

(Member of South West Rivers Association)

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 15th March, 2019

Hartnoll Hotel, Bolham at 1830hrs.

MINUTES

- 1. Welcome.** The Chairman (HL) welcomed the 79 members and guests present and explained the evening's agenda was very full. The secretary announced apologies for absence were received from from Messrs Horrocks, Le Quesne, Dixon, Shepherds-Cross, Maund, Hewitt, Howell, also Drs Morrissey and Mr and Mrs Rusher.
- 2. Minutes** and matters arising of the AGM held on 16th March 2018. The minutes were approved and signed with no matters arising.
- 3. Election of Officers and Committee.** David Rice, Simon Reece and Bill Hayes stood down from the Committee. David Rice was re-elected, proposed by Iain Stewart Hunter and seconded by Mark Thomasin-Foster. Simon Reece and Bill Hayes were thanked by HL for their sterling work during their time on the committee. Adrian Howell, proposed by William Heathcoat Amory and seconded by Henry Llewellyn, and Fred Leach, proposed by Bill Hayes and seconded by Roger Furniss, were both elected to the committee. The Treasurer Iain Stewart Hunter and Secretary Mark Thomasin-Foster, nominated by Godfrey Davis and seconded by Tom Arthur, were re-elected for one year to their posts respectively.
- 4. Committee's Activities.** The Chairman expressed thanks to the RETA Committee, Pat Veale for Fish the Exe, Tom Arthur for the Website, Stags for generous sponsorship and the Hartnoll Hotel. He named several guests and thanked them for their presence. He continued his report recording the very poor salmon fishing season and mentioned the work done on the river over the past year through the River Exe Project. He noted that RETA's 2019 membership currently stood at 236 whereas 2018 membership was 258. The Chairman announced that a new RETA leaflet was now available and had been circulated to those present at the AGM.
- 5. Finances and approval of accounts.** The Treasurer presented the annual accounts for the year to 31st December 2018. He recorded subscription income at £7680. Fish the Exe brings in extra members in a "good water" year but few were recruited last season. The surplus for the year was £6737 with certain river work eg electrofishing, now being covered by the Exe Mitigation Funds. All auction receipts and direct donations for the River Exe Project are held by WRT with the current figure at £55k. The EMG fund holds £102k but this will be drawn down in 2019/20 by some £60k for river work including the preparation for weir improvements. The accounts were adopted and the treasurer thanked.
- 6. River Exe Project.** John Hickey (JH) from WRT set out the work being undertaken on the Exe system. Using Powerpoint slides he mentioned the situation of juvenile salmonids in the 100+ sites surveyed in 2018, The upper river was fair to good but on the lower river results were poor. The very low water levels in 2018 may be reflected in this data. He said the electrofishing showed some success on the Pulham. He noted the importance of gravel being in good condition to provide for successful redds. On Riverfly he explained that data from the spring looked good but autumn sampling produced more disappointing results. Pollution issues from agricultural land both arable and grassland and from roads remained of concern for both chemical and sediment run off. Active working with farmers and the use of chemcatchers was beneficial in the protection against pollution. He mentioned the amnesty to remove old and out of date agrochemicals. JH stated that a priority scheme would be appropriate for the improvement on the Batherm. He finished by mentioning the role of buffer strips, management of slurry stores, undersowing of maize crops and the winter housing of cattle all of which would benefit the river.
Roger Furniss (RF) continued the overall report, mentioning the acute problem of weirs and highlighting the difficulty of getting smolts safely out to sea let alone adult fish to their spawning grounds. He said £4m will be needed to tackle the worst offending weirs and recalled that SWW were supportive along with WRT who will lead RETA's bid for funds. Mike Holland (EA) intervened in the report to explain the problem arising from the flood breach of St James weir at the head of the tide. The EA has the power and emergency funds to tackle the problem but it is complex and in need of fast remedial action. Because of a reduced river level caused by the breach the next weir up the river, Trews the fish pass there was likely to be ineffective at certain lower flows. A question was asked as to how effective a Larinier pass actually is. The response was that experience elsewhere is that the pass is very effective. RF resumed his presentation mentioning planned habitat improvement and coppicing work on the Barle and Little Exe including RETA's pledge of £5k per year in support. The lead for this work this will be Alistair Langford in cooperation from DAA volunteers and the ENPA. RF explained that work was still ensuing on piscivores with Andrew Maund leading on cormorant control. On goosanders, which had become surprisingly common on the river, he said that although NE had refused a control licence, RETA would repeat the spring

count and continue pressure on NE in the hope of obtaining a licence. Volunteers will be needed for a whole river piscivore survey. RF finished this part of his report by mentioning the crayfish control project including the financial support given by RETA. He was able to note that a WEG grant for non-native invasive species on Exmoor had been granted.

