

## **Minutes of Annual General Meeting for North West branch of RSB held on 18 November 2023 at University of Central Lancashire**

**Introduction and welcome** – by David Wareing and Michael Clapham. As our Chairman for the past year has now resigned and now resides in Hull, Michael gave a brief welcome and invited attendees to introduce themselves.

**Apologies for absence** – Alejandro Lopez, Nigel Brown.

**Minutes from the previous AGM** – Proposed as correct by Alan Bedford, seconded by Geoff Holroyd.

**Review of committee roles** – Andy Richardson has had to resign as Chair due to relocation to Hull having a new job. Jean Wilson proposed that David Wareing should take the role of Chair, Elisabeth Green seconded. Unanimously voted in. Jean Wilson and Michael Clapham would support him as joint Vice- chairs, but for this year only, this was proposed by David Wareing seconded by Alan Bedford and unanimously voted in.

Geoff Holroyd was proposed by Jean Wilson to be re-elected as Treasurer, and seconded by David Wareing, this was unanimously voted by members.

Elisabeth Green was proposed by Alan Bedford to be re-elected as Secretary, and seconded by Philip Day, this was unanimously voted by members.

**Elect new committee members** – Linda Martin proposed by Janet Preece, seconded by Elisabeth Green.

Wesley Ward proposed by David Wareing, seconded by Alan Bedford.

Alejandro Perdomo Lopez proposed by David Wareing, seconded by Alan Bedford.

Philip Day, Janet Preece, Alan Bedford reelected en bloc.

Daisy Taylor and Gilbert N Chofong will attend a committee meeting or two in order to see what is involved before they commit. Gilbert is still based in Germany but hoping to move to the UK soon.

**Chairman's report** – As Andy is no longer Chairman and David has just taken on the role of Chair, he has reviewed the events of the past year.

21/01/23 GIS Training day at Wyre Estuary Country Park by Dr. Andy Richardson

This was a fully subscribed and informative event attended by members from all over the North West.

22/03/23 A fish eye's view of Loch Sunart by Mark Woombs at the Manchester Sea Life Centre.

This evening event was well attended and kicked off with full access to the Manchester Sea Life centre and all it had to offer from starfish to sharks and seahorses to turtles, with centre staff keen to answer any questions on the exhibits. This was followed by a convivial buffet reception with drinks and a wide range of cheeses and freshly cut bread sticks.

The main event followed with a short trip to the lecture theatre through the Lego centre. Here Dr Mark Woombs took us on an underwater photographic journey through Loch Sunart, a 19 mile long sea loch on the west coast of Scotland. This loch is a 'Marine protected Area' or MPA and as Mark explained it has many rare and unique species, for example the Serpulid tube worm (*Sepula vermicularis*), which Mark photographed in Loch Teacuis a small side loch off Loch Sunart. The very presence of this rare species is one of reasons why Loch Sunart is classified as an MPA. Another species leading to this designation is the Celtic feather star (*Leptometra celtica*), this species is usually found at over 100m depth but in Loch Sunart it occurs as shallow as 12m. As Mark explained this may be due to the exceptionally sheltered environment afforded by this long sea loch which may mimic the tranquillity of much deeper waters.

The whole lecture was richly illustrated throughout with Mark's photographs taken on his diving excursions to the loch, we were all truly awed by the stunningly detailed and colourful, intimate shots, as shown below.

22/04/23 Small mammals ecology day- Wyre Estuary Country park

The interview, reported in the spring issue of *The Biologist* with Tim Sparks and Kate Lewthwaite, emphasised the importance of recording the appearance of species on the calendar, phenology. In 2015 the RSB North Western branch instigated the first BioBlitz at the Wyre Estuary Country Park and have taken the lead role in the subsequent June BioBlitzes.

As the popularity and increasing need to expand the areas of interest has increased, the branch has been preparing for BioBlitz 2024. In order to ensure sufficient numbers of recorders we have organised Ecology days that are led by recognised experts in their particular field.

