

The Year in Retrospect 2018-2019

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 benefit of the public.

Highlights of the Year

- Completed successful 60th Anniversary celebrations with fully booked lunch at Simonsbath House Hotel at the end of November, the place and date of the founding of the Society;
- Published research into a Register of Exmoor's Natural Capital which received praise both from Dieter Helm and Ian Bateman, chairman and member of Government's Natural Capital Committee
- Commissioned the Vice Chairman to report on the state of pheasant shooting on Exmoor – a hot topic.
- Attracted exceptional speakers at the 2019 Spring Conference on the theme of 'Inspirational Exmoor: Natural Beauty and People's Wellbeing'.
- Helped plan an event called the Big Picnic to celebrate the 1949 National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act and honoured by the presence of The Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall
- Appointed a development co-ordinator to undertake a membership drive, increase publicity and use of social media.

The Society promotes the conservation of Exmoor for the benefit of all in a variety of ways: through conferences, issuing statements, influencing local and national policy, undertaking research, using its website and social media, undertaking outreach, making awards and monitoring planning.

Conserving & Campaigning

The Society explores the evidence before campaigning on issues and hot topics.

Natural Capital: The publishing of '*Towards a Register of Exmoor's Natural Capital*' is a major achievement as it breaks new ground in four ways (see

Spring Newsletter 2019). At a national level, Prof Dieter Helm and Prof Ian Bateman, chair and member of the Government's Natural Capital Committee have endorsed this approach. In Prof Helm's latest book, *Green and Prosperous Land*, he says that the Register is a leading example in how national parks 'need to incorporate the 25-Year Environment Plan objectives in their statutory duties to enhance their natural capital'.

Glover Review: The Society responded to the Review into National Parks and AONBs. It emphasised the importance of the landscape designation nationally and internationally. There should be great weight given to a national body/trust to further the cause. National Parks contribute to the Government's 25-year Environment Plan and the natural capital approach by protecting their unique set of assets. More can be done to enhance landscape, nature and heritage. For example, land management oversight, at a national park level, should be accorded equal status with planning. A fresh look at governance was needed to ensure that there was a better fit with national park purposes. The full response is on the Exmoor Society website.

The interim report - a letter from Julian Glover to Michael Gove released in July – reflects The Exmoor Society's recommendations underlining the need for a strong body to promote national parks (and AONBs) at the national level, changes in governance to better reflect national park purposes, the importance of finding more space for nature and enhancing landscape conservation and helping the challenges facing local communities. Overall, it seeks to re-ignite the fire and vision which brought the system into being in 1949, recognising that much more can be done to contribute to the 25-Year Environment Plan.

Game Shooting Review: The Vice Chairman, Dr Keith Howe, was asked to look into the facts of shooting on Exmoor as the ENPA reported an increased discussion about the developing impact of game shoots, the size and number of which have grown significantly on Exmoor over the last 20 years. Various issues of concern were raised and these showed favourable and unfavourable aspects, ranging from relatively minor sources of irritation to those having discernible impacts more generally. The report

can be accessed on our website. The Society continues to monitor the recommendations made in the report.

Planning

- A proposal from the National Trust to develop a hydro-electric scheme on Hoar Oak Water and at Watersmeet created a great deal of public interest. The Society responded that developing sources of alternative energy is an important goal as long as they are in the right place and at the appropriate scale. It objected to this proposal because of its scale and the locations in a very sensitive landscape that would lead to a loss of natural capital assets.
- The Society has supported officers' recommendations for refusal in some cases where the landscape impact in particular, would be detrimental.
- The Society continues to raise concerns over countryside clutter, such as the increase in signs, seats, fences, in different landscapes, such a moorland, coast and open countryside and even in some settlements.

Events & Outreach

- The annual Spring Conference in partnership with Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) aims to promote discussion on issues of importance that affect the national park purposes. Dame Fiona Reynolds was a key speaker on the theme 'Inspirational Exmoor: Natural Beauty & Peoples' Wellbeing'. Her address outlined the content of her recent book, *The Fight for Beauty*, arguing that people need beauty as an essential ingredient in their lives and overall wellbeing.
- Education: We continue to find ways to help schools to get their children out of the classroom to experience Exmoor for themselves. Cost of transport is one of the biggest challenges faced by schools and this year we have been able to support both Dunster and Dulverton schools by funding the cost of coach hire for outings to enjoy a range of teaching opportunities at Haddon Hill, Alderman's Barrow and the Haddeo river. In addition, we have been able to assist Dunster School to cover the cost of the licence for their Forest School activities which form an integral part of its curriculum.
- Walks: The Society provided an extensive walks programme, in different locations and on diverse themes, led by knowledgeable guides.
- The Resource Centre continues to attract interest with several new acquisitions for the archive, including an 1885 diary with sketches from Alan Hughes and Victor Bonham-Carter's library and files which will be kept as a Collection, mostly relating to Exmoor but also other papers and photographs that show the national importance of his work.

Awards & Competitions

This year's winners are as follows:

- Founder's Award – Hugh Thomas
- Brian & Mary Chugg Conservation Award – Adam Lockyear
- Adult Poetry Competition – Audrey Coldrick, Mark Haworth-Booth, Paul Ings, Lynne Pearl, Anthony Watts (five joint winners)
- Lucy Perry Competition – 1st: George Thomas; 2nd: Erin Huxley; 3rd: Katie Wilmot; Highly Commended: Harry Edworthy, Isabel van Santen; Luke Thomas-Everard; Lydia Weston
- 2019 Alfred Vowles Photographic Competition – closing date 31 September 2019
- Pinnacle Award – not yet judged
- MacEwen Essay Competition – 1st: Adam Lockyear; Runner-up: Michelle Werrett

Governance

Finance: Total incoming resources for 2019 amount to £94,058. The income on the general fund of £47,751 is close to expectations and the restricted/designated fund income of £46,307 is mainly from bequests & donations. Total resources expended amount to £80,931. General fund expenditure has been well controlled, and after transfers resulted in a surplus of £2,995. Expenditure on restricted & designated funds totalled £31,154 and this has mainly been spent on completing the project "Using the Archives" project, grants - in particular the Pinnacle awards - and employing a Development Co-ordinator. The valuation of investments has increased this year by £17,245 which increases the net movement of funds on the general fund to £20,240.

Executive:

- Trustees decided to continue the strategic aims of Campaign, Conserve and Engage.
- The proposed Royal visit to Exmoor in July involved much extra work for the Society and administrators, Anne and Liz. The event, called the Big Picnic, celebrated the 1949 National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act. It was honoured by the presence of Their Royal Highnesses, The Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall who spent 20 minutes in discussion with the Society.
- With a generous legacy, the Society was able to employ in March a Development Co-ordinator, Charlotte Thomas, for one day a week until December 2020.
- We continue to work in partnership with others including the Campaign for National Parks, the Campaign to Protect Rural England, Southwest Water, the National Trust, with local groups and, in particular, Exmoor National Park Authority.