

Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 21 May 2025

Notice of Annual General Meeting

The 112th Annual General Meeting of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland will be held online by Zoom and in person at Edinburgh Zoo on Wednesday 21 May 2025 at 6:30pm. RZSS President Ian Marchant will preside.

Agenda

1. Adoption of the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 5 June 2024
2. Matters arising
3. Presentation of the 112th Annual Review and Impact Report
4. Chief Executive's Report
5. Presentation and adoption of the financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2024
6. Election of members to the board of trustees
 - a. Nominee one
 - b. Nominee two
 - c. Nominee three
 - d. Nominee four
 - e. Voting online/in room
7. Questions from members
8. Reappointment of auditors: the board of trustees recommends Henderson Loggie
9. Resolution on membership subscription rates
10. Election result
11. Presentation: Archive project by Fiona Menzies (RZSS Archivist, UoE) and Amanda Dodds (Paper Conservator, UoE)
12. Vote of thanks

2024 AGM Minutes

Minutes of the 111th Annual General Meeting of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS), held at Edinburgh Zoo and online by Zoom on Wednesday 05 June 2024 at 6.30pm.

Present

Ian Marchant (President)
Mary Bownes (Chair)
Karen Blackport (Vice Chair)
Fiona Davis (Honorary Treasurer)
Roger Wheeler
Peter Budd
Andrew Kitchener
John Fitzgerald
Richard Rutnagur
Anna Meredith
John Denerley
Simon Corcoran
Jack Kerr (Board Secretary)
David Field (Chief Executive Officer)

And 165 members (75 in person and 90 online)

Introduction

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm. IM welcomed members to the 111th Annual General Meeting and introduced BSL interpreters Jackie Greenshields and Louise Rodgers who would be assisting throughout the evening.

Apologies

Apologies were received from trustees Kerry Falconer, Karen MacEachern, Katie Lennox and member Lord David Steel of Aikwood.

A) Adoption of the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 24 May 2023

The minutes were proposed and then adopted by the membership.

B) Matters arising

IM reported that there were no matters arising documented and that MB and DF would cover a range of topics in this evening's presentations.

IM explained the proceedings of the evening, presenting the RZSS 2023 annual review video and then handing over to Chair of the Board MB for her remarks.

C) Presentation of the 111th Annual Review and Impact Report

MB gave thanks to the RZSS teams for preparing the annual review video which shows the achievements being made in line with the RZSS mission and strategic plan. Special thanks were then given to board members Roger Wheater and Peter Budd who have now reached the end of their term and will be standing down. Their excellent support and guidance over the years has been invaluable.

MB explained that visitor numbers have been at a reduced level over the last few months and there have been enclosure development delays due to the unpredictable wet weather. Members were reassured that a robust strategy is in place, along with the roll out of various marketing initiatives. Completed enclosure developments and catering facility upgrades were also mentioned, including the imminent opening of the Scottish Wildlife Discovery Centre at the Highland Wildlife Park, providing a strong sustainable future for RZSS.

MB concluded by thanking all the members, patrons, partners, volunteers and staff, handing over to Chief Executive Officer DF.

D) Chief Executive's Report

DF welcomed everyone to the meeting highlighting that RZSS has been working hard to deliver the 2030 strategy, monitoring our achievements and the impact on our pledges, resulting in the production of the impact report.

DF explained that RZSS has accelerated its international recognition as DF was elected Vice President of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) this year, along with becoming Co-Chair of the Reverse the Red global initiative, in line with the Species Survival Commission (IUCN). In May DF was at the centre of the first ever 24-hour online World Species Congress to celebrate biodiversity, and RZSS also hosted the international Joint TAG Chairs meeting aimed at bringing together global population managers to discuss how to improve population management moving forward.

DF confirmed the Scottish Wildlife Discovery Centre development at Highland Wildlife Park is well underway and will open early summer 2024. Emphasis was given on the progress and improvements being made to both sites from infrastructure through to exhibit/habitat maintenance and site planning. DF noted that external independent assessments and reports are frequently collated for both our sites and we have seen an increase in these scores as we progress through our improvements.

DF touched on the departure of the giant pandas, stating that although contact has been limited there is reassurance that both are well and settled. There are plans to bring in a new species of bear in 2025 and cheetahs are also coming to the zoo soon along with many other new additions.

DF concluding by thanking the members, volunteers and RZSS staff.

E) Presentation and adoption of the financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2023

Honorary Treasurer FD presented the accounts reinforcing that 2023 was a strong year with a financial operating surplus of £1.1m, keeping a healthy balance sheet whilst investing in the charitable mission. FD further explained that the operating surplus reflects the day-to-day operations of the charity, and this is the figure the board mostly discuss. Thanks was given to the RZSS finance team for all their work.

FD confirmed a cautious approach has been adopted for the 2024 budget which has an operating surplus of £0.8m, Income initiatives are already in play to mitigate the wet weather we have experienced to date this year which has impacted our visitors' numbers.

FD discussed the high-level breakdown of income growth and expenditure as RZSS see a 10% year on year increase on the operating costs. Inflationary pressures on property, catering, and living costs were noted with the addition of the new staff pay and grading scheme.

Overall, the balance sheet remains strong which has allowed the following spend on our RZSS charitable mission through the 2023 financial year:

Conservation £2.2m
Genetics £0.3m
Engagement £1.1m
Scottish Wildlife Discovery Centre £3.9m

The 2023 financial accounts were proposed by Board Member PB, seconded by Board Secretary JK and 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 six new nominees and one further term trustee. Biographical details and supporting statements had been published in advance with the papers for the meeting and the seven candidates would each now give a three-minute speech.

