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voices for
nature**

THE RSPB, THE LODGE, SANDY, BEDFORDSHIRE, SG19 2DL

Minutes of the 119th Annual General Meeting held 2 October 2010

The 119th Annual General Meeting of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) was held at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, Westminster, London, at 11am on Saturday 2 October 2010. 655 Fellows and Members of the Society were present.

The Chairman of Council, Mr Ian Darling welcomed members and guests to the meeting and introduced Professor Sir John Lawton FRS, Vice President of the RSPB, who would be chairing the meeting. Apologies had been received from the President, Kate Humble, who was abroad filming a new television series on the spice trade. A video message from Ms Humble was played. The Chairman of Council also introduced the Society's new Chief Executive, Dr Mike Clarke who had taken over from Sir Graham Wynne when he stood down at the end of May 2010.

Professor Sir John Lawton, Chairman of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, Chairman of the Government's working group reviewing England's protected areas, RSPB Vice President and former Chairman of RSPB Council, took over as chair of the AGM and explained that notice of the meeting had been published in the August 2010 issue of Birds magazine, together with a review of the Society's key achievements and a summary of the Annual Accounts. Everyone attending the AGM had also received a copy of the latest annual review, containing the summarised accounts for the last financial year.

1. MINUTES OF THE 118TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM was advised that RSPB Council was satisfied that the minutes of the 118th Annual General Meeting, held on 3 October 2009, accurately reflected the proceedings of the meeting. Although there was no legal requirement to do so, Council had adopted the procedure of signing the minutes at the next AGM. Copies had been available in advance of the meeting, including being posted on the RSPB website, and every member attending the AGM had a copy in their delegate pack.

The minutes of the 118th Annual General Meeting were signed by Professor Sir John Lawton.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Referring to Wallasea Island, the Society's partnership with Crossrail aimed at creating the UK's biggest coastal restoration project at no cost to the RSPB, Mr Malcolm Frod (Crosby, Liverpool) enquired what happened to the £1,000 donation that he and his wife had given to this project. The Chief Executive thanked Mr Frod for his kind support and updated the meeting on the Wallasea Island project. He explained that the RSPB had been fortunate in securing and recovering much of the money needed for the multi-million pound project, working in partnership with Crossrail, but without the generous support of RSPB members it would not have been possible to secure the long term development of the island.

Mrs Ann Nussey (South Croydon) asked what was being done to clarify the threat coming from ring-necked parakeets (referred to in the 2009 AGM minutes) and other alien species, so that the RSPB could take timely action and not wait until, in her opinion, it was too late. The Chairman suggested that staff respond to this during the Question session, after the presentation of the annual report.

There were no other matters arising from the minutes.

3. PRESENTATION OF THE ANNUAL REPORT AND ADOPTION OF THE ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2010

3.1 Annual Report

The Chairman of Council, Mr Ian Darling, presented the Annual Report in which he outlined the activities of the RSPB during the 2009/10 financial year and updated members on recent events since the end of the reporting year. He explained that separating the Chairman's and Treasurer's reports was difficult, given that the economic climate loomed large in their thinking, but he hoped members would be relieved to hear how the RSPB had fared in these challenging times, and he thanked them – and the whole of the membership – for their extraordinary loyalty. With 187,000 new members, the RSPB ended the year with a record membership of 1,076,112 - a powerful demonstration that people cared about nature conservation, however difficult the economic times.

Focussing first on the bird highlights, he reported that 46 pairs of white-tailed eagles had reared 36 chicks, the highest number for 150 years. Altogether, 82 bitterns had boomed in the UK, 33 of them on 13 of the RSPB's nature reserves. This was an amazing success story as in 1997 there had been just 11 (it had taken a great deal of research, advice, money and effort, in collaboration with many others, to prevent them from disappearing). They had bred at Lakenheath Fen for the first time and there were no fewer than seven nests at Ham Wall, after just one the previous year. And where there were bitterns, there were also reed and sedge warblers, dragonflies and damselflies, and probably water voles and otters.

Corncrakes on RSPB reserves had increased by 19%, to 289 calling birds in 2009. They had been reintroduced at the Nene Washes reserve, where they had increased from nine to 13 calling males. Few people remembered corncrakes calling in English meadows, and no-one would remember cranes. A few had nested in Norfolk in recent years, and he was proud to report that two pairs had nested at the Society's Lakenheath Fen reserve, fledging one chick, making them the first cranes to breed successfully in East Anglia's Fens for 400 years.

At Radipole Lake, a great reserve close to Weymouth town centre, marsh harriers had raised two young, the first to breed in Dorset for nearly 50 years. Scotland's seabirds had their most productive year for a decade in 2009 and, thankfully, Arctic terns at North Hill in Orkney had fledged more than 220 chicks, after none the previous year. Red-necked phalaropes had increased from 17 males at 10 sites to 26 males at 15 sites last year. Males were counted because they incubated the eggs and looked after the chicks.

