



BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2009

Minutes of the meeting held at the University of Winchester, Sparkford Road, Winchester on Saturday 21 November 2009

Present

There were c 250 members present.

Chairman's Introductory Remarks:

Maurice Avent, Chairman of Butterfly Conservation, welcomed members to the AGM and Members' Day, hosted by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Branch of Butterfly Conservation. He thanked the Branch Chair, Roger Buchanan, and the Branch Committee. He also gave special thanks to Julie Williams, Sandra Muldoon, Georgie Laing, Neil Madigan and the many other members of staff from BC's Head Office in East Lulworth who had worked extremely hard to turn the day from a dream into a colourful reality.

The Chairman gave an introduction to the Members' Day programme beginning with BC's South East Woodland's Project Officer Kate Dent talking about the highly successful 'Tytherley Woods Project'. This would be followed by a talk prepared by long-standing Butterfly Conservation member, Dave Green, on 'The Moths of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight'. After lunch members would have the opportunity to enjoy talks on extremely topical research areas, the first by Dr Jason Chapman of Rothamstead Research on 'Radar Studies of Lepidoptera Migration' and the second by Dr Owen Lewis of Oxford University on 'The Decline of the Small Tortoiseshell: is *Sturmia bella* to blame?'. The Marsh Christian Awards, presented by Dr Jim Asher, would precede afternoon tea and the drawing of the Branch raffle prizes and prize hamper, courtesy of NFU Mutual. The winner of the auction for the beautiful hand made quilt would also be announced. The afternoon would culminate with a keynote presentation on 'Butterflies on the BBC' by Stephen Moss, BBC Series Producer, Natural History Unit.

The Chairman then opened the formal AGM, notice for which had been served together with the agenda, Council election addresses and proxy forms; all of which were circulated in Butterfly Magazine, Autumn 2009 edition, Issue 102.

1. Apologies

These were received from Trustees Peter Bradbury, David Hanson, Neil Jones and Mark Young. Apologies were also received from June Stubbs, Alistair Weatherbe, Stephen Jeffcoate, Jane Smith, Jon Lundy, Paul Butter and Sue Collins.

2. Minutes of the last AGM held on 22 November 2008

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

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising

4. Chairman's Report to Members

Maurice Avent stated that it was a great honour to stand before members as the Chairman once again and that the organisation was increasingly being recognised as a key player in the battle for public acceptance of the importance of conserving the biodiversity of the country and indeed Europe. In recent months Butterfly Conservation had been invited to many events including: a Guardian debate on valuing nature, chaired by Polly Toynbee; a couple of working lunches with the Chairman of Natural England, Poul Christensen CBE; and a Heritage Lottery Fund event supporting Moths and Bats at the Houses of Parliament, where Lord Davies, the parliamentary Under Secretary for Defra, gave an excellent speech on the importance of valuing our wildlife. In addition Cemex had requested BC's attendance at the opening of their new plant at Tilbury. Cemex had been extremely supportive to BC, most recently in conserving and expanding the remnant Small Blue population at their quarries close to Southam. In early November the Society had been invited again to the Palace of Westminster where Jim Fitzpatrick, the Minister of Food spoke of his enthusiasm for Environmental Stewardship and confirmed that 66% of farmers in this country had now signed up to environmental schemes.

These invitations were representative of the esteem with which Butterfly Conservation is held, as a result of the sheer hard work and dogged determination of its senior management team, working under Dr Martin Warren's superb guidance. The Chairman and Dr Warren had been asked to attend the Natural History Museum for the launch of The Year of Biodiversity in the presence of BC's President, Sir David Attenborough. The Chairman stated that a year dedicated to biodiversity will help BC to further draw attention to the plight of many of Britain's lepidoptera and the need for conservation generally for the sake of all species, including human beings.

