

2019 Friends of Weir Wood Society Annual General Meeting

Minutes of the AGM held at Forest Row Community Centre on 29th March 2019.

The Chairman opened the meeting at 19:15 by welcoming members to the 22nd AGM of the Society. Attendee members were asked to sign a sheet so we had a record of those present.

1. Apologies for absence

Peter Johnson (Committee Member), Doug Roberts (Auditor), Andrew Guest, Michael & Nora Wreatham, Mark Roberts, Charles Macrorie. 36 Members were present for the AGM meeting.

2. Approval of the 2018 AGM minutes

Copies of the AGM minutes were available on the website, plus printed copies were available for members at the back of the room.

These minutes were accepted by a majority vote.

3. Matters Arising from the Previous 2018 AGM minutes.

Mark Roberts had raised concerns about the poor condition of the Car Park. The Chairman advised that last year the deep hole by the entrance to the Car Park had been suitably tarmac repaired, and he had repeatedly contacted Forest Row Parish Council who were responsible for the Car Park maintenance about the holes in the toppings surface and they had now agreed to try and get contractors to carry out repairs, but it could not be before April 2019.

4. Chairman's Report

by Bob Johnson

The Chairman advised that East Sussex County Council had told him they no longer wanted to be involved with non ESCC sites, which included the Weir Wood Reservoir site, and they were looking for other suitable providers to take over their role. To date no suitable provider had been found for Weir Wood.

ESCC also verbally promised us that they would continue to provide us with Rangers until a suitable alternative provider was found, and to their word, they have renewed their Ranger contract with Southern Water for another 12 months which would take us to the 31st March 2020.

Mention was made that due to the increasing problems of using cheques to purchase materials for work parties, the Committee had implemented the provision of three debit cards with the Society's bank last year under control of the Treasurer, and so far, these have worked satisfactorily.

To protect the Society's funds, we needed to amend section 21 of our Society's Constitution Rules to show the monetary safeguards that were put in place to protect the Society's funds from fraud. All the details were fully explained in our Newsletters of Summer 2018 & Autumn 2018, including the final amended wording in Section 21 of our Society's Constitution Rules.

Those changes to the Constitution Rules agreed by the Committee had been available to view on the website as version "Amendment 6 - Committee Approved - Sept 2018. The Chairman advised that the Treasurer would mention the subject again in his report to follow, when questions could be asked. On acceptance of the Treasurer's

report, the Amendment 6 rules would be deemed to have become a fully AGM approved version.

The Chairman then went on to thank the following:

Sussex Ornithological Society for a donation of £1000 towards the “Friends”. This was part of a legacy left to them by Barbara Mortlock, who was a founder Member of our Society, and lifelong supporter of Weir Wood. This money was to be spent on bird related projects and some had already been used to build a brand new 4th Tern raft for our successful and increasing numbers of breeding Terns.

Peter Erridge, who had over the last couple of years been giving illustrated talks about Weir Wood Reservoir its nature & history to various local groups, and had very generously donated us the monies he raised from these talks towards our funds for nature conservation & study.

East Grinstead Rotary Club who helped us by kindly taking on the task of maintaining the picnic area, and had done a fine job.

Tuesday Volunteers & helpers who made such a very effective and happy work team Together with our regular ESCC Rangers Mathew & Michael they had all worked brilliantly and achieved a huge amount, making this another very successful year for our habitat management work.

The volunteers who also carried out work outside of Tuesday, topping up bird feeders, bird ringing and various other wildlife monitoring checks & surveys that were regularly carried out.

Reserve Management:

The Chairman spoke about the following site improvement projects, which were over and above the routine work of checking nest boxes, refugia etc, and the general site management.

New Reed Bed: He advised that Southern Water had put some monies towards a proposed new reed bed for the dam end opposite the picnic area. The current position was that the area had been cleared of Willows down to stump level. The stumps were treated in the autumn of last year by Southern Water Contractors. Once the stumps have been confirmed as dead, the dead stumps would be cut down by the Contractors once water levels allowed.

The plan was to then erect protective cages into which the young reeds would be planted. The cages were to protect the reeds from browsing predators such as deer and also to break up wave action during high water level periods to stop the young reeds being smashed down.

Pintail Bank edge improvement: It had been decided to try to improve the site for waders and resting wildfowl along the edge of Pintail Bank.