The RSPB paid great attention to wider biodiversity on its nature reserves and knew of 304 species with more than 20% of their UK population or distribution on its reserves. That was an important responsibility. Staff had found some species never recorded on the Society's reserves before, including the reed leopard moth at Sutton Fen; Breckland thyme on Cavenham Heath; and the field cuckoo bumblebee on Oronsay. One reserve always recognised as stunning for its sheer variety of wildlife was Abernethy, where an extraordinary 4,100 species had now been recorded.

Not everything was good news, however. Together with the UK's leading bird conservation organisations the RSPB had undertaken the third *Birds of Conservation Concern* review which put 52 species on the red list of most conservation concern, 126 on the amber list and 68 on the green list. Eighteen species were even more of a worry than before and had moved onto the red list, but six had moved from red to amber. There was still unacceptable persecution of birds of prey in some areas, especially in England's Peak District and on heather moors in Scotland. The RSPB's bird of prey campaign had produced the biggest ever RSPB petition to the Government, with more than 210,000 people calling for an end to the illegal and unjustified killing of these birds – an excellent example of membership participation. There were strangely unaccountable declines in once widespread birds such as willow tits and lesser spotted woodpeckers, and some long-distance migrants such as spotted flycatchers. The willow tit, once a relatively common bird, had disappeared from a number of counties in southern Britain, in quite a short time. The RSPB was trying hard to find out why.

Rare birds on nature reserves were sometimes easier to help than the widespread species that depended more on the overall health of the countryside. Yet at Hope Farm, the RSPB's demonstration farm in Cambridgeshire, some of the special farmland birds had increased by 177% since 2000, so there was room for optimism.

Moving on to nature reserves, the Chairman reported that as well as many extensions to existing sites, the Society had bought two new reserves during the year - Wallasea Island in Essex, heralded for some time, and the Crook of Baldoon in south-west Scotland, took the total number of RSPB nature reserves across the UK to 209. The Society had hoped that Saltholme in Tees-side would be a success, and it was, welcoming its 100,000th visitor in February, within a year of opening. This was three times the numbers expected. Saltholme's birds had a hugely successful breeding season, with lapwings, redshanks, pochards, yellow wagtails and great crested grebes all increasing. Other successes included the discovery of otter prints on the reserve, as well as a water vole colony. The reserve maintained the area's reputation for rare birds, with glaucous-winged gull, purple heron, citrine wagtail, blue-winged teal and bitterns all adding excitement for visitors.

Visitors were vital to the RSPB, because we hoped to encourage them to take a longer-term interest in wildlife and the Society's work. There were some 2 million visits to our reserves in the year, which was quite astonishing. Twenty-four of the Society's reserves now had the Government Quality Badge, demonstrating to schools the quality of field teaching that the RSPB provided. The RSPB also had an army of 16,000 dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers, each doing their bit to make the world a better place for wildlife and people. He expressed thanks to every one of them, and said he was encouraged to see more families joining the RSPB – we had close to 200,000 junior members (RSPB Wildlife Explorers) who were continually enthused and encouraged by the excellent materials produced by the Society's youth and education staff. More than half a million people took part in the Big Garden Birdwatch and Make Your Nature Count surveys, and more than half a million people saw species as varied as house sparrows, white-tailed eagles, red deer and water voles at the 80 Date with Nature events staged across the UK.

The Chairman explained that much of the Society's work was done in close collaboration with others. Two innovative partnerships had been agreed in the Peak District - at Dove Stone, 12 miles from Manchester, the RSPB would manage an area of United Utilities water catchment; and with the National Trust it would jointly manage the National Park Authority's Eastern Moors estate, 12 miles from Sheffield. It was with many partners that the RSPB embarked on some of its most ambitious and visionary work. Such projects were called 'Futurescapes', in which landscape-scale conservation was brought to bear on substantial areas of the countryside. Other work needed to deal with specific sites, such as the unique Dungeness peninsula. Plans to develop a small airfield at Lydd into a major international airport had been approved by the local council, against the advice of practically

everyone, including their own advisers. The RSPB was pleased that the Government, persuaded by the outraged reaction of so many people, had decided to call this in for a Public Inquiry.

The RSPB continued to examine broader, global issues, where it could bring extra perspective and expertise to bear. For instance, it presented its own views on the problems of climate change. Many supporters had attended massive rallies in London and Glasgow to make it clear what they felt about climate change. Bringing such subjects to the attention of governments, and revealing how much support the environmental movement had, was vital. The RSPB's Letter to the Future campaign caught the imagination of members, supporters and politicians alike, and 310,000 people had already let politicians know how much they cared about the future of the planet.