The Chairman went on to acknowledge the wise counsel of his fellow Trustees and particularly thanked David Dennis for his continued support as Vice Chairman. In his report at the 2008 AGM the Chairman confirmed that Trustees would review the recommendations of the Charity Act 2006 and as a result the Governance Group had updated the Job Descriptions of key volunteers on Council as well as drawing up Terms of Reference for Council and the key committees. Great progress had been made and at the AGM in 2010 members would be asked to approve changes to the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Society; these will be geared to ensuring that BC's Board of Council is constantly refreshed in its search for improvement. Two long serving members of Council had stood down and would not seek re-election, Dudley Cheesman and Neil Jones, and an exceedingly long serving member of Council, David Dunbar had resigned in July. The Chairman expressed personal thanks to all three for their commitment to Butterfly Conservation over many years and for the wonderful work that each had contributed in their period of office. During the year Peter Bradbury had been inducted as a Trustee.

The Chairman went on to summarise the most relevant features of the past year which had marked the end of BC's 40th Anniversary Year and the beginning of its fifth decade. The cachet of BC's 40th year had been used to help bring real value to the Stop Extinction Appeal; with the help of BC's President David Attenborough over £110,000 had been raised. More importantly our members had continued to support the 2009 Match Pot Appeal with gusto and enthusiasm, for which the Society was deeply appreciative.

The Match Pot approach helped BC to multiply donations ten-fold by using the money raised to release landfill taxation that would otherwise finish in the Exchequer. Much of this funding had been used in the last financial year to actively concentrate on conserving butterflies and moths on a widespread scale in 76 key landscapes.

BC's President, Sir David Attenborough, highlighted the importance of this approach by announcing the top twenty Butterfly Survival Zones which had received widespread media coverage. It had been the Chairman's pleasure in mid July to attend the formal launch of the Morecambe Bay Limestone project, where the effectiveness of the early clearance work was already apparent and the High Brown Fritillary had been evident in good numbers. Tremendous progress had also been made with the South East Woodlands project. Bentley Wood on the border of the Chairman's own county of Wiltshire had benefitted from that initiative and butterflies were already colonising cleared areas after a couple of years of the scheme. Other major projects included the unique heathlands known as the Brecks of Norfolk and Suffolk, the grasslands of Fermanagh, and the Highlands of Scotland. Earlier in the year the Chairman had joined in the opening of BC's new reserve at Ewyas Harold where extensive clearance work would help Pearl Bordered Fritillaries and Grizzled Skipper butterflies on common land in the extreme west of the West Midlands area.

The Chairman stated that the Moths Count project had now entered its final year. Despite the short term funding streams BC would endeavour to ensure some members of the team would remain to continue the magnificent work. At the end of the last financial year the Moths Count team had already collated over 5 million records and enhanced the knowledge of distribution of these often under-reported creatures, this figure had since grown to a staggering 7 million records. The Moths Count scheme provides tremendously interesting data on the extension northwards of the distribution of many species and the lifestyle changes whereby there is a very fast development of univoltine species becoming bivoltine further north in their range. These key indicators of climate change are one extremely valuable outcome of this unique project and serve as a reminder to us all and to government in particular that global warming (whatever its cause) is no myth.

On mainland Europe too, BC's partners in Butterfly Conservation Europe have heralded the results of climate change by publishing a Climate Risk Atlas of European Butterflies. The atlas had utilised the best available scientific data to predict movements in the ranges of all common European species and the resulting maps show dramatic change. Meanwhile reports have been produced to update the European Grassland Butterfly Indicator which drew attention to the rapid decline of grassland species across our continent. All this information will be collated with data from other NGOs in an attempt to force improvement in European agricultural and habitat policies.

During the last financial year BC launched the Learn section of its website. This important resource is very informative for youngsters and teaches them in a manner linked to the National Curriculum. Butterfly Conservation's Head of Fundraising, David Bridges, had been a magnificent fund-raiser for many years and would continue to work on potential Heritage Lottery support for further education innovations.

The support of James Driscoll, Butterfly Conservation's Head of IT, with the ongoing development of the website had been invaluable. Earlier this year James had also set up the new paperless Direct Debit. At the beginning of April BC had reached its highest membership figure at 13,729 after a year in which its retention rate was 93%, thus maintaining significant growth. Last month individual membership had reached 14,827. James had analysed website statistics and confirmed there was a very tight correlation between press releases developed by BC's Publicity Team, led by Louise Keeling, and web recruitment.

