

The Year in Retrospect 2017-18

The Year in Retrospect highlights the significant contributions and activities the Society has undertaken in order to achieve its charitable objective of promoting the conservation and protection of Exmoor National Park for the public benefit.

Highlights of the Year

- Celebrated the Society's 60th anniversary by an extended programme of activities through the year;
- Actively supported hill farming by being part of *Exmoor's Ambition*;
- Commissioned and steered research into a unique Register of Exmoor's Natural Capital;
- Completed successfully a second Archive Project that had six main themes;
- Increased the Pinnacle Award to three winners;
- Engaged in the Landscape Character Assessment commissioned by ENPA and continued to take the lead in the Landscape Advisory Group;
- Participated in the production of the Partnership Plan;

The Society promotes the conservation of Exmoor National Park in a variety of ways: through conferences, issuing statements, influencing policy, undertaking research, responding to consultations, using its website, undertaking outreach, making awards and monitoring planning.

Campaigning

In the last year, the campaigning activities have been largely involved with farming issues as a result of Brexit:

- Commissioning and steering research by Rural Focus Ltd into a register of Exmoor's natural capital. The report *Towards a Register of Exmoor's Natural Capital* focussed upon understanding the concept of natural capital and how it can be of practical use. Three pilot farms were selected, based on Exmoor's landscape characteristics and each investigated to provide a foundation for a natural capital register.

- *Exmoor's Ambition* is a partnership between Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) and Exmoor Hill Farming Network (EHFN) and involved the Society and other conservation bodies. It is a proposal for adapting farm policy for Exmoor in the light of Brexit and has widespread interest on a national level.
- The Society has successfully supported Exmoor's Landscape Character Assessment so that it has become a supplementary planning document.

Planning

The Lynton and Barnstaple Railway, between Killington Lane and Blackmoor Gate was a major planning proposal over which there were different interests and concerns but overall the Society believed the benefits outweighed the disadvantages.

Telecommunications masts vital for C21st living mainly went through the planning process smoothly apart from one or two causing greater concern. An unusual application for a eucalyptus plantation next to moorland was withdrawn.

Second Archive Project

The second project has reached a successful conclusion at the end of September. Dr Helen Blackman has undertaken six main themes: Archive Hub, Then & Now, Postal Paths and Communications, Exmoor Studies, Exmoor as an Outback, and a book length study of the Society's history.

Events & Outreach

The annual Spring Conference, in partnership with the ENPA, aims to provoke discussion on issues of importance that affect the National Park designation. This year's conference, *Beef, Birds and Beauty – A New Future for Exmoor?* was an appropriate theme as the C21st Hobhouse Review into national parks and AONBs was announced by Secretary of State Michael Gove, to be led by Julian Glover, an experienced journalist with a house in the Peak District National Park.

The walks programme extended geographically to cover all areas of Exmoor and was based upon walk leaders' expertise. The range of themes was impressive: Atlantic woodland lower plants and lichens, mosses and

liverworts, bluebells in Burridge Woods and the first cuckoos at Molland; Knights, not only at Simonsbath but on the moor, Devon Commons; the Longstone area, etc. Requests for talks continued which included the Two Moors Festival, Braunton Probus and several local history groups.

The Society continues to be represented on many bodies including the ENPA's Consultative & Parish Forum, Moorland Board, Landscape Advisory Group, Historic Environment Advisory Panel, Learning and Engagement Panel as well as other special interest groups such as SW Water's Mires Project and Headwaters of the Exe Project. It liaises with like-minded groups, e.g. CNP, SW Lakes Trust, Dartmoor Preservation Association, CPRE, The National Trust and many other local groups.

The Society offered the following Awards:

- Founders Award, which in 2018 was given to Mrs Toni Jones in recognition of her contributions over many years in supporting Society events, being a Trustee and for all her philanthropic contributions to Exmoor.
- Mary & Brian Chugg Conservation Award was presented to Robert Deane of Rural Focus Ltd, for his exceptional work on *Towards a Register of Exmoor's Natural Capital* in recognition of his conservation work over and above the requirements of his professional position as a consultant.
- A Poetry Competition for adults attracted over 50 poems from a wide area – even as far as the Czech Republic. The winner was Pat Glover. As the poems contained a myriad of fascinating insights into Exmoor, the Society is considering producing a booklet of them all.
- The Alfred Vowles Photographic Competition was won by Keith Hann for his superb image of a wheatear, as announced in the 2018 Spring Newsletter.
- The closing date for the Lucy Perry Literary Competition was changed this year to coincide with the end of the school year and results will be announced in next year's Spring Newsletter.
- A special Jubilee Pinnacle Award for young entrepreneurs was extended to three winners.

Communications

The Society communicates its activities across different media. It regularly issues press releases which are published in local papers and promotes local events in its shop window. Its website is refreshed regularly with up-to-date details of its activities and Twitter is used to link to current information and raise awareness of local issues. The Resource Centre, including the Archives, Reference Library, themed displays and workspace area with WiFi, is used increasingly by researchers, the public and people making enquiries on specific subjects of interest. The shop not only has postcards, notelets and secondhand books but also displays work by local arts and craftspeople, and new booklets in the Exmoor Studies series.

Governance

Trustees decided that the strategic aims set out the previous year would continue under the headings of Campaign, Conserve and Engage. The need for a membership drive was highlighted by building on the 60th anniversary events.