



Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held online on Saturday 4th November 2023 at 10.05am.

Present

163 members were recorded as present.

Chair's introductory remarks

Karen Goldie-Morrison, Chair of Butterfly Conservation (BC), welcomed everyone to BC's AGM, notice having been properly served, together with the agenda, Council election statements and proxy voting details, all of which were circulated to all members with the 2022/23 Annual Impact Report.

Two questions had been submitted in advance and would be answered in the Q&A session. Russel Hobson, Director of Evidence & Policy, and Dan Hoare, Director of Conservation, were live in the chat function and would answer as many general questions as they could this morning. Any that remain unanswered would have answers posted on BC's website.

1 Apologies

Apologies had been received from BC's Trustee, Dr Elaine King, and the following BC members: Mrs J Bale, David Drew, Jenny Griffiths, Peter Hornby, Erika Jakins, Rita Kelly, Mary MacMillan, Colin and Claire Slator, Sue & Bob Smith, Mrs S Smith, Sally Thomson, and Stephen Walters.

2 Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Saturday 12th November 2022

The Minutes of the meeting had been published on BC's website and, as they had been made available to those wishing to see a full copy, the Chair took them as having been read.

Proxy votes on the Resolution to approve the minutes were cast in advance of the AGM and we had received 123 votes in favour, 0 votes against and 12 votes abstaining. The minutes were approved.

3 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4 Annual Report - Chair's Report to Members

Karen began by discussing climate change and the impact on animal and plant species. Nearly 70% of global wildlife populations have gone since 1970. Worldwide, up to one million species face extinction. The Biodiversity Conference of the Parties (COP 15), held in late 2022, emerged with a global pact: to protect 30% of the world's land and sea by 2030, to stop extinctions; and to restore 30% of degraded environments.

A Wildlife and Countryside Link report calculated that just 3.22% of England is effectively protected and managed. Successful conservation requires better policies. We need to fund nature-friendly farming properly; end the poisoning of lakes and rivers; and create larger wild

and more natural areas. The advocacy work of wildlife organisations, including BC, needs to be relentless.

The recent 2023 State of Nature report confirms the bleak picture of wildlife in the UK. 16 out of 20 of our most beloved garden birds are in decline; more than a quarter of our mammals are at risk of disappearing completely; and many pollinator species are facing extinction, particularly wild bees and butterflies.

BC's June 2022 State of Butterflies report showed that butterflies have disappeared from almost half the places in the UK they frequented 50 years ago. 80% of butterflies in the UK have declined since the 1970s. The science is clear; urgent action must be taken now to halt these declines and restore our natural environment for future generations.

BC's purpose to conserve and recover butterflies and moths and to champion them for the benefit of nature and people has acquired a new urgency. The 2026 Strategy reflects this urgency. Karen outlined BC's three ambitious goals:

- to halve the number of the UK's threatened species of butterflies and moths. This goal has a target of 71 species. Successes with the Chequered Skipper and Marsh Fritillary have already restored them to historic habitats and extended their ranges.
- to improve the condition of 100 of the most important landscapes for butterflies and moths. We have identified the landscapes, and already we have successes with projects such as our Bog Squad, Green Recovery and Kent's Magnificent Moths.
- to transform Wild Spaces for people, butterflies, and moths. A major focus is to bring nature into people's lives. Anyone can log their Wild Space on the BC portal, and the potential number of Wild Spaces is huge: 95,000 citizen scientists took part in this year's Big Butterfly Count.

This AGM marks the end of Karen's fourth and final year as Chair of BC and she was proud that, despite Covid and repeated lockdowns, BC has emerged with enviable finances and a powerful focus with which to apply them. Thanks to some generous bequests, income in 22/23 increased by 25% over the previous year. This enables BC to spend a record sum on conservation delivery, critical to deliver the goals.

If we halve the number of threatened species, improve the condition of 100 of our most important landscapes and create new wild spaces, butterflies and moths in the UK will benefit. BC will be making an important step towards saving butterflies and moths from extinction.

Karen concluded by thanking those who make BC's work possible: the staff, led by Julie Williams and the Senior team; the thousands of volunteers both within and beyond the 32 branches; fellow trustees; and BC's members and supporters. Finally, Karen thanked her Vice Chair of the past two years, Ilija Vukomanovic, also standing down today after 8 years on BC's Council.

5 Treasurer's report to members and adoption of the Annual Report & Consolidated Accounts and Balance Sheet for the year ended 31st March 2023

Hugh Ellerton presented the financial results for the year ended 31 March 2023, in his first report as BC's Honorary Treasurer.

This year, the most significant challenge facing BC has been the effects of prolonged inflation and an uncertain employment market. However, BC has emerged in a stronger financial position with significantly increased income, allowing us to invest in conservation and research, vital to fulfil our ambitious conservation strategy targets.

Both income and expenditure have increased this year. Last year we reported a small surplus of income over expenditure of £79,000; this year the surplus is £691,000. Income rose by £1,946,000, allowing us to hire new specialist staff to progress our ambitious strategy, hence expenditure increasing by £1.3 million in the year.

