

To Chairs of all Members Centres (Copies to all staff and all members of Council)

This bulletin covers the period July to September 2011 inclusive

Introduction

In the last bulletin I referred to the effect that a changing political landscape was almost bound to have on the Wildlife Trust movement. This has manifested itself through a full scale governance review by RSWT, which was likely to happen anyway but which now assumes even greater relevance. The main changes will be a reduction in the number and size of most committees (with the merger or disbandment of some sub-committees) and the formation of a grouping of England-only trusts, to be called The Wildlife Trusts England (TWTE) which matches a similar collective in Wales called Wildlife Trusts Wales (WTW) and which, along with SWT and Ulster WT, completes the set of country representation within RSWT. This new TWTE collective reflects the increased political differences between the home nations and the growing sense of identity in England and will enable proper representation from England on the Countries Committee resulting in a much better balance. The implications in all this for Scotland are slight as we will retain our places on the full Council (me), the Strategic Development and Research Committee (David Grundy) and the Countries Committee (Me and Simon Milne). I will have the honour of presenting this change to the RSWT AGM in November on behalf of the trustees and I will report back to you next time.

Conservation Committee

The Conservation Committee met at Falls of Clyde on 9th August. The discussion items included a look at the second draft of our Peat and Horticulture Policy, a debate surrounding a new policy document on our Public Affairs Strategy and a briefing on the developing draft of the 5 Year Plan. We then received reports on the IUCN UK Committee Peatland Programme, quarter 1 of year 5 of the Operational Plan and the Consultation Log.

Members Centres

I have been unable to do much in the way of MC visits this summer but in the months ahead I plan to visit at least four, including presenting talks at some of them. Furthermore Jean Barr has a comprehensive programme of visits at the planning stage so we hope nobody will feel left out.

Council

On 1st September the Council met at the offices of our legal advisers Morton Fraser. Items covered included the Operational Plan, Risk Management, the use of unrestricted funds, the 5 Year Plan, the policies on the use of lowland peat in horticulture and public affairs (following their scrutiny by Conservation Committee on 9th August, mentioned above), a review of Council Standing Orders, Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels, the delivery of practical conservation work, and the proposed hydro electric scheme at Coigach.

AGM and Members Day in Dundee

It is appropriate to make a brief mention of the occasion for the benefit of those of you who were unable to make it. The morning got off to an inspirational start with a presentation from Peter Cairns whose stunning images, some with accompanying music, had us spellbound. Syd House then treated us to an introduction to Scotland's National Tree Collection and the morning ended with a lively question and answer session featuring a panel of experts including the speakers plus, Jonny Hughes, Simon Milne and our young ambassador Sam Cairns. In the afternoon the local Members Centre gave a presentation on their work and then we heard from the team of teacher-naturalists from Montrose Basin.

The day finished with the AGM and a final question and answer session. This year's AGM marked the beginning of my fourth year in office. It also marked the election to Council for the first time of Prof John Harwood and Robin Harper and I look forward to working with them both. David Houston and John Sheldon were re-elected for a second term and the rest of the Council remained unchanged.

This year's venue "The Space" in Dundee was well suited to the purpose and we are already on the lookout for something similar in the Perth area for the 2012 event. We have asked Simon King, well known to you all as a wildlife TV presenter and as President of the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts, to give the keynote address and we have our fingers crossed that he has that day free in his very full diary.

Looking Ahead

We are entering a difficult financial period due to the continuing bleak economic outlook. Of particular concern to many of you is the impact of the changes to government training schemes for the unemployed on our Conservation Teams. Senior staff are working hard at assessing the facts and options as we know them and drawing on the results of the recent consultation among Members Centres and others. I am very grateful to those who responded. Council will be looking at this again in December.

Another area of uncertainty is the future of the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels project which is nearing the end of its initial three year term but which we would very much like to continue. Once again funding is the stumbling block but we are working on that and as always we will report back.

The future of the wild beavers in the Tay has still to be decided by the Environment Minister and although SWT has no direct responsibility for those animals there are implications in the Minister's decision for the Knapdale Trial and for our Members Centres in Perthshire and Angus.

My next bulletin is due in January, by which time the picture on some of these issues will be a little clearer. In the meantime it remains for me to wish you all a safe and warm winter.

Allan Bantick
Chairman of Council
Scottish Wildlife Trust