

2025 AGM Minutes

Minutes of the 112th Annual General Meeting of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS), held at Edinburgh Zoo and online by Zoom on Wednesday 21 May 2025 at 6.30pm.

Present

Ian Marchant (President)
Mary Bownes (Chair)
Karen Blackport (Vice Chair)
Fiona Davis (Honorary Treasurer)
Andrew Kitchener
Sandy Batho
Richard Rutnagur
Kerry Falconer
Katie Lennox
Anna Meredith
John Denerley
Mark Tate
Dee McIntosh
Jack Kerr (Board Secretary)
David Field (Chief Executive Officer)

And 175 members (88 in person and 87 online)

Introduction

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm. IM welcomed members to the 112th Annual General Meeting and introduced BSL interpreters Linda Joyce and Louise Rodgers who would be assisting throughout the evening.

Apologies

Apologies were received from trustees Karen MacEachern, John Fitzgerald and Simon Corcoran.

A) Adoption of the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 05 June 2024

The minutes were proposed and adopted by the membership.

B) Matters arising

IM reported that there were no matters arising and explained the proceedings of the evening.

C) Presentation of the 112th Annual Review and Impact Report

MB presented the 2024 annual review video which reminded us of the incredible accomplishments of RZSS across the year.

MB highlighted the coordinated, rapid response from RZSS and partners across Scotland to the illegal release of the lynx into the Cairngorms National Park in January. Thanks were given to the excellent RZSS staff who added to their workload finding and capturing the lynx, caring for them in their quarantine facility and engaging with the media.

MB mentioned the Scottish Wildlife Discovery Centre at Highland Wildlife Park which is now open to the public, allowing for further community reach and engagement. The planning and delivery of the centre has been a huge project and MB thanked staff and teams involved.

MB also noted that all the departments across RZSS are essential to the charity's success, ensuring our income grows which maximises our impact, and concluded by thanking RZSS staff, partners, volunteers, trustees, members, patrons, supporters and visitors, as well as chief executive DF and the executive team.

D) Chief Executive's Report

DF welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting that animals have provided many of the highlights, lowlights and challenges throughout the year. The executive team are conscious we hold a number of single housed individuals currently, contributed to by the lengthy waits to gain licenses for animal transports. DF is hoping the government will have procedures in place soon to improve the process of moving animals to and from mainland Europe. Additionally animal disease is on the increase and blue tongue zones pose restrictions on movements across the UK.

DF mentioned some up and coming highlights including sloth bears, which are expected to arrive at Edinburgh Zoo in June. Also, possible capybara pups, with the successful introduction of our male Rodney to the females.

RZSS teams are working on the future site plans, with the aim to produce a document that can be developed over the next 10-20 years. These plans include site infrastructure as well as weather proofing. Current priorities include renovation of the koala home at Edinburgh Zoo and a new red panda habitat at Highland Wildlife Park.

DF thanked all the RZSS teams for their hard work, contribution and dedication, while also thanking the volunteers and the Board of trustees for all their advice, time and wisdom, especially MB.

Thanks, was given to Karen Blackport who has stepped down as RZSS vice chair and will continue as an RZSS trustee and chair the Engagement and Community Advisory Group.

DF highlighted that the impact report is ready, and the achievements should be celebrated, especially within the conservation work and community engagement.

Sadly, RZSS teams had to say goodbye to polar bear Victoria due to ill health. Victoria was an iconic animal at Highland Wildlife Park and will be missed.

E) Presentation and adoption of the financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2024

Honorary Treasurer FD presented the RZSS accounts detailing that 2024 was a tough year for visitor numbers, particularly the first half of the year. RZSS ended with a slightly weaker balance sheet than 2023 but it still remained strong thanks to collective efforts and diversifying our income streams.

Much effort had been put into balancing careful cost control, while also still increasing our investment levels in our staff, site repairs and our conservation mission.

