

## The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales

Minutes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting held on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2022 at 6.30 pm on Zoom

There were 38 participants including Trustees and staff (all of whom were members)

Chair Mike Alexander welcomed everyone to the AGM. He reminded attendees of some best practice regarding voting and noted that members could vote but staff were requested not to despite being members. When approving the appointment of the auditors, on this occasion members could vote but not Trustees.

There was a short video of an exclusive interview with Sir David Attenborough which took place on Skomer during the filming of the Wild Isles programme due to be screened on TV in Spring 2023.

Mike handed over to Chief Executive Sarah Kessell to give her report and round-up of the highlights of the work achieved during the financial year 2021/22

Sarah's presentation is available to view on the Trust website and her notes from her presentation are below.

*'A fuller report on our achievements during 2021 is included in our Annual Report which is on our website, but this is a canter through some of those highlights.*

*Reserves Manager Paul Thornton has developed a vision for the future of Caermalwas Fach farm, encompassing regenerative agriculture. At the moment we are seeking funds to repair the house and outbuildings, and then we will look for the right tenant to take on the farm. In the meantime the land continues to be grazed and managed for wildlife.*

*We secured two grants under the Nature Networks Fund, funded by Welsh Government and administered by the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF). The terrestrial grant is funding capital work on many of our SSSI nature reserves. This includes replacing bird hides, access work, infrastructure for grazing and management of hazardous trees as well as tools and equipment, essential for managing our nature reserves.*

*The majority of conservation staff time is still taken up with site work on over 100 nature reserves including liaison with neighbours about access and drainage, liaison with graziers, legal issues over site tenure and lease renewals, and ash dieback. Collapsing and eroding footpaths are an increasing problem, exacerbated by more regular storms and heavy rain followed by very dry periods.*

*We started a new living landscapes project in the Vale that includes floodplain restoration to prepare for a future water vole re-introduction. Partners include Natural Resources Wales, the Vale Council, Fonmon Castle Estate, South-East Wales River Trust and Aberthaw power station. We have hosted a bio-blitz to build up records of species in the area and engaged with the new owners of Aberthaw. We hope to be involved again with the Aberthaw lagoons in the future.*

*In Brecknock we worked with our neighbouring Powys Trusts and other partners to fund and start several new projects: Rhos Pastures aims to raise awareness of the value of this important, local habitat and to engage landowners in better management for wildlife, Green Connections aims to work with local*

*communities to manage public spaces better for wildlife and to help communities engage with wildlife and the Canals project aims to improve wildlife habitats along the Brecon and Monmouth canal and increase sustainable, recreational use and awareness of the local wildlife.*

*We also worked with National Resources Wales on the next phase of the Healthy Hillides project in the Valleys, managing landscapes better to prevent wild fires, educating and engaging the public with their local countryside and wildlife and on the importance of helping to prevent fires.*

*Nearly 9,500 members of the public came through the CBMWC visitor centre and shop in 2021, an excellent number considering the social distancing measures in place for much of the year.*

*The Nature Networks marine Fund supported our marine monitoring work on Bottle-nosed Dolphins in Cardigan Bay and Seabirds on Skomer. This allowed Sarah Perry and her team to conduct their first ever winter cetacean surveys with over 40 animals encountered on a trip in January 2022. • 171 staff days were spent surveying SAC species or organising volunteer surveys. A total of 70 volunteers took part in marine mammal surveys from the CBMWC base in Newquay, contributing 5,415 hours of their time during the 2021 season. • Information and data from our monitoring activities were used to support our work on Marine Protected Area designation and management. It also helped inform the revision of the Ceredigion Marine Code for commercial passenger boats in Cardigan Bay as levels of disturbance continue to increase.*

*We have contributed to a project looking at a baseline state of the Irish Sea, in partnership with all the Wildlife Trusts bordering the sea. The results show that the Irish Sea has multiple and growing pressures and insufficient management exacerbated by multiple devolved governments. We will publicise the report and then agree on the next steps for coordinated action.*

*Skokholm wardens Richard Brown and Giselle Eagle returned for their 9th year. They received their first hostel guests on 7 June, having worked through the logistical challenges posed by Covid in the shared accommodation. Red-flanked Blue-tail was among some first records for Skokholm logged by the Bird Observatory staff: (the island bird list now stands at 301 species).*

