

ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

held online and at London Zoo, Regents Park

at 19:00 on 13 November 2025

Present: Professor Sir Jim Smith (Council Chair)
The Council of the Zoological Society of London
146 Fellows of the Society

Attending: ZSL's Interim Chief Executive Officer and Executive Committee

1. CHAIR'S WELCOME

The Chair of ZSL's Council welcomed attendees to the 196th Annual General Meeting of the Society and thanked the Fellows for their ongoing support of ZSL.

The Chair noted that it had been announced earlier that day that Matthew Gould had stepped down as Chief Executive Officer. Council had appointed Kathryn England as Interim Chief Executive Officer and were looking forward to working with her and the rest of the Executive Committee as ZSL entered its bicentenary year.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Fellows who were unable to attend the meeting. The Chair confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 21 November 2024 were approved.

4. ZSL AWARDS AND MEDALS

The Chair announced the winners of ZSL's 2025 Awards, ahead of a presentation ceremony on 9 December 2025.

5. ZSL'S YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

The Chair introduced Alex Porter and Grace Alagaratnam from ZSL's Youth Advisory Board, who gave an overview of the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) and its achievements during the year. The YAB was formed in 2023 with a mission to unite and amplify diverse youth voices to foster an inclusive and equitable future for people and wildlife. Eight new members joined the YAB in July 2025 and in the preceding four months the YAB had delivered a citizen science workshop at Chester Zoo, attended the first Youth Summit at London Climate Action Week, and presented its research on conservation career aspirations

at the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA) Education Conference. ZSL's YAB would be participating in an upcoming UN Climate Change Conference (COP30) event at Kew Gardens and were planning a Youth Event in 2026 to tie into ZSL's Bicentenary. The YAB members thanked the Fellows for the opportunity to present and encouraged Fellows and ZSL staff to get in contact with the YAB for input or support on any upcoming projects or events.

6. CONSERVATION HIGHLIGHTS

Andrew Terry, Director of Conservation and Policy, gave an overview of ZSL's conservation and science impact from the previous year under ZSL's four strategic pillars.

Restoring Habitats

This strategic pillar focused on the intersection between wildlife, people, and shared habitats, working to turn conflict into coexistence. It was ZSL's largest and most complex area of work, encompassing large scale international research and conservation projects. In 2024 ZSL had launched Transforming the Thames, supported by the Endangered Landscape and Seascape Programme. As well as being one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, the Thames Estuary was incredibly biologically important for the UK. ZSL had established a seagrass research facility at London Zoo and had planted new beds of dwarf seagrasses in the Thames, which provided an important habitat for wildlife in addition to acting as a carbon store. ZSL had a long history of working on seagrass conservation in the UK as well as in the tropics.

Another success in 2024 was ZSL's partnership with the Philippines government and other stakeholders to create the country's first large scale ocean marine protected area. The Philippines was one of the most climate vulnerable countries in the world, and ZSL was working to preserve and protect its wildlife in the 150km² marine protected area was off the Northeast coast of the islands, in a way that supported and centred the local coastal communities who were reliant on it.

Protecting Species

ZSL had a rich and long history in species based conservation and the new strategy identified target species for which ZSL wanted population level recovery over the next four years. As part of this work, ZSL had launched the Extinct in the Wild Action partnership, a collaboration with a range of global organisations focused on prioritising conservation efforts for species that only existed in collections and were extinct in the wild. At the end of 2024 ZSL were informed that a particular species within the collection, the boxer pupfish, was on the brink of extinction and was likely extinct in the wild. ZSL was working with other organisations such as Bristol Zoo to establish a breeding programme for this species whilst simultaneously working in the field on habitat restoration.

ZSL was also celebrating the down listing of Polynesian tree snails from extinct in the wild to critically endangered. Through field missions, ZSL had confirmed not only the continued presence of the species in the wild, but also that they were breeding, which met the conditions to be able to downlist the species. This was one of ZSL's longest standing conservation programmes and Paul Pierce Kelly, who had been instrumental in the programme had been recognised in 2025 with a Lifetime Achievement Award from EAZA.

Another species success story was that of Darwin's frog, a paternal brooding species under extreme threat from the infectious fungi Chytridiomycosis. ZSL had a long history researching this disease, responding to outbreaks and spread of the fungi in the wild, and managing and breeding populations of threatened amphibians at its zoos. A film documenting the rescue mission by ZSL, "A Leap of Hope" had been released in early 2025.

Training Conservationists

ZSL's education access scheme started in 2021 as a way to provide an annual subscription for schools for unlimited access to ZSL's zoo's education and teaching resources, and to provide a support network to help teachers make the zoos an extension of the classroom. With support from the Steel Charitable Trust the programme had been significantly expanded in 2024. ZSL had also launched a pilot programme for three local schools in Luton to improve nature training and target the gaps in education resources.

In ZSL had a long history of providing veterinary training in India via a collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India and Edinburgh University to deliver the Interventions in Wildlife Animal Health (IWAH) field course. This was an annual, Master-accredited field skills course, taught by vets and biologists to develop the skills needed for working in national parks and protected areas with wild species. In 2024/25 the course had moved to Kenya with twenty-seven participants from thirteen countries taking part in the eighteen day field course.

