

Minutes of the meeting held at Cheltenham Racecourse, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire on Saturday 19th November 2011

Present

There were approximately 300 members present

Chair's introductory remarks

David Dennis, Chair of Butterfly Conservation, welcomed everyone to the AGM and Members' Day, hosted by the Gloucestershire Branch of Butterfly Conservation. He thanked Sue Smith, the Branch Chair, and the Branch Committee as well as the staff from Head Office.

The Chair began by thanking Maurice Avent, the previous Chair of Butterfly Conservation, for all the hard work, support and friendship he has given via this role over the past three years.

The Chair gave an introduction to the Members Day programme which would commence with a welcome from Sue Smith, Gloucestershire Branch Chair. This would be followed by a talk given by the Head of Sustainable Business in Marks and Spencer, Mike Barry. Jim Asher would present 'The State of Butterflies in the UK' and Sonia Copeland Bloom would follow with an overview of her book – 'Crystal the Small Miracle'.

After lunch members would enjoy talks on local conservation topics, the first by Matthew Oates, Nature Advisor to the National Trust on 'Conserving Butterflies and Moths in the South-East Woods' and the second by Dan Hoare, BC Regional Officer SE England. The drawing of the Branch raffle prizes, and the prize hamper, courtesy of NFU Mutual, would precede the Marsh Christian Awards, presented by David Dennis. The afternoon would culminate with a talk by Mike Dilger, BC Vice President and presenter on the One Show, entitled 'The Trials and Tribulations of a Natural History Presenter'.

The Chair then opened the formal AGM, notice of which had been served together with the agenda, council election address and proxy forms; all of which were circulated in Butterfly Magazine, autumn 2011 edition, Issue 108.

1 Apologies

Apologies had been received from Trustees Peter Bradbury and Mark Young, also from Tony & Gay Hoare, Harold & Elizabeth Hughes, Bill Bacon, Eric & Angela Rose and David Bridges.

2 Minutes of the last AGM held on 20th November 2010 at Churchill College, Cambridge

The minutes of the meeting had been published on the website, and made available on request. They were approved unanimously (proposed by Ian Small and seconded by Jenny Mallett).

3 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4 Annual Report - Chair's Report to Members

The Chair, David Dennis, started by saying it was a huge honour and responsibility to hold the position of Chair for such an effective and forward-looking organisation, and that he was very grateful to be entrusted with this position. He went on to explain that he has been a member for nearly 20 years and a trustee for six, but most of his working life had been spent with Marks and Spencer mainly in the area of Personnel Management and Communications. David felt that his experience of people and how they can best work together is something that he can contribute to BC and this is particularly important as we work towards realising our 2020 vision.

The Chair then went on to say that the 2020 vision is ambitious and has come out of a feeling that we must do more and on a bigger scale if we are to succeed in our aim of halting and reversing the decline of butterflies and moths. This issue has occupied our thinking a great deal over the last financial year. In the middle of the year, the Branch Chairs joined senior staff and trustees in Birmingham for a two-day meeting, which David said was the first for many years. He felt it was vital to involve all BC Branches in not only hearing about the 2020 vision, but in actively helping to shape it. At the recent BLM meeting, David was delighted to hear that more than one Branch now has its own 2020 plans for how to implement the vision on their patch. This is the staff/volunteer partnership at its best.

The Chair went on to state that the last financial year had not been the easiest time for BC with our funding streams becoming increasingly uncertain and some, from the government, suffering severe cuts. Yet at the same time BC is embarking on significant plans for growth.

Looking at what had been achieved in 2010-2011, David spoke of the completed SE woodland project which was our biggest ever and resulted in a new guide to woodland management for butterflies and moths. Linked to this project was the scientific knowledge that we have built up over many years which has been proved to work when it comes to saving endangered species. On specific sites in the South we have increased Pearl-Bordered Fritillary populations fourfold, whilst elsewhere Wood Whites have increased fivefold. We are now working to maintain and develop large Marsh Fritillary colonies as far apart as Dorset, Northern Ireland and Scotland, and we are seeing High Brown Fritillaries colonise sites in Cumbria after years of decline.

In the Brecks project in Norfolk, the Grey Carpet moth has colonised on no less than four plots of land, and the rare Forester Moth has arrived in one of these as well. We also opened three new reserves in Lancashire, Somerset and Stirling which have brought our total throughout the UK to 37.

David particularly mentioned the completed Moths Count Project which involved a huge amount of co-operation with moth recorders all over the UK. The result was that records totalling 12.5 million sightings, now constituted the single largest dataset on the National Biodiversity Network Gateway, leading to much better targeted conservation work on our most threatened species.

During the year we also started an exciting new partnership with Marks and Spencer that came out of discussions between Martin Warren and Mike Barry from M&S. This led to the launch of The Big Butterfly Count with 10,000 participants in the first year. This July, in spite of appalling weather at just the wrong time, that figure was trebled to 30,000. In partnership with M&S we are definitely doing something right. Interestingly only 11% of those participants were BC members, meaning we have now engaged with almost another 27,000 interested people who we are now working hard to recruit.