*Skomer reopened on 27 April 2021, as soon as government Covid restrictions allowed for outdoor attractions to do so. The new Skomer team pulled out all the stops in 2021 to deliver a full island seabird count for the first time in many years. That means counting every single bird from the land or sea twice within the first three weeks of June. A mammoth task only made possible by their organization and hard work but also the help we receive with day to day island management from our resident volunteers. 38,896 individual puffins were counted on Skomer on 24 March 2022, 4,083 more than 2021. A post-war record. The continuation of seabird monitoring on Skomer is essential and we are relying more and more on the long-term, uninterrupted datasets (some dating from the early 1960's) they are particularly important to assess broad population trends, filling knowledge gaps, and informing decisions about use of the marine environment.*

*Annual funding for Skomer seal and seabird monitoring from NRW and JNCC was secured. Grey seals continue to thrive with 265 pups born on the island's beaches and in the caves, 22 more than in 2020 and the highest total on record.*

*We delivered a series of 'wellbeing days' for Ovo Energy staff (based in Cardiff). And this year we have had the most sign up's for 30 Days Wild from all the Welsh Trusts and are 12th overall out of the 46 Trusts, reflecting the high quality of our social media engagement.*

*Both Stand for Nature Wales projects have established their youth forums and are actively campaigning in their local areas. The Cardigan Bay Youth Forum appeared on ITV's Coast and Country with Ruth Dodsworth, surveying dolphins and completing a beach clean. The Cardiff Youth Forum took longer to establish, but we now have a group of students (aged 19-24) who are interested in influencing others through campaigns. They attended the Cardiff Global Day of Action march (part of COP26 events) and are leading on a no-mow campaign in Cathays. Many of the outreach and training events had to be held online during 2021.*

*Lisa Morgan, Head of Islands and Marine continues to lead on our work to respond to the Crown Estates intention to unlock up to 4GW of new floating wind capacity in the Celtic Sea by 2035. February was spent responding to the final S36 and Marine Licence applications for the first Welsh project Erebus, the Environmental Statement was 31 chapters long with numerous technical appendices in addition. Our position remains that the application should not be progressed based on the lack of appropriate ornithological evidence and assessment of the impacts on the Skomer, Skokholm and the Seas off Pembrokeshire Special Protection Area features. The lack of compensation for cable protection impacts on Pembrokeshire Marine SAC was also cited as a reason to object. Other eNGOs have expressed similar concerns. • By November 2021 we were aware of 7 FLOW projects are various stages in the Celtic and Irish Sea, all with the potential to impact on Skomer and Skokholm SPA seabirds.*

*We also objected to a planning application for an Intensive Poultry Unit (16,000 birds) in Carmarthenshire that we believed would have a negative impact on the Dinefwr Estate SSSI and the River Tywi Special Area of Conservation (SAC) as well as local-important terrestrial and river species. Ammonia pollution is considered the prime cause of the worst air borne pollution in Europe.*

*A WCVA grant enabled us to appoint a Digital Communications and Fundraising Officer. Madi set up the Our #WILDFundraiser campaign, raising over £10,000 in the first year. Mike, a new Trustee, cycled to COP26 in Glasgow from Pembs to raise funds and to raise awareness of climate breakdown.*

*Donations from Waterloo Foundation and the Moondance Foundation helped us through a second year impacted by Covid and supported us while we rebuilt our usual income streams and we are now working with Guardian Angels to offer WTSWW members a free Will writing service, we hope to receive pledges from this. This is available to access on our website. We are hoping this will raise our profile and highlight the importance of legacy giving to the Trust.*

*We quickly realised how important digital engagement and storytelling was becoming to charities. We decided that this had to be a priority for our communications and marketing so we continued in 2021 with two very successful broadcasts; Wild About Parc Slip & Skomer LIVE series 2 which assisted the Trust in fundraising and raising our profile to a wider audience.*

*For Skomer LIVE 2021 we Worked with Lizzie Daly and Yussef Rafik to present the 5 live broadcasts which received over 20,000 views. • Skomer LIVE featured on ITV Wales Coast and Country with Ruth Dodsworth and we had Viewers from around the world including USA, Australia, Philippines, Austria,*

Germany, Canada, Aberdeen, France and Italy. • During the show we Launched 'Running on the Waves' - our very own fundraising song written and recorded by British singer songwriter David Gray!

