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**42nd Annual General Meeting**

**Minutes**

The AGM was held at 14:45 on Monday 19th December 2022 in the Pentland Suite, Edinburgh International Conference Centre, The Exchange, 150 Morrison St, Edinburgh EH3 8EE, United Kingdom and as a videoconference.

187 members of the British Ecological Society attended the meeting in person.

**1. Minutes of the Past AGM**  
The minutes of the 41th AGM held on Monday 13th December 2021 in Auditorium 1B, The ACC Liverpool, Kings Dock, Liverpool Waterfront, L3 4FP were presented to the meeting.

The motion to approve the minutes was proposed by R. Brooker, seconded by T. Ezard, and unanimously accepted.

**2. The new BES Strategic Plan**

Hazel Norman (BES CEO) and Tom Ezard (BES Hon. Treasurer) presented the new ambitious strategy for the BES for 2023 – 2025 and how we will deliver on our vision of nature and people thriving in a world inspired by ecology. The new plan, developed with input from BES Committees, members and staff, has 5 major goals:

1. Advance ecological science to deepen our understanding of the living world

2. Put ecology at the heart of decision-making for a sustainable planet

3. Nurture a growing community that is strong, equitable and collaborative

4. Celebrate the wonder of ecology to inspire action and change

5. Become more sustainable to enable our long-term future, and lead the way in best practice

Dr Norman explained some of the key ways in which the BES would deliver these goals and Dr Ezard provided a 3 year budget which meant an investment from BES reserves of £2.5m over the period.

The new plan is available on the BES website and will provide a framework for BES Committees and staff over the coming years.

**3. The Future of Ecological Research in the UK**

Yadvinder Malhi told the meeting about a project where the BES has brought the ecological community together to develop and present a united voice on the future challenges for ecology and how they can best be met.

During the consultation process we have sought to identify the priorities for ecological research conducted in the UK over the coming decades. The initiative involved i) a community-wide consultation that helped to understand the research landscape; ii) a two-day workshop with a focus group spanning academic researchers, practitioners, funders, and government stakeholders from all four devolved nations; iii) a wider consultation at the current Annual Meeting; and iv) iterative inputs from a Scientific Steering Committee. The focus was on ecological research within the UK, though many of the outcomes apply to international ecological research. He noted that whilst the UK plays an important role in international ecological research, that falls outside the remit of this particular report.

The work has identified 5 main themes:

* Novel Futures
* Living Laboratories
* Dynamic Ecosystems
* Wholescapes
* Frontiers of Discovery

The output will be a report published in the first half of 2023 which will aim to influence funders and ecologists. Professor Yadvinder encouraged the audience to contribute to the work by taking part in the workshop being held the next day at the Annual Meeting.

**4. Accounts**   
Dr Ezard presented the Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2021 which had been submitted to Companies House. The 2021 accounts had a surplus of £2m, of which the majority is from the investment portfolio and further extra surplus from not running in-person meetings until December. Excluding investments, the surplus is around 2% higher than budget. Haysmacintyre, the Society auditors were satisfied with ongoing improvements to control measures and reported a clean audit. The motion to approve the accounts was proposed by K. Kirby, seconded by A. Beckerman and unanimously accepted.

**5. The Reports of the Treasurer and the Auditors**

Dr Ezard presented his report. He noted that in the current financial year, the BES is running a deficit of almost £1m, which is overwhelmingly due to fluctuations in the investment portfolios. The overall benchmark for 2022 performance is a deficit of ~7.7%, while our two portfolios are running at -6.3% and -12.2% to mid-November.

We are currently unusually cash-rich, but this was a decision taken by the BES Finance Committee and Board of Trustees last year given expected volatility and the need to hold funds for the transition of *Methods in Ecology and Evolution* to an open access model. With interest rates rising again, the Finance Committee will look more frequently at fixed-rate, no fee options for cash holdings over the next 3 years.

This does suggest that one of the goals of mitigating risk by embedding different decision-making processes through different fund managers is being realised. Looking forward, this also builds in flexibility for how we might alter the mandates given to these firms to deliver the new Strategic Plan.

**6. The Appointment of the Auditors for 2022 and the Auditor's remuneration**

The motion to delegate to the Board of Trustees the appointment of the auditors for 2022 and to agree their remuneration was proposed by M. Emmerson, seconded by T. Coulson and approved unanimously.

**7. The report of the Honorary Secretary**

Professor Rob Brooker presented his report on the activities of the Society for 2022.

*External Affairs Team – led by Karen Devine*

Green Recovery challenge fund:  The BES Education team secured £250,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund’s Green Recovery Challenge and throughout has been working with 50 primary schools in the northeast of England to deliver green transformations of schools grounds, getting kids outside and training up both teachers and volunteer members in ecological education. Sammy Mason and Alexa Roditi, supporting 6 internships and over 50 BES member volunteers have done a great job, meeting and talking to over a thousand children this year

Protected areas report:  The Policy Team delivered their report on Protected Areas in April this year with significant input from our members volunteering their expertise and time as authors. The impact of that report continues and is still being recorded but it is a significant step change for the BES in growing our collaborations across the UK governments, statutory and non-statutory bodies.

