

## **Minutes of the Online Annual General Meeting held on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> November 2020.**

### **Present**

408 members were recorded as present.

### **Chair's introductory remarks**

Karen Goldie Morrison, Chair of Butterfly Conservation (BC) welcomed everyone to BC's first online AGM. Karen gave thanks to Sarah Adlem, James Staples and the staff from Head Office for the work involved in organising the event.

The Chair advised that Dr Richard Fox, BC's Associate Director of Recording & Monitoring would provide a talk after the formal AGM about BC's impact on the climate crises.

The Chair then opened the formal AGM.

### **1 Apologies**

Apologies has been received from

Vice President: Anthony Hoare  
Chief Executive: Julie Williams  
Members: John Arnott, Wendy Burnett, Simon Davies, Candida Doyle, Richard Ellinor, Stuart Lindsay, Fiona McKenna, Madeline Russell, David Wood.

The Chair advised that in the absence of Julie Williams, the Chief Executive Officer's report would be delivered by Russel Hobson, BC's Director of Evidence & Resources.

### **2 Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Albrighton Hall Hotel in Shrewsbury on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

The Minutes of the meeting had been published on the website and made available on request.

Proxy votes to approve the minutes were cast in advance of the AGM and received 315 votes in favour, 0 votes against and 42 votes abstaining. The minutes were approved.

### **3 Matter Arising**

There were no matters arising.

### **4 Annual Report - Chair's Report to Members**

The Chair began by looking at BC's achievements over the last year and highlights included:

- 2019 was the best year for butterfly populations since 1997 according to the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme;
- BC's membership passed the 40,000 mark;

- the Big Butterfly Count attracted more than 113,000 citizen scientists;
- infrastructure was developed to support the revised Conservation Strategy and partnerships were being built to influence the state of species conservation in the UK;
- the analysis of BC's data continued to impact the UK's environmental policy.

The Chair advised of the importance of collaboration between conservation organisations to ensure politicians create policies that tackle climate change and biodiversity loss.

The Chair continued with how Covid-19 had disrupted BC over the past year and gave thanks to Julie Williams and all staff for their work during this difficult time.

It was confirmed that Council now reduced to 10 trustees and thanks was given to all trustees for their support and commitment over the past year.

Since becoming Chair, Karen advised she had led a trustee enquiry into BC's fundamental purpose and impact for the long term. BC has reasonable financial reserves and must continue to protect and restore butterflies and moths and their landscapes.

The Chair concluded by thanking all BC members, volunteers and supporters for their continuing commitment to the conservation of butterflies and moths.

## **5 Treasurer's report to members and adoption of the Annual Report & Consolidated Accounts and Balance Sheet for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020**

BC's Honorary Treasurer, Nigel Symington, began by advising that BC had a very successful year last year. The implications of Covid-19 were not known until the beginning of March by which time the majority of BC's finances for the year were determined. Income increased to £4.9million, and BC's total expenditure reached a record £4.9million, of which expenditure on conservation was £4.2million.

BC's expenditure exceeded its income by £378,000. BC's reserves had been built up over several years. The overspend was planned following careful consideration by Council who decided it was better to use the money for conservation work than leaving it in the bank. A prudent level of financial reserves of six months remain at year-end.

Nigel confirmed that BC's most important single source of income was from grants received in support of conservation activities, at £1.3million.

Nigel gave thanks to BC's members for their generosity, as membership income increased to £1.1million, including Gift Aid, and donations were received at £600,000. Legacy income was down by 11% from 2018 to £600,000. However, he stressed that this source of income is by its very nature inherently variable from year to year.

BC's membership increased by 9% to just over 40,000, with nine out of ten members renewing their membership every year.

Nigel continued by praising BC's branches, volunteers and citizen scientists for their amazing contribution. BC estimates the value of their work to be £14million.

Due to Covid-19, at the end of the financial year BC's endowment fund declined from £5.5million to £4.7million due to falling markets, which resulted in an unrealised investment loss of just over £800,000.

Nigel stated the financial impact of Covid-19 across the charity sector was a funding shortfall of £10billion. BC's grant income will be significantly reduced in 2020 with most funders closed to new applications until March 2021. BC forecast that as a result of Covid-19, income will be £1million lower in 2020.

27 members of staff were placed on furlough, and 11 members of staff were made redundant.

Nigel confirmed that together with BC's auditors new financial control measures have been developed and are being regularly reviewed by trustees and management. Cash outflow will be approximately £1.1million over the next three years.

Nigel ended by thanking staff, branches, members, supporters and volunteers for their generosity and support.

The Honorary Treasurer proposed the adoption of the Annual Report and Accounts. Proxy votes to approve the Annual Report and Accounts were cast in advance of the AGM, and received 324 votes in favour, 4 votes against and 29 votes abstaining. The Annual Report and Accounts were adopted.

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

Nigel Symington proposed the reappointment of Buzzacott LLP and for Council to be authorised to set their remuneration. Proxy votes to approve the reappointment of Buzzacott LLP and set their remuneration were made in advance of the AGM and received 329 votes in favour, 2 votes against and 26 votes abstaining. The reappointment of Buzzacott LLP and authorisation for Council to set their remuneration was approved.