For Wild About Parc Slip 2021 we Worked with BBC Springwatch Presenter Iolo Williams and Lizzie Daly. We recorded a 40 minute LIVE broadcast at Parc Slip in front of an audience of 72 people and in partnership with the Valleys Regional Park and just under 5,000 people watched the broadcast. Chris Packham filmed at Teifi Marshes with Megan for his new show 'Chris & Meg's Wild Summer and our top media highlights from the year included films called Wild Islands featuring Skomer and Skokholm, BBC Wonders of the Celtic Deep series featuring CBMWC and ITV coverage of our Red Squirrels project.

We input to the UK-wide RSWT strategy and took part in working groups to discuss the complexities of devolution and crown dependencies and how this impacts governance and delivery of our work across the Trust movement. • Continuing the theme of working together across the Wildlife Trust movement, we launched the all-Wales conservation plan that sets out our work across Wales over the next 10 years. • On the local level, we used the RSWT strategy and all-Wales Conservation Plan to guide the development of our own WTSWW strategy over the next 10 years. Workshops for Trustees and our staff and input from members and volunteers ensured that our new strategy is fit for purpose and is supported at all levels. The final version of the Strategy was written by our Chair Mike Alexander.

In order to ensure successful delivery of our new strategy, we restructured the conservation team to create areas of specialism and a lead for each area of our strategy. As well as our Head of Islands and Marine, we created a Wilder Engagement Manager to lead on our Team Wilder work, a Nature Recovery Manager to lead on our 30by30 work and we now have three Reserves Managers covering different geographic areas. This team works closely together and all are managed by me. As part of this process, we promoted 3 existing members of staff and recruited 2 new people; Rhodri Irranca-Davies as our Nature Recovery Manager, and Duncan Ludlow as our third Reserves Manager.

We received a Green Recovery grant from NHLF that covered several important areas of work. The project focused on advice and training to improve our skills and help us develop different ways of working in the future. This covered advice on improving income, leadership Skills for managers, An internal audit, advice and training for staff, trustees and volunteers on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Community Engagement training, focusing on co-production and collaboration and to tie in with our EDI aims and our Team Wilder work.

Our Trustee Rosey Grandage has taken up the role of EDI ambassador for the Trustees, and attends the staff working group, ensuring buy-in and support across all levels of the Trust.

Working to a common system for calculations, the first iteration of WTSWW's carbon footprint was based on data from the 2019/20 financial year. The total footprint was 280.5 t CO<sub>2</sub>e which is approximately half the typical wildlife trust footprint. The biggest contributors to WTSWW's footprint were staff commuting (15.2%), the operation of diesel-fuelled fleet vehicles (13.6%), electricity use and livestock emissions. Transport related emissions overall accounted for 31.4% of the total footprint. Our action plan to reduce our carbon footprint takes account of these priorities. We have made significant progress in reducing mileage through the use of online meetings and hybrid working, but it will be a while before electric alternatives for our reserves vehicles are available on the market and perhaps longer before we can afford them! We are also working with other Trusts to investigate ways to reduce (methane) emissions from grazing projects without compromising our biodiversity objectives.

*Overall, despite continuing impacts from Covid and a very busy year, we were still able to plan for the future. We are so grateful for the grants and donations from individuals and businesses we have received which have helped us through the Covid years. I would also like to thank our Local Groups and volunteers who have supported us in many practical ways, and helped keep up contact with our local members. Despite the constraints on meeting face-to-face, the Local Groups have grown and embraced technology to bring in bigger audiences for their online talks. Our staff have proved to be multi-talented and resilient and I owe them so much for supporting each other and me, and for staying positive through some very dark times. Last but not least I want to thank our Board of Trustees who have shown integrity, commitment and wisdom in guiding the Trust through the last couple of years. This amazing partnership between staff, Trustees, volunteers and funders means we are still here, still going strong and now focusing on delivering for nature's recovery.'*

Sarah thanked everyone for listening and asked if there were any questions.

John Finney asked whether regarding floating wind turbines if consideration is given to the low vibration on the water and cetaceans. Lisa Morgan Head of Islands and Marine replied that it is being taken into account and as part of the work responding the Erebus proposal, that there are many expert working groups and there is one dealing with underwater and sound vibration. Lisa would send the paper work on this to John Finney.

