

# BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION

## Minutes of the AGM of the British Ornithologists' Union held online on 31 March 2021 via Zoom

Mr Steve Dudley welcomed everyone to the meeting.

A total of 41 members attended the meeting, four of whom were Officers of the Union.

Prof Juliet Vickery welcomed everyone and thanked them for taking the time to join us.

### 1. Apologies for absence

None were received.

### 2. Minutes of the previous AGM

Minutes of the previous AGM held on 29 June 2020 via Zoom (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.

Approval of the minutes was proposed by Ms Theresa Robinson and seconded by Prof Jenny Gill.

### 3. Adoption of the Annual Report of Council & Approval of Accounts for 2020

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

Prof Vickery stated that 2020 could be summed up in three words; resolve, responsiveness and reach.

Despite the challenges presented by Covid-19, the BOU had delivered many of its objectives for the year, with some exceptions – the annual conference was postponed (to 2021), member travel grants were not awarded, and although awarded, many of the small research grants and bursaries were not taken up (held over to 2021). Everything else was delivered, despite all that was thrown at us during the pandemic.

Prof Vickery then looked back at 2020, starting with our switch to virtual conferencing with the autumn conference on 'Climate Change and Birds', which was held via Zoom and attracted over 350 delegates, and the first ever International Shorebird Twitter Conference (#ISTC20) which

we co-hosted with the International Wader Study Group.

Prof Vickery thanked Dr Francis Daunt, Chair of BOU's Meetings Committee, Committee members and the many others for their support in making the necessary changes to the conference calendar and delivering these events.

We continued to progress our equality, diversity and inclusiveness work and took significant steps to reach our target of having 50:50 male:female shortlists for BOU awards, through the creation of our new Awards Nominations Committee who will implement an open and accountable nominations process. Prof Vickery thanked Dr Hugh Wright, outgoing Chair of the BOU Engagement Committee and Dr Lucy Wright, Chair of the new Awards Nominations Committee for driving our work on this. And whilst on gender, Prof Vickery was pleased that BOU Council is now 50:50 male:female in its makeup for the first time in our 162-year history. Our Equality and Diversity Working Group have also started to move beyond gender to ensure the BOU reflects both our members and wider community. As part of this we published a series of Rainbow Blogs written by members of the LGBTQIA+ community and their allies.

Prof Vickery thanked the editors of IBIS for rising to the challenge of the increased number of submissions, following a call at the start of the pandemic encouraging authors to finish off those papers they had close to completion and submit them. At the other end of the process, it was noted that the journal's impact factor had risen and she thanked the Chair of the IBIS Committee (Dr Jen Smart), Editor in Chief (Dr Dominic McCafferty) and all the editors, associate editors, reviewers and staff for their hard work on making IBIS such a success.

The BOU remains at the forefront of ornithological science on social media, and most of this is driven by our Chief Operations Officer, Mr Steve Dudley, and Prof Vickery thanked him for his continued excellent work in this area.

Prof Vickery stated the resolve of the BOU to get things done during the pandemic was down to the work of our brilliant team of committee members and committee chairs, all of which continues to be underpinned by our excellent staff, Mr Steve Dudley and Mrs Angela Langford.

In terms of responsiveness, the BOU is a small team and the advantage of this is that decisions can be made quickly, thus allowing us to respond rapidly to challenges thrown up by the fast-moving changing landscape of the Covid-19 pandemic. Prompt decision-making at both committee and Council levels meant that the BOU, our members, our staff and our finances all fared better during the pandemic than might have been the case.

The world of virtual conferencing is a whole new ball game for us; we now know just how much more is involved in delivering things virtually, and as a result we brought in additional help to deliver them. But, whilst virtual conferences do have their drawbacks, they do have their benefits and Zoom conferences have allowed the BOU to increase its reach whilst reducing the carbon footprint of our events. The 'Climate Change and Birds' autumn Zoom conference attracted over 350 delegates, the largest ever audience for a BOU event, with 60% of delegates from outside the UK, as opposed to the 15% we expect for a face-to-face conference; and the same is true for the annual conference we are running at the moment of which this AGM is a part.

