

# BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION

Minutes of the AGM of the British Ornithologists' Union held online on 29 June 2020 via Zoom

Mr Steve Dudley welcomed everyone to the meeting.

A total of 32 members attended the meeting, four of whom were Officers of the Union.

Mr Dudley first thanked everyone for taking the time to join us today. He acknowledged how Covid-19 had impacted on everyone, and pretty much on everything, in recent months, and we very much hoped that our members had managed during these unprecedented times of a global pandemic. He said that the BOU is nothing without its members. We were their society and we appreciate even more their willingness to attend this meeting at this time.

He stated that the way people had responded to the many challenges to changes in their work and life circumstances had seen many negatives being turned in to positives, and that this AGM was one such positive. Our usual in-person meetings held at our annual conference are only ever attended by a few of those present at the conference, with usually more than 95% being made up of UK members, with members from outside the UK having little opportunity to attend. In a quick glance down those who registered for today's meeting he said he immediately saw that around 20% of those attending were from outside the UK. It was great to have so many members present that wouldn't normally be able to make it to the meeting. He thanked everyone for taking the time to attend, in particular those for whom 5pm in the UK was either a late night or an early morning their local time.

Prof Vickery opened the AGM.

## 1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Michael Casement and Angela von Känel.

## 2. Minutes of the previous AGM

Minutes of the previous AGM held on 27 March 2019 at the University of Warwick (published online <https://www.bou.org.uk/about-the-bou/rules-annual-reports-agm-items/>) were approved as a true record of that meeting.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

## 3. Adoption of the Annual Report of Council & Approval of Accounts for 2019

President, Prof Juliet Vickery, introduced the Annual Report and Honorary Treasurer, Mr Graham Appleton, the Annual Accounts.

Prof Vickery stated it was her first AGM as President and how different it is from the AGM she had been anticipating when she became President last year. But we were all making the best of current circumstances and connecting as a community from different geographies and disciplines. She stated that it was our community, and people that make it, that provide the theme for what she wanted to say about the past year, the current situation and the year ahead.

Prof Vickery then looked back at 2019. She started with the excellent Alfred Newton Lecture given at the 2019 annual conference in Warwick by Prof Lei Cao from the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Her lecture highlighted the need for global cooperation and learning and the value of citizen science in understanding and conserving the natural world in China, an important and pertinent message for the world today.

Prof Vickery then commented on the first awarding of the newly designed Janet Kear Union Medal. Formerly the Union Medal, it had been redesigned by the BOU's Steve Dudley and renamed in memory of Janet, who was President of the Union between 1991 and 1995. The first award of the new medal was to Mike Wilson for his extraordinary contribution to the BOU and ornithology, in particular as Book Reviews Editor for IBIS for over twenty years.

Prof Vickery went on to talk about our journal, IBIS, and the appointment of Jente Ottenburghs as Journal Publicity Support Officer. Jentes' well-crafted articles were the most read and most shared of our blog posts and as such are broadening our reach.

Prof Vickery thanked the IBIS editors led by Dominic McCafferty (Editor in Chief) and supported by Angela Langford (Journal Manager), for all the hard work and careful thought that goes into maintaining the quality of IBIS.

A significant amount of work last year had been devoted to successfully negotiating a new contract with our publisher, Wiley-Blackwell which Mr Appleton would touch upon in his address.

The BOU is all about community and nothing epitomised this more than the BOU's excellent social media activity. From which she would like to pick out our presence on Weibo - China's largest social media platform – which is run by BOU members Yachang Cheng and Lei (Robbi) Zhu. She thanked them for the huge amount of work they did promoting the BOU and IBIS in China.

IBIS and social media are just two of the ways we engage with and support our community. We are always looking for better ways to do this and our Engagement Committee is proving to be an engine room of creativity and she thanked all of those on this incredibly active committee, in particular Hugh Wright who chairs it.

Prof Vickery stated that the BOU is committed to becoming more equal, diverse and inclusive in all we do and to ensure that our activities are open to anyone interested in ornithology. In the past year we have invested time and effort, and taken concrete steps towards improving gender equality. But we recognise that equality and diversity is about much more than that and, as we move through 2020 and into 2021, we are researching ways to proactively engage, involve and celebrate other underrepresented groups in the ornithological community including the LGBTQ+ and BAME communities, and to this end we have expanded our Equality and Diversity Working Group. She thanked all members past and present of the working group.

Prof Vickery stated that for her personally, a real highlight of being part of the BOU community is the face to face interactions of our meetings - the chance to rekindle long standing friendships, form new ones and learn and be inspired by extraordinary work from all around the globe. As a conservation scientist she was particularly looking forward to this year's annual conference on restoring bird populations. This conference had now been rescheduled for spring 2021, and she was immensely pleased that both our fabulous organising committee and virtually all the speakers from our fantastic programme had agreed to move with us to 2021. She said that nothing beats face to face meetings as they offer many opportunities that virtual

meetings cannot replicate. But online events have several indisputable advantages – for delegates they cost less in time, money and carbon and they may be easier to fit in around other work and family commitments – all of which may well make them more accessible to a wider community and hopefully easier for more of our members outside the UK to participate.