The RSPB was a UK-wide organisation but worked hard to reflect devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Chairman cited some examples of the Society's work. In Scotland, a £2 million funding package, including 50% from the EU's LIFE+, was secured for the conservation of Scottish machair, to help breeding waders, corncrakes and corn buntings. Machair was coastal grassland enriched by windblown sand, and in early summer it was ablaze with flowers and abuzz with rare bumblebees. There was much relief when the Wales Transport Plan revealed that the Gwent Levels would be spared a proposed M4 toll road. The RSPB had celebrated 40 years of the beautiful Ynys-hir reserve, where a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of nearly £700,000 allowed us to start restoring a large area of grazing marsh, which would be good for lapwings, reed buntings, curlews, otters and hares. Common sandpipers and water voles had bred for the first time at Conwy; shovelers were new breeders at Newport Wetlands and the first short-eared owls in more than 20 years had fledged from Ramsey Island. A record seven pairs of hen harriers nested at the Lake Vyrnwy reserve. In Northern Ireland, more people than ever were supporting the RSPB, with the highest ever membership growth reported in 2009-10. After years of RSPB campaigning, the government had banned lead shot over wetlands, and purchases at Portmore Lough had doubled the size of the wet grassland there, giving the growing lapwing population areas to expand into. The first red kite chick had also fledged in the Northern Ireland reintroduction scheme.

Internationally, the RSPB had been as active as ever. Long-term projects such as saving albatrosses and Asian vultures had achieved more success, and the magnificent Harapan rainforest in Sumatra continued to demand attention. A host of collaborative projects with other BirdLife International partners were steadily seeing results, but there was never room for complacency: staff were especially worried that the catastrophic declines in vultures across southern Asia may soon be mirrored in Africa.

Coming back home, the Chairman said he must record an immense vote of thanks to Sir Graham Wynne who retired as the RSPB's Chief Executive in May after an outstanding career with the Society. He was sure members would welcome the new Chief Executive, Dr Mike Clarke who had all the necessary qualities to become another excellent Chief Executive, following the likes of Peter Conder, Ian Prestt, Barbara Young and Graham. The RSPB had been extremely fortunate in its Chief Executives over the years.

The Chairman concluded by saying that members were the RSPB's driving force, and without them the organisation would not exist. Thanks were also due to a lot of people and organisations for speaking up for nature - farmers, landowners, businesses, councils, other environmental organisations, politicians, teachers.... the list went on. More could be found in the Annual Review, on the RSPB website and in *Birds* magazine. All in all, it had been a challenging year for wildlife and conservation and these challenges would continue into the future. The RSPB had a new government and new people to work with, and a new economic backdrop to its work, but it felt ready for the testing times to come.

3.2 Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2010

The Honorary Treasurer, Mr Alan Martin observed that life was never straightforward. Following the economic tsunami two years ago, the RSPB had headed into 2009-10 with some trepidation, but with hopes that, as the indicators started to turn positive, the worst was behind. Alas, any fragile optimism had long since been snuffed out, as public sector cuts now lie ahead. But the relief was welcome while it lasted and allowed the RSPB modestly to replenish its financial reserves.

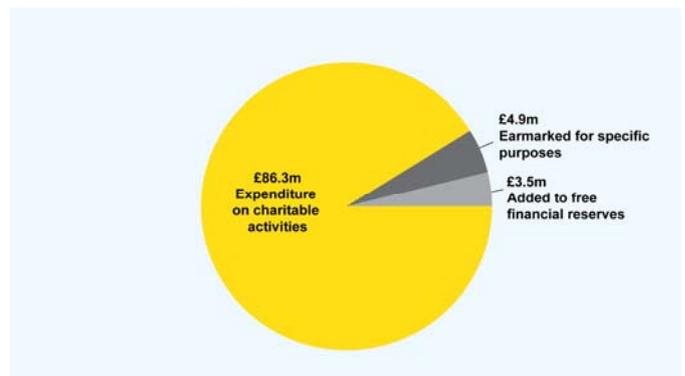
Throughout the recession, one of the most reassuring trends was the number of RSPB members renewing each month. Achieving any membership growth during a recession was always going to be tough, but the RSPB did it. The increase to 1,076,112 members and a 2% growth in subscriptions income was pleasing, to say the least. He reminded the AGM that the detail of the Society's income and expenditure could be found in the Annual Review and in *Birds* magazine, but he would summarise the financial picture.

Net income had risen by 10% to £94.7 million and the Society had spent £86.3 million on charitable activities, up by 6% on the previous year. The difference between income and expenditure was £8.4 million and if this were added to the financial reserves, the total would increase from £24.5 million to £32.9 million. But this apparent increase in financial reserves had to be treated with some caution.