- Mark Tate (on Zoom)
- Simon Butlin
- John Fitzgerald
- Malcolm Fitzpatrick
- Edward Jones
- Deirdre (Dee) McIntosh
- David Windmill

IM opened the voting lines both in the room and online with clear instructions provided.

G) Questions from members

Q1. RZSS President Ian Marchant asked when cheetahs would be arriving at Edinburgh Zoo?

DF responded stating the DEFRA license request had now been submitted which usually takes around 6 weeks to process and that hopefully cheetahs would be with us soon.

Q2. Member 2 asked if we plan to get binturong back at Edinburgh Zoo and if so, would this be a breeding pair?

DF explained that binturong are on our long term species plan, but that there are no binturong available currently across Europe.

Q3. Member 3 asked about rhino enclosure developments, with the current rhino due to depart in November.

DF explained that the greater one-horned rhino EEP Coordinator has recommended Edinburgh Zoo receive two young males to hold for a couple of years until they reach breeding age. Interim work will be carried out on the exiting enclosure before these males arrive, however the long-term plan is to develop a new rhino habitat elsewhere in the zoo.

Q4. Member 4 asked when the koala enclosure refurbishment was due to take place and when the two new males would be arriving.

DF confirmed that planning permission had been received for the enclosure refurbishment, but it would likely be end 2024/ start 2025 before work would commence. The living collections team are currently in the process of organising the transport paperwork for both males.

Q5. Member 5 enquired about panda diplomacy and whether RZSS has attempted to engage with the relevant political parties to bring giant pandas back to Edinburgh Zoo.

DF confirmed that RZSS has not engaged with any political parties and giant pandas don't feature in our future planning, nor are they part of the regional collection planning. RZSS have no intentions to bring giant pandas back to Edinburgh Zoo.

Q6. Carole Kennedy asked for further information on the health of Babu the sun bear.

DF noted that we lost our male sun bear Rotana late last year due to cancer. Babu has also now been diagnosed with cancer and is being treated with end-of-life care by the keeping staff and veterinary team.

Q7. Member 7 asked if any female giraffe would be brought into the zoo and, if so, when?

DF explained that female giraffe are on the long term plans for Edinburgh Zoo, but not in the short term. We currently have a great exhibit with five males and RZSS will continue to work closely with the EEP Coordinators recommendations.

Q8. Tracy Wainwright asked what the future plans are for Brodie the male polar bear?

DF confirmed that Brodie will be staying at the Highland Wildlife Park until further facilities are found by the polar bear EEP Coordinator. RZSS recently refused an EEP recommendation for him to move due to the unsatisfactory facilities of the receiving institution.

Q9. Member 9 asked about binturong enclosure plans and additionally where would the Pallas's cats be housed?

DF confirmed Pallas's cats will be housed in the old binturong enclosure.

Q10. Member 10 recognised the work from giant panda keeper Alison Maclean. Noting there had been limited communication from China, had it been confirmed if Yang Guang and Tian Tian have been retired off show?

DF further recognised Alison Macleans contribution to the zoo and the giant panda programme. DF confirmed there have been limited communications from China and it is not known if the pair have been retired off show. Any information received will be passed onto the members.

Q11. Member 11 highlighted penguin fatality figures published in the 2023 animal inventory.

DG stated that there are no concerns within the living collections department. The team of vets on site and the Animal Welfare Advisory Group analyse the findings and the main cause of fatality has unfortunately been due to ingestion of foreign materials blown into the enclosure which can cause gut impaction.

Q12. Member 12 stated that it is not just Edinburgh Zoo that receives minimal communications from China regarding returned giant pandas. This is ongoing across all zoos worldwide and appears to be normal.

Q13. Graeme Cobb gave thanks to DF for spending the time to meet pre-AGM for a site visit. Graeme will continue to monitor the positive steps being taken by the charity.

Q14. Ellie Goodman asked for an update on a shuttlebus from Aviemore to the Highland Wildlife Park.

BS explained the intention is to trial transport from Aviemore High Street this summer, but ultimately a trial depends on successful recruitment of a bus driver. Recruitment in this area is notoriously difficult.

H) Re-appointment of auditors for 2024

The re-appointment of external auditors Henderson-Loggie was proposed, seconded 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 sought a proposer, a seconder, and received approval from the members to increase membership subscriptions as shown below.

	2024/25 Paid outright	2023	2024/25 Annual direct debit	2023	2024/25 Monthly direct debit	2023
Adult	£90	£84	£76.50	£71.50	£6.38	£5.95
Joint adult	£141	£132	£120	£112.50	£10	£9.38
Child	£48	£45	£40.50	£38	£3.38	£3.16
Student	£60	£56	£50.75	£47.50	£4.23	£3.95
Life	£1,015	£950	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 John Fitzgerald was re-elected to the board, alongside Deirdre McIntosh and Mark Tate as new trustees. MB thanked the remaining candidates for their interest in becoming trustees and for partaking in the election process.

K) Presentation: From Formal to Informal Learning: Creating Stronger Connections with Nature, by Phill Mathis (Learning Manager) and Jess Wise (HWP Discovery and Learning Programme Manager)

Learning Manager, Phill Mathis and HWP Discovery and Learning Programme Manager, Jess Wise highlighted that sharing our spaces and fostering a love of learning has been at the heart of RZSS for a very long time. Impressive 2023 statistics covering RZSS onsite learning, offsite outreach, and the use of the free online learning platform Zoodle were provided.

The expansion in RZSS facilities and in the team has allowed the learning journey to move out of a traditional classroom setting, expanding our offerings and providing the ability to reduce and remove barriers to reach as many learners as possible.

The programmes are intentional and collaborative providing opportunities and unique experiences. In turn creating stronger connections with nature to foster a passion which lasts a lifetime.

L) Vote of thanks

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