This year the BOU again supported the World Seabird Twitter Conference (#WSTC6) in May - the biggest one yet with over 180 presenters from every continent. In October we are co-hosting, with the International Wader Study Group, the first ever International Shorebird Twitter Conference and in November, our annual one-day autumn meeting has been switched from the usual in-person event to a Zoom conference with a parallel Twitter event.

Covid-19 has had a huge impact on the BOU, not just in terms of meetings but in terms of finances and planning. An example of this was no sooner had we awarded this year's grants and bursaries than lockdowns prevented the award recipients from embarking on their projects. She thanked the Grants Committee and in particular the outgoing Chair, Phil Atkinson, and Steve Dudley for their hard work in planning a way forward to ensure that all these projects remained funded and went ahead.

Prof Vickery ended by stating that few people appreciate that the BOU is pretty much run by just two people – Steve Dudley and Angela Langford – and wanted to end by thanking them both for all that they do to support and grow the BOU and ensure it moves with these changing times. She also thanked the members for supporting us and, in doing so, helping us to support the ornithological community around the world.

Prof Vickery handed over to Mr Appleton, Honorary Treasurer to present the review of the Union's finances.

Mr Appleton began by stating that when he was appointed as Treasurer, back in April 2017, BOU finances were in fine shape. High bank balances, built up thanks to several good years of IBIS sales and popular conferences, enabled the BOU to plan to spend significant sums on the development of ornithology and ornithologists. Balanced against this positivity was the prospect of a much-changed world for publishing and the near certainty that IBIS income would

decline significantly in an increasingly 'open access' or as he prefers to call it, 'author pays' environment. Our current strategy is to spend money now, to invest in a future which is less dependent upon IBIS.

When approving a budget for 2019, Council once more chose to reduce the BOUs' cash holding. With less and less money available to support young and early career researchers we felt that we were in a position to help while we could.

Mr Appleton reported on three worrying negative aspects of the 2019 figures that Council needs to be addressing:

- Loss of sponsorship points to tricky financial times for businesses that have previously supported ornithological charities.
- A squeeze on NGOs has reduced attendance at conferences.
- We have a falling membership.

The overall loss in the year was £25,882 but a recovery in the stock market increased our investments by over £81,000, which meant that we posted a very healthy-looking set of accounts, and Mr Appleton commented that he received excellent support from the BOU's Investment Trustees.

Mr Appleton reported on another excellent year for IBIS financially, thanks to the hard work by Wiley-Blackwell, our publisher, and the quality of the journal. He also reported on successful negotiations with Wiley-Blackwell to extend our IBIS contract by two years through to the end of 2023. Income will be reduced in 2020 and 2021 but the contract delivers certainty for 2022 and 2023. One of the great plus points about the new contract is that it provides the editors with more flexibility in terms of number of pages we can publish. This means that there will be far more papers this year, as we publish a backlog of papers that built up during 2019.

During 2020 committees continue to meet virtually and that will actually help to reduce expenditure.

Covid-19 is negatively affecting our finances in several ways:

- The fall in the value of investments and dividends will mean that we will have less money to fund

awards and grants. We know that several projects that we are supporting through the 2020 round will be delayed and it is possible that we will have to reduce or even cancel the 2021 round of awards.

- At the end of 2019, it looked as if the investments that underpin the Warham Scholarships would be strong enough to support a fourth, and perhaps even a fifth PhD. We were about to advertise the fourth round but this has now been delayed to 2021.
- Conference income helps to pay staff salaries and we have reduced expenditure wherever possible to try to make up for recent losses.
- We hope that IBIS revenue will be unaffected by Covid-19 but Council has already agreed to increase BOU subscriptions in order to replace some of the lost income associated with the new contract.

Going forward, Mr Appleton was pleased that we have extended our contract with Wiley-Blackwell through until 2023, which makes it much easier for Council to make measured decisions about the future. It's a team effort. Our Meetings Committee will work hard to generate renewed interest in conferences; the Engagement Committee will try to increase membership; the IBIS Management Committee will make sure that IBIS continues to be a quality journal; and our Investment Trustees will look after previous legacies and investments, the income from which underpins so much of what the BOU does.

The adoption of the Annual Report and approval of the Accounts for 2019 was proposed by Lucy Wright and seconded by Rob Robinson.

#### **4. Elections to Council**

Council proposed that Sonya Clegg be elected as an Ordinary Member of Council, to replace Phil Atkinson as Chair of the Grants Committee; and Julie Miller be elected as an Ordinary Member of Council, to replace Tom Finch.

There being no other names put forward, rule 10.3 applies and the nominations are approved.

**5. Appointment of Auditors**

The reappointment of Baldwins, as the Union's auditors was, proposed by Mr Appleton and seconded by Eileen Rees

**6. Any Other Business**

There being no other business, Prof Vickery declared the AGM closed at 17:35h and thanked members for their attendance.