

# Bat Conservation Trust



## Minutes of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) 2020

Via Zoom

Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Abigail Entwistle (BCT Chair) chaired the meeting and covered Zoom housekeeping and rules for voting:

- All participants will remain muted but if there are any questions/comments relating to the AGM proceedings or if a point of order needs to be raised, participants should use the chat by writing 'QUESTION' or 'POINT OF ORDER' and a member of staff will ask them to unmute themselves for the question/raise the point of order. If participants would rather not speak in public, they can put 'READ' in capitals at the beginning of the question and the moderators will know to read it out themselves. If participants do speak they were asked to please introduce themselves first so this can be recorded in the minutes.
- While the AGM is taking place please reserve the online chat for AGM related questions only. If participants need technical assistance please email [members@bats.org.uk](mailto:members@bats.org.uk) or call 020 7820 7181. They will be able to catch up with people in the online chat at the end of the formal business for a bit should they wish to do so.
- Normally the AGM is open both to members and non-members but this time around for logistical reasons only members should be present. There shouldn't be any non-members here but if there are please remember you cannot vote for resolutions.
- A reminder for family members: If you have a family membership and your respective family member is also attending the AGM please amend your Zoom name so it is clear there are 2 people voting (e.g. Smiths x2 or Smith & Brown). For help with this please ask a BCT member of staff to help (marked as Co-host in the chat).
- We will be voting on 7 resolutions and for each a member needs to propose it to go to a vote and a second member needs to second it:
  - If member wishes to propose a resolution please use the 'Chat' and write 'I PROPOSE'

- If member wishes to second a resolution please use the 'Chat' and write 'I SECOND'
  - If member wishes to propose or second a resolution make sure you are sending the message on the chat to everyone rather a private message to other participant
  - Please also note that to propose/second your Zoom name must be valid (i.e. it needs to display your first and last name)
  - The first person to type will be the proposer/second and this will be announced by the Chair or a member of staff.
- We will then ask for members to vote for each resolution by running a poll and members simply need to select the option that suits them on the screen. So it is recommended that participants have the speaker view option selected. This view can be changed either on the right or left hand side of the screen, depending on which device members are using [at this time a test poll was conducted]
  - Note for Family members: if each member within a Family Membership wishes to vote differently please do not answer the poll and use the chat to let BCT know what each of your votes will be (e.g.: John Smith votes in favour and Mary Smith abstains).
  - If for some reason a participant gets disconnected during the AGM and has missed voting on a resolution (and they do wish to continue to vote) please call 020 7820 7181. AGM proceedings will pause briefly for 5 minutes until the member is able to re-join so we can count the vote. When reconnected again the member will be placed in a waiting room and then a member of staff will let them in as soon as it is suitable. If the member is unable to connect within 5 minutes of being disconnected the member of staff that is with them on the phone will provide further instructions.

**Total proxy votes:** 3 (votes have been added to the below counts)

**Other votes:** Kirsty Park could not see the poll so she voted on the chat.

### **1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from: Kevin Daniels, Annette Faulkner and Colin Faulkner.

### **2. Minutes of the AGM 2019**

The chair presented the 2019 AGM minutes and asked if there were any amendments to be made. No points were raised and consequently no amendments made.

To approve the minutes for the 2019 AGM (**resolution 1**)

**Proposer:** Steve Parker

**Seconded:** Ruth Waters

**For [54] Against [0] Abstain [10]**

### **3. Annual Report of the Board of Trustees 2019-2020**

Abigail Entwistle, BCT Chair, gave a presentation reviewing some of the highlights of our annual report for the period April 2019 – March 2020.

Discover:

- NBMP data have enabled us to produce statistically robust population trends for 11 of the UK's 17 breeding bat species. In 2019 a total of 2,021 sites were surveyed by 1,032 volunteers, which is more than double the 1997 figure. We also ran 21 bat detector or sound analysis workshops which provided training for over 320 volunteer surveyors.
- In 2019, BCT piloted the British Bat Survey in South West England: 163 surveys were undertaken at 28 sites. In parallel to this pilot we also undertook monitoring across 18 sites on the Public Forest Estate. In total across the two projects we collected over 11TB of data, from which we identified over two million individual bat calls.
- BCT collaborates on a range of research that addresses our priority evidence needs. Data from the National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP) are used to calculate two UK biodiversity indicators: C8 Mammals of the Wider Countryside (bats) and C4 Status of UK Priority Species (Defra, 2018). This year NBMP data also contributed to the Office of National Statistics Natural Capital Accounts.
- Analysis of data from the National Nathusius' Pipistrelle Project confirmed for the first time that Nathusius' pipistrelles migrate from Eastern Europe to the UK, and that there is also a resident population in the UK. This project, undertaken by an MRes student at University College London (UCL), also collated data on Nathusius' pipistrelle roosts and found that 81% of roosts were shared with another species, most frequently soprano pipistrelle. We subsequently hosted a PhD student, also from UCL, investigating the effect of season, sex and age on Nathusius' pipistrelle movements across the UK. This research is currently being prepared for publication.
- We made two scientific awards in 2019/20.
  - The winner of the 2019 Kate Barlow Award was PhD student Benneth Obitte of Texas Tech University, for his project 'Why hunt: assessing drivers and sustainability of intense Egyptian Fruit bat hunting to guide conservation

intervention'. Benneth's research investigates the drivers of bat hunting and meat consumption in southern Nigeria, particularly of the Egyptian fruit bat which is a target of widespread hunting. A survey conducted in 2016 reported that offtake levels reached over 1,500 individuals per day from a single cave. This high offtake could cause local extinctions and the breakdown of bat-plant ecological networks. Benneth's research will help to shape conservation plans, and engage stakeholders on the importance of cave roost protection.

- The Vincent Weir Award was awarded to Dr Patrick Wright (from University of Exeter, in collaboration with the Vincent Wildlife Trust) for his work in developing and applying cutting edge molecular approaches to significantly advance bat monitoring techniques. His PhD research demonstrated that Bechstein's bats in the UK are less inbred than feared, but he did identify a colony with much lower diversity than is the norm in Britain.

Act:

- BCT continues to develop and contribute towards new professional guidance.
- Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edition) continues to have a far reach. We have contacted the Technical Review Board and initiated a consultation to update the guidelines.
- BCT contributed to Thermal Imaging Survey Guidelines published in September 2019; this is a standalone technical guide for ecological consultants and will be signposted from the 4th edition of Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines.
- BCT sits on the Advisory Group for the production of an update of the Bat Mitigation Guidelines alongside a variety of stakeholders including the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies.
- The Grey Long-eared Bat Project, as part of 'Back from the Brink', has been working with landowners to improve foraging and connectivity around the most isolated maternity roosts for this species. The project is now in its final year and has already involved 188 landowners.
- Working with landowners has resulted in nearly 60 hectares of land actively in the process of being restored to unimproved grassland without input from the countryside stewardship scheme and is instead due to the willingness of landowners to make beneficial changes. Including measures under the countryside stewardship

scheme this makes the total increase to over 250 hectares under positive management for the grey long-eared bat. A focus on unimproved grassland, which is a rare habitat, has benefits for a host of other biodiversity.

- We continue to work very closely with other environmental NGOs through the four Environment Links and Greener UK to pool resources and expertise to get a strong and effective voice for bat conservation across the United Kingdom.
- The general election in December 2019 heralded a big change in the political arithmetic that meant that United Kingdom did eventually leave the European Union on 31 January 2020. Because biodiversity is devolved to each of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, much of our work in 2019 focused on the likely impacts of Brexit and the proposals contained within the (Westminster) Environment Bill.
- BCT continues to promote the importance of retaining and strengthening the legislation protecting bats. Promotion of bats and their protection is carried out through our Species Champion MPs. For most of this period we had 3 in England, 2 in Wales and 8 in Scotland.

#### Inspire:

- The Helpline fielded a total of 13,309 enquiries (calls, emails and letters) in 2019-20; 10,964 of these were dealt with by Helpline staff and 2,345 came through the Out of Hours volunteer service.
- Bat groups are at forefront of bat conservation in the UK and remain at the core of BCT; without support from volunteers in bat groups, we couldn't achieve our objectives. We have a formal relationship with 85 groups (70 Partner Groups and 15 Network Groups).
- BCT delivered 28 training courses in 2019-20 for a combined audience of 400 people; this is a larger audience than in 2018-19 when we ran 29 courses for 341 people. Seventeen courses were openly advertised, two were for volunteer groups and nine were in-house training courses for various professional audiences including local councils, Aspire and the University of Exeter.
- This year we offered several new courses: 'Thermal aided bat surveys', 'Bats for Planners' and 'QGIS for Bat Groups'. With the instigation of social distancing in March, we adapted and ran our Wildlife Acoustics Kaleidoscope Pro course online for the first time.
- The regional bat conferences continued with the North of England taking place in Lancaster, but the Midlands Bat Conference had to be postponed due to the

coronavirus outbreak and will take place later in 2020 instead.

