

The Year in Retrospect 2020-2021

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

- Dealt with all the requirements of the Covid 19 pandemic whilst keeping the Society “open for business”.
- Held a series of four live webinars in place of the annual Spring Conference.
- Highlighted our Nature Recovery strategy with involvement in the Visualisation exercise by the Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) and explored the theme “Nocturnal Exmoor”.
- Continued our involvement in future farming schemes by supporting ENPA test and Trials for Defra and helping sustain the Exmoor Hill Farming Network (EHFN) financially.
- Welcomed people’s enjoyment of the national park and developed a template for managing sensitive sites for biodiversity, landscape quality, heritage and access.
- Appointed a new development co-ordinator to undertake the promotion of social media, corporate membership, and marketing.
- Pursued discussions on our commissioned “Towards a Register of Exmoor’s Natural Capital” nationally and locally.

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: We continue to campaign for progress in natural capital as defined in our Register. Natural England organised a series of three webinars, in December, for its Landscape Network and asked the Society to contribute to one of them. The Vice Chairman led the theme “Landscape and Natural Capital in a National Park- The Case of Exmoor. (see Spring Newsletter 2021

Nature Recovery: The theme Nocturnal Exmoor was explored in four live webinars in May. Overall, by concentrating on Nocturnal Exmoor the significance of darkness to both wildlife and people was revealed. In the last 100 years the scale of change from moonlight to electricity today has led to 24hour daylight experienced in many places. Light pollution affects species that move and forage at night and people who lose the ability to use moonlight darkness to see the stars. The webinars now on our website brought together biologists, ecologists, farmers, writers, film makers, astronomers and tourism providers all showing how much we should value the darkness.

The Society was invited to take part in a Visioning exercise on what is the current state of nature on Exmoor and opportunities to make a difference. Nature recovery will continue to be an important aspect of our work, in partnership with others, in future.

Game Shooting Update: The Vice Chairman was asked in 2018 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 but in 2021 is concerned that so far actions arising from its recommendations have been limited. Complaints have been repeatedly made and apply to two localities. Since 2018, the context for game shooting in Exmoor has changed with new national policies for agriculture and the environment and the consequences of Covid-19. As a result questions about game shooting will be asked in relation to positive and negative impacts on ecology, economy, society and culture. The Society will continue to reflect on these developments and publish them on its website.

Research Projects: the society has commissioned two projects the first a scoping paper into Exmoor's Farming Heritage. The second is to consider Art in Support of Improved Understanding of the Changing Character of the Exmoor National Park. The focus of the research will be to use full colour art images spanning the period from the 1770s to the present day.

Enjoying Exmoor: The Society supports the general approach of welcoming people to visit Exmoor and enjoy its special qualities. It is noticeable that Exmoor receives a small number of visitors compared with England's other national parks, 2 million day visits a year compared with the New Forest, smaller than Exmoor, 13 million. The pandemic in 2020 has led to a greater numbers with overcrowding in popular places, litter and problems of overnight camping and motorhomes in wilder places. We believe we need to be ahead in visitor management particularly in some areas with no infrastructure that are particularly sensitive to conservation values being affected or lost. We are working on a template that can be used to identify such sites, issues raised, acceptable solutions possibly trialling more radical ones.

Planning

The Society monitors the weekly list of new planning applications most of which are approved without coming to the Planning Authority. Occasionally, the Society raises concerns and sometimes out right objection taking notice of the planning officers' recommendations.

- A retrospective proposal for change of use of an area from sheep and cattle feeding to a timber storage area was objected to by the Society and strongly opposed by the planning officers for several reasons including landscape impact and the site located in open countryside. It was similar to an application turned down two year's ago but with a few additional landscaping proposals. There was strong support from the farming community for the business to continue and Authority members decided to approve the application.
- The Society objected to a proposal for an agricultural building on a small holding of ten acres in a hamlet, the Authority members decided to refuse permission.
- The Society continues to raise concerns over countryside clutter such as the increase in signs, seats, fences, in different sensitive landscapes, such a moorland, coast and open countryside and even in some settlements.
- A Planning White Paper, to which the Society responded, caused much controversy nationally and we now await the publication of the Planning Bill.

Events & Outreach

- The annual Spring Conference in partnership with Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) was cancelled in 2020 and live webinars in May 2021 were tried in place of the 2021 Conference.

Although there were many technical difficulties they were well received in feedback from participants and will be used in future as well as reinstating the annual conference

- Education: There has been little opportunity to continue the activity for the last two years.
- Walks. The Society has provided an extensive walks programme, in different locations and on diverse themes, led by knowledgeable guides. Depending on Covid-19 instructions allowing only six people at the beginning of the programme, then up to thirty, finally no restrictions, and because of pre-booking only they have proved very popular particularly with new people just having moved to Exmoor.
- The Resource Centre has had to restrict access for much of the time but has dealt with many email questions. There has been some work of recording the detail of material from the estate of Victor Bonham Carter entering the information on each item into the archive catalogue. Donations of material have been received. (see further detail in the Spring News Letter 2021)

Awards & Competitions

This year's winners are as follows:

- Founder's Award – Dr Sean Beer for his support over many years and undertaking the enormous task of updating of the catalogue of the Exmoor Review by both theme and author.
- Brian & Mary Chugg Conservation Award – Linda Blanchard for her voluntary conservation work on Exmoor's heritage.
- Adult Poetry Competition – Dora Westlake for her poem "Wolf Moon"
- Lucy Perry Competition – not held
- Pinnacle Award 2020 – Caroline Westcott for setting up a catering business.
- MacEwen Essay Competition – Nick Hosegood "Exmoor's Future Woodland"

Governance

Finance:

Total incoming resources for 2021 amount to £133,364. The income on the general fund of £48,143 is close to expectations apart from shop income which was lower than hoped due to the pandemic restrictions.

The restricted/designated fund income of £85,221 is mainly from bequests.

Total resources expended amount to £70,073. General fund expenditure has been well controlled, and after transfers resulted in a surplus of £335.

Expenditure on restricted/designated funds totalled £17,618 and this has mainly been spent on the completion of the book, grants – in particular Pinnacle Award and continuing to employ a part time Development Co-ordinator.

The valuation of investments has increased this year by £41,480, which increases the net movement of funds on the general fund to £41,815.

Trustees: (Executive)

Trustees continue the overall strategic aims of Campaign, Conserve and Engage. With much greater understanding of the crises in Biodiversity and Climate Change the Society is emphasising action on Nature Recovery and Climate Resilience and Adaptation. It has been able to financially support bodies that help achieve our charitable aims. We have employed a Development Coordinator to increase the use of social media, membership both individual/ families and corporate, sponsorship and marketing.

Although, having to deal with the pandemic in 2020-2021 there have been opportunities to update our policies, public relations, and website and meet virtually at six Trustees and six Policy meetings and with others, particularly the National Park Authority.

We continue to search for an honorary Treasurer, following the remarkable achievements of our present one, Karen Trigger FCA, who wishes to step down in September.