FD discussed the high-level breakdown of income growth and cost growth which allowed the following spend on our RZSS charitable mission through the 2024 financial year:

Conservation £1.8m
Genetics £0.4m
Engagement £1.1m
Scottish Wildlife Discovery Centre £1.6m

FD also noted the RZSS budget for 2025 anticipates that an upward trajectory of costs will continue and growing our income diversity income streams is imperative moving forward.

The 2024 financial accounts were adopted by the membership.

F) Election of members to the board of trustees

IM stated that an election would be held this evening for three trustee vacancies. Candidates included one new nominee and three further term trustees. Biographical details and supporting statements had been published in advance with the papers for the meeting and the four candidates each gave a three-minute speech.

- Prof Mary Bownes
- Dr Andrew Kitchener
- Dr Richard Rutnagur
- Charles Wardman

IM thanked trustee Dr Karen MacEachern who has now stepped down from the Board of trustees and opened the voting lines both in the room and online with clear instructions provided.

G) Questions from members

Q1. RZSS President IM asked on behalf of member 1 what is likely to happen to pygmy hippo Haggis?

DF responded stating Haggis will eventually leave the zoo to form a new breeding pair. However, Haggis will remain with RZSS for another six months or so.

Q2. Member Ramsay Shields asked if the annual review video could be uploaded to YouTube to share with family and friends?

DF confirmed that it is possible to add the annual review video to YouTube and we will ensure this is done.

Q3. IM asked on behalf of member 3 how the BBC Inside the Zoo programme can be accessed now and if RZSS plan to sell it in the gift shop? Also, will another series be filmed?

Ben Supple, RZSS deputy chief executive, confirmed the BBC own the rights to the Inside the Zoo series therefore we cannot sell it, even though we would love to. Short clips can still be found on BBC iPlayer and YouTube. The BBC don't have any plans to film another series currently, however RZSS would be delighted to welcome them back for filming.

Q4. IM asked on behalf of member 4 what will replace the zebras on the African plains?

DF confirmed the zebras will be moving to their new habitat shortly. Then the Przewalski's horses will move to the African plains along with two Bactrian camels. The team will potentially be looking for more antelope species to fill this space, but appropriate housing facilities must be considered first.

Q5. Member 5 enquired about incentives to visit the zoo and whether reduced rates for city residents would be beneficial and worth investigating?

BS agreed this is worth investigating but it can be potentially controversial. It causes discussion and debate within the tourist sector and RZSS wouldn't want to commit at this stage.

Q6. Member 6 asked for clarification as to whether greater one-horned rhino Qabid would be replaced by two short-term rhino and whether this meant RZSS would be going out of this species?

DF confirmed Edinburgh Zoo have been requested by the studbook to take two young rhinos, train them, then facilitate their move to go and form breeding herds elsewhere. The wider breeding programme requires this support, and we refuse to house rhino in our current enclosure on a long-term basis as it does not comply to modern zoo standards.

Q7. IM asked on behalf of member Jean Wood if the cost of the recent advertising campaign has paid off and if there is a connection with the increase in membership?

BS confirms there is a definite correlation between the advertising campaign and membership increase. Highlighting our relationship with Lothian Buses is reciprocal and we now advertise RZSS as a charity, not just two separate sites. Our brand awareness is increasing year on year which also correlates to an increase in income and legacies.

Q8. IM asked on behalf of member Alex Dickson if there are future plans to add reptiles to the collection with the closure of Wee Beasties and additionally honeybee observations?

DF confirmed Wee Beasties will open again before the summer with basic species on show. The team do have thoughts regarding reptiles and fish moving forward and would like to link this to our WildGenes work. Honeybees have been investigated but there is a lot of licensing required when bringing them into a zoo environment. Therefore, our focus remains on the native bee populations at both sites with no plans to add an observation hive at this time.

Q9. Member 9 asked about options to add more accessible car parking bays at the member's gate?

DF confirmed the teams are already looking into this.

Q10. IM asked on behalf of member 10 if there could be a membership portal with further access to web cams etc?