Strengthen:

- Bat Conservation Trust continues to promote its range of memberships (and the benefits that go with it) as a way for people to support our work to protect bats and to find out more about them.
- This year we have implemented the new membership fees for most of the memberships (which were approved in the 2018 AGM). Possibly to take advantage of the old fee 10 Life members joined this year (nine of whom joined before the new fees were implemented).
- We have also launched the new database which will create a better experience for users (both for prospective members and current members) and it will streamline BCT's processes for managing relationships with donors/members.
- The Adopt a Bat scheme continues to be a popular option with 50 new subscribers joining the scheme in the first three weeks of December leading up to Christmas and 29 new subscribers in the weeks leading up to Valentine's Day.
- Although this annual review is focused on the year up to March 2020, it would be odd not to acknowledge the challenges of the past six months. It's hard to think of anything in the past six months that has had more impact on our work than COVID-19.
- Like every organisation we have had to adapt significantly in the way we deliver our work. Our office has been closed since March, we have had to furlough some staff, many of the activities that we co-ordinate or carry out have either been delayed or we have needed to change the way that we deliver them.
- As well as the safety of our staff and volunteers, we've also had to consider the safety of the bats themselves. We don't yet know whether humans can pass SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) to animals in the wild so it is important that we take a precautionary approach until scientists understand more about transmission risks from humans to other animals.
- And finally of course there has been the challenge of misinformation about bats in relation to COVID-19. We have had to divert significant staff time into managing communications – this has included dealing with enquiries from members of the public concerned about bats in their neighbourhood, challenging negative media stories and donors asking if bats were to blame for COVID-19.

The Future:

So looking ahead, we need to:

- Continue to improve the evidence base and to provide solutions for bat conservation
- Be strong in our advocacy, speaking up for strong policy and legislation protecting bats.
- We need to increase engagement with and understanding of bats by the public and the media, through our National Bat Helpline, through partnership projects and with the help of the many bat volunteers around the country.
- Continue to invest in fundraising and diversify our income streams

To approve the Annual Report of the Board of Trustees 2019-2020 (*resolution 2*)

**Proposer:** Anne Hyatt

**Seconder:** Liz Ferrell

**For [69] Against [0] Abstain [0]**

**Question from Tricia Scott:** Number of calls that the Helpline deals with is clearly a magnificent effort by everyone involved, both the in-house staff and the out of hours staff, but demand just seems to keep on rising and I am wondering whether BCT has given any thought on what to do about that. Because clearly the money is not limitless but calls seem to be. As a carer myself through this year, I have had a number of occasions where people called me directly saying they can't get through to the Helpline. Has BCT given any thought to what they can do differently? Or in addition to try to cope with this huge demand?

**Response from Abi:** I do know that they are giving it a lot of thought but I am going to ask Kit if she'd like to give some more detail on that.

**Response from Kit:** We have definitely given this issue a lot of thought. We aren't getting funded for so much of the work that we do in the Helpline so we are thinking very carefully about how we can change the way we deliver to still get the good objectives we want for bats, but at the same time trying to do it in an effective and efficient way. This is something we are very likely to be talking to bat carers and other volunteers about over the next few months. In terms of this year I think you are absolutely spot on; there seem to have been a lot more bats needing help, but also this year in particular it has been difficult because we have been trying to manage the Helpline remotely and there have definitely therefore been some glitches in terms of people getting through. A friend of mine has certainly experienced that.

So I think there are two issues: one is that this year we've tried to manage the Helpline remotely and not in the office which has caused some issues with people getting through, but in terms of the future we have been giving it a lot of thought to how we can do that better and more cost effectively and will be consulting with bat carers and other volunteers.