*Society Programmes team – led by Jonathan Wood*

Sold out Annual Meeting and exhibition: For the first time ever, we sold out the venue of a BES Annual Meeting, having to close registration for in-person attendance on the earlybird deadline day. We have also sold every spot in the exhibition. That’s testament to a number of things: the quality of the speakers and presentations, the breadth of ecology represented here, and the welcoming and inclusive nature of the BES. However, it wouldn’t be the same conference or be as successful without the hard work of the events team over the whole year leading up to it.

Membership growth: You are all members of a Society that is growing and ever more international. We now have well over 7,000 members in around 120 countries worldwide. That’s a 40% increase in numbers in the past four years, including through all the uncertainty of the pandemic.

The Membership team manage this work to attract and retain people through all that the Society offers its members. And they have plans that should see us continue this rate of growth into the future. So if you’re enjoying being part of this conference and this Society, tell your friends and colleagues and encourage them to join too.

*Publications Team – led by Andrea Baier*

The BES publications portfolio continues to perform strongly in a world where the framework for academic publishing is rapidly changing.

MEE flip: Earlier this year, the Board agreed to transitioning *Methods in Ecology and Evolution* to a fully gold Open Access journal as of January 2023. The transition is taking place in two steps:

* All papers that have been submitted to the journal from early July 2022 will be open access on publication.
* From 1 January 2023 the paywall will be removed from all existing content too.

The journal already published a high proportion of OA articles because many authors choose to share their methods as widely as possible. With the journal now becoming fully open access, everyone around the world who is designing their next set of experiments will be able to consider the new and improved methodologies published in the journal.

People and Nature: Our second youngest journal, the interdisciplinary journal *People and Nature* received its first Impact Factor in June this year, a little more than 3 years after it published its 1st issue in March 2019. Being considered for indexing and getting an IF are important milestones for any new journal – it signals that the journal is meeting certain quality criteria and makes more potential authors aware of the journal. This is of course particularly important for an interdisciplinary journal like People and Nature that is looking for authors who do not typically publish in ecology journals.

*Internal personnel and other operational issues*

Now looking to some of the internal management activities if the Society, which come under the purview of the HR team and the Personnel Committee. Amongst the issues that we’ve been working on, some of which will no doubt be familiar to many of you in your workplaces, are:

* Returning to the workplace and the role of in-person meetings post Covid. This is obviously high on the agenda, and we’re all feeling our way here and different individuals have difference needs and desires. We’re in a process of ongoing dialogue with staff to find the balance here which matches the needs of the Society and individual staff members.
* Linked to the post-covid work place changes we have been looking closely at staff turnover and retention, and the cost of living, and have been working hard to improve our attractiveness as an employer and to retain skills and talent.
* Further changes in staffing will come out of the Strategic Plan, with new recruitment in key strategic areas; we are doing this in a considered way because we recognise the need to marry new recruitment with financial caution.

*And finally some thankyous*

This is my first year in the Hon Sec role; I would like to pass on my thanks to Adam Vanbergen from whom I took over. Adam did an excellent job as Hon Sec and they were big metaphorical boots to fill; I am grateful for the work he put in to make sure the hand-over process was a smooth one. I am also very grateful for the support of Benjamin Hunt and the rest of the HR/admin team for their support while I’ve been getting up to speed.

A general but very substantial thanks is due to all of the Society’s staff for their excellent ongoing work which means we have a vibrant, thriving organisation which has managed to weather the storms of Covid and come out the other side in such good shape, and ready to tackle the new challenges and opportunities arising from the strategic plan.

And finally a huge thankyou to everyone who supports the BES with their time and expertise; our members and volunteers are essential to everything we do!  As I’m sure you are aware so much of what we do simply wouldn’t be possible without you.

**8. To Elect Members of the Board of Trustees**

Through the online ballot BES Members voted for the roles of President Elect, Vice President, Honorary Treasurer, Chair of Policy Committee, Chair of Publications Committee and an Ordinary Member of the Board as existing post holders come to the end of their term of office in December 2022. The results of the online ballot were as follows:

President Elect – Bridget Emmett, elected with 99% of the votes for

Vice President – Tim Coulson, elected with 97% of the votes for

Honorary Treasurer – Markus Eichhorn, elected with 98% of the votes for

Chair of Policy Committee – Rick Stafford, elected with 99% of the votes for

Chair of Publications Committee – Rob Freckleton, elected with 98% of the votes for Ordinary Member of the Board – Thorunn Helgason, elected with 99% of the votes for

A total of 1,062 votes were cast by BES members.

**9. Any Other Business**

There was no other business tabled in writing to the Honorary Secretary in advance so the meeting was closed.