John Finney commented that the Trust is working on Scope 1 and 2 and also asked if as part of the Carbon Calculations whether the Trust is looking at how to collect data indirectly from suppliers. Sarah said that this would be included but the process is still being worked on and that the Carbon Calculations is a significant worry and a very large piece of work.

Lynda Hickling asked whether the Trust gets any recompense from companies like the BBC who want to film on Trust reserves. Gina Gavigan, Marketing Manager, responded that the Trust gets a filming and location fee and charges for filming on reserves. She noted that if the filming impacts on the nature reserve and species then it would not be given permission to take place. Sarah commented that some filming may not be charged eg Sir David Attenborough on Skomer but that the BBC were charged for filming Autumnwatch at the Teifi Marshes.

Mike gave thanks to Sarah for her presentation and for all the hard work achieved.

The formal part of the AGM took place.

### **1) Apologies for Absence**

Anne Payne

Catrin Evans

Mark Brian

### **2) To approve the minutes of the AGM held on 18-11-21**

DC 28-11-22/ approved for circulation by MA on 28-11-22

These were proposed as correct by Rob Pickford, and seconded by Richard Cowie and agreed by all present.

### **3) Chairperson's report**

Mike gave his Chairperson's report and his summarised notes are below.

*'Over the past few years we have survived what has probably been one of the most challenging periods that our Trust has ever had to endure. We only survived because of the extraordinary commitment and dedication of our staff. We could never have predicted their outstanding ability to respond so positively and effectively to the emergency.*

*I recently presented the Bill Condry memorial lecture. Bill was one of our most active and influential members during the early years of the original West Wales field Society and its successor the West Wales Naturalist Trust. One of our best-known naturalists and authors, my favourite book is his 'Natural History of Wales' in the new naturalist series.*

*The evening began with a reading from a paper written by Bill in 1975, in which he described the challenges facing Nature Reserve Managers. His paper could have been written yesterday and not almost half a decade ago. My lecture was about the Pembrokeshire Islands and I also considered the adverse factors or influences that our staff have to confront. It was quite a gloomy account, all the long standing factors that Bill Condry wrote about are still relevant, but they have been joined by a host of more recent factors, for example, plastic pollution, and even more recently the Erebus offshore renewable energy trial, And most threatening of all Avian influenza.*

*In short, the threats to our countryside and wildlife have increased, and I fear will continue to increase.*

*We are all aware that our special wildlife places, our nature reserves are under constant threat and we know some fall below the condition that we require. We don't have enough staff and they have to struggle with insufficient resources.*

*Don't forget that many, if not most, of the reserves were in a very poor condition when they were acquired, and be aware that wildlife takes a very long time to recover. Even longer when resources are so scarce.*

*For many habitats recovery can take several decades even centuries, just think about the average age of an oak tree in a healthy woodland.*

*Yesterday I was re-working a lecture on conservation planning and came across a slide about Parc slip. It was a poster prepared by Nigel Ajax Lewis sometime in the 1980s, depicting a vision of what Parc slip would become. It was a reminder of the industrial past, deep coal mining followed by two decades of open cast or strip mining. When the Trust began working at Parc Slip it was effectively a blank canvas, there was very little life of any kind. Today the Trust has achieved so much, a site that without any doubt deserves its status as a nature reserve. There has been so much progress towards achieving Nigel's wonderful vision, but there is still a long way to go, and even if we ever achieve his vision, it will probably need to change to meet the challenges of tomorrow. Parc Slip serves to remind us that we can and have achieved so much, but we must understand that the future will be even more challenging. For most sites*

*the best that we can expect, in our lifetimes, is recovery, we must understand the difference between human time and nature's time.*

*We can no longer have any doubt that we are at the beginning of a global environmental catastrophe, some scientists already claim that we have moved from the Holocene to the Anthropocene. The news from COP 27 in Egypt is less than inspiring. "There is no credible pathway to 1.5C in place today" UN*

*COP 26 in Glasgow, promised so much, there was a lot of talk, much of which turned out to be little more than greenwashing.*