#### **4. Annual Accounts and Auditors' Report 2019-2020**

Steve Markham, BCT's treasurer, provided an overview of the work towards a balanced budget. It was a challenging year for charity sector:

- Statutory funding reduced in last year / Other income stable or increased - overall deficit
- Unexpected end to the year – investments down (though recovering – medium term approach average 6% annual income)
- New auditors for 19/20 accounts – reduced cost, fresh eyes (Auditors changed from Sayer Vincent to HW Fisher after an auditor review.)
- Continued controlled expenditure / invest in core strategic BCT projects to secure BCT's long term financial viability

Income was £1,267,202 (2019: £1,228,508) and expenditure was £1,602,907 (2019: £1,510,878), leading to net deficit for the year of £335,705 (2019: net deficit of £282,370). Taking into account losses on investments of £118,383 (2019: gains of £66,195), the net movement in funds for the year was a decrease of £454,088 (2019: a decrease of £216,175).

BCT will need careful control of expenditure and diversification of our income streams to mitigate expected reduction in statutory funding in coming years. Currently reliant on statutory funding for some projects.

BCT will continue with strategic approach

- Investment income – continue to assume 6% allows us to plan more strategically – recovering from unpredictable end to year. Investments total £2,181,194 (2019: £2,746,041) at 31 March 2020. The aim of these funds is to provide a steady additional annual income stream to support our work, helping to reduce the risks associated with our reliance on project funding. It was an unpredictable year for investments and global stock markets were severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; investments have however recovered to a degree in the start of the next financial year. For budgeting purposes, BCT assume a 6% total return per year,

which allows us to plan more strategically.

- This year we have invested in our fundraising and communications team to be in the best position we can be to face challenging times ahead and reduce our deficit budget.
- As you can see from the accounts, the past year has been challenging financially, and we are anticipating that the fundraising climate is going to get even more difficult in the next couple of years. We are going to have to be very creative about how we generate income, and may need to make some difficult decisions about how we deliver our work.

**Question from Peter Koki:** Do project and research costs far exceed funding raised for these activities?

**Response from Kit:** These accounts are actually from the previous financial year but realistically we don't envisage the situation improving a huge amount unless we reduce our expenditure. So we have spent quite a lot of Trustee time over the last 6 months working out how we can reduce our expenditure, and staff of course have been involved with this process and have come up with various ideas about how we can streamline delivery. But it's an ongoing process and it's not finished yet. We will be continuing to work on trying to reduce that deficit down over the coming year.

**Question from Glyn Cooper:** Could you just clarify for me in which heading the membership fees come under? Would that be the voluntary income? Just to have a feel for the amount of membership fees compared to other income streams

**Kit Stoner:** It does come under voluntary income yes. The breakdown is in the notes in the annual report and I have it here, the membership subscriptions were £146,000.

**Glyn Cooper:** Under which heading is that?

**Kit Stoner:** Under donations and legacies in the main annual accounts

**Glyn Cooper:** That's fine, thanks

**Question from Rowan Wise:** Where does BCT invest in the market ? in which funds?

**Response from Kit Stoner:** I wouldn't be able to tell you without looking it up but we have an ethical investment funds manager, so we have an ethical portfolio and they swap our funds around depending on the market. At the moment everything is so much up in the air but we do have a balance of UK and overseas and emerging markets investments.

**Response from Steve Markham:** We do review where we invest but it is ethically invested. We did ask our investors about this because we wanted to be clear whether any of our

investments were in fossil fuels. At the time (around one year ago) that proved difficult for the investors to answer but that question is going to become more important? this year so they will be able to answer it. We want to look over something that is outside fossil fuels but we are still looking.

To approve the Annual Accounts and Auditors' Report 2019-2020 (*resolution 3*)

**Proposer:** Tricia Scott

**Secunder:** Stuart Brittenden

**For [63] Against [0] Abstain [2]**

## **5. Appointment of Auditors**

BCT appointed a new auditor in 2020 - HW Fisher. We were satisfied with the overall level of service provided and recommend that we approve them again for the 2021 audit.

To approve the Appointment of Auditors (*resolution 4*)

**Proposer:** Steve Parker

**Secunder:** Jean Matthews

**For [63] Against [0] Abstain [1]**

**POINT OF ORDER from Bob Cornes:** Are results displayed on the polls without proxy votes?

**BCT:** Yes they are. Three proxy votes have been submitted and they will be added in at the end.

## **6. Auditors' Remuneration**

To authorise the Trustees to determine the Auditors' remuneration for next year's audit. (*resolution 5*).