BS acknowledged that a membership portal is a lovely idea but would take time, resources and finances. There are other technical developments currently ongoing including the site apps that have taken priority and we are progressing with first.

Q11. Member 11 asked if it's possible to learn more about the individual animals we have on site and their characters through the apps.

BS confirmed we can add more information about the animals in future planning and add live information as the visitor moves around the site.

Q12. Member 12 stated that Copenhagen Zoo has a viewing platform that can be accessed from outside the zoo. Is there scope for Edinburgh Zoo to do something similar at the top of the site on Corstorphine hill?

DF acknowledged Copenhagen Zoos viewing platform and also similar at Zoological Society of London with their penguin viewing. From Corstorphine hill some species are already visible, however the opportunity to provide this type of viewing would require a little more thought.

Q13. IM asked on behalf of member 13 if there are plans to mitigate against wet weather through site/enclosure planning and what is the plan for the old monkey house?

DF confirmed sheltered areas, viewing and seating are being incorporated into all the new habitats being built at both sites, taking into account guest welfare. The monkey house long term development is in discussion currently.

Q14. IM asked on behalf of member 14 about patron privileges on site?

BS described the patrons programme as an enhanced membership with a series of talks and tours through the year. Any patrons who have a particular interest are welcomed to reach out to engage further.

Q15. Member 15 asked if the ticket barriers at the car park are suitable as guests are having to get out of their cars to access the machine?

BS has noted this comment and further discussions would be required on this topic to further investigations.

Q16. IM asked on behalf of member 16 if there are any further plans for new enclosures at the Highland Wildlife Park and if so what species?

DF confirmed the executive team are bouncing around ideas for new species at the Highland Wildlife Park, but nothing has been confirmed yet.

Q17. IM asked on behalf of member Alex Dickson if there are any plans for the dinosaurs at the top of the hill?

BS expects the dinosaurs to be in place for the next 12-18 months since their recent uplift. They currently still receive good feedback, but the area will require development over the long term.

H) Re-appointment of auditors for 2025

The re-appointment of external auditors Henderson-Loggie was proposed and passed by the membership.

I) Resolution on membership rates

IM explained that the constitution requires any changes to membership subscriptions to be approved at the AGM. IM proposed and received approval from the members to increase membership subscriptions as shown below.

Category	2025/26 Paid outright	2024/25	2025/26 Annual direct debit	2024/25	2024/25 Monthly direct debit	2024/25
Adult	£92.25	£90	£81.09	£76.50	£6.76	£6.38
Joint Adult	£145	£141	£127.50	£120	£10.63	£10
Child	£49.25	£48	£43	£40.50	£3.58	£3.38
Student	£61.50	£60	£54	£50.75	£4.50	£4.23
Life	£1,040	£1,015	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

J) Election result

IM thanked all members for voting and reported that the election had now been verified. IM was delighted to announce that Prof Mary Bownes, Dr Andrew Kitchener and Dr Richard Rutnagur were re-elected to the Board. IM thanked the remaining candidate for their interest in becoming a trustee and for partaking in the election process.

K) Presentation: RZSS Archive Project, by Fiona Menzies (RZSS Project Archivist) and Amanda Dodd (RZSS Project Conservator)

RZSS project archivist, Fiona Menzies and RZSS project conservator, Amanda Dodd presented on the RZSS archives, raising awareness of RZSS involvement with the University of Edinburgh's Heritage Collections since 2022 with the aim to:

- Create an accessible online catalogue
- Conserve damaged items to ensure access in the future
- Promote the contents of the RZSS archive

Additionally, the Heritage Collections team have been facilitating outreach sessions, engaging with the local community and encouraging use of the RZSS archives.

Instructions were provided on how to access the online RZSS archive catalogue using the below QR code. Findings amongst the archives include animal records, correspondence, estate records, publications, many photographs and slides, and much more.



L) Vote of thanks

IM concluded the meeting by thanking all those who attended in person and online and the meeting was declared closed.