We started the last financial year with 14,700 members and ended up with just under 16,000. We now have well over 17,500 – a 19% increase in only 18 months, which equates to eight new members per day. All this has been achieved in spite of the worst economic news for decades. If kept up, then this time next year we could be announcing that we have topped 20,000 when six years ago we had little over half that number.

In spite of the economic outlook, we are basically in good financial shape. This is due to careful and prudent planning on David Hanson's and Julie Williams' part. There are worries about our future, but no crisis.

As a result, this year we are able to invest in strengthening our fundraising team. We accept that this may mean for a period that the percentage of our spending which goes directly to conservation work may drop a little from the current admirable figure of 86%, but this has been carefully discussed and is supported by Branches. We have to take action to compensate for lost revenue from government and to stay on track towards 2020.

David then spoke of his reasons for looking forward to his three years as BC's Chair and the three groups which each play a vital role. Firstly, the trustees. They are a team from many walks of life, some are committed Branch activists, and all have different backgrounds and skills. They are hard working and committed, and through them David believes the governance of BC to be in safe hands. The second group is the staff team led by Martin Warren, Julie Williams and Nigel Bourn. With the conservation and support teams in Manor Yard, Paul Kirkland's team in Scotland, Russel Hobson's team in Wales and our regional officers, they make up a formidable team.

The third group is our tremendous network of Branches and volunteers. We've calculated that last year the volunteer hours, (if valued in cash terms), contributed £9.5 million to our conservation efforts, which is over three times our actual spend.

David wound up his report by saying that membership increase means that each Branch now has on average about 80 members more than 18 months ago, and in some Branches many more. Many Branches run 'new members' days – and what better way to show these new enthusiasts that we are a dynamic organisation in which they are really welcome. Amongst these new members could be future active volunteers, Branch treasurers, species champions and publicity officers.

Above all, good working relationships are a must – and David broadly feels we already have them. Going forward, he would like to see even more of a partnership between Branches and HO, taking advantage of the skills and expertise which we have, but which is not evenly

distributed. The challenge of the 2020 Vision is to raise our game across the piece, and David believes that BC is at a stage when the ways Branches and HO operate, need to evolve quite quickly to meet the demands of a membership twice, or eventually even four times the size it was.

5 Treasurer's report to members and adoption of the Annual Report & Consolidated Accounts and Balance Sheet for the year ended 31 March 2010

David Hanson opened his report by referring to the income table in the Financial Review, and specifically the receipt of £2,085,691 at the top of the column headed Endowment Funds. David then went on to explain the history behind this starting in 1999 when the Vincent Wildlife Trust set aside part of its invested funds and donated the income earned each year to Butterfly Conservation.

The Trust has now given us those invested funds valued at just over £2 million, with the restriction that we may continue to spend only the income from them. David stated that what has changed for the better is not the amount we can spend, but the security attached to it, as the fund is ours in perpetuity.

David then went on to summarise the financial world in which we live and work.

2007/08. Acute banking crisis with Northern Rock, Royal Bank of Scotland, HBOS/Lloyds and Lehman Brothers. Also that we were in a recession from April 2008 with interest rates collapsing from 5.0% to 0.5% by March 2009.

2009/10. David stuck with his view that this would be seen as a lull between two storms.

2010/11. There is an acute euro zone sovereign debt crisis with Ireland, Greece, Portugal, and Italy with Spain not too far from it.

David then went on to say that at a day to day level, the twists and turns are hard to follow. Looking at the bigger picture, we seem to be watching a slow motion crash taking place over several years – four so far – and not done with yet by any stretch of imagination.

2011/12. Are we looking at a second acute banking crisis and second period of recession?

David explained the influence all this has on Butterfly Conservation. He explained that we had lost a large slice of our NE grant this year and one sizeable annual donation last year which has tested us. However, the support from members is exceptional and all the indicators such as membership numbers, membership renewal rates and support for appeals such as Match Pot are very reassuring.

David explained that interest rates remain very low meaning Treasury management remained a challenge. If a second banking crisis did take place next year and official rates remained at 0.5%, banks may have to increase what they offer to savers in order to secure funds.

For several years we have had a policy of striving to increase our financial reserves, and David then showed a table that reflected the published figure for our reserves over the last four years, reaching our target of £1 million.

Fundraising in the current climate is more challenging than ever, and David reflected this by showing a pie chart and tables published in the Annual Review document. These showed that our fundraising effort is across a broad front, charitable trusts, statutory agencies, landfill funds etc. We are fortunate that David Bridges and his colleagues have the skills to submit high quality applications across this wide range.

Our response to this challenge is to strengthen our fundraising team, in effect using our current financial strength to ensure that in the medium term we will have the income needed to achieve our 2020 vision. David then went on to welcome Robert Pitts as the new Head of Fundraising; David Bridges will continue to be working on the major HLF and Landfill applications.

A third benefit of having these financial reserves is that when a particularly attractive butterfly reserve becomes available, it is possible for Trustees to underwrite the purchase negotiations. Although the team always endeavours to negotiate a good price and seeks external funding, these financial reserves greatly reduce the risk that a valuable butterfly reserve will slip through our fingers.