7. RETA's Code of Catch and Release. RF explained the new National Byelaws and that all Exe estuary netting will be banned thereby allowing more salmon to migrate to their spawning grounds. However the EA sought extensive control on rod catches, RETA, through RF's involvement with the Angling Trust, had made strong representation that C&R policy should be voluntary on rivers which were not "at risk". RETA has already outlined a strict catch and release policy of at least 90% released will be required. With 71 salmon taken on the Exe in 2018 61 were recorded as released. This does not yet achieve the required 90%. Salmon returned to the river must be treated with utmost care and returned using the published protocol. Hugh Maund questioned if a returned salmon survive and spawn successfully. RF said the call must be that each salmon is "one for the future NOT one for the pot". RF then recalled DEFRA's "5 Point Approach" and we along with Angling Trust pressure must apply pressure to get the other elements of the Approach applied namely abstraction, pollution, predation, stock assessment and migration barriers. RF noted that in many ways we are pawns in a political game. He finished by reminding members that the C&R protocol is on the website.

8. Fish-the-Exe Project. Pat Veale reported that the project had a poor year because of low water levels but that the DAA had had a successful trout catch year. In asking for extra water/beats to be made available to the project he pointed out that those owners who were not fishing for salmon because of low flows they might make their water available to the project for trout fishermen even if it was only for short duration. He pointed out that fishermen on the river is always a positive.

9. WRT Report. RF returned to the key points from the electrofishing work on the 107 sites surveyed in 2018. Low numbers but a slight improvement on 2017 in salmon but trout juveniles were worse especially in the lower reaches. The Barle remains good for salmon but poor for trout. Perhaps RETA should look further at trout populations. The lower tributaries all poor or devoid of salmon juveniles. The key question remains as to habitat and what actions should be taken.

10. Robin Bailey Award and Tuition Day. The Chairman spoke to a report from Fred Leach explaining that RETA had joined with the Devon Salmon and Trout Association with funding also from DAA and the Torridge Association to run 3 days tuition, two at Exebridge and one at Bellbrook which was an "improvers" day for 8 rods. 28 young attended the 2 days at Exebridge. HL recorded thanks to Fred Leach, the fishery owners and the coaches. Limited funds are available for 2020 when it is hoped to repeat the tuition scheme.

The Chairman then turned to the Robin Bailey Award. He announced that the recipient to be Iain Stewart Hunter whose tireless work for RETA was highly valued and he said Iain very much deserved the Award. ISH replied by thanking RETA and saying that it was the ongoing team work which provided the success of the Association.

11. Any Other Business. There was no further business and the Chairman closed the AGM.

Presentation by the Sponsors of the 2019 AGM. The Chairman introduced Simon Cooper of Stags, Estate Agents of the West Country and expressed RETA's great appreciation of the sponsorship that Stags were providing for the AGM. Simon Cooper then spoke about Stags and their wider agency work covering a full service across the South West. The audience showed their appreciation and the Chairman repeated the Association's gratitude.

The Raffle with some 18 prizes (mainly bottles!) donated by members made £530 which will be earmarked for the River Exe Project.

There followed a short break in proceedings.

The Speaker. The Chairman said he was very pleased to be able to welcome Bill Beaumont, Senior Fisheries Scientist at GWCT, to the meeting expressing the Association's appreciation for all the work being done by GWCT in the research on fisheries. Bill Beaumont then gave a fascinating talk covering the Trust's work on the Frome and wider work on Salmonids. The audience applauded the talk and after several questions the Chairman added his thanks for the most interesting and enjoyable presentation.

The Auction. David Rice auction 18 lots most generously donated by members of the Association and others interested in the conservation of the river and its ecology. The Auction raised £4165 which again will be forwarded to the River Exe Project Fund. The Chairman thanked all those who donated and also those who bid and purchased lots.

Members and Guests then enjoyed a complimentary buffet supper.