The edge had been reshaped along one area, with scrapes being made that would hold water. Also several spits had been built out into the reservoir with the spoil from the scrapes. It was hoped this would in time attract more waders and wildfowl. Some further work would be carried out once the water levels dropped sufficiently to allow us to complete another spit using another mound of left over earth.

Habitat improvement near hide: To the left of the hide, vegetation had been cleared in a low lying area, and a small stream diverted into some shallow ditches that were

made and designed to improve the habitat in winter and give a shallow marshy area to attract birds, and this has been successful with reports of a Water Rail being seen in this area.

Black Poplar Trees: Six of the rare Black Poplar Tree saplings had been planted within the reserve this winter, some were to replace some losses we had had from those planted 5 years ago, as young Black Poplar saplings were very prone to disease and damage.

Nesting wildlife:

The Chairman made reference to some of the nesting birds within the reserve.

He advised that the heronry had another productive year in 2018, with 39 nests proven active at one point. Eventually there were 23 proven successful nests that produced 37 young. This year numbers were similar.

There were more breeding Cormorants. In 2018 there were 10 nests of which 8 nests were successful producing 16 young, compared with 3 nests in 2017. This year there were already 10 nests.

In 2018 there were 5 pairs of nesting Common Terns from our 3 rafts, and all pairs successfully fledged young – 14 in total. The Chairman reminded that this year we would also have more capacity with our new recently built 4th raft.

Last year the displaying pairs of Great Crested Grebes made only a few nests and no young were seen. Grebes were already displaying this year. It was thought the decline in nesting maybe due to the generally higher water levels and the increasing numbers of Herons. The possibility of trialling some floating platforms that were designed specially for grebes was being looked at to see if these would help.

5. Membership Secretary & Website Editor Report. By Tom Howard-Jones

Membership: The Membership Secretary invited members to come to him if they had any questions, concerns or suggestions as he would love to hear them.

He went on to advise we currently had 156 paid up members, but there were some 73 people who were members last year who had not yet re-joined. He asked them to see him later if they wished to re-join or wanted to check on their status. Tom said that these numbers were about the same as at the time of the last AGM.

Over 70% of our members had now agreed to communicate by email rather than post. That saved us time and costs. Tom said would members who were willing to change over to using email please let him know.

We were now using electronic membership cards. In general they seemed to be accepted. Using them saved us a lot of time and costs. Tom said he would be interested in any feedback.

We had kept our annual membership fee fixed at £3 per person. We very much appreciated the voluntary donations that so many of our members made. Most people rounded up their fees. Some members had done much more than that and were most generous. As an indication, so far this year we have received £441 in membership fees and £583 in donations. This money was essential for our conservation work, and Tom thanked all for their generosity.

Web Site: Tom advised the web site had been running OK all year, except for a slight blip with the sightings page which was quickly resolved by Peter Johnson.

He went on to give an idea of the traffic:- over the last 30 days there had been 330 visitors who had held 683 sessions and viewed 1500 pages. That was some 10 visitors each day.

Tom gave a big thank you to those who had sent in sightings and photos, but advised he had just a handful of contributors who supplied most of the content. He would like to receive a wider range of inputs and would like to hear from more people. Sightings and photos should be sent to the email addresses given on our web site. That way sightings would be captured and included in our reports to the SOS and other bodies.

He hoped people found the web site useful. He wanted to know if anyone had any suggestions for new topics or better ways to cover people's interest.

He reminded members that the new version of the web site went live in March 2015, which was now 4 years ago.

Facebook Group: Tom reminded that our Facebook group was started in November 2016 - over 2 years ago, and there were now 155 members.

It seemed to be popular and a number of people contributed to its content. In the last 28 days we have had 25 posts - almost one a day - plus 121 comments and reactions.

Tom asked if anyone would like to learn more about it to please see him or contact him later, and reminded that he would like to hear from more of you.

He also reminded that Facebook would automatically let you know when anything happened in the group. In particular it was very good at letting you know about forthcoming events and reminding you when they were going to happen.

Final thanks: Tom gave a special thanks to Peter Johnson for his work in sorting out the difficult issues that cropped up occasionally with the web site and the Facebook group.

6. Treasurers Report

by Bob Hastings

The Treasurer presented the audited accounts for 2018. He thanked the auditor Doug Roberts, a retired Tax Inspector for, once again, doing a thorough audit in January. He was pleased that Mr Roberts had also agreed to stand as our auditor for the 2019 accounts, and this was accepted from the floor by a majority show of hands.

