**BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION DORSET BRANCH**

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting Held on Saturday 23rd February 2019**

**at Puddletown Village Hall**

**1. Welcome by the Chairman and Apologies**

Nigel Spring, Chairman, said that it was nice to see everyone on a lovely spring day and welcomed in particular our speaker David Brown. We sometimes worry about the possibility of bad weather if we have the AGM at this time of year, but today it is more likely that people could be walking the first transect of the season and a number of Brimstones had been noticed in various places on the way here. Some 65 members and friends were present. Apologies had been received from Jon Bellamy, Andy & Linda Barker, Richard & Kathie Clarke, Giles & Barbara Droop, Jan Nattress, Alison Neil and Peggy Taylor (who had kindly sent a generous donation).

**2.** **Minutes of Last AGM (24.02.18)**

The minutes had been circulated at the meeting. They were accepted as a correct record.

3. **Matters Arising**

Adrian Neil asked about the point raised under AOB by Andy Barker regarding sharing information on rare butterflies. He was told that nothing much had happened about this yet.

4. **Chairman’s Report**

Nigel reported that Branch membership is now tantalisingly close to 1,000. This would be a fantastic milestone to achieve and we should think of some way to celebrate it. Maybe we could find a celebrity to welcome as the thousandth member and he asked for ideas. As it would save the Branch money, he asked anyone who would like to receive the Newsletter in digital form to let Robin George know. He was grateful to those who had made the arrangements for the afternoon and thanked the members who had helped in various ways, particularly those who had provided and served the refreshments. He thanked the committee for all their work during the year, in particular Lyn Pullen for the website, Georgie Laing as treasurer and Jane Smith and Lyn again for the production of the Newsletter. It gets better all the time, particularly the cover and the excellent photos. Robin George is our very hardworking Membership Office. Colin Burningham and Christine Bonner nobly took on running the Display & Sales Stall and took it to 10 shows, fairs and other events last year. Nigel thanked them for their efforts, a lot of work is involved and he knew that they could do with a bit more help with it.

Nigel particularly wanted to express his gratitude to Bill Shreeves for the fantastic work he does as Records Officer, a role he has occupied for many years. Bill is now trying to relinquish some of the burden, but he is still the person everyone turns to for his wisdom and huge depth of knowledge about Dorset’s butterflies. This year Bill made the usual preparations for the regional recorders’ meetings, but he has passed on the responsibility for running them to others and has tried to enable the meetings to develop a new pattern. This worked well for the first meeting at Toller Porcorum, resulting in more input from members. We are fortunate that Stephen Brown has recently stepped in with an offer to organise the meeting at Wimborne which would probably not have happened otherwise.

Nigel noted what a strange year 2018 was, spring was late and followed by a hot dry summer. The numbers of some species were boosted, but we didn’t see many migrants such as Red Admiral, Painted Lady or Clouded Yellow, nor the large colourful butterflies that people tend to notice. Small Tortoiseshells seem to be in terrible trouble and there are problems with Chalkhill Blues. In the north and the central band of the county they are doing very badly and Portland appears to be just about the only exception. An MSc. student at Bournemouth University, Gareth Hunt, is investigating what is happening to them.

Nigel admitted that he might be biased in his view about Marsh Fritillaries. According to the results sheets for all transects they did not have a very good year, but twice as many larval webs as before were found at Alner’s Gorse during the 2018/9 winter. Perhaps the parasite affecting them elsewhere has not arrived there yet. There were other positives: Dukes of Burgundy are responding well to targeted management on sites where work has been carried out, Common Blues continue to improve after a lean period and Small Coppers made an amazing sight in late summer. It will be interesting to see whether these increases will have an effect on this year’s numbers.

The branch relies enormously on volunteers and Nigel expressed his gratitude for their contribution to its activities, particularly conservation tasks, but the numbers attending work parties has declined. Nigel intends to examine the reasons why this is happening: at present a lot of work on the reserves is carried out by contractors with some help from volunteers, but government grant funding for this work will decline or even dry up completely and it is not clear what will happen then. Butterfly Conservation as an organisation will need to find more ways to use the untapped volunteer energy in our communities for the benefit of butterflies, moths and their habitats We will hear from David Brown in his talk after this meeting about the Cyril Diver project in the Studland peninsular which was a fantastic example of what is now called citizen science and which could possibly act as a model for our branch to use on some of our sites as a way to recruit and motivate volunteers.

