



Draft Minutes of the Twenty Sixth Annual General Meeting of the British Deer Society, a Company Limited by Guarantee, held by Zoom on 14th May 2023.

Members:

39 Members had registered their online presence and attended, 163 voted by proxy.

Society Chairman Hugh van Cutsem welcomed all to the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies were received from a number of members and noted for the records.

Deaths

George Allan Allison; Robin Archer; Michael Bland; Norman Brade; Bob Brunsdon; James Crooks; Fred Courtier; Iain Dawson; Ronald Druce; John K Fawcett; William Fernie; Ian Griffin; Terence Giulian; Stephen Harrison; Neil Hartley; Trevor Hastings; Derek Herron; Anthony Holmes; Clive Heap; John F Jackson; Jeanette Lawton; Alistair McCrae; Martin McNicholl; Mervyn Mulich; Colin Palmer; Chris Perkins; Peter Prince; David Ross; Ivan Sarahs; Brian Sim; B K Simpson; Keith Slater; Anthony Smith; Bob Smith; R G Snow; Nicholas Starkie; Simon Wade; Derek Walker; Samuel Whitbread; Richard Whiteley.

The Chairman expressed condolences to the families and friends of all concerned. He noted the recent passing of Jeanette Lawton, a Society Fellow and past BDS Vice Chair whose great passion had been education. She had led the BDS Education Committee in the 1980s and 1990s, providing an education centre at Trentham Gardens, Stoke and will be well remembered for the many show stands and events she managed. She remained a staunch supporter of her local Midlands Branch having held both Chair and Secretary roles over the years.

Minutes of the Twenty Fifth Annual General Meeting:

The company minutes had been circulated and were proposed by Morris Charlton, seconded by Simon Gibson and accepted.

Ordinary resolution in respect of the following special business of the society:

1.To authorise the holding of the AGM on the basis set out in this notice and in particular as detailed in the notes set out notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the Society's Articles of Association

Carried (Online and Proxy votes: 158 For; 0 Against; 1 Abstentions)

Ordinary Resolutions:

2 To adopt the Annual Accounts, the Directors' Report and the Independent Examination Report of the Auditors for the year ending 31st December 2022: *Carried (Online and Proxy votes: 158 For; 0 Against; 1 Abstention)*

3 To re-appoint Messrs Fletchers & Partners as Chartered Accountants to hold office (if required) until the conclusion of the next Annual General Meeting: *Carried (Proxy votes: 158 For; 0 Against; 1 Abstention)*

4 To re-elect Lord Andrew Hay as President of the Society until the next Annual General meeting:

Carried (Proxy votes: 157 For; 0 Against; 2 Abstentions)

5 To re-elect Hugh van Cutsem as Chairman of the Society until the next Annual General Meeting:

Carried (Proxy votes: 156 For; 0 Against; 3 Abstentions)

The Chairman thanked members warmly for their support.

Any Other Company Limited Business

7. Chairman's address

The Chairman reported the retirement of board members Dominic Griffith, John Bruce and Leigh Welch and in thanking them, emphasised their highly valuable and tireless work as Trustee/Directors and the reliance the society places on its volunteers.

He mentioned the planned reduction of the board size over recent years and the process now beginning to search for TDs with specific skills to help shape an energetic society to take forward into the years ahead. He referenced the areas of science, education and marketing, the necessity of good governance and the importance of looking across the Society to bring on young members.

He said that the recent England Deer Management Consultation would have a huge impact on deer within the country. Forestry Commission (FC) had through Defra put their recommendations to government and results were awaited. Deer were firmly in the spotlight. Learning from Scotland, it would be better to work with government to ensure deer welfare is not compromised. BDS had been heavily involved in conversations with FC and others within the sector, whether the advice would be heeded, they would wait to see.

The Chairman believed that given our membership and interaction with deer across the country, everyone had a role to play in achieving a vibrant and healthy balanced deer population. We must play a bigger role in collecting data, particularly at landscape scale. This was vital as data can win arguments. Looking at the massive government backed tree planting initiatives, implementing good management plans would be essential so deer are not blamed. There will be a rapidly growing market for our wild venison, a phenomenally important food source, which must be managed to avoid deer being culled and left on the hillside. We need more focus on building local markets and educating in how to cook venison.

