanks on behalf of BC to both Neil Thompson and Mark Young, who have made first class contributions to Council.

9 Q & A

Q: Does Butterfly Conservation see the current climate change as a challenge and taken the opportunity to assess the threat and opportunities available?

Martin Warren (MW) advised there was no simple answer to the difficulties caused by climate change. BC is constantly evaluating the issue and found that whilst it does effect on average one third of the species of butterflies, it is possibly not the chief problem affecting the decline in numbers of other species. It is a very hot research topic and MW advised that an interesting talk would be given by Richard Fox, Head of Recording, later in the day which would explain the situation in greater details.

Q: Wildlife Trusts currently have a chain of visitor centres which prove to be popular, has BC considered this at their flagship sites?

MW advised that BC have considered having a visitor centre but at present there is no suitable site. In addition is it very costly to build and continue to maintain a visitor centre. However, should the right opportunity arise then it would be a strong possibility.

Q: The RSPB are currently encouraging all members to write to the Environmental Minister, Rory Stewart, to insist he take action by defending the laws that protect nature to other EU Ministers

MW advised that BC has strongly promoted this call on social media but have not undertaken a mail shot to all members as there is a huge overlap of members with RSPB who have done a general mailshot. BC did not want members to feel bombarded. BC was a part of an umbrella organisation in Europe which had been promoting the defence of the Directives and the online petition had a huge response, with over 500,000 people signing. MW explained that it is important that the voice of BC and like-minded charities was heard, because there would be a huge threat to the environment if the Directives were abolished.

Date of Next AGM

The date of the next AGM will be Saturday 5th November 2016 being held at The Belfry Hotel in Nottingham.

The AGM was then formally closed.

Signed by the Chairman..... Date.....