The Treasurer advised that our bank balance was up by almost £2000 on the previous year but this was slightly flattering in that £1000 donated to us from the Barbara Mortlock Fund was received in 2018 but the expenditure would be in 2019. £200 from the Rotary Club and yet more donations from Peter Erridge were gratefully received.

However he noted our lifeline remained with our members who have again responded superbly. Member's subs for last year brought in £615 and their donations an additional £816. Subs were used mainly to cover our admin costs and once again our membership secretary had worked very hard to minimise these. Donations were used to fund the projects we undertake during the year.

A “typo” error was found on a date within the accounts summary that was pointed out by one of the members. This typing error would be amended by our auditor, and we would then send to all members a corrected 2018 accounts summary with their next newsletter.

The Treasurer felt the issue of debit cards to three members of the Committee was a huge step forward last year. Many firms we purchased materials from would not accept cheques which was increasingly becoming problematic.

The Treasurer noted the Chairman had made reference in his speech to the Constitutional changes that were needed to comply with these new developments.

To remind the safeguards that were in place. A text would be sent to him immediately after any debit card purchase of over £50, so any large fraud could be immediately recognised, and the bank informed.

On purchases of less than £50 the bank would send out a weekly text, so no monies could be spent using our debit cards without the Treasurers knowledge and preventative action could then be taken.

The holders of the debit cards were responsible for their safe keeping and had signed declarations to that effect.

The Treasurer asked if there were any questions regarding the accounts from the members, but none were asked.

The 2018 accounts and the Aims & Objectives – Amendment 6 of the Constitution Rules were then both accepted by a majority show of hands.

7. Election of Committee and Officers

Mention was made of the loss of our Committee Member Richard Lowe who had sadly passed away in December last year.

The Chairman thanked his Committee for their hard work in managing and running the Society, plus he highlighted how many were also involved in helping on Tuesday work parties, so had multiple roles.

No nominations had been put forward for any of the Officer or Committee Member roles, however all standing members had agreed to stand for re-election.

Officer Election Result

Chairman - Bob Johnson

Treasurer - Bob Hastings

Membership Secretary - Tom Howard-Jones

Website Editor - Tom Howard-Jones

Minute & General Secretary – Vacant. (Bob Johnson currently covered this role)

All above were re-elected by a majority show of hands

Committee Member Election Result

Committee Members: Peter Johnson, Shaun Taylor, Alan Caulkett,

Phil Holland, Glenn Tocher.

All above were re-elected by a majority show of hands.

8. AOB - Question & Answer session:

Bob Johnson Confirmed that the Committee wanted to organise the production of a high quality illustrated book detailing some of the history and natural history of Weir Wood as a way of marking our 25th Anniversary in 2021.

The Committee were thinking of 100-120 pages in full colour A5 format. Pricing for a 300 copy print run, would make the book about £5 per copy as we estimated this would need a budget of £1500 for the project and we would hope to get most of this back.

Committee member Phil Holland has had some experience with producing this type of low volume book, and would be our overall manager for the project.

Several people had agreed and started to write some material to give us a feel for the book.

Bob wanted to know how many people might be interested in purchasing a book of this type. A show of hands from the floor suggested a good number of those present would be interested. The AGM attendees generally agreed that spending some money on a 25th anniversary celebration publication was acceptable, even if it did not re-coup every penny, but the exercise would be designed to be at least cost neutral.

If we find the idea is well received, then we would like members, particularly some of the older members who may have interesting stories, pictures or information about the early years of the reservoir and/or our Society to contact us during the next 18 months so we could include some of that material in the book.

Bob Hastings asked those members present to confirm that they backed the expenditure plans for the book, and there was a positive response from those present.

No other questions were raised.

9. Closure

The AGM meeting was formally closed at 19:45, with the Chairman thanking all who attended for giving their support.

At 20:00 An illustrated talk by our guest speaker followed. This year the Society were pleased to have Matt Eade, a very experienced and well travelled birder who gave us a very interesting talk entitled “Birding in Sussex & Beyond (Antarctica)”.

The first half covered some of the rarer birds of his local patch in the Cuckmere area together with a detailed look at the kittiwake breeding colony he monitors at Splash Point. After the break he talked about his trip to Antarctica with some excellent photos of the bird life & cetaceans.

Minutes by Bob Johnson

3rd April 2019