Creating Change

ZSL's final strategic pillar was creating change, where the goal was to integrate nature into people's decision making, at a personal, corporate and political level.

ZSL's Professor Rosie Woodruff had led a long term programme of work on bovine tuberculosis. This devastating disease led to the slaughter of over twenty thousand cattle a year, was incredibly damaging for farmers and incredibly expensive for UK taxpayers. The disease was spread mainly between cattle but could also be spread from wild badgers leading to the controversial long term culling programme and was one of the largest wildlife conflict issues in the UK. Rosie's work focused on the dynamics of the disease within badger populations and in 2024 she published the results of a four year farmer led

vaccination pilot in Cornwall using robust science to show that badger vaccination was technically effective and socially acceptable. In 2024/25 Rosie had launched a collaboration with the National Farmers Union to grow the initiative to expand the farmer-led vaccination programme and use blood tests to continue track the effectiveness of vaccinations.

Finally, ZSL's sustainable business and finance team worked closely with the finance sector, including investors and banks, on decisions that would ultimately impact nature. ZSL's SPOTT assessment tool had celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2024. SPOTT evaluated the sustainability of different supply chains associated with timber, palm oil, and natural rubber and had expanded from assessing 24 companies to over 230 companies, representing about \$400 billion of corporate value, or an area of land of over 65m hectares in some of the world's most important biological areas. Whilst transparency within these industries had grown, only 51% of companies were confident in their ability to track supply chains demonstrating SPOTT's value. ZSL were taking these results and other impacts to the COP30. ZSL had a team in Brazil at the negotiations, working with partners on the importance of integrating nature into those climate talks.

7. ZSL'S FUNDRAISING

Pippa Carte, ZSL's Director of Development gave an overview of fundraising and support for ZSL's mission. Pippa noted that there were thousands of worthy causes to which people could choose support and so ZSL was enormously grateful when people choose to support its mission. This support came in multiple different forms, from direct giving, fundraising through challenges, corporate memberships, and more significant individual philanthropy such as investing in capital projects.

The current external environment was particularly challenging for charities, with demand for services increasing, the cost of operating increasing, and the available funding decreasing. The result had been closures, cost cutting programmes including redundancies and the restriction of services. Over half of Charities had reported that in the last year income had either remained static or declined and only a third of charities had reported meeting their income targets.

Global aid and other government funding for biodiversity and the climate had constricted significantly over the preceding twelve months, with the cessation of USAID and a 40% reduction in overseas development aid across Europe. In the UK, DEFRA funding had been cut and whilst the general public gave a wonderful £15.4 billion to charity in 2024, this was the lowest level since 2016, with four million fewer individual donors. There was more positive news with growth in philanthropy including those who choose to make a gift to charity in their will, and the £5.1 billion in giving through legacy estates was expected to double by 2050. Pippa gave a summary of other areas for growth and opportunities to support ZSL in the coming months, including ZSL's Festive Dinners appeal, plans for more lotteries and

prize draws and seeking additional support from trusts and foundations. Finally, Pippa thanked the Fellowship for their ongoing support and encouraged Fellows to share any ideas or fundraising successes.

8. FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Timon Drakesmith, Chief Financial Officer, presented an overview of the financial results for the financial year ended April 2024. The financial results for the 2024/25 financial year were very positive, with record total income and increased cash reserves. The year to date, from 1 May 2025, had been more challenging with a difficult market context and reduced trading across the visitor attraction market.

Total net income was £92.7m, the highest level of income ZSL had ever achieved. Compared to pre covid to April 20-19 in the region of £70m. Net income was £1.7m, down on 2023/24. The unrestricted deficit was £1.8m. Unrestricted cash was £13.6m, £3.7m up on the prior year.

Two thirds of ZSL's income, around £62m, came from admissions, trading and zoo membership, emphasising the importance of providing an engaging and positive experience for zoo visitors. In terms of expenditure, £44.9m, around half, of ZSL's total expenditure was on the zoos, and animal collections. ZSL's conservation field programmes, science and research made up £25m of total expenditure.

Total Capital Expenditure for the 2024/25 financial year was £6.4m, compared to £7.1m in the prior year. This was spread relatively evenly between London Zoo (£1.9m), Whipsnade Zoo (£2.2m) and an investment of £2.3m into a high performance "super" computer to support research at the Institute of Zoology. This continued the post covid trend of significant investment into ZSL's sites.

Turning to the year to date, the external environment was difficult. The UK economy was subdued with zero GDP growth. Reduced consumer confidence meant less consumer spending and increased competition within the visitor attraction market had led to aggressive discounting and promotions. This was set against the wider context of a reduction in global funding for nature and the environment, with USAID being completely withdrawn and UK aid being cut back significantly. The weather during the summer of 2025 had also impacted visitor numbers, as the extremely high temperatures meant that indoor, air conditioned venues were more appealing than outdoor attractions such as the zoos.

