

The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales

Minutes of the 8th Annual General Meeting held at The Civic Hall, Crescent Road, Llandeilo on Saturday 27th November 2010

The AGM was attended by 38 members including 4 Trustees. Nine staff were present.

The Chairman, Prof Lynda Warren welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending despite the snow and icy conditions. She gave out the H&S and housekeeping information for the meeting. She added that due to the icy conditions and with more snow forecast the proposed walk around Castle Woods had been cancelled. Prof Warren handed over to Chief Executive, Sarah Kessell to give a summary of the work carried out in the financial year 2009 to 2010.

Sarah gave a presentation and stated that there had been many changes including new CEO, Chairman and Finance Manager. Trefwrddan Isaf farm had been sold and a new finance system had been installed. The new finance system had improved financial reporting and had also assisted the staff to work closely to budgets; she added that the Trust was now more financially stable. Sarah added that all staff are doing more than one job and are working very hard for the Trust. Her presentation included some highlights of the year: completion of the Skomer restoration project; £10K raised by appeal for work on reserves; completion of the Business Plan which included a financial recovery plan; setting up of a Finance and Audit committee; writing of the Development Plan with involvement from the Local Groups, staff and volunteers; Membership Strategy written – Sarah thanked everyone who had helped to recruit new members; various Task & Finish groups had been set up and Business Plans were being written for Welsh Wildlife Centre and Parc Slip Visitor Centre; closer working with the Friends of Skomer and Skokholm on the Skokholm Restoration Project; there had been a lot of work undertaken in opposition to the proposed Badger Cull (this was itemised) with more still to do; the Trust had responded to 5300 wildlife queries, 15000 attended the walks and talks – Sarah thanked the Local Groups for their part in this. She gave a progress report on the work done so far this year with most targets being met. The Trust is working with Wales Co-operative and receiving free marketing advice and help with redesigning the Trust website which should be launched at Easter 2011.

Rose Revera gave a presentation on the Parc Slip Survey. She stated that she was a placement student from Cardiff University and was doing the project as part of her degree. There are two main aims of the project: i) can artificial refugia be developed as a survey methodology for small mammals, ii) do larger sections of mats shelter a greater diversity of species and a greater number of individuals. Rose gave a breakdown of the number of mats and the species found under them. The project runs until June 2011. In addition to the main project, Rose is also studying the Great Crested Newt population on Parc Slip and is creating a database of individual abdomen patterns. Next year, members of the Bridgend and Cardiff groups are going to go around the reserve with her and any other members are welcome to join in. Rose thanked the Bridgend Group for funding the purchase of the GPS and Weatherwriter, the Parc Slip volunteer work party for their help in putting out the mats, Richard Cowie of Cardiff University and Rob Parry and the staff at WTSWW.

Steve Sutcliffe gave a talk on the Skokholm Restoration Project. He gave the background to the purchase and closure of the island in 2006 for H&S reasons. The Friends of Skomer and Skokholm had met with Sarah and developed a plan to restore the buildings using volunteer labour when possible. For specialist work contractors were used. The scaffolding had been donated by a firm in Cardiff. The old roof which contained some asbestos had been removed following strict guidelines and will be taken off the island by specialist contractors next year. The new roof had been installed. Visitors to the island will know of the iconic paintings on the fragile wall of the toilet, these had all been photographed before the walls had to be stripped and the toilet re-roofed. The kitchen had been re-arranged. Cookers had been donated. £26K had been spent and £22K had been raised. £1K had been donated for tools. New furniture is required and any one wanting to donate can contact the Trust. The jetty will be replaced in April and the work on the Cottage will be done in August and September. Overnight visitors will be accommodated in May, June and July raising funds to enable the Trust to employ a warden who will be able to carry out survey work which has been on hold for a few years. Day trips will also take place next year. It was clarified that the buildings had been previously painted with a rubberised paint causing moisture to be retained in the stonework but the buildings were now being lime washed which will prevent them becoming damp.

Prof Lynda Warren thanked them for their presentations which all showed how much can be achieved with staff and volunteers working together. She hoped that the Trust would encourage even more dedicated volunteers in the future.

Following a short break and a head count to check that the AGM was quorate, the formal business of the AGM started at 11.30

1. Introduction

Prof Warren welcomed those present.

2. Apologies for Absence

Mr G D Atkins, Lowri Anne Hughes, Trevor Boxer, Shirley Fowler, Steve Rosser, Misses Thirza and Hilda Swindells, Mark Winder, Nigel Hollett, Jo Mullett, June Glennerster, Nikki Anderson, Cliff Benson, Derek Thomas, Trevor Theobald, Sash Tusa, Penny Pugh, David Pritchard.

3. To approve the minutes of AGM held 5th December 2009

These were proposed as being correct by Denys Smith and seconded by Mike Evans and approved by all present.