In summary, these financial reserves, now built up to our target level of £1 million, provide us with the ability to:

1. Give increased security to staff
2. Strengthen our fundraising capability
3. Underwrite reserve purchase(s)

David proposed the adoption of the Annual Report & Consolidated Accounts for the year to 31 March 2011, which was seconded by Dr Simon Spencer, and passed with one abstention.

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

Mandy Gluth proposed the reappointment of Buzzacott with Jim Asher seconding this. The appointment was approved and Council was authorised to fix their remuneration.

7 Chief Executive Officer's Report

The Chief Executive Officer, Dr Martin Warren welcomed everyone and stated that he would recap on a few things said by David Dennis and David Hanson. Martin pointed out that news was not all good as a third of our income comes from Government funding which will undoubtedly decline over the next 5-10 years.

Despite this background, BC was held in very high regard by Government agencies and had done very well in securing funds for various projects. A new three-year contract had been agreed for the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme and agencies had made contributions to our ongoing butterfly and moth recording schemes.

In Scotland, Paul Kirkland had negotiated a new grant for 2011 and we have been encouraged to apply for the next three years.

In Northern Ireland, with thanks to Catherine Bertrand, we have a new three year grant, and in Wales we are in year two of a three year grant thanks to Russel Hobson.

The biggest area of concern was the big reduction in grant from Natural England which had led to the loss of two staff early in the year. Martin thanked the many members who wrote to their local MP's with regard to this matter. He had had a positive meeting with NE's Chief Executive, Helen Phillips and discussions were continuing about new funds. He was hopeful that the grant may be increased, but not to the level it has been in recent years.

Martin then spoke of what BC was doing with the funds raised from agencies and other sources such as Landfill.

The Marsh Fritillary had declined over the last 50 years, but we are now working with farmers to manage over 3000 hectares in Scotland. In Cumbria, three new colonies have been re-established and three more sites are being prepared. In Dorset, where we have worked with NE to bring the numbers of colonies up to pre 1980 levels, and the Project Officer for the Two Moors Project in Dartmoor has been working with farmers to restore habitats. As a result of all this, the Marsh Fritillary is responding well and has been on the up over the last 15 years.

The Pearl-bordered Fritillary is one of our most rapidly declining species, but here too there have been successes. In the Morecambe Bay project, 44 hectares have been managed to restore habitats. In the Wyre Forest, numbers have done exceptionally well. A three-year project called Back to Orange, jointly managed by the Forestry Commission and Butterfly Conservation, was completed in 2010 as part of the Grow with Wyre Landscape Partnership Scheme, and this has resulted in this dramatic increase in numbers. Populations have recovered well in the Tytherley Woods Project area, and the South Shropshire Woods SITA Trust funded project is well on the way to delivering significant rideside management for the Wood White.

The National Moths Recording Scheme has been hitting approximately £1 million a year, resulting in it being the largest dataset available anywhere. The Big Butterfly Count has successfully reached out to a new audience. Launched by David Attenborough with support from Marks and Spencer at the National History Museum in July, we had a total of 30,000 counts from 34,000 people. However, over 80,000 people visited the website and over 52,000 downloaded the ID chart.

Martin paid tribute to the team of staff who have worked tirelessly to gain the successes above, and for all their support. He also thanked volunteers for their effort which equates to £9.5 million.

Martin closed by highlighting some of the main calendar events in the year ahead.

8 Council Elections

Prof John Dover and Mrs Mandy Gluth were to stand down and Ms Vanessa Williams was resigning from her post. Three new candidates were standing for election, Roger Dobbs, Michael Johnston and Sue Smith, with Maurice Avent, Peter Bradbury and Dr Simon Spencer standing for re-election. All candidates had prepared a short statement in the form of an Election Address; they were nominated, eligible and had made declarations. As there were sufficient vacancies, their election, en bloc, was proposed by Andrew Brown and seconded by Neil Thompson. Maurice Avent, Peter Bradbury and Dr Simon Spencer were duly re-elected and Roger Dobbs, Michael Johnston and Sue Smith were duly elected to serve on Council for a period of three years.

Having closed the AGM, the Chair expressed grateful thanks on behalf of BC to the retiring trustees. Each of them has made a first class contribution to Council and they remain very actively involved with us.

It was noted that solicitor Vanessa Williams has offered her assistance as a volunteer consultant and John Dover would continue to serve as an expert member of our Conservation Committee.

Mandy Gluth has served nine years on Council, and the Chair spoke of the huge wisdom and common sense she brought to the issues dealt with by the Health and Safety Forum of which she chaired. Mandy embodied BC at its best, creating a real partnership between volunteers, trustees and staff.

Maurice Avent has been Chair for the last three years, and David Dennis thanked him for all his hard work and support during this time. Maurice has offered to help in a fundraising capacity, developing new relationships with major donors. Maurice was then presented with gifts of thanks from his friends in BC.

The Chair told the members the sad news of the death of Dulcie Gray, BC's longest standing Vice President.

9 Date of Next AGM

The date of the next AGM will be Saturday 17 November 2012. It will be hosted by the East Midlands Branch.