During the year BC benefited from a large donation of £1million, which will fund important research projects over the next few years. In addition, legacy income was at the highest level ever, thanks to some exceptionally large legacies. These legacies are a vital, if unpredictable, income source for BC, allowing us to invest in delivering our strategy.

Members are critical to BC's continuing success. Despite Covid and the rising cost of living, the number of members continues to grow. Whilst we lost more members than normal as a result of the cost of living crisis, the vast majority of members have remained loyal over the years, and Hugh thanked all members for their important support. The number of members fell very slightly this year, but, as of today, the number of members has recovered, and it is now at its highest level ever.

BC's free reserves of £4 million, or eight-months operating costs, continue at a healthy level. These reserves are crucial for us to ensure we can cope with fluctuations in income, for example legacies.

This year BC spent £5.3 million on conservation activities, more than at any time in its history. This included an increase in our conservation headcount from 69 to 81 persons in the year.

BC's endowment fund, which stands at £5.3 million, fell 2.5% in the year after several years of positive growth. This decline was in line with exceptionally weak stock and bond markets globally in the period. Hugh was pleased to say that fund has recovered since the year end. BC continues to operate a sustainable investment policy with a lower carbon footprint and higher social dividend than relevant MSCI benchmark figures.

Hugh expressed his thanks to the finance team for their hard work and diligence in producing these annual accounts and obtaining an unqualified audit report.

The Honorary Treasurer proposed two resolutions: the adoption of the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2023, and the appointment of Buzzacott as auditor and to authorise Council to fix the remuneration for this financial year, and handed over to the Chair to give the results of the proxy votes. Proxy votes to adopt the Annual Report and Financial Statement had been cast in advance of the AGM, and we had received 127 votes in favour, 0 votes against and 8 votes abstaining. The Annual Report and Consolidated Accounts and Balance Sheet for the year ended 31 March 2023 were therefore adopted.

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

The Chair said that BC had been well served by Buzzacott LLP over the last year and remained extremely pleased with their diligence. The Honorary Treasurer has proposed the reappointment of Buzzacott as Auditor, and that Council be authorised to set their remuneration.

Proxy votes on the Resolution to approve Buzzacott's reappointment and set their remuneration had been cast in advance of the AGM. We had received 122 votes in favour, 2 votes against and 11 votes abstaining. The reappointment of Buzzacott LLP and authorisation for Council to set their remuneration was approved.

7 Chief Executive Officer's (CEO) Report

Julie Williams, CEO, began by outlining concerns about extreme weather patterns caused by climate change. July to September 2023 were the hottest on record across the globe. Last year, the world's leading climate scientists warned we only have 12 years to limit global warming to a maximum of 1.5 degrees and avoid a climate breakdown.

As well as the climate emergency, there are biodiversity losses with species disappearing faster than ever in human history. Climate change and habitat destruction are killing off animal and plant populations across the world. The UK has experienced a significant loss of biodiversity and is now one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth. Reports using biological data from millions of volunteers highlight that we are just not moving fast enough and that our politicians are not listening or acting. We can no longer wait for the Government to set the agenda; we need to change the conversation. Nature is in crisis.

BC is already taking focussed action to ensure we play our part in protecting and restoring our butterflies and moths and encouraging people to connect to nature. A main strand of our work is to engage, connect and inspire people to care and act. BC's 2022/23 Annual Impact Report highlights the impact our work, with members' support, has made. We are making an impact, focusing on more butterflies and moths in recovery, more landscapes improving and more people taking action. We have the solutions.

We now hold over 55 million moth and butterfly records gathered by tens of thousands of recorders. This data enables us to carry out research and gain further insight into the ecology of butterflies and moths, and the impact of climate change on their habitats. Julie gave a huge thank you to all the recorders that tirelessly collect this vital data, allowing BC to deliver a step change in understanding other key drivers of change like land use and pollution.

We can all as individuals and as an organisation make a difference, and be advocates for our planet. The next few months, when headlines will be dominated with general election updates and pledges by the different political parties, provide an opportunity to influence and ensure that environmental protection and funding is directed to tackling both the climate and the biodiversity crisis. The climate and biodiversity emergencies must be at the top of every political party's agenda to ensure it is at the top of the next government's agenda. By sharing our passion for butterflies and moths we can inspire more people to care. The more people who care, the more politicians will listen.

BC is a key member of Rethink Nature and the partnership of 7 species organisations have just recruited an Advocacy Lead for Species Recovery. This role is crucial in ensuring the sector has a stronger collective voice for species and the new post will raise the profile of the plight of species with policy makers across the UK. BC will continue to work with the Environment Links across the UK, who provide a combined voice for all those who care about the natural world; lobbying hard to ensure environmental protections are strengthened, and ensuring that the environment is the first consideration for policy makers not an afterthought.

We will be carrying out our own sustainability audit and setting reportable targets for us to reduce our own carbon emissions, challenging ourselves to do more.