The main thing to note was that the RSPB spent nearly all its income on good solid conservation work. A small sum was not spent in the financial

year, for a variety of reasons, but it was not all available to add to the financial reserves as some of it was actually earmarked for specific expenditure. This was partly to cover items that were scheduled for 2009-10 but were carried forward - mainly because of factors such as poor weather, most notably the unusually persistent snow over the winter. The rest covered a major land purchase commitment for which income was received in the last financial year. This still left

£3.5 million to bolster the Society's modest free financial reserves, taking them to £13 million, which gave some protection against any troubled waters ahead. Mr Martin suggested this was excellent news, partly because of the extra conservation work the surplus paid for, but mainly because it said there were an awful lot of people who cared enough about the environment to support the RSPB's work, even when they were personally experiencing financial strain.



The financial reserves also enabled the Society to capitalise on opportunities as they arose, for example, the chance to enhance the visitor facilities at the South Stack reserve on Anglesey. The RSPB had been trying to acquire new premises for more than 20 years and in March they came up for sale. The new centre being developed was already hugely successful. The Treasurer explained that unlike some charities, the RSPB did not go in for raising huge sums of money only to hoard it away in saving accounts and investments. It used its money, spending the maximum possible on conservation, while exercising necessary prudence; the remaining financial reserves represented just nine weeks' expenditure.

Looking at income in a little more detail, the Treasurer explained that the RSPB enjoyed a variety of income streams. This was very important because it gave much greater stability and security. However, a large slice comes from individuals. One of the smaller but growing income streams was RSPB trading, which was rapidly becoming a major contributor to RSPB finances. Retail, catering,

mail order, and trade through outlets such as DIY stores and garden centres, each recorded healthy growth. Mail order in particular had benefited from recent investments in improved service. Customers appeared to appreciate the improvements and voted with their orders. The birds benefitted too, as the increase in sales of bird food had been quite dramatic.

A larger slice of income (£27.9 million), and one often mentioned at the AGM, was from legacies. The subject of legacies was invariably a difficult one to broach, but he felt it would be remiss of him not to highlight the important part that legacies played in passing on to future generations the wonderful wildlife we all so enjoyed. At last year's AGM it was reported that legacy income appeared to be falling, but amazingly the trend reversed and legacy income had finished above the previous year's level. A few people left the RSPB remarkable sums; most were more modest and sometimes shared between a number of good causes, but they all added up, large and small, to a remarkable amount of conservation work, even with the current fluctuations in house prices and stocks and shares.

Grants also made a substantial contribution but, with government cuts looming, this was likely to be an area that would suffer. However, there was a ray of warm sunshine. One of the more surprising sources of income was from the Society's relationship with a German development bank, KfW. This organisation shared with the RSPB the determination to address the issue of global warming. Their commitment, totalling more than £10 million, would help forestry work in Indonesia and the restoration of peatlands in Eastern Europe on a scale previously unimaginable. The first instalment of £2.3 million was received from KfW in 2009-10. Like the KfW money, many of the grants the RSPB received were 'restricted', meaning that the money was given for specific purposes. Examples included grants received for improvements at Rainham and Saltholme nature reserves and modifications at Titchwell Marsh in anticipation of continued sea-level rise. Grant funding remained a vital source of income, but the Society had to be mindful of the likely consequences of public spending cuts and avoid overstretching its commitments.

On the subject of large-scale conservation, the Treasurer mentioned the funding associated with Wallasea Island, on the Essex coast, and said it was difficult to envisage how this project could have been contemplated without the Society's partnerships with Crossrail and the Environment Agency. Crossrail contributed to the project because Wallasea was the best place to dispose of excavated material from their tunnelling under London. At the same time, the waste material was an essential part of habitat design and restructuring on the reserve, to help the formation of new saltmarsh and lagoons. The Environment Agency was also contributing as a means of meeting its obligations to re-create intertidal habitat lost through maintaining sea defences elsewhere. These contributions accounted for the sharp increase in the 'Grants, commercial donations and trusts' line in the annual accounts, while the associated expenditure appeared in 'Acquisition of nature reserves'.

Wildlife and nature reserves were the exciting parts of the RSPB's work, but it couldn't achieve much without adequate, effective and efficient administrative support – the work of the backroom teams. In hard times, there was always a temptation to scale back on support services, such as Finance, Personnel and computer technology – or, worse still, on areas that helped our long-term capacity to generate funds. While savings had been made in these areas, it was also necessary to invest, and the upgraded trading process was an obvious example. Success depended upon all these services working together, and the improvements were made on time and on budget. Investment was also made in member recruitment activities, and to great effect. He was delighted to report that the RSPB's administrative overheads were small and represented around 5% of charitable income.