After 162 years, the BOU's resolve to support the ornithological community is as strong as ever. It has seen us through a tough year, and with great teamwork we've been able to respond and react to the sweeping and dramatic changes imposed on us by the pandemic and we are working hard to become more equal, more diverse and more inclusive.

Prof Vickery ended by stating that few people appreciate that the BOU is pretty much run by just two people – Mr Dudley and Mrs 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 all our Council and committee members, and members of the BOU for supporting us and, in doing so, helping us to support the ornithological community.

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

Mr Appleton began by stating that there was an underlying fall in investments of £62,890 which does impact on our ability to afford to award grants and undertake other

activities. However, much of this loss had been recovered during this current year to date, and it is hoped that we will be able to advertise for our fourth John and Pat Warham Studentship by the end of 2021.

In terms of operational costs, the BOU broke even but only due to timely decision-making made early on in the pandemic.

Mr Appleton thanked members for their continued support, despite reduced activity on our part, and Council for their rapid decision making which meant the BOU did not lose conference venue deposits; and to Nottingham University for their understanding and working with us to carry forward our conference booking and deposit from 2020 to 2021, and now on to 2022. He also thanked the member who donated his attendance cost of the postponed 2020 annual conference, and he stated that it was this sort of generous support from our members that makes him happy to be associated with this great charity.

Mr Appleton thanked the Meetings Committee and the individual conference organisers; it was down to them that we made the successful switch from in-person to virtual for our autumn conference, which delivered higher than expected revenue. He thanked the IBIS Management Committee, as their hard work ensured that IBIS continues to thrive even during the global pandemic. Mr Appleton also thanked the Grants Committee for their flexible approach and management of awardees during the pandemic.

Mr Appleton thanked Mr Dudley for the decisions he made early in the year to cut expenditure wherever possible and to implement the many other changes during the year which ensured the BOU ended the year in a similar financial situation to the start of the year, despite all the challenges of the pandemic; he added that many other charities will not be in as fortunate a position as the BOU in this respect.

Mr Appleton also thanked the BOU's Investment Trustees, Mr Nigel Crocker, Mr Richard Price and Mr Stephen Rumsey, for steering us through some choppy financial waters. The Investment Trustees are responsible for the management of not only our historical investments but also the two recent legacies left to us by members, all of which go to help fund grants, bursaries and more recently the Warham studentships.

The adoption of the Annual Report and approval of the Accounts for 2020 was proposed by Dr Rob Robinson, seconded by Dr Katherine Bowgen and passed *nem. con.*

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

Council proposed that Mr Graham Appleton be re-elected as Honorary Treasurer; that Dr Richard Bradbury be elected as Vice President to replace Mr Neil Bucknell; that Dr Mark Eaton be elected as an Ordinary Member of Council to replace Prof Will Cresswell; that Dr Tom Finch be elected as an Ordinary Member of Council to Chair the Engagement Committee to replace Dr Hugh Wright; that Dr Rosemarie Kentie be elected as an Ordinary Member of Council to Chair the IBIS Management Committee to replace Dr Jen Smart; that Dr Lucy Wright be elected as an Ordinary Member of Council to Chair the Awards Nominations Committee (new position).

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

#### **5. Appointment of Auditors**

Mr Appleton stated that it was pointed out at the last AGM that we did not have a system in place to review our auditors. Council accepted this and have agreed that there will be a formal review of auditors every four years, with the first review due in 2022.

The reappointment of Azets Audit Services (formerly Baldwins), as the Union's auditors was proposed by Mr Appleton, seconded by Dr Rob Robinson and passed *nem. con.*

#### **6. Any Other Business**

There being no other business, Prof Vickery declared the AGM closed at 18:16h and she again thanked all of those people that keep the BOU moving and thanked members for their attendance and continued support.