

(Member of South West Rivers Association)

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 18th March 2022
Held at the Hartnoll Hotel, Bolham at 1830hrs.

MINUTES

- 1. Welcome and apologies for absence:** The Chairman welcomed the members and guests present. There were 15 apologies and 45 attended.
- 2. Minutes and matters arising from the AGM held on 19th October 2021:** There were no matters raised and the minutes were signed.
- 3. Election of Officers and Committee:** Fred Leach and David Rice were duly re-elected unopposed. Iain Stewart Hunter and Mark Thomasin-Foster were elected to the posts of Treasure and Secretary respectively.
- 4. Committee's Activities:** The Chairman began his report by thanking our main AGM Sponsor Jackson Stops and noted that they were represented by Richard Addington and Michael Clark. He continued by welcoming the other guests and he noted that the Hartnoll Hotel again kindly provided the room free of charge. He thanked the Committee, Lance Nicholson for Fish the Exe, Tom Arthur for his website work, David Rice for running the on-line auction which raised £3,844 and the Treasurer for all his membership and treasury work. The Chairman noted that the season had again been dry with low river flow but on the last day of the season when flows increased fish were caught. Nick May (EA) said he thought the salmon catch would be a bit over 100. The Chairman reminded members to report their catches as the EA determine the status of the river on these figures. The Exe is now defined as "at risk". He continued by mentioning that RETA was working up a GIS system in conjunction with WRT and assisted by Alistair Langford. He finished his report by noting the absence of Phil Turnbull the WRT seconded River Exe Officer who had to miss the meeting on compassionate grounds and Roger Furniss who was ill both of whom we owe many thanks for their work on behalf of RETA and the river.
- 5. Finances and approval of accounts:** The Treasurer presented the annual accounts. He explained that funds were divided between those held by RETA and those held by WRT but ring fenced for RETA. In 2021 membership was 268 (highest ever recorded) but the current roll call was 228 with several subscriptions to be chased. He said Grayling fishing through Fish the Exe had increased membership with Lance Nicholson collecting £915 in tickets. Lance Nicholson had donated their admin charge most generously to RETA. There was an increase in promotional cost because of the rebuilding of the website and for marketing material for SEW. With £25,000 transferred from RETA funds to the SEW appeal fund the annual account showed a deficit of £14,500. The auction held on-line raising £3,844 which will be transferred to the SEW fund. The SEW target being £200,000 with current donations £20,420 and a further £16,00 pledged over the four year term of the appeal, The treasurer thanked those donors and urged members to donate. Charles Tweedie a RETA member had donated his large stock of wader hangers in the expectancy that members will purchase and the proceeds donated to the SEW Fund. The Treasurer's report and accounts were accepted.

6. RETA's and SWRA's Work Programmes: In Roger Furniss absence reports on RETA's work were given by:-

Adrian Dowding (WRT) outlined the juvenile survey work, 98 sites monitored or salmon, the Barle remains the main cradle, Upper Exe fair, Haddeo interesting Quarme nil, Culme and mid river poor. For trout overall 20/21 disappointing, Barle and Upper Exe poor, Haddeo good above Bury, Pulham good, Quarme fair. Iain Stewart Hunter said pollution and thrash dams were damaging to the Quarme and a thorough walkover survey should be completed. He wondered if chemcatchers could be deployed again. No survey was done on the Little Dart and the Lowman recorded low for trout. Adrian Dowding explained that 5 temperature loggers will be deployed on

the Exe. Dylan Roberts said new work was planned in conjunction with Plymouth University on sediment loads and agricultural pollution under the Rapid Response Catchment programme. Hugh Maund asked about data comparisons.

Alistair Langford then presented RETA's work on GIS development and the value this will provide in the form of an overall view – spawning survey (Nick May thanked for training 15 volunteers), gravel cleaning (now by contractor) and habitat management work (coppicing and bank work). All this will be entered onto the GIS. Fred Leach then spoke about Riverfly (nationally called ARMI). Survey work is fairly straightforward with data recorded nationally. He thanked Richard Horrocks for his extensive work assembling the 2021 report. He reminded RETA that this work provided the EA with pollution monitoring with, for example, the Culme pollution disaster after a farm fire and the incident discovered by riverfly work at Exford where the EA was never able to trace the polluter.

Godfrey Davis then reported on the Exe Mitigation. He explained that South West Water provided compensation, now about £20k pa, for the damage to the Haddeo because of Wimbleball Reservoir. The Haddeo once a very valuable salmon spawning tributary. He explained about the water bank held in Wimbleball for release into the river at times of low flow for smolt descent or adult fish migration. The water bank is controlled by EA but RETA indents when it is considered extra river flow is needed. He explained that Phil Turnbull's secondment was enabled by SWW. He was mentioned that as Wessex Water also extracts from Wimbleball it is hoped that contributions might flow from that water company.

William Entwisle, Chairman SWRA, then reported on SWRA work programmes. He paid tribute to Roger Furniss as the previous chairman. He said that SWRA represents all SW rivers and that his objective is more fishable days on all rivers with a realistic chance of a fish caught. He expressed concern about the loss of fishing effort because of imposed catch and release and thereby the possible loss to the SW economy with the reduced fishing enthusiasm. He felt that the EA should be looking not just at rod catch but at juvenile fish surveys to grasp the data about declining salmon numbers. His concerns also included climate change, water quality and currently the public's obsession with beavers. He stressed that beavers with no natural predators there must be the acceptance that their population and dams will necessitate management. He added to his list of challenges being IFCA, access and property rights and fish predation. He finished his presentation by talking about the regional hatchery where he recorded that RETA maintains a future interest. It being hoped that more SW rivers will use the facility in future and in the hope that costs might be minimal or even fully covered.