In 2022, the focus was on Invertebrate Orders, and this year we have looked at GIS, plants and vertebrate groups. In April, Dr Alan and Hilary Bedford shared their enthusiasm and knowledge relating to small mammals. It was an early start for the 12 trainees as the traps had been set the evening before and the weather was damp and on the cool side, therefore early release was important for survival of the captured rodents who were identified, sexed and weighed before being returned to their runway.

A classroom session followed detailing the types of traps available, pre-baiting, bait options, positioning, runways, thermal range and the species of small mammals that are likely to be recorded as well as how to identify and estimate populations. Our methods on the day captured mice, voles and shrews. However, Alan also demonstrated the use of video cameras in photographing larger mammals such as rats, hedgehogs, otters, badgers and foxes.

Hopefully, we now have a band of Biologists who can join the recording teams for the fourth BioBlitz to be held on June 14th and 15th 2023, the North Western branch welcomes volunteers with expertise from other branches who would like to join us on this exciting and important project.

10/06/23 Botany Day led by David Earl was a full day of identification and recording of plants.

28/06/23 Annual Year 12 Schools Quiz – Myerscough College, Bilsborrow

After last year's successful Year 12 Schools' Quiz, Myerscough College were delighted to act as hosts again, a fine venue for the 2023 biology challenge. Teams of four year 12 students from schools all over the North West of England and one school from the white rose county over the Pennines, took on ten sets of biology-based questions.

Each challenge lasting 15 - 20 minutes was devised by the North Western branch committee members, as well as staff at Myerscough College, SeaLife Blackpool and the Wyre Rivers Trust. The subject matter was engaging and testing, students having to apply their biological knowledge and think outside the curriculum 'box'. Subject matter included pharmaceuticals freshwater quality index, owl pellet dissection, sharks, plant lives, bees, endangered species and African wildlife.

Each attendee received a certificate of attendance and a commemorative mug, members of the top four teams were presented with book prizes and the winning school received a quality Brunel microscope. We were

fortunate to have the RSB Regional Membership Officer, Christopher Longmore attend the Quiz and present the prizes to the winning teams. The results were very close, each question was awarded a percentage mark.

Results: 1st: Stonyhurst College 773. 2nd: Wirral grammar School for Girls 763. 3rd: Hutton 6th Form College 756. 4th: St Ambrose College 751. Xaverian College deserve a mention scoring 750.

23/07/23 The Nocturnal World of Bats and Moths – Charlie Pass and Dave McGrath Wyre Estuary Country Park

After two days of torrential rain, the clouds finally departed enabling 18 participants and organisers to enjoy an evening of discovery!

The company gathered in the Riverside Room and the evening began with an informative talk by Charlie Pass, conservation and engagement officer for The Wyre Rivers Trust. Charlie's illustrated presentation taught us about bats, their biology, and behaviour - in particularly those we would be likely to encounter that evening.

Following Charlie's talk Dave McGrath, retired environmental officer for Blackpool Council, demonstrated how to set up a moth trap in the outdoor classroom. He explained about the types of lamps used and how to collect specimens for identification.

As it grew dark, we set off to walk along the path between salt marsh and trees. Charlie handed out at least one bat detector to each pair of attendees and to everyone's delight, the bats were out. We spent a good hour watching and listening, picking up their clicks on the bat detectors. Pipistrelle, Noctule and Brown Long-eared bats were the local residents.

When we returned to base, Dave switched on the lamp to lure the moths to the trap and specimen jars were used to hold the moths to enable identification. Thoroughly engrossed in the process, it was nearly midnight before we said goodnight to bats, moths and naturalists!

18/10/23 Plankton with Mark Woomb's and Barry Kaye at the Sea Life Centre Blackpool. Another fascinating and informative talk on Phytoplankton and Zooplankton with superb photographs. Many of these photographs have been used to publish a calendar for 2024, Jean Wilson can be contacted for orders.

Alan Bedford thanked Jean Wilson and Elisabeth Green for the catering at most of the above events.

#### Treasurers report – Geoff Holroyd

Financial Report 2020-22 and 2021-23

##### Operating Account

Account balance as at 30 September 2022 was £133.51 in November 2022 we received £1176.07 from Central to give a starting balance for the year (starting October 2022) of £1250.00 which is our annual allocation.