**Proposer:** Gail Armstrong

**Secunder:** Ani Binet

**For [63] Against [0] Abstain [1]**

## **7. Election of Trustees**

### ***New Trustees***

The Board of Trustees is pleased to nominate John Randall (Lord Randall of Uxbridge) – for election as a Trustee (**resolution 6**).

**Proposer:** Ruth Waters

**Seconder:** Nik Knight

**For [62] Against [0] Abstain [3]**

John has had a passion for wildlife from his earliest days. He has been a member of the RSPB for over 55 years. After studying Serbo-Croat at London University he joined the family retail business but his love of nature was never far away and he was a tour leader for several specialist birdwatching companies at the same time. He was elected a Member of Parliament from 1997 until 2015. During his time in Parliament John put forward the Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill. This ultimately led to the Marine and Coastal Access Act of 2009. He retired from Parliament in 2015 to spend more time campaigning on the issues that mattered to him. He has served as a Council Member of the RSPB and is currently a Trustee of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, a Vice-President of Fauna and Flora International as well as a Trustee of other non-wildlife charities. In 2017 he became Prime Minister Theresa May's Special Adviser on the Environment. Now in the House of Lords, he is a strong advocate for wildlife and conservation. He is really keen to learn more about bats and getting to grips with his bat detector as well as using his business and political knowledge to give bats and their conservation the attention they deserve.

### ***Existing Trustees***

All Board of Trustees members are eligible to stand for up to three consecutive periods of three years, before they must stand down from the Board for at least one year.

One Trustee is standing for re-election at this AGM and the Board of Trustees is pleased to make the following proposal, for Annika Binet to be re-elected as a Trustee for a second term.

Annika (Ani) Binet – nominated for re-election as a Trustee (**resolution 7**)

**Proposer:** Steve Parker

**Seconder:** Liz Walsh

**For [64] Against [0] Abstain [1]**

Annika has been an active volunteer bat worker since 2007, first in Australia, then in the Channel Islands and is now based back on the UK mainland. She has been a member of a selection of UK and CI based bat groups since 2008, served two separate terms as Chair of the Jersey Bat Group, from 2009 to 2011 and from 2015 to 2016, and is a member of the committee of Hampshire Bat Group. Her experience has given Annika a good understanding of the day to day operation of a charitable bat group and of volunteer bat workers generally.

Annika founded her own bat research and training non-profit organisation with a small team of research volunteers in order to conduct additional Channel Island wide bat research projects. She has given talks and provided training to volunteer bat workers not just in Jersey but also for the Societe Guernsiais Bat Section in Guernsey and the Alderney Wildlife Trust; as well as giving talks for numerous UK bat groups as well as at regional and national conferences.

Having been based within a small island bat group for 11 years, having connections across the other islands and now being based back on the mainland UK, Annika is in a unique position to understand the concerns of a range of partner groups. In particular, she understands the different concerns of the island bat groups, especially in relation to the small pool of experience, equipment and funding - you cannot just ask a member of a neighbouring county bat group to drive across the border to help with a fundraising, research or training event.

### **Officer roles**

For your information, the Board of Trustees has agreed the following Officer roles for the coming year. This is in line with the change in procedure agreed at the 2019 AGM.

Kirsty Park – Chair (replacing Abi Entwistle)

Jean Matthews – Vice Chair (replacing Kirsty Park)

Bob Cornes will remain as Secretary and Steve Markham will remain as Treasurer.

### Agenda item 9 – Any other notified business

**Item brought forward by Annette and Colin Faulkner on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2020 (via BCT staff as Colin and Annette could not attend the AGM):** where there are two adults in the family membership both members should be named routinely in all correspondence, as is the case with other charities, in replacement of the one member rule several years ago.

**Response from Joe Nunez-Mino:** Our old membership database wouldn't allow us to export the details for both members. Our new one does but unfortunately we did overlook that this year and the mailings went out without both members being named. However we have now fixed the issue and we will from now on always name both members in the correspondence, whether that's by email or through the post.

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Kirsty Park, Chair

Minutes: Andreia Correia da Costa (Senior Engagement and Fundraising Officer)