4. Chairman's Report

Prof Warren reported that a lot had happened in the last 18 months; staff had changed the ethos of the Trust and it had become much more business-like. There was much more enthusiasm and it was moving forward. She praised the staff and added that as Chief Executive Sarah Kessell was dynamic and keen, Executive Officer Diana Clark was the backbone of the Trust and was a steadying influence, and Finance manager Moira Williams has given confidence to the staff and trustees and has enabled the Trust to know where it is financially and to plan and budget. New ways of working had been set up, including working towards targets in the Business Plan and

Development Plan; staff had taken on new jobs as part of the restructuring. All emergencies had been dealt with efficiently. There had also been some Board restructuring with Trustees working with staff on Task & Finish groups and a new Finance and Audit committee set up, which had increased efficiency and given a better overview of the Trust's work. Prof Warren was pleased that John Gale, the Trust's past Treasurer was on the Finance and Audit committee. She added that it was a shame that so much time has to be spent fighting battles, for example the badger cull, she is proud of the work achieved on this but felt that the battle was not over yet and that the cull might not be avoided altogether but at least the Wildlife Trust is being listened to. The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) asked for Sarah Kessell to be on the Advisory Group dealing with bovine TB.

Looking forward there are likely to be changes with the elections, Natural Environmental Framework that WAG is promoting and the possible merger of Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency Wales and Forestry Commission Wales, all of which will have implications for the Trust.

Despite the recent request for new Trustees, only one application was received which was unfortunately after the deadline. Prof Warren hoped that more people would get involved with the work of the Trust.

Prof Warren reminded members to sign the attendance sheet and that copies were available of the full minutes from the previous AGM and full accounts. She handed over to Prof Barry Thomas for the Treasurer's Report.

5. Treasurer's Report

Prof Barry Thomas gave a brief overview of the previous financial year stating that the Trust was operating in a deficit position which the recession had made worse. There had been economic problems and there are still difficulties this year but the Trust is working to the Business Plan which incorporates the Financial Recovery Plan and it is hoped to turn the deficit to an operating surplus in the next five year. He thanked Finance Manager, Moira Williams for her sterling work. He added that the Trust has had to release some assets to reduce historic debts and it also needs to recruit more new members.

Prof Thomas said that staff have been re-organised and have taken on extra work and now staff salaries need to be reviewed. A job evaluation process has begun to get a better system to assess what jobs are worth. He added that volunteer work is important but the Trust needs its staff.

He asked members to accept the audited accounts for the financial year ended 31st March 2009. This was proposed by Lynda Hickling and seconded by Derek Moore.

Members were asked if they had any questions for the Chairman, Treasurer or Chief Executive. None were asked.

6. Recommendations of the Board

i) that the following be co-opted to the Board of Trustees following the end of their second term in office: Prof Lynda Warren and Lynda Hickling.

It was explained that the Board are able to decide if they wish to co-opt Trustees for a year and it was unnecessary for it to be approved by the AGM.

7. To elect new members to the Board of Trustees

As previously mentioned a nomination had been received from Ruth Watkins but not in the due time and it would be incorrect to elect. Prof Warren stated that the Board proposes to co-opt Ruth Watkins for the next year. Ruth runs a local farm and is a virologist and will be a great asset to the Trust.

8. To confirm the re-appointment of the Auditors

Prof Warren stated that the Trust auditors Broomfield & Alexander give sound advice in simple language. They had offered to attend the AGM but it was felt unnecessary and would incur charges. The auditors had been very complimentary about the way the accounts are handled. The re-appointment was proposed by John Gale and seconded by Derek Moore.

9. Any Other Business

i) Prof Lynda Warren thanked the East Carmarthen group volunteers for their assistance with serving refreshments for the meeting. She also thanked those present for donations towards the refreshments. Members were reminded that there were Trust gifts and Christmas cards for sale and that there were raffle tickets and quiz sheets to buy.

ii) Denys Smith thanked the Trustees but thought it was a shame that the accent for recruiting Trustees is always on business ability. He thanked Diana Clark for her organisation of the AGM. He added that even though the walk to Castle Woods was cancelled, members could still drive up to Dinefwr Castle if they wished to visit it at any time. He gave directions for visiting by car and on foot.

iii) David Gardner stated that he used to be Chairman of Wildlife Trust, West Wales and although he had stood back from the Trust for a while he was deeply impressed by the staff and the Board and acknowledged the work that had been done in difficult circumstances. He had expected a raft of people to put themselves forward as Trustees, and he added that he would be pleased to be co-opted to the Board. He said that he had watched with awe the work that was being done on Skokholm. He had been impressed by the way that the Trust had been able to turn things around. Prof Warren thanked him for his comments and stated that the Board is able to co-opt at any time of year and members can contact her if they are interested.

iv) The draw of the raffle took place.

Members were thanked for their support and for attending the AGM and were invited to have refreshments before leaving.

The AGM finished at 12.15 pm