Annual Allocation	£ 1250.00
Additional (Event) Funding	£ 500.00
Event income	£ 75.00

## Various ecology keys and guides

**Event reports** – Jean Wilson - Events for the year covered by David's report above

**Future events** - The Schools Quiz at Myerscough College and the Bioblitz at Wyre Estuary Country Park will both be held in June, the latter on the 14 and 15 June.

A Bioblitz has been held every 3 years at Wyre Estuary Country Park, the last one being in 2021. All of our Ecology Events, mainly organised by Alan and Hilary Bedford, aim towards training people to participate in identification of species for the Bioblitz. The training days and Bioblitz also promote community engagement in the Wyre area. The Friday is attended by schools and the Saturday is open to the general public. The report from the last Bioblitz was distributed to attendees, Jean stressed that the most important function of the Bioblitz is the identification and recording survey of species found.

Other suggestions include a fungal foray, tree planting with Wyre Rivers Trust and pub lunch, a brewery tour, a visit to Hutton Roof, and an event at SeaLife Centre, all to be finalised.

Philip Day will enquire if we can get involved in the 200th anniversary of the University of Manchester.

Ideas for events geographically further afield are welcome from members.

**AOB** – Jacqui Piner attended a Fellows lunch last week. Feedback is given to HQ via this event but it is restricted to Fellows. Jean, who also attended, suggested each Fellow be accompanied by another member for more views to be heard.

Gilbert Chofong is an Ambassador for RSB. He is applying for (non RSB) funding to train mainly African researchers, in order to promote diversity. He has recently returned from Benin to recruit. He is at present based in Germany but if possible will attend a future committee meeting and keep in touch.

Professor Nigel Brown was not able to attend this meeting but sent a report -

#### **Points for Northern AGM**

1. This item is let you know what is happening across the RSB to learn about any issues you wish to raise.
2. The RSB will be moving towards being a virtual organisation with no major office space on or before August 2025, allowing considerable savings to be made and staff to be recruited from around the country.
3. Staff are maintaining a 4-day working week, with different staff taking Monday or Friday as an extended weekend.
4. We are looking at the structure of our branches and the requirements for a branch. There has just been a survey of branch committees, and a decision will be made on any changes to the future structure and governance of branches.

5. We wish to increase membership overall and also to improve the gender balance, particularly at Fellows and Members levels, where there are more men than women. Branches are crucial in increasing membership and the membership team was expanded to help in this.
6. We would also like to see good engagement with local schools and universities; and the relaunch the Ambassador scheme should help with this. If anyone wants to volunteer as an Ambassador for the RSB, they can see the links on the RSB website: <https://www.rsb.org.uk/membership/individual-membership/rsb-ambassadors> and the call for new ambassadors is at: <https://my.rsb.org.uk/services.php?section=jobs&jobid=104>
7. Council has looked at our strategic priorities over the next 5 years. This would extend the 3-year Vision Statement and Strategy 2022-2024, which is an evolution of the former plan rather than a revolution. We are keen that Branches are involved in its delivery as the Voice of Biology. If you have not seen and noted the current plan, the link is: [https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/RSB\\_Plan\\_2022-2024\\_.pdf](https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/RSB_Plan_2022-2024_.pdf)
8. There are several member benefits, which include the 25% discount on Oxford biology Primers and our joint journal "Emerging topics in Life Sciences", as well as access to training courses. A list of benefits is given on the website at: <https://www.rsb.org.uk/membership/individual-membership/membership-benefits>
9. There is also a new list of perks which can be seen by logging into *mySociety* at <https://www.rsbperks.org.uk/a/>
10. If anyone has ideas for new member benefits or resources they would value, please let the Committee know and relay this to Nigel Brown ([nigel.brown@ed.ac.uk](mailto:nigel.brown@ed.ac.uk)).
11. Anything else you wish to feed back to Council can also be done through Nigel or the Committee.

The Meeting closed at approximately 12.15

19 attended