8. CEO's Report

David McAuley referred to the year's highlights which were well laid out in the easy-to-follow Annual Review, which illustrated the year's work. He thanked the team for its production.

Last year we had said goodbye to staff members Annie Nadin and Glyn Ingram. We were now building for the future, with different types of proactive roles and had welcomed Charlotte Corcoran and James Scott. Shortly Andrea Barden would be joining to focus on marketing and fundraising.

2023 had proved very challenging for charities generally, with the war in Ukraine, cost of living and interest rate rises generally affecting giving.

In early March, a small planning team of BDS members, branch officials, board and selected people from HO had met and distilled our meaning as: *"We want to educate and inspire everyone about deer in their environment"*. This would be accomplished by building (physically and virtually) resource centres to focus on training (a second distance learning package), best practice events involving branches at local level, policy and external affairs, online resources, data collection and research.

He noted that a new natural history curriculum for schools would be due for launch in 2025 bringing the opportunity to develop an educational programme for teachers, to help deliver GCSE. He said BDS must take a lead and build an educational programme.

BDS is also currently looking at student and professional membership with a supporter level for regular giving and have circulated surveys as part of the work. We need to attract more young people into countryside membership and keep building partnerships. Key challenges are costs and funding.

Close of formal part of the AGM.

Announcements

The Chairman announced the following awards:

1) Jim Taylor Page Trophy

For award to Iain Semple of Central Scotland Branch for his stalwart committee work as both Branch and Scottish Area Council Secretary for a significant number of years, coordinating meetings, minutes and events before standing down.

2) Fellowship of the Society

John Bruce

Considerable and generous input for many years had been given by Johnnie, not least as BDS Chair of Scottish Council and ex officio Trustee/Director for 18 years, during which period he also acted at one time, as Chairman of Central Scotland Branch. His home at Balmanno provided a welcoming venue for numerous best practice events, training, range days and council meetings.

Early on in his tenure, Johnnie also took on the role of Scottish Secretary, working tirelessly for BDS north of the border, striving to position BDS to be able to influence government bodies in deer welfare matters. He coordinated BDS responses to numerous Scottish consultations, networked and warmly welcomed all to the BDS stand at Scottish Game Fairs and events.

A specific interest had seen him as a passionate member of the BDS Science and Research Committee, where he has enthusiastically participated, assisting and monitoring BDS Scottish based university research projects. He pushed for early dissemination of news and publication of advice on Chronic Wasting Disease in deer, well before it was on the radar of many people. In 2018, he was responsible for a two-day science-based seminar and AGM in Edinburgh, which attracted a range of speakers and an audience of government officials, NGOs and industry in addition to BDS members.

His broad ranging interests had also seen him championing survey work, Deer Vehicle Collisions, trunk road advisory work, Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime and additionally being a key member on a number of Scottish industry working groups.

Dominic Griffith

Dominic served as a Trustee/Director for 15 years, additionally undertaking a key role as Vice Chair for the last three Society Chairmen, so offering support in many disciplines.

A professional Deer Manager, consultant and writer of deer books, Dominic had also been closely involved with BDS training for over 30 years, giving generous input and invaluable knowledge, initially at the Training Committee and subsequently within BDS Training Advisory groups. His commitment to training over many years helped the Society to continue developing new initiatives within a structured training programme.

His early involvement was as coordinator of the Lowland Deer Management Course, which was run at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester, before being instrumental in the formulation of the BDS Deer Management Course which he subsequently managed. He still instructs on this course and on others, being a Qualified Assessor, Internal Verifier and LANTRA Qualified Trainer.

He acted for a number of years as the Society's representative director of Deer Initiative Ltd, vigorously defending the interests of Britain's deer against a consensus of attitudes which could on occasion seem negative, something which he continues to champion in other spheres today. He also represents the BDS on the DMQ board, ensuring a balanced view of assessment procedure is maintained.

In recent years Dominic also played an invaluable part within the BDS Fundraising team, organising London Dinners and sourcing auction lots and bidders for our fundraising auctions. The BDS Board needs a wide range of skills to ensure the functions of the Society.