Turning to pensions for RSPB staff, the Treasurer reminded the AGM that he had commented last year that most pension schemes had suffered in the wake of the financial crisis. The RSPB's pension scheme was no exception. With the three-yearly review now complete, the trustees knew that,

without changes, annual contributions from the RSPB would have to increase by at least £2 million. It was a level they could not contemplate. Over recent years, changes to the scheme had included increasing the retirement age, increasing employee contributions, and replacing the final salary scheme for new members of staff. And yes, there have been increased RSPB contributions. While not forgetting that staff were amongst the Society's most important assets, scheme changes needed to go further. After long and complex deliberations, involving the staff and advisers, it was decided to reduce the rate at which pension entitlement was earned in the final salary section and to reduce exposure to rising life expectancy. The savings made would allow the RSPB to meet its future pension obligations without significant impact on operational budgets.

While he had sought to give an optimistic presentation, the Treasurer said he had to be realistic about the challenges ahead. Almost the entire charity sector was justifiably fearful of the impacts of public sector cuts. All wondered where, when and how deeply some of these would fall in the nature conservation arena. The RSPB had budgeted cautiously for the next 18 months and would inevitably have to scale back work when grant reductions started to bite, unless it could tap into new sources of income. Undoubtedly, resolve would be tested in the months ahead. But the fact that support for the Society's work had held firm was surely worthy of a small toast and members might choose a glass of whisky. RSPB income streams were many and varied and, for example, the Society's partnership with The Famous Grouse, through its sales of Black Grouse whisky, brought in much-needed funds to help black grouse to thrive!

The Treasurer said he believed that the various constraints on expenditure, and some remarkable income successes had put the RSPB in good shape to face the current financial year. It was, of course, members and supporters who really set the pace at which the conservation work progressed and, as always, trustees and staff were hugely appreciative. He also wished to pay tribute to the RSPB's staff, who took in their stride the pay freeze of 2009 – no doubt like many other people at the AGM. Together with the Society's industrious volunteers, staff had responded to the economic challenges with the same enthusiasm with which they embraced every challenge. Their hard work, restraint and creativity, combined with members' financial support, enabled work to continue apace on most fronts. RSPB Council was confident that this successful partnership of supporters, volunteers and staff would continue to serve well the interests of conservation and wildlife, through whatever challenges lay ahead.

3.3 Questions

The Chairman invited questions, first on the Annual Report and Accounts and then on the work of the Society more generally.

Mr Tyrell Maris (Teddington, Middlesex) referred to the changes made to the Society's pension scheme to allow the RSPB to meet its future pension obligations without significant impact on operational budgets, and asked whether the trustees had 'played fair' by the Society's dedicated members of staff. The Honorary Treasurer advised him that the trustees had addressed the process of revising the pension scheme very carefully, consulting staff groups as well as advisors over the various options. The easiest solution would have been to close the final salary scheme but the trustees had resisted that and the changes made had enabled the Society to continue the scheme at a reasonable financial cost. He felt they had arrived at a good balanced solution and reassured Mr Maris that the Pension Trustees valued the staff – they were one of the Society's most important assets.

Julie Bradley (Leamington Spa, Warwickshire) observed that this was her first AGM and she was most impressed with the clear, inspiring presentations. She referred to the RSPB's upgraded trading

operation which she recognised produced valuable funds for the RSPB, and expressed a little concern that it was creating a demand for products which used precious resources. She wondered whether, as a conservation organisation, the RSPB was taking this into account. The Chief Executive reassured her that while the trading operation provided valuable, unrestricted income, staff were very conscious of the sustainable use of resources and looked very carefully at the sourcing of products. Increasingly, there had been growth in recycled products and the RSPB now offered some slightly quirky, innovative products which even his teenage daughters were interested in buying. He felt the Society offered a good range of products that also helped conservation.

Pierre Jean Mare (Hendon, North London) observed that the National Trust did a roaring trade in their restaurants and tea shops, but most of the RSPB nature reserves he had visited offered no such provision. He enquired whether there were plans to establish refreshment areas at the Society's nature reserves as a potential source of income. The Chief Executive explained that the RSPB had to consider such facilities as any organisation would, in business terms. There had to be sufficient turnover and demand to justify the investment, and the Society also had to take into account the sensitive nature of some sites. But where this was possible, and where it would provide a financial return to the organisation, then it would be considered. He added that the Society was making one such investment at South Stack on Anglesey, and had also incorporated refreshment areas into some of its newer sites close to urban areas – for example, Saltholme on Tees-side and Newport Wetlands in South Wales – where there was sufficient volume of visitors to justify the investment. He certainly recognised that the end of a day out, a nice cup of tea was very welcome.