Finally, Nigel wanted to share what, on the face of it, was good news about the Portland reserves. Last year he received a letter from the owners of the land at Perryfields informing him that they would not renew the lease that enables us to undertake conservation work on the reserve there. However, he has recently had a meeting with one of the directors who said there had been a mistake and they are now happy to renew it. However, we are not sure that Head Office wants to continue with a lease, they might prefer to have a looser agreement that would not provide so much security for us. In the meantime, the Portland Conservation Forum, consisting of representatives from Dorset Wildlife Trust, Dorset County Council, Natural England and Butterfly Conservation has been revived. DWT are already doing some interesting work on Portland and it might be possible for the Forum to establish a Community Interest Company that would be able to secure leases on several sites that have been set aside in return for planning permission. However, no final agreement has been reached for most of them. The aim would be to enable management of all the sites taking into account their importance for birds and other species as well. The plan would also include Broadcroft where the lease has run out. It is potentially a very exciting development.

**5. Treasurer’s Report**

Georgie Laing presented her financial report for the year ended 31st March 2018. She explained that, under the new accounting method, it is the first time that Head Office has done the bookkeeping. The Branch still sets the budgets and approves payments, but H.O. does the administration and sends us monthly reports. There have been some teething problems but Georgie hopes that matters will improve. There have been delays in Single Farm Payments and other grants coming through, for example one amount was not paid until 6 months after the accounting period. Head Office still have to approve all contracts over £2,500

We had budgeted to spend £13,200 on work on the reserves, but the delays in approving contracts and receiving grants led to an underspend. The 10-year grant comes to an end this year and we do not yet know what will happen after that when a new system of Countryside Grants comes in. The committee has therefore decided to designate £10,000 to be held in a separate fund for expenditure on the reserves in case this is needed. A balance of just over £13,500 has been carried forwardin general funds to the present financial year.

Branch membership is still increasing, but the branch precept from H.O. has remained at £6 and only just covers our costs. We are only a few short of having a membership of 1.000 and should reach this figure soon.

Georgie was delighted to inform the meeting that, since the end of the last accounting period, we had received a large legacy of £10,000 from Timothy Field. No decision has yet been made on how to spend it, but Timothy used to visit some of our reserves so it might be appropriate to put it towards work on the Portland reserves.

A motion to adopt the accounts was proposed by John Winterbottom and seconded by Sylvia Dicker. It was carried unanimously.

**6. Record Officer’s Report**

Bill Shreeves said that he would not talk about the state of butterflies in Dorset last year as that information was contained in his written report and was being presented at the regional recorders’ meetings. Instead he wished to highlight the importance of recording butterflies this year as it is the last in the 2015-9 cycle for which an atlas of Dorset records will be compiled. We need to record as many butterflies as possible to boost both the number of butterflies recorded and the km. squares covered in the report. Between 2015 and 2018, an excellent total of 2,313 squares have been covered already and, even with one year to go, this total is the third best since the old atlas of 1970-94. There are about 600 squares in the county still left and, if butterflies were recorded on only another73 of them, that would equal what was achieved in the last 2010-14 cycle. If 152 could be done, that would equal the best ever period of 1995-9.

Bill outlined six suggestions for how to help with the recording effort: if you have not done any before, pick up a leaflet about types of recording; sign up to attend the ID training day at Cerne Abbas in May; join the band of recorders who search ‘white holes’ (squares where no butterflies have been recorded so far); help on a transect walk - recorders are particularly needed for Kingcombe, Powerstock and Durlston East; get involved in the large amount of work that is needed to check old sites where Chalkhill Blues have not been recorded recently; assist in sorting and verifying the large amount of data now being submitted to the website, Nick Urch will continue with this task for the time being but would like more help. Leaflets, forms and signing sheets were all available at the back of the hall.

Bill finished by thanking Robin George and Arthur Bryant for preparing the PowerPoint presentations for the regional meetings, Steven Brown for organizing the one at Toller Porcorum and for stepping in at a late stage to ensure that the Wimborne one would go ahead and Jon Bellamy for continuing to arrange the meeting at Wareham. Bill hoped for a really good set of records this year and wished everyone well for the butterfly season.

**7. Election of Officers**

**Secretary:** Adrian Neil, proposed by Pauline Pires, seconded by Colin Burningham.

**Newsletter Editor:** Jane Smith, proposed by Robin George, seconded by Richard Belding.

Both were elected unanimously. It was observed that Jane has done very good work with the Newsletter, but needs more articles for future issues.

**8 Any Other Business.**

**Waitrose Community Matters Fund.** Richard Belding said that it was the last full week of the collection of tokens at Waitrose in Dorchester for Butterfly Conservation. So far, we seem to be doing quite well and we hope that £400 will be raised. We could also apply to be nominated for the collection in Wimborne

**Asian (or Yellow-legged) Hornets.** Nigel said that Myra Sealy had asked him to mention that bee keepers are worried about the Asian hornets appearing in this country as they have decimated bee colonies in other parts of Europe. They should not be killed, but information should be passed to the address on a leaflet that is available at the back of the hall and on this link: http//www.brc.ac.uk/risc/alert.php?species=Asian\_hornet.

The meeting closed at 2.48 p.m.

A.N.

17.03.19