7. Fish-the-Exe Project: Pat Veale then spoke about the Fish the Exe Scheme. He asked for more fishing to be donated to the scheme even odd days on a beat were welcome. Last year 24 grayling, 64 trout and 10 salmon were caught through the scheme. He explained that where young fishermen who had attended a junior tuition day under Fred Leach then those rods would before offered a year's free RETA membership enabling them to take day rods through Fish the Exe at a cost of £10 per day (normally the charge is RETA membership at £30 plus £10 beat fee). Any junior would of course need to be accompanied by an adult. He finished by pointing out that fishermen are so important to the conservation and wellbeing of the river and its ecology.

8. Robin Bailey Tuition Day and Award: Fred Leach reported that it was hoped that two junior fishing days will be held in 2022. The Chairman said that the cancelled 2020 AGM and the delayed 2021 AGM muddled the timing of the annual Robin Bailey award and that as the last recipient, Julian Capps, had only really held the award for 5 months since the last AGM it was decided he should continue to enjoy the award in 2022.

9. Strategic Exe Weirs: Godfrey Davis presented the progress on the Project. He outlined the problem weirs, St James breached and now an easy passage. Trews had seen salmon caught and migrating on 8th March. The earlier EA camera on the Larinier had shown the fish pass to be effective but salmon did still attempt the baulk pass now too raised out of the water but just passable in high water conditions. He said that the cost of a camera and its data collection was £45k pa. RETA still urged the EA to invest in this as it is an essential to salmon migration data. The EA and Exeter City Council who own the weir are considering its future as it is known to be insecure. The Mill on the Exe, the owner is believed to be Exeter CC but this needs ascertaining as ownership is a primary fundamental before any design can begin. At Exwick and Cowley which seriously delay migration work is underway modelling flows. On Bickleigh Bridge weir a new pass has been designed to provide passage in low and medium flows. Bolham Weir is difficult but it is a very serious barrier to fish. Bridgetown improvement is underway. Godfrey Davis finalised his report by saying that we need "oven ready" designs for the weirs so that funding can be sought. He therefore urged the membership to support the Project so this spade work of design, engineering and planning can be completed ready then to attract funds for the actual weir improvements. He thanked Phil Turnbull for all his most able work.

10. Any Other Business: There was no further business raised,

The AGM closed at 8pm

Guest Speaker: Dylan Roberts, Head of Fisheries at the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust first congratulated RETA on its activity and it's care of the Exe. He continued saying he would cover three topics. The Channel Project SAMARCH, Beavers and finally the Missing Salmon Alliance. In the Channel with ten partners including France he mentioned gill netting in Devon and Cornwall where some numerous kilometres of nets are often set, designed to catch mackerel and bass but by-catching salmon and sea trout. GWCT is working on the depth of net setting as this does seem to help avoid snaring salmonids. In Cornwall GWCT is involved with the IFCA committee as it is this committee that oversees the bye-laws. There is no estuary netting but still difficult issues arise from commercial fishing with protecting salmonids. The catch of salmonids in the gill nets is still significant and as an illegal net catch these fish are thrown away. Considerable research is underway through tagging of fish (500 tagged with 75 tags so far returned). Depth of fish swimming appears to depend on light – daytime, deeper night time, shallower which makes the setting of gill net depth even more complicated. Work continues with the EA. Dylan Roberts then turned to his second topic of Beavers. He said that the move to re-introduction was sure to continue and that simplistic and wild statements were being trawled in the press and by certain NGOs as to the “great” benefit beavers have on rivers, He mentioned Scotland where serious management of beaver populations has been required to ensure fish movement in rivers. He pointed out that 400 years ago when beavers were last present salmonids numbers were plentiful and that beaver dams mattered less as enough of the large numbers of fish overcame the obstacles. Now every salmonid needs as much care as can be given if we are to reverse the risk to these populations. He said that GWCT is reviewing all the evidence and working on the essential topic of beaver management. He mentioned the work by Professor Cowx and said that in many ways it appears that beaver dams caused more damage to sea trout migration than salmon. However multiple beaver dams were particularly damaging. For trout on the whole the dams and beaver presence were not a problem. Finally Dylan Roberts mentioned the Missing Salmon Alliance, an umbrella organisation involving the Atlantic Salmon Trust, GWCT, Angling Trust (with Fish Legal), Fisheries Scotland and the Rivers Trust, coming together to share expertise, coordinate activity and to drive action to protect Atlantic Salmon.

The Chairman thanked Dylan Roberts for his presentation which covered so much of interest to RETA.

Raffle

Many generous donations of raffle prizes were gratefully received and duly won

The Auction of Promises had been held on line in support of the work on the River Exe, The auction closed in early March.

Contact David Rice, Newsletter@riverexefisheries.org.uk

Members and Guests enjoyed a complimentary buffet supper.

The evening and AGM was generously sponsored by Jackson Stops