Resulting year to date (May to October 2025) total visitor numbers were down 3% against the previous year. Market data from other zoos and other London visitor attractions indicated an average fall of about 5%. Admissions income was 8% lower than the same period in the previous year. This was larger than the fall in total numbers due to increased member visitation and reduced one-off paying visitor numbers, which were down 10% compared to the previous year.

Overall, ZSL was forecasting an unrestricted deficit of up to £3m for the 2025/2026 financial year. Cost reduction actions were being taken as a result of this forecast, including the voluntary redundancy scheme which was anticipated to result in around £1.5m of savings, as well as actions to grow income. Cash balances were being monitored closely.

9. MEMBERSHIP OF COUNCIL: RETIREMENTS AND ELECTIONS

The changes to Council following the 2025 Council elections were reported by the Chair as follows:

i. Retirements

In accordance with Byelaw 22 (d), Athena Markides had retired as a member of the Council.

The Chair thanked Athena for her four years on Council, who had brought her insurance and legal expertise to Council discussions.

ii. Elections

In accordance with Byelaw 22 (d), Nik Engineer had been elected to serve on the Council for a term of 4 years.

iii. Selections

In accordance with Byelaw, Council had selected Richard Kimblin for a second term of four years on Council.

10. FELLOWSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2026

The Chair introduced the proposed subscriptions for 2026 on behalf of Council as follows:

Fellowship type	2025 rate	Proposed rate 2026
Fellow	£165	£169
Fellow (concession rate)	£148	£152
Pre-2018 Concession Fellow	£125	£139
Graduate Fellow	£80	£83
Student Fellow	£48	£48
Non-visiting Fellow	£51	£55
Overseas Fellow	£85	£89
Scientific Fellow (proposed – not yet in place)	£180	£180

The Chair noted that ZSL's Council had considered the proposed increase for 2026 in depth and had tried to keep the increase to a minimal, however, Council encouraged those Fellows who were able to make an additional contribution over and above their subscription to consider doing so.

The proposed subscriptions were approved by the meeting.

11. FELLOWS' QUESTIONS

In response to a question as to whether ZSL were looking to obtain new hippos (*Hippopotamus amphibius*) at Whipsnade Zoo, Malcolm Fitzpatrick, ZSL's Chief Zoological Officer, advised that the facilities at Whipsnade were not sufficient to be able to provide the necessary level of care for hippos. The current capital expenditure priorities were Gorillas and Elephants and therefore ZSL was not able to invest in the necessary facilities for hippo.

In response to a request for an update on the breeding recommendation for pygmy hippos (*Choeropsis liberiensis*), Malcolm Fitzpatrick advised that the identified individuals noted at the prior AGM were still too young to introduce, but shared pictures of the young male currently at a zoo in Poland.

In response to a question as to whether breeding endangered species remained a priority for ZSL, Malcolm Fitzpatrick highlighted several breeding successes from the previous year, including the Socorro dove (*Zenaida graysoni*), red panda (*Ailurus fulgens*), African lion (*Panthera leo*), and Sulawesi crested macaque (*Macaca nigra*). Specifically for ZSL's ungulate species, Malcolm advised that DEFRA were enforcing movement restrictions due to bluetongue virus. ZSL were working with the Pirbright Institute to develop innovative mosquito proof quarantine facilities with the hope of being able to share an adopted prototype with other zoos and remove the movement restrictions. ZSL had also had significant success during the year breeding amphibians, including Darwins Frog as described by Andrew Terry earlier in the meeting. With the support of local conservationists, ZSL had collected slippery frogs and puddle frogs from the Atewa Forest Reserve in Ghana which were at significant risk from mining concessions. These species had now bred for the first time at London Zoo and ZSL were able to share these breeding protocols with colleagues in Ghana and also set up a population there. Whipsnade Zoo was also expecting two more giraffe births, a white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum simum*), and Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) Gita was pregnant.

In response to a question about the ongoing maintenance of ZSL's buildings, Owen Craft, Director of Zoo Operations, advised that ZSL had extended the contract of its third party facilities management company who were responsible for planned and preventative maintenance, reactive jobs, and minor works. In terms of decision making and the prioritisation of works the key considerations were safety, compliance, and animal welfare, followed by visitor experience. In 2024 London Zoo's hundred year old reptile house had been transformed into Zoo Town. The previous Galapagos tortoise house had been developed into a new Capybara exhibit, and ZSL had also invested in a programme of works to reduce water and other utilities, resulting in a saving of over £100k.

In response to a question regarding an increase in high paid employees from the previous annual report to the 2024/25 report, Timon Drakesmith advised that this was the result of accumulated pay rises and some thoroughly deserved promotions.

In response to a question regarding the changes to the byelaws in early 2025 and whether this presented fewer opportunities for Fellows to be involved in the Society's governance, Simon Lee, ZSL's Head of Legal, Governance, and Risk Management, gave an overview of the changes and responded to the specific point about limits to terms of office of Council members. SL reminded Fellows that there had been two changes to the byelaws in recent years, one in 2021 and one in 2025. The driving force behind both reviews was to benchmark ZSL against the Charity Governance Code. This Code was written with input from charities, trustees, membership bodies