BC's advocacy campaigns will highlight what everyone can do, how everyone can take part and show they care. We will continue to commission or lead research that will find solutions to problems, such as how can we help a particular species to cope with climate change, and what is the best way to manage land for butterflies and moths. We want to work with others to develop Wild Spaces that help urban communities participate in helping butterflies and moths.

Julie urged members to think how they can take action, from offering to talk to local groups or schools about butterflies and moths in their area; talking to their local council about setting up Wild Spaces to support butterflies and moths; signing up to environmental petitions; and reading the environmental chapters from the political party manifestos before making their decision on voting next year. Above all we have to talk about the environment as the essential world that surrounds all of us, flood social media with beautiful images, talk about our joy in seeing the natural world, and make the connection between modern life and nature . We need to change the conversation and inspire others to care.

Julie concluded by thanking her Senior Leadership Team and BC's staff for their dedication and hard work; BC's committed volunteers who work tirelessly for butterflies and moths; and BC's Board of Trustees, especially Ilija who leaves today. On behalf of all the BC staff team, Julie gave a huge thank you to Karen, as she comes to the end of her tenure as Chair and a BC Trustee. Despite the Covid pandemic and the on-going impact this has had on the organisation, Karen has been instrumental in developing the Trustee Board and reshaping our subcommittees and trustee recruitment processes during her four years as Chair. Julie welcomed Martin Spray as the new BC Chair as he takes over today.

Finally, Julie gave her wholehearted thanks to BC's members, whose support and encouragement make BC's work possible.

8 Council Elections

The Chair advised that there were four vacancies on Council this year. Glenn Allison, Hugh Ellerton, and Karen Goldie-Morrison have stood down by rotation. Ilija Vukomanovic has also decided to end his tenure on Council after eight years. The Chair again thanked Ilija for his dedication and commitment to Council and BC.

Glenn Allison and Hugh Ellerton are entitled and willing to stand for re-election. One new candidate submitted a nomination to stand for election: Catrin Evans submitted an Election Statement which was distributed with the invitation to this meeting. Catrin was nominated, is eligible and has made a declaration.

There were sufficient vacancies for these appointments to take place without a contest. Proxy votes were cast in advance and the results, in alphabetical order by surname, were as follows:
Glenn Allison received 115 votes.
Hugh Ellerton received 117 votes.
Catrin Evans received 105 votes.

Proxy votes on the Resolution to appoint Glenn Allison, Hugh Ellerton and Catrin Evans as Trustees had been cast in advance. 130 votes were received in favour; 1 vote against; and 4 votes abstaining. The Chair declared that Catrin Evans had been appointed as a Trustee and Glenn Allison and Hugh Ellerton had been re-elected as Trustees.

9 Q & A

The Chair read two previously submitted questions, which were answered by the CEO.

Q: I attended the AGM in Huddersfield last year and thought it was very successful. This was the first time I had attended an AGM, and I enjoyed it very much. I don't have internet access, and I'm disappointed that this year's AGM is not in person, although I appreciate the cost implications of putting on a face-to-face event. I also notice that the members' event has been reduced to a morning instead of an all-day event. What are the plans for future AGMs and Members' events?

A: We are sorry that you are disappointed with the decision to hold an online event this year, and that this particular person does not have access to the internet. We try extremely hard not to exclude any of our valued members.

We had to move to an online AGM during the pandemic and we received such a positive response from a large proportion of our members who previously had not been able to attend a Members' Day and AGM in-person.

Running a hybrid event where we are in person and broadcast it live is very costly so to ensure as many of our members as possible have the opportunity to attend we are going to run the in person Members day every other year.

Next year we will be in person somewhere in the south of England and I hope many of you today will be able to join us.

Q: What is BC's policy on reintroductions?

A: Butterfly Conservation has a long history of involvement in butterfly (and moth) introductions. This led to the development of the Butterfly Conservation's first 'Policy on Introductions and Reintroductions' in 2010.

However, the world has changed. The approach to species introductions by the Statutory agencies has changed from 'regulating' to 'facilitating', practice in the wider conservation community has relaxed, our members are more interested in well-planned introductions and ultimately, on a fragmented island, we need a conservation toolkit that will allow for adaptation to a changing climate.

So we have a new 'Position statement on Reintroductions and Introductions' that is available on our website. This reflects a more flexible approach, where we seek to share and be part of best practice and communicating that to the public. This will be part of a programme of best practice guidance and case studies that is in the pipeline and we will keep the position statement and recommendations updated as new evidence comes to light.

Our experience is that to be successful, reintroductions need to be well-planned, evidence-based, take significant resources and have the full commitment of local land managers and partners. As a result, reintroductions are a part of our toolkit but we consider very carefully where we invest our conservation resources. Dr Caroline Bulman, our Head of Ecology, is now our lead on reintroductions so if you have further questions please direct them to her.

Date of Next AGM

The date of the next AGM will be Saturday 9th November 2024. The AGM and Members' Day will be held both in-person and live-streamed online next year. Details of the location will be provided on BC's website as soon as possible.

The AGM was then formally closed, at 10.43am.

Signed by the Chair.....

Date.....