*Closer to home we witnessed the very brief Liz Truss dynasty, her anti-environmental position was so extreme that it brought environmentalists and in particular the British environmental non-governmental organisations, together to fight for a common cause. It was so heartening to see the National Trust shouting so loudly in protest. I was equally saddened to see the NT warned by the Charities Commission 'NOT TO STRAY INTO PARTY POLITICS'.*

*I would suggest that our concern for the future the continued survival of human and all non-human life on this planet is not a party-political issue, it is or should be recognised as the most critical global challenges of our time.*

*At the Bill Condry lecture, that I mentioned earlier, a member of the audience asked me what was the best thing that she as an individual should do to fight climate change. Whatever we feel about politics and politicians, they are the people who make decisions, we must as individuals ensure that our voices are heard, we must do all we can to encourage politicians to take action, we can only trust their words when they are translated into action. As an organisation I think that we need to shout very loudly despite what the Charities Commission might say.*

*Sorry, I have been such a gloom and doom merchant, sometimes our actions seem so futile, sometimes I wonder why we bother. But the answer is always the same, the greater the threat the greater the need for Wildlife Trusts and the greater the need for active members.*

*We all, trustees, and members of the Trust, owe our Chief Executive, Sarah Kessell, and her management team, together with all our staff and volunteers, a huge vote of gratitude for everything that they have achieved. They always achieve so much on our behalf.'*

Mike Davies added that on a positive note from his recent trip, on South Georgia the fur seal had been hunted almost to extinction but the population has now bounced back due to resolute conservation measures. He felt it is important to maintain hope.

Mike handed over to Stuart Bain, Treasurer.

#### **4) Finance Report and presentation**

*Stuart's presentation is available to view on the Trust website.*

*The annual accounts and Trustees Report is available to download on the Trust website.*

Stuart said the main focus of the year 21-22 had been on Covid recovery, resources, funding and conservation and costs. He presented graphs to show the Trusts income streams with 30% coming from grants. Covid had affected trading during the period. He noted that there had been big changes in the sources of our operating income and that the £1.6m emergency grants would not be repeatable.

He showed a slide of the grant income from 2005 to 2022. In 2022 50% of grant income came from People's Postcode Lottery. He noted that there is increasing competition for grant funding so there is pressure on SK and her team to obtain income. He urged members to consider leaving a legacy to the Trust and said that information was available on the website.

DWT (the Trust's trading arm) had started to bounce back since 2021. In 2022 the Trust still spent approximately 60% of its net charitable income directly on conservation and education. He noted that support and governance costs are going down (10%) although staff are working hard with long hours.

Stuart thanked Sarah, Finance Manager Margaret Drury and Finance Officer Marie Lindley who have been impressive in the way they have managed the finances. He felt it was a positive financial picture of health.

He concluded with the need to look at challenges regarding improving staff remuneration and diversifying income streams.

David Ramsey asked a question in the Chat function regarding the drivers that caused the spike in grant income in 2006/2007. Stuart said it was grant income for the substantial re-development of Skomer and did not reflect a typical year.

It was proposed by Jane Evans that the annual audited accounts be received by members. This was seconded by Lucy Griffiths and all approved.

Mike thanked Stuart for his work as Treasurer.

**5) To confirm the re-appointment to the Board of the following: Paul Culyer** (personal statement provided)

Paul had been Trustee since 2019 and Vice Chair since 2020 and had stood in as Chair during Mike's absence. It was proposed by Nigel Ajax Lewis that he be re-appointed for a second term. This was seconded by David Ramsey and approved unanimously. Paul thanked Mike and the members.

**6) To confirm the appointment to the Board of the following: Lucy Griffiths, Jenny Hughes, Jess Moore, Leonora Thomson** (personal statements provided)

Mike hoped that members had read the personal statements and said that Leonora had been a co-opted Trustee for the past year and had been a considerable asset. There were three new applicants who had been recommended by the Board. Mike Davies proposed that they all be appointed to the Board, this was seconded by Richard Cowie and approved unanimously.

**7) To confirm the re-appointment of the Auditors – Azets**



This was proposed by Nigel Ajax Lewis and seconded by Richard Cowie and approved unanimously.

### **8) Questions from Members**

There were no questions.

Mike thanked everyone for attending and that it was good to see so many active Trust members. Sarah thanked Diana Clark for her organisational work.

The meeting closed at 19.30