Valerie Lang (London) asked if the Society could pay as much attention as possible to making its nature reserves accessible for the less mobile. She appreciated that nature reserves did not naturally lend themselves to this, but it would be good if the RSPB could do more. The Chief Executive responded that this was an important issue for the RSPB. He was proud that visits to its reserves had topped two million this year, and wanted those visits to be available to all. Clearly there was a balance to be struck in terms of the locations, but where possible the Society wanted to ensure that physical and other barriers were removed to provide such access. The Society worked very closely with a number of groups who gave advice on the special needs of particular groups of people, and this was something it would continue to do, not simply for legal reasons, but because it brought nature into more people's lives, whatever their mobility.

Gwen Cook (London) commented that the use of the Crossrail excavated material in the development of the Wallasea Island project was a most imaginative use of the tunnelling material from under London. The RSPB got the sediments and Crossrail found somewhere to put it. She sought clarification that the project would be cash neutral and asked how the material would be transported. The Chief Executive outlined the partnership between RSPB and Crossrail, and explained that the material would be transported largely by train to the river and then on ships around the Essex coast to Wallasea. In terms of environmental impacts, the two organisations had opted for the least damaging on the environment.

The Chairman advised the meeting he was moving on to general questions about the Society's work and asked staff to respond to the question on ring-necked parakeets, raised under matters arising. The Chief Executive responded that the whole issue of invasive species was moving up the agenda and the RSPB was continuing to press the Government to take action. In the case of parakeets, there was no evidence to show that they were having a particular effect on other species but this was something that needed further work. In a sense, this was a global issue, certainly across Europe.

Sue Lees (London) quoted from the recently published report by Professor Sir John Lawton, 'Making Space for Nature' in which he had stated "that England's protected wildlife areas are not effective

enough at preserving species for various reasons, including small size and lack of connection between sites." In view of this critical report on the state of England's wildlife sites, she asked if RSPB Council would be prepared to consider spreading the mantle of RSPB support over the efforts of much smaller wildlife groups fighting to save patches of biodiversity from development, by writing expressing RSPB support for such efforts, especially when the campaigns were supported by local volunteer RSPB groups. She cited a case in point, the 11 acres of Kiln Meadow, Ipswich, used by 6,000 toads along with lesser-spotted woodpeckers, otters, water voles and so on, which was about to have more than 100 houses built on it. Professor Sir John Lawton explained that one of the key things his report highlighted was the importance of local wildlife sites. He was pleased to report that the Secretary of State for Defra, Caroline Spelman had read the report and the news from her office so far was very positive. The Chief Executive added that the RSPB had been working in partnership with other conservation organisations in response to the report, and leading up to it, and that included seeking to collaborate with organisations working at a local level. Responding to Ms Lees request to support local campaigns, he explained that where the RSPB objected to any development, it had to be prepared to do the follow through, and sometimes that could be very time demanding in terms of public enquiries. The meeting had heard earlier about plans to develop a small airfield at Lydd into a major international airport, which had finally been called in for a Public Inquiry. This was an issue he had dealt with when he first joined the RSPB staff, which gave an idea of how long and involved these issues could be, so the RSPB had to be careful about the sites it supported, because by objecting to proposals it was committing to potentially putting in a lot resources, and it simply could not cover all sites. In terms of the Kiln Meadow site, there was considerable local concern and local interest and the RSPB was providing support through its local group. While it might be appropriate to provide a letter of support, the RSPB had to be careful not to overstate its case. It was already dealing with 1,600 cases a year, primarily at national level, and sadly with so many local sites under threat around the country, the RSPB did not have the resources to engage with them all.

Clive Cohen (Barnet) observed that as the illegal shooting of birds in Malta was much improved following Malta's accession to the European Union, he wondered whether the days of confrontation were over and whether, with the adoption of a new strategy, the RSPB and/or BirdLife International could assist the Maltese shooters society in trying to contest the 'Rambo elements' through educational and conservation programmes in the field. He also suggested inviting representatives to visit RSPB reserves in the UK and thereby bridge past differences and save wasteful resources on outdated policy, however controversial. The Director, International agreed that there had been a shift in how the Maltese people reacted to some of these problems; the bulk of the Maltese population did not support the attitude of the hunters. Fortunately, the hunters remained at the extreme end of the spectrum, but a Raptor watch camp in Malta was currently documenting the continuing illegal shooting of protected birds, including honey buzzards and marsh harriers. It had proved extremely difficult in the past to engage intelligently with FKNK, the group of hunters in Malta, but he saw value in Mr Cohen's suggestion and one of the things he would be seeking when he met the European Federation of Hunters in Brussels the following week would be improved dialogue.

