

## THE YEAR IN REVIEW

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

### ENGAGEMENT

We have concentrated on growing this part of our activities so that the Society can reach a wider audience and get more traction with its programme of environmental information and education. To that end we have increased our communication to our supporters with the introduction of our fortnightly e-news *The Bolve*, we are working on a programme of educational activities for children and developing knowledge sharing forums to build support for nature and landscape conservation.

The events we have held this year are outlined below:

**The Exmoor Society Asks: Tourism, the Future?** This debate and discussion, held at the White Horse in Exford, was on the question of how to reconcile the demands and impact of tourism with the purposes of a national park.

**Exmoor Meadows Day.** This was a first, held at White Rock Cottage in Simonsbath in partnership with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, the Sowing the Seeds project run by Exmoor National Park and Mark de Wynter-Smith of Exmoor Forest Estate. A day of information and expert advice that was met with great enthusiasm by the 85 odd people who joined us. This has prepared the ground for a meadow makers forum.

**The Exmoor Scavenge.** Our first event specifically aimed at families with young children was held on Selworthy Beacon in July with the support of trustee Darren Sherwood and our new engagement officer, Frankie Wright. These will continue with the aim of introducing children to nature educating a generation of young naturalists and giving families the skills to plan days out for themselves

**Conference.** This year's conference *All Things Bright and Beautiful* was held in Simonsbath in May. The theme was the wonder of nature and the audience in the crammed church were taken on a journey up the trophic levels. Talks were followed by a delicious lunch and guided walks. Once again, we had excellent speakers, not least Alastair Fothergill, the eminent BBC natural history producer, who showed footage from Wild Isles and Professor Karl Ritz who dug deep into soil to show the remarkable life that sustains it.

**Talks.** We initiated a series of talks in Dulverton on environmental themes. Journalist Kate Hughes gave one based on her book *Going Zero* which describes her family's journey to eliminate all waste. Entomologist Professor Dave Goulson spoke to a full house in Dulverton Town Hall on how to look after insects; and naturalist Nigel Philips gave us a taste of the strange and exciting life along the Somerset Coast.

**The Exmoor Archive.** Three research projects are using the Exmoor Archive this year. Adrian Howkins and Leonard Baker from Bristol University are working on a history of Exmoor National Park, and a study of coastal woodland, focused on the north Exmoor coast. Writer Sara Hudston is reviewing Hope Bourne's archive as part of her research for a publication on women writers of Exmoor; and the Environment Agency have been using photographs, newspaper cuttings and written reports on flooding on Exmoor to inform flood management planning for the future. Our tree planting maps have provided Land Use Consultants with historical detail to create future landscape visualisations to inform the National Park's new woodland strategy and the archive has also been used by local landowners, historians and visitors to explore a variety of aspects of Exmoor's history. Our library has been used by authors researching material for articles for the Exmoor Magazine.

The archive is also working with the South-West Heritage Trust on plans to hold an exhibition on the life and work of Hope Bourne at the Somerset Rural Life Museum in 2024.

Exhibitions. We hosted a private view and exhibition of Alfred Vowles' competition winners, and photographic exhibitions of recent Pinnacle Award winners and the astonishing insect pictures by Claire Haskins. We showcased treasures from our archive including the bequest of Lorna Doone material we received last year. We also hosted an exhibition on the history of Hoar Oak Cottage

Spring Clean Litter Pick. This was the suggestion of Mark Lutyens, one of our members and resulted in two big bags of rubbish collected from the roadside on Winsford Hill.

Walks. This year's walks programme has been the biggest ever as we extended it into the autumn and spring. Led by knowledgeable guides to some of the most beautiful and interesting places on Exmoor, walkers went bird and butterfly spotting, were introduced to Exmoor's archaeology, shown lost villages and told tales of murder, mystery and mayhem.

### CONSULTATION and CAMPAIGNS

We were invited and made a submission to the House of Lords Climate Change and Environment Committee into Protected Landscapes.

We responded to the government's consultation on permitted development rights.

We have begun work with the Forestry Commission and Exmoor National Park Authority to promote awareness of the special qualities of protected landscapes when considering tree planting schemes.

We wrote to the members of the Exmoor National Park Authority with a call for governance reform of the committee in the spirit of the recommendations of the Glover Review into protected landscapes.

We collated stakeholder responses to the proposed reintroduction of Pine Martens on Exmoor and sent them to the steering group.

We are a steering group member for the Exmoor National Park Partnership Plan Review

### PLANNING

The Society monitors the weekly list of new planning applications, most of which are determined by ENPA planning officers under delegated powers without going to the Planning Committee of the Authority. Occasionally, the Society comments or raises concerns and sometimes outright objections, taking notice of the planning officers' recommendations.

We objected to a proposed development for several glass and steel holiday pods surrounding Bradley Pond, near Withypool. The application was refused.

We objected to a proposed mobile mast at two very prominent sites near Simonsbath, while suggesting a much more discreet location nearby. The first application was withdrawn and the second refused.

