

## AGM 2024

### WRITTEN QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

#### David Sillito

I have exchanged e-mails with Juliet Vickery on this matter and although I understand and agree with many of the points made in response and in the article that she makes, we have one fundamental difference of opinion. I feel it important to outline why I have submitted two questions to the Board for the AGM. I do hope my preamble is not too long.

Our CEO Juliet Vickery had a 4 page article in the Autumn issue of BTO News. It covered the executive's decision to attend the Restore Nature Now march in June of this year, a decision supported by the Board.

The march was attended by Extinction Rebellion (a Key Partner of Restore Nature Now), Just Stop Oil, Hunt Saboteurs, the National Trust and controversial figures such as Chris Packham and Emma Thomson. Without doubt the public at large will have negative views about their behaviour. Certainly, many laudable organisations were also in attendance.

I suspect that this has been seen by many members as a surprising departure from normal activities by BTO and in anticipation of this, the executive decided to offer an explanation and justification in the autumn magazine.

The first justification offered is that the tone and underlying aims of the march aligned with BTO core values. It may well be that this is true for many of the participants. It is demonstrably untrue concerning Just Stop Oil, Extinction Rebellion, Hunt Saboteurs etc. Association with these organisations brings BTO into disrepute and gives credibility to their behaviour. This applies to Juliet's second justification about other organisations involved, although many of the others are exemplary.

Her third point covers the role of scientists and how they personally can be involved in the environmental challenge we face, promulgate their ideas and make a bigger contribution. The paper she cites, written by former colleagues, is very interesting although I am long past dissecting such papers and no longer have access to the many references. It is an opinion piece only and has no scientific basis in itself. It is tendentious stating at the outset the authors' position on Government and biodiversity. Her article mentions solely the points that suit the justification for attending the march and advocacy but makes no mention of some of the caveats offered by Gregory et al. I select a warning within the paper that might be relevant. In Section 4 'The biggest danger is that societal trust in science could be undermined when scientific and advocacy roles become conflated.' In substance, whilst supporting so many of the organisations involved in the march, I see the risk in being associated with some of the less honourable ones as being too great. The Board needs to think carefully about this.

My questions for the Board are:

- 1. Does the Board recognise that apparent links with organisations such as Just Stop Oil will be detrimental to BTO?**
- 2. Does the Board have a mechanism for testing their view with the membership?**

#### Board's response

BTO took part in this event to raise awareness of the perilous state of nature, not to align ourselves with any other of the ca 400 causes represented. We have no links and are not associated with the vast majority of these organisations, including Just Stop Oil, exceptions being organisations such as RSPB and NT with whom we have very good formal partnerships.

Mr Sillito highlights this line in the paper

*The biggest danger is that societal trust in science could be undermined when scientific and advocacy roles become conflated.*

We completely agree that science advocacy is flawed when it reflects personal values and preferences. We will remain evidence-led in all we say and do, and we will work to make sure the evidence we produce, based on data our supporters collect, is listened to by decision makers.

We do not regularly test views with members, and we do not have an easy way to do so in a timely manner. This is why we have a Board the election of which is approved by members. We will continue to consider all such decisions carefully at Board. We sought responses to our presence at the march through BTO News, after the event, as a useful gauge for future similar decisions. We had 18 responses: 14 that were supportive and 4 were critical. We will be publishing excerpts from these in the next BTO News.

However, it is important to recognise that, while we do not have a formal process for testing the views of members we do have many, very effective, informal routes. We regularly receive feedback and hear views of members through our regional network and organisers of long term monitoring schemes as well as through face to face training events and workshops and annual conference - the next one being in Manchester on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2025 .

**Larry Hayes**

**In the absence of any organised training courses can you outline active strategy for enabling C permit ringers to progress to A permit in Scotland?**

**Board's response**

BTO has not centrally organised generic ringing training courses for many years, largely due to a lack of resources – we wish we could! We do encourage ringing groups to operate courses and to charge for them to cover costs/generate profit. And we are considering central organisation of specialist courses/workshops that target gaps, such as wildfowl, raptors and waders.

There are other ways to progress, and we have invested in a number of initiatives recently designed to help this. For example, we now have a modular permit system which enables progression from C to A more easily by reducing the breadth of knowledge required. We have developed the [Find-A-Trainer](#) map that can be accessed by registered BTO volunteers. A Find-An-Experience map will follow soon. In addition, we have been able to award a number of seabird grants, thanks to our seabird appeal, to make seabird ringing more accessible.