## **7 Chief Executive Officer's (CEO) Report**

Russel Hobson read the CEO Report on behalf of Julie Williams.

Russel began by thanking everyone for joining the AGM.

The CEO gave an update on the effects of Covid-19 across the charity sector and within BC. By reducing expenditure quickly, BC are now in a stronger position to move forwards. Thanks were given to the staff made redundant, as well as to remaining staff for staying positive through difficult times.

The CEO continued by thanking the restructured Senior Leadership Team for their support, and specifically Dr Sam Ellis and Dr Nigel Bourn who stood down from the Senior Leadership Team earlier in the year.

The CEO thanked the Chair and trustees for their continued support and governance.

Finally, the CEO thanked BC's volunteers and members for their dedication and loyalty. Their continued support and donations are vital to ensure BC can continue with its conservation work.

The CEO advised of new initiatives BC is focussing on, and plans for next year, including:

- Develop a 2030 Strategy outlining how BC will deliver its work and achieve its aim of protecting butterflies and moths;
- Work with an academic partner in 2021 with an aim to quantify the impacts to people's health and well-being from exposure to nature, and taking part in projects such as the Big Butterfly Count;
- Create an Engagement and Volunteering Strategy to underpin BC's commitment to volunteers and activities, and find ways to appeal to underrepresented groups;
- BC's flagship urban community project, Big City Butterflies, works to connect people to nature in London. The project funding was postponed because of Covid, but plans to proceed in 2021;
- Explore how BC can better reach and support urban communities to spend time in nature;
- Review BC's approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and implement changes;
- Deliver BC's research priorities and future proof its data management systems.

## **8 Council Elections**

Andy Barker, Roger Dobbs, Susan Foden and Michael Johnston stood down by rotation. Fiona Barclay resigned earlier in the year.

Susan Foden was entitled and willing to stand for re-election.

Roger Dobbs and Michael Johnston stood down at the end of their nine years' tenure and are not eligible for re-election. Andy Barker stood down from office after six years' tenure. The Chair expressed thanks to Andy, Roger and Michael for their dedication and commitment to Council and Butterfly Conservation.

The Chair confirmed Council as reduced to 10 trustees, as approved at the 2019 AGM. There are two vacancies on Council.

One new candidate stood for election, Hugh Ellerton, who had submitted an Election Statement (sent to all members). Hugh was nominated, eligible and made a declaration. There were sufficient vacancies on Council for these appointments to be made without a contest.

Proxy votes were cast in advance of the AGM, and the following were received for each candidate.

For the election of Hugh Ellerton, 340 votes in favour, 8 votes against, 9 votes abstaining.

For the re-election of Susan Foden, 339 votes in favour, 6 votes against, 12 votes abstaining.

Proxy votes were cast in advance of the AGM to appoint Hugh Ellerton and Susan Foden as trustees and received 336 votes in favour, 4 votes against and 17 votes abstaining.

The Chair confirmed that Hugh Ellerton has been appointed as a trustee and Susan Foden has been re-elected as a trustee.

## 9 Q & A

The Chair welcomed Dr Dan Hoare, BC's Director of Conservation, and Dr Kate Dent, BC's Director of Engagement & Volunteering, to the AGM to assist with answering questions.

**Q: This has not been a good year for the Painted Lady. What are the main reasons for this?** Asked by Tim Collins.

Dan Hoare answered that the Painted lady is one of the great migrants of the butterfly world and numbers can be unpredictable. 2020 has been a relatively poor year for the Painted Lady in the UK. 8,000 sightings were logged this year in the Big Butterfly Count compared to 400,000 sightings for the same period in 2019. The numbers which reach the UK are due to various factors, including conditions in the core breeding grounds around the desert fringes of North Africa and Arabia, prevailing winds on the way, and conditions through Southern Europe. Conditions in North Africa and Arabia determine how many butterflies emerge there in early spring, and recent studies of pollen samples on butterflies show that with favourable wind conditions the first early migrants can come straight to Northern Europe.

Dan continued that many more Painted Lady butterflies make shorter journeys into Southern Europe, where they lay eggs on thistles, burdocks and other widespread plants and those caterpillars give rise to more adults which continue the journey, and may have two or three generations before butterflies reach the UK. Poor breeding conditions or a change in the wind on route can block that migration and prevent big numbers from reaching the UK. Studies using radar data show that the off-spring can migrate back South in the autumn, often at heights of 200m where they are not visible to people.

Dan finished by saying that the last big migration of Painted Lady to the UK was in 2009, when it is estimated that at least 11 million Painted Lady's reached the UK in spring, and 21 million headed back South in autumn.

**Q: With I understand that prior to the first lockdown, ambitious and financially costly plans were agreed which resulted in a deficit budget being approved for the financial year 2020/2021. Whilst appreciating that the Coronavirus pandemic has had an effect on the ability of BC to carry out some of the work and schemes planned for 2020, in the interests of transparency I would like to know what were the full details of these ambitious plans, what will now happen to them, the amount of any upfront expenditure incurred and will this be recoverable by BC?** Asked by John East.