We supported a much better-sited mobile mast proposal in a mobile 'not spot' at Sandyway.

We repeated earlier concerns about the proposals for Hurlstone Bungalow.

We voiced concerns about the proposals for semi-permanent holiday accommodation, including conversion of a field shelter, at Riscombe, Exford. The application was refused.

## PUBLICATIONS

In partnership with the Exmoor Hill Farming Network we have fund-raised and commissioned a book to celebrate Exmoor's farmers to coincide with the 70th anniversary of Exmoor's designation as a national park and the 10th anniversary of the EHFN in October 2024. *Exmoor Farms: A Year on the Moor* is being written by Society trustee Victoria Eveleigh and photographed by Eleanor Davis.

## AWARDS AND COMPETITIONS

We have set up a new Exmoor Society Research Fund to support projects that contribute to the understanding of Exmoor. This year funding has been awarded to two candidates. First, Leonard Baker, University of Bristol for his study of historic management of Exmoor coastal forests. The award will assist with archive searches and will help to provide interpretation and dissemination of the findings via talks and workshops. Leonard has already undertaken some work in our archive.

The second award goes to David Mears at the University of Exeter for his project studying the economic value of Exmoor hedges in relation to natural capital. This project builds on the work of the Exmoor Society commissioned report *Towards a Register of Exmoor's Natural Capital* and will support an exceptional undergraduate student. (Trustee Dr Keith Howe was not in any way associated with this application.)

The Founders' Award generously sponsored by Halsgrove Publishing was presented to Katherine Williams for her exceptional work as manager of the Exmoor Hill Farming Network to promote Exmoor farms and foster their relationship to the Exmoor landscape and community.

The Brian & Mary Chugg Conservation Award presented to Mr Fred Leech, who has for many years marshalled the community to participate in 'citizen science' and monitor river flies and other populations of insects which indicate the health of Exmoor's rivers and fish-stocks.

The Pinnacle Award 2023 was presented to Serena Colwill for her project Farm School that invites school children to experience, understand and learn about farming and the environment at her farm in Exford.

This year's Alfred Vowles' photography competition, judged by Eleanor Davis the photographer for the Exmoor Farms book, was won by xx. It was well-supported and the many stunning entries are available to view on the Society's website.

## EXMOOR SOCIETY GOVERNANCE 2023

### FINANCE

The total income for the Society for 2023 increased to £175,837, however, this includes a very generous legacy of £112,156 from Duncan Jeffray. Excluding the legacy the total income received was £63,681 which is remarkably consistent with the year ending 31 May 2022 when total income was £63,670. Within that figure there is a small decline in membership subscription income but a larger rise in event income, a trend likely to continue unless we can increase membership numbers which is a challenging task in this financial climate.

On the expenditure side total resources spent were £63,373 compared with the previous year of £75,965 a pleasing performance as our core income covered our costs albeit only just.

Total funds held by the Society as bank deposits and investments increased from £538,618 to £648,233 reflecting the legacy received. However, the value of our investments fell by £2,805, a good performance given the general background. At the year-end we still held the legacy in cash but £100,000 has since been placed on a six month deposit account, as the decision was taken by the trustees to hold off further equity and bond investments for the time being.

Investments are held in CCLA COIF funds which are designed for charities. The investment performance and a risk assessment of the fund has been considered as good by the trustees. The bank deposits are with the National Westminster Bank. The investment income and bank interest for the year of £14,169 is important income without which we would be running at a loss.

The Society's policy is to hold two years charitable expenditure and a sum of £50,000 against contingencies and emergencies.

I would like to draw attention to the importance of legacy income in allowing us to be more ambitious in carrying out our charitable purposes.

The trustees have approved the accounts which were prepared by and examined by Westcotts, Chartered Accountants of Barnstaple.

#### TRUSTEES (EXECUTIVE)

We have welcomed three new trustees to our board: Mr Bruce Macintosh, Mr Charles O'Connor and Mr Darren Sherwood. We have said goodbye with enormous thanks to Mrs Arabella Amory, Mr Bill Gash, Professor John Wibberley and Mr Roger Watts.

Trustees continue to fulfil the overall strategic aims of Engage, Research, Comment. As our understanding of the crises in biodiversity and climate change grows, the Society is emphasising action on nature recovery. Although we are not a grant giving body, the Society supports research and activities that help achieve our charitable aims.

We have held 6 trustee meetings. We have built our network through contact with the Exmoor MPs. Ian Liddell-Granger and Selaine Saxby and Bill Revans Leader of Somerset Council. We have forged connections, with other local charities including the National Trust, the Campaign for the Preservation of Rural England, the Somerset Wildlife Trust, Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society and Exmoor Natural History Society. We continue to work closely with the National Park through our representation on National Park Authority Advisory Groups including the Headwaters of the Exe, Woodland and Forestry, Historic Advisory Group and chair the Landscape Advisory Group. We are represented on the Moorland and Farming Board and are members of the Parish Consultative Forum and the Exmoor Local Access Forum. We are Council members of the Campaign for National Parks.