Iris Barton (Oxford) enquired whether the RSPB would do everything possible to stop the high-speed rail link going through the Chilterns, and join with all the other organisations, including The Wildlife Trusts whose reserves would be affected, in campaigning against the route. The Chief Executive explained that this was one of those balance issues in terms of dealing with the nation's use of energy and transport, and having to balance forms of transport that had the least impact on the environment. As yet, the environmental impact of the high-speed rail link was not wholly known, and he felt the RSPB needed to evaluate that, and then take a view. Clearly, there would be site impacts in terms of the route and these had to be addressed. But at this stage, he could only say that RSPB would be looking at those impacts, and also looking at the overall benefit of providing alternative means of transport. One of the biggest ways of shifting attitudes to travel was through the provision of better

forms of transport, and high-speed trains could be more efficient and popular. The RSPB would be assessing this over the next few months, and while it would be looking at the impact on sites it would also need to take account of transport alternatives and how an infrastructure could be developed that reduced any impact on the environment through energy consumption. A member of the audience added that people in the Chilterns were very concerned about the proposed route and the effects on the area. She appreciated the need to cut our carbon footprint and move people to more efficient forms of transport, but she was not sure the evidence was there. The Chief Executive added that the RSPB would be very concerned to see the Government rush through anything ill-considered. This proposal should be subject to an environmental impact assessment which would address all the points made, and many others. The Government had made it clear, that it was looking at its rail strategy in conjunction with aviation, and this would have to be taken into account as well.

John Davis (Harpenden) felt a lot of attention had been given to raptors and their persecution, which was fine, but people wanted to know what the RSPB was doing about the fact there were very few garden birds around at this time of year. He suspected there was a lot of movement, although he felt they were also persecuted by the grey squirrel, and requested an article in *Birds* magazine about the local movement of birds. The Director, Conservation agreed that quite a lot of work had been done on raptors, and felt members would be interested to hear that this year a piece of scientific work was published by BTO which looked at whether grey squirrels, sparrowhawks, magpies and other species might be responsible for some of the declines in garden birds and farmland birds. The study repeated the results of other recent studies, which suggested that if there were any effects, they were pretty small. He felt it was the countryside rather than gardens that was lacking in birds, and the reasons behind that were changes in farming practices. This was why we needed the Government to continue investing in wildlife friendly grants for farmers – the RSPB was very worried they maybe cut in the Comprehensive Spending Review due to be announced on October 20.

Commenting on the decline of common species of birds, such as sparrows and starlings, Linda Winsall (Eastbourne) wondered if RSPB members should be doing more to encourage and improve the urban environment for birds. There seemed to be a culture of covering every little bit of earth in gravel or woodchip, as well as covering front gardens for car parking, and she felt local councils should be encouraged to utilise any little area of spare earth as habitat for birds and other wildlife. The Chief Executive advised that the RSPB was carrying out research into the house sparrow, one of the species that people associated with urban areas, and the work was identifying the importance of the availability of insects at certain times of year. He suggested there was a lot that could be done, both in people's garden and in public open spaces. He added that the RSPB had been undertaking research into how green space benefited people as well, and in terms of access to open areas and nature there was a significant improvement in people's well being if they lived within 500 metres of green space. The Chairman added that one of the interesting consequences of the recession, was that local authorities were beginning to realise that mowing lawns to death was expensive and not good for wildlife and there had been moves in the Midlands, for example, for local authorities to stop mowing, plant trees and let the grass grow which was beneficial for wildlife. Ann Powell gave the meeting some good news by advising that near her home in Bromley, Kent, the sparrow population had risen to 32 flocks over the last two years.

Robin Jeffery (Hornchurch, Essex) referred to the manufacture of bird feeders and asked whether, in support of conservation and reducing the carbon footprint, bird feeders could be made more squirrel-proof, by making the feeding part out of aluminium, or something similar, for example, as most people were aware that a lot of the plastic content was oil-based. The Director, Marketing explained that a lot of time and effort had been expended over the years to try and squirrel-proof bird feeders. The RSPB offered a fully metal range, which were pretty indestructible, although a squirrel had managed to unhook one in her garden! She advised Mr Jeffery to talk to members of the Trading

team over lunch. Responding to an earlier comment on the sustainability of the RSPB's trading operation, she explained that the Society's aim with the majority of products, especially the big selling products like the bird food range, was to make sure it was grown in an environmentally and sustainable way. The sunflower hearts and all the seed could be traced back to where it was grown, and when grown in Europe it was transported by boat, although the Society tried to get as much as possible from the UK. All wood and paper products were FSC certified and the new range of organic chocolate was palm oil free. Also, all the profit from the trading operation went back into funding conservation work.