The Treasurer answered by explaining how budgets are set and that they face extensive scrutiny from the Audit & Risk Committee before being approved after a further rigorous discussion in Council.

BC runs many projects each year, nearly 50 of them are listed within the Annual Report, and many of these continue for more than one year. The funds required for each project to ensure delivery are moved into a Restricted Fund so they cannot be used for any other purpose. The funds are kept until the project is completed, although some projects have had to be reprofiled or delayed. For example, the Kent Moths project was postponed, and the decision made to delay submitting the funding application for the Big City Butterflies project was because the National Lottery Heritage Fund was closed for new funding applications.

The delivery of some existing projects had to be amended due to Covid-19 restrictions, such as the Back from the Brink project which has been extended. No projects have been cancelled or suffered any waste of money as a result. For most projects BC has a contract with the funder, and should BC cancel the project, the grant would have to be repaid.

The Treasurer concluded that a lower level of income is expected next year, and a less ambitious level of activity will need to be planned.

**Q: Can BC be more pro-active in recording the genome of butterfly populations on the edge of extinction and those being reintroduced from various donor sites?** Asked by Mel Mason.

Dan Hoare answered why genetics might be of direct interest to conservation programmes for threatened butterflies in the UK. Firstly, that isolated populations might suffer from reduced genetic diversity compared to others, often referred to as inbreeding, and it could contribute to population declines, although there is little evidence of this as a key factor driving declines in the UK.

Dan stated that BC has collaborated in recent studies on important UK species, such as Marsh Fritillary and Scotch Argus, which showed no clear relationship between genetic diversity and population size or isolation, and it is not driving the declines of those species. Where species are doing well, there is widely varying predictions and implications for population dynamics and for conservation between species and between habitats. Variation between colonies is important for local adaptation, and is a reason why moving species around should be looked at carefully.

Almost all cases show clear limiting factors with habitat quality, how suitable habitat is for breeding for that species. Habitat quality is by far the major issue driving population numbers. Many threatened species have evolved to colonise new habitat patches in small numbers, and they have high reproductive rates. In good conditions, numbers can increase rapidly to build up large populations, but habitat quality limits it. Even for reintroductions, relatively small numbers can give rise to large populations and subsequent local adaptation and genitive drift between colonies can increase genetic diversity.

Dan explained that studies of the Large Blue showed that the England population, restored since it went extinct in the 1970's, is now more genetically diverse than the Swedish population it was derived from.

Dan continued that a second reason to look at conservation genetics, is to investigate how different isolated populations may be another reason to conserve them, if they are genetically distinct and they contribute something to the overall UK gene pool for a species. BC's Conservation Strategy states to prevent populations of threatened species being lost from any occupied landscape, BC invests its resources into the hard work of keeping habitats and landscapes in good condition rather than create a gene bank which might help us theoretically in the future. We are collaborating with researchers to examine whether considering gene conservation units, i.e. genetically distinct populations within a species, (which is an approach that is being taken with tree stocks in the UK), might also be an approach that could work with invertebrates.

Dan concluded that BC do not routinely take genetic samples from populations of threatened butterflies, but support and assist academic partners in specific studies where we believe it can inform our conservation work.

**Q: What is being done to look after those interested in this subject and provide them with ongoing support and education to take it forward? Do you work with Butterfly Parks? Do you work with the Natural History Museum and Tring Museum?** Asked by Kathy Keeley.

Kate Dent replied that BC prescribes to partnership working, including with parks and museums. BC is one of seven conservation organisations within the Rethink Nature

partnership, which has helped develop the Back from the Brink project alongside Natural England, and has sought to save 20 species from extinction and benefit over 200 more. BC has also worked with zoos on captive breeding and reintroduction projects, including Zoological Society of London, Bristol Zoo, and Chester Zoo. BC currently partners with the Natural History Museum and London Wildlife Trust on the Brilliant Butterflies project in South West London. Further details of partnership projects, both current and past, can be found on BC's website at <https://butterfly-conservation.org/our-work/conservation-projects>.

Kate explained that BC offers a wide variety of learning opportunities and activities from school children learning through our Munching Caterpillars projects, local walks, talks run by BC Branches across the UK, and expert QGIS training for BC's butterfly and moth recorders. (QGIS is mapping software that can be used to display species records, map site management and help analyse BC's work and assess its impact).

Kate concluded that BC aims to provide something for every level of interest, and this year has included many online sessions which have proved extremely popular. BC is keen to develop this further in the future and are keen to develop lifelong learning enabling people to develop knowledge and skills over time and at a pace that works for them. This is part of a wider review of BC's engagement work which is currently taking place with an aspiration to reach more people and offer more opportunities.

The Chair thanked Dr Kate Dent and Dr Dan Hoare for their assistance with the questions.

**Date of Next AGM**

The date of the next AGM will be Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2021. The venue is yet to be finalised, but will be held in Yorkshire.

The AGM was then formally closed.

Signed by the Chair.....

Date.....