Dominic's deep understanding of deer and their management at a technical level had been invaluable. His working experience of the management of all species of deer in the UK, and a wider understanding of the European systems had helped ensure that BDS continues to deliver sound advice in its primary function of ensuring the long-term welfare of deer.

The Chairman said he felt it was sad when people such as Johnnie and Dominic retired from the board, but he was reassured that we could continue to draw on their experience and they would help secure leading people for the future.

Questions

Educational package - Mike Attenborough Cox referred to the BDS schools' educational package which had been proposed some years previously and asked whether this would now be going forward. Morris Charlton responded that the package had been produced and made available and the information emailed to all schools, however it had coincided with shifting website platforms and there had been a lack of resource at that time to follow through satisfactorily at branch level.

The CEO added that he was currently writing a paper to fund an educator or intern to develop suitable material up to GCSE level so a programme would now be progressed. Simon Gibson added that this must be developed professionally and in line with the curriculum in order to gain government recognition. Stewart Blair offered his assistance with a prospectus or route into qualifications if considering similar in Scotland. He was currently working with schools and delivering wildlife management qualifications through the University of the Highlands and Islands.

Membership

Asked about membership numbers, the CEO said a few members had cancelled DDs, which it was believed was due to cost of living. Numbers had dropped slightly and were currently around 5,400. A big drive on membership was poised to

start and he had hopes to drive membership up to 10,000 which would be made up of a broader community, hence the need for more education and photography.

Rosemary Bethell felt there was a problem in that the perception of many is that BDS is only interested in killing deer. The difficulty was to get others to understand that our interest is the love of deer and training to do to our best for them. We need to better inform the wider public that deer need to be managed, with welfare paramount. The Chairman agreed that this was a challenging position, in that we must attract those who have a love of seeing deer and get them to understand the need to also manage deer, so appealing to all comers. The challenge was to get people to accept the balancing act.

Discussing cost, Judy Richardson suggested that those ending their membership might be asked for a donation. Joint members could receive a single copy of *Deer* or circulate spare copies. The CEO said that moving forward they were looking at a digital version and its future. However, there would still be a lot of costs involved producing the copy itself. John Darbyshire wondered whether a supporters' group might be the answer for those currently not members who look at *Digital Deer* and read *Deerbytes*. The CEO felt we must educate ourselves that this is a Charity which should not be expected to deliver perks, as membership income was for funding the welfare of the deer themselves.

Asking about insurance, David Boyson was informed that it had become unaffordable, so BDS had ceased offering it. The CEO added that only around 1,300 members had taken up the insurance and it was not cost effective.

Peter Robson was told that family membership was available. The CEO also added there was now an online option for members to pay their membership by monthly DD, plus a facility to make monthly donations to the Society.

Venison

Graham Downing referred to the programme of tree planting, the need to cull and have a better market for venison, coupled with the need for low-cost nutrition and activity of food banks. He felt there must be a huge opportunity for BDS to find a way to route food to these banks or create a national system to ensure venison reached a good home and provided a valuable resource.

The Chairman noted that he had spent time talking to Approved Game Handling Establishments (AGHEs) about possibilities and limitations. The stumbling blocks appeared to be firstly, the quality of carcase required which should be lead free, plus there was a need for stalkers to appreciate that once culled, this became a food product. So, a carcase could often be deemed as unfit due to mishandling. Secondly, logistics were an issue. The cull was countrywide and the Country Food Trust would be delighted to receive venison. However, there were currently impediments regarding sufficient centralised collection areas and larder storage etc. The launch of the Quality Assured Wild Venison Scheme was promising but it needed supermarket involvement and education of the public. The CEO agreed, adding that the two main food charities Fair Share and Country Food Trust would take processed and cooked meat to the end customer, but they had impeccable track and trace systems. BDS would continue to work on this with the Quality Assured Wild Venison Scheme.

Chairman's closing remarks

The Chairman said that in our 60th Anniversary year, BDS must focus on increasing membership and if all our members could recruit just one member, we would flourish. He reminded all to support the Summer Internet Auction which was a large part of our fundraising campaign. He thanked all for joining and the HO staff for their tireless work, noting that a huge amount of activity was invisible to members. The new systems brought in over recent years, enabled a far better organisational capacity and would provide the platform to progress new initiatives and our growing team.

The Chairman ended by thanking all for attending the meeting.