The publicity efforts had generated web interest which in turn raised membership, fundraising had also been extremely effective. BC was particularly blessed to have a Finance Team who had been extremely wise, the shrewd handling of our funds throughout the turmoil of the last couple of years has been admirable. BC's Finance Director, Julie Williams, and its Hon Treasurer, David Hanson, had put committed funds on long term deposit while interest rates had been high and thus maximised earnings while interest rates elsewhere tumbled. The Society was extremely grateful for their foresight which in turn enabled the most important division of BC, the Conservation Programmes, to benefit from 83% of our expenditure.

Jim Asher, well known to many as a supreme photographer and wonderful lecturer was also Chairman of the Conservation Committee, his ability for lateral thinking and forward planning helps to ensure that every penny donated to conservation was wisely used; in the last financial year over £2 million had been spent on Conservation Programmes and in helping to ensure that species survive and indeed prosper. There will be difficult times ahead but BC must do all possible as a team to achieve the goal of saving lepidoptera and the landscapes that they require, in order to ensure that they prosper alongside multifarious other biodiversity for generations to come.

Council had approved the recommendation for three individuals who had made significant contributions to Butterfly Conservation to become Vice Presidents: Julian Gibbs, one of BC's founding fathers; Sue Collins whose exceptional skills and magnificent perseverance had done so much to build Butterfly Conservation Europe's reputation within the Common Market; and finally BC's past Chairman and Council member Dudley Cheesman, whose virtues had been extolled earlier.

5. Treasurer's report to members and adoption of the Annual Report & Consolidated Accounts and Balance Sheet for the year ended 31 March 2009

The Treasurer had sent his apologies for not being able to attend the AGM in person and had expressed his gratitude to David Dennis, BC's Vice-Chairman, for agreeing to deliver the report.

The Report and Accounts document was in every respect a team effort. It is a comprehensive operating report on the charity's ambitions, achievements and occasional disappointments for the year, supported by a great deal of accounting information.

The primary 'owner' and assembler' of the Accounts was BC's Director of Finance, Julie Williams, to whom the largest share of the credit for its excellence was due. Julie had again been very well supported by all the members of her Finance Team and also by all Branch Treasurers without whose welcome and timely support the task would be impossible.

Much of the operating report had been prepared by BC's Chief Executive, Dr Martin Warren, and members of the Conservation Team with other contributions from the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman and some Trustees. The team effort in the preparation of the document accurately matches the way BC works by blending the contributions of paid staff and volunteers harmoniously and effectively.

There were some outside players on the team, most notably BC's auditors, Buzzacott, whose contribution was highly rated.

The fortunes of butterflies year by year are affected by weather conditions and a range of environmental factors. Similarly the financial fortunes of BC were affected by economic conditions outside its control as well as by its own efforts.

The accounts cover the year from April 2008 to March 2009, an extremely turbulent period for economies. In April 2008 the UK economy entered a recession.

Midway through the financial year in October 2008 Lehman Brothers, the US investment bank was allowed to go bust, while a range of other US banks were shored up in various ways. Here Royal Bank of Scotland had to be all but nationalized and Lloyds was allowed to rescue HBOS, thereby almost bringing itself to collapse. The outlook was extremely bleak.

By March 2009 it was apparent that a range of actions by governments and central banks worldwide had just about prevented financial Armageddon.

In April 2008 banks were very short of funds and to secure funds they were offering 5 or 6% on deposits. Therefore BC placed on deposit for 6, 9 or 12 months as much of its cash balances as could be justified in order to benefit from those exceptional rates of interest for as long as possible.

In a more dramatic series of moves than ever seen before, the Bank of England cut its official interest rate from 5.0% to 0.5% and the government flooded the economy with cash. Many of the usual tried and tested homes for BC's cash offered 0.2% or a similarly derisory figure. The Treasury activity now added to Julie Williams's portfolio involves an unceasing search for better solutions than this. For example, BC recently placed over £800,000 with Abbey for 12 months at 3.0%.