The Chairman drew the question session to a close and thanked members for some fascinating questions. Staff were present to talk to members about their work and answer any further questions. There was also an enquiry stand where members could fill in a question card and receive a response after the AGM.

The Chairman proposed the adoption of the Annual Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2010. This was second by Mr Robin Jeffery and carried unanimously. The Accounts were declared duly adopted.

The Chairman went on to explain that no new members of Council were being elected this year. As explained in *Birds* magazine, and advised at last year's AGM, Council had reviewed its mode of operation and following consultation with the Charity Commission had decided to reduce its size from 24 trustees to 18. The Privy Council had approved this change and as Council wished to achieve it as soon as possible, there were no trustee vacancies this year. One trustee – Professor Valerie Brown – was retiring at the AGM, having come to the end of her five-year term of office, and he thanked her for the time energy and commitment she had given the RSPB. By not replacing Professor Brown, Council would achieve the desired number of 18 trustees. However, vacancies would arise again at next year's AGM and nominations for these would be sought through *Birds* magazine in January.

4. ELECTION OF AUDITORS

The Chairman reported that the RSPB's auditors, Horwath Clark Whitehill continued to serve the Society well and Council wished to re-appoint them for the coming year. With effect from 1 October 2010, and since the AGM agenda was published in *Birds* magazine, the firm had changed its name, so the auditors would be offered for re-appointment under the new name, Crowe Clark Whitehill LLP.

Council therefore proposed the re-appointment of Crowe Clark Whitehill as the Society's auditors, this was seconded by Miss Vera Kelly and duly carried.

The Chairman declared that Crowe Clark Whitehill had been appointed the RSPB's auditors for the year 2010/11.

The Chairman then explained that the AGM for all formal and legal purposes had come to an end and the meeting would now pay tribute to some special people who, in a variety of different ways, were making a significant contribution to nature conservation.

5. PRESENTATION OF THE RSPB MEDAL

The Society's most prestigious award, the RSPB Medal, was awarded to HRH The Prince of Wales in recognition of the outstanding contribution he has made to environmental issues both at home and abroad. Giving the citation, the Chief Executive described The Prince of Wales as a staunch environmental advocate, one who had been devoting his efforts towards conservation, corporate responsibility, the sustainable use of the Earth's resources, and raising awareness of climate change long before it became an issue of global concern. He had used his personal authority for conservation to good effect with Heads of State around the world, including many issues of pressing concern to the RSPB and to BirdLife International partners. Examples included the proposed soda ash plant at Lake Natron in Tanzania, the threat from biofuels to the globally important Tana River Delta in Kenya, and the horrendous impact that the veterinary drug, Diclofenac, had had on vulture populations across much of southern Asia.

The Prince of Wales was unable to receive the Medal personally, as he was in India for the opening of the Commonwealth Games, but sent a representative – Sir Nicholas Bacon, Lord Warden of the Stannaries, for the Duchy of Cornwall – to receive it on his behalf. Sir Nicholas read a message from the Prince of Wales, in which he said it was a great honour to receive the Medal, and he was enormously touched that the RSPB had seen fit to present it to him.

6. PRESENTATION OF THE PRESIDENT'S AWARDS

The Chief Executive explained that the President's Awards enabled the Society to show its appreciation for the fabulous efforts of the RSPB's 16,000 volunteers, who were, without doubt, one of the Society's greatest assets, enabling it to achieve so much more for conservation. It was clearly not possible to recognise every one of those volunteers in person, but through the President's Awards the AGM could celebrate the endeavours and fantastic achievements of a few special people.

President's Awards were presented by Professor Sir John Lawton to: Margaret and Derek Cook, Nigel Palmer, David Redwood, John and Rose Solbé and Donna Staples. Citations were read by the Chief Executive.

7. TRIBUTE TO SIR GRAHAM WYNNE

The Chairman announced an additional item to the agenda. The Society wished to pay tribute to its former Chief Executive, Sir Graham Wynne, and was delighted that a special friend of the RSPB, the former Chairman and now Vice President of BirdLife International, Dr Jerry Bertrand was present at the AGM to do so. In paying tribute to Sir Graham, Dr Bertrand referred to the special qualities – especially vision - that made Sir Graham such an outstanding chief executive. Under his leadership, the RSPB had accomplished amazing things and was highly regarded around the world. Dr Bertrand explained how he had worked closely with Sir Graham through BirdLife International, and now regarded him as a personal friend. He was delighted to be able to acknowledge the tremendous work and achievements that Sir Graham had masterminded as chief executive of such a remarkable organisation. In responding, Sir Graham said he was honoured to have such a tribute paid by Dr Bertrand.

8. DATE OF THE NEXT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Before the meeting closed, the Chairman announced that the 119th Annual General Meeting would be held on Saturday 8th October 2011 at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, Westminster, London.