The centralized banking arrangement set up two years ago with NatWest came into its own because Julie Williams could see all branch cash balances on one screen and invite those with significant balances to participate in any advantageous deposits that Head Office were making. So the deposit with Abbey included £108,000 of branch funds.

Looking at BC's income for the year to March 2009, the benefit from the 40th Anniversary Stop Extinction Appeal and the Anniversary Ball, which raised over £100,000, can be seen. Income from grants showed a very welcome rise of 24% but this contained an especially large payment in the first year of a new three year grant agreement with Natural England. BC's receipts in years two and three will be substantially lower.

Generally speaking BC's income in 2008/09 did not show any adverse effect from the recession that began as the year opened, but neither the recession nor its after effects are over and done with yet.

Total expenditure increased by around 4% to nearly £2½ million and the key feature here was that 83% of this total, or over £2 million, was spent on conservation.

Looking ahead on expenditure, finances can be controlled in two main ways. Year by year BC sets budgets for every aspect of the charity's activities and Julie Williams maintains an eagle eye on each budget holder's performance during the year, watching for any sign of a step over the line and producing excellent Management Accounts for Executive Group and Trustees to consider and review.

Much more strategically BC has a Priority Action Plan listing a range of activities, initiatives and projects which it would like to undertake over the next three years. As each of these comes forward for consideration it is costed and likely sources of funding investigated. Any contribution or underwriting required from BC's General Reserves is identified. Looking then at the expected evolution of General Reserves over the current and two subsequent years gives a clear steer as to whether it is prudent to embark on the project or whether further external funding should be secured before the go ahead is given.

This control process is essential because as the Finance Team looks down the various income lines and thinks ahead, it is easy to become concerned about the prospects. Returning, for example, to Natural England and similar grant making agencies from which BC draws close to one-third of its income, it is clear that the shocking state of government finances post recession will require 10% pa cuts in their total grants. It is important to work hard to sustain partnerships with these agencies to ensure BC suffers nothing worse than this average cut.

BC is full of ideas for future exciting projects. The Treasurer assured members that BC has a process in place to ensure that this enthusiasm does not result in financial over commitment.

David Dennis, on behalf of BC's Honorary Treasurer David Hanson, proposed the adoption of the Annual Report and Consolidated Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2009 and these were approved unanimously (seconded by Dudley Cheesman).

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

Mandy Gluth proposed the reappointment of Buzzacott. Hugo Brooke seconded 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, thanked the Chairman and stated that the aim of his report was to give a summary of BC's plans for the future and how BC can build on the excellent work described by the Chairman and the Treasurer.

BC would continue to focus its work on saving the most threatened species from extinction. This work involves giving advice and arranging management on individual sites but it increasingly involves working at a landscape scale. A priority for coming years is thus to maintain effort in existing landscape scale projects many of which were beginning to have remarkable success in reversing decades of decline.

As part of this ongoing programme BC will be developing new projects in new areas. Currently under development is a major fundraising bid for the Duke of Burgundy which is now believed to have been reduced to just 85 sites, and is on the brink of extinction on many of these. Other bids are in planning stage.

BC's second major priority is to continue its recording and monitoring schemes, which are some of the biggest schemes on insects anywhere in the world and are giving vital information on crucial issues such as biodiversity loss and climate change. The HLF funding for the Moths Count project ceases in August 2010 and detailed discussions have been held with Government agencies over long term funding for this and our butterfly recording scheme (Butterflies for the New Millennium). Regrettably progress has been painfully slow and it seems that everyone wants the data the schemes provide but no-one is prepared to fund the

schemes themselves. This is incredibly short-sighted as the Government needs good data to target its conservation work and avoid damaging development.

However, BC is determined to continue both of these schemes and will continue to bang on the door of the numerous institutional users. Whatever the outcome, BC will need to contribute from its own resources and, as part of the fundraising strategy, a fundraising appeal has just been run to existing moth recorders. BC is also planning a national appeal to all our members early next year. It is hoped that members will contribute to these appeals if they can. In a rapidly changing world, it has never been more important to document changes in our butterflies and moths as a key measure of the health of the environment.

Next year is 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity. BC's big event is the Sixth International Symposium to be held at Reading on 26-28 March 2010. The theme will be "2010 and beyond for Lepidoptera" and will include assessments from around the world on whether the 2010 target of halting biodiversity loss has been reached. These will include assessments from BC's UK projects including Moths Count, the BNM, and UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme. An impressive line up of speakers from four continents has been lined up and our President, Sir David Attenborough, has kindly agreed to open the Symposium.

The Chief Executive also reported that BC was about to buy a major piece of woodland (over 80 acres) next to its reserve at Park Corner Heath in Sussex. This is a vital site for butterflies and is occupied by the last remaining colony of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary in south-east England (outside Hampshire). BC was able to move quickly to buy the site thanks to a legacy which was left by Pamela Lewis who left BC money to buy a reserve in memory of her parents. This will be a very fitting memorial and should help BC save the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary in the region.

Contracts would hopefully be exchanged for Rowland Woods in the next few weeks. A regional appeal to members will be taking place before Christmas. The funds raised will help BC conduct the extensive management work that is needed to conserve this unique colony and improve habitats for a wide range of other important species.

Another very exciting development is that BC has been holding talks with a major retailer about a new collaboration to raise awareness of butterflies and encourage conservation by their customers and suppliers. This is a major opportunity for BC to reach out to a wider audience and hopefully raise funds for its core work. It is hoped that this partnership will be launched in March 2010 and discussions are underway regarding running a popular Butterfly Count during Save Our Butterflies Week in July 2010.

On the European front, BC has been very active with colleagues in BC Europe and has developed a number of exciting projects. The BC Europe network now comprises 37 organisations from 34 countries, giving an immense amount of expertise. These partners have produced data for a new Red List of European butterflies that would be published early in 2010. Thanks to the voluntary effort of Sue Collins, BC Europe has also worked with partners in the European Habitats Forum to improve EU environmental policies, especially on reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. BC has also input into ideas for a new biodiversity target post 2010. Although the existing target of halting biodiversity loss by 2010 has been missed, it has been extremely helpful in focussing attention and effort. A new target is vital to maintain momentum across Europe.

The Chief Executive confirmed that he had met with Council twice in the last few months to discuss a long term vision for Butterfly Conservation. BC was painfully aware that, despite its best efforts, species continue to decline and habitats continue to become degraded. BC needs to up its game even more in coming decades if it wants to achieve its goal of saving species from extinction.

The Society is thus working on a 2020 vision for the charity and hopes to firm this up during the coming year. A meeting will be held to discuss the plans with Branch Chairmen next September, and it is hoped that all Chairmen can attend this crucial event. The date is 25-26 September 2010 in Birmingham.

BC has ambitious plans for the coming year, but none of them would be possible without the amazing support of its volunteers. Each year volunteers contribute over £5 million pounds worth of effort, which allows BC to punch well above its weight.

The Chief Executive concluded by thanking all of BC's members for their superb help and support.

8. Council Elections

Dudley Cheesman, David Hanson, Neil Jones, Jenny Mallett, Neil Thompson and Mark Young were to stand down by rotation. Dudley Cheesman and Neil Jones had not put themselves forward for re-election. David Hanson, Jenny Mallett, Neil Thompson and Mark Young were entitled and willing to offer themselves for re-election. These four candidates had prepared short statements, were nominated, eligible and had made declarations. As there were sufficient vacancies, their election, en bloc, was proposed by Ian Small and seconded by Marjory Taylor. David Hanson, Jenny Mallett, Neil Thompson and Mark Young were duly re-elected unanimously to serve on Council, for a period of three years.

9. Date of Next AGM

The date of the next AGM will be Saturday 20 November 2009. It will be hosted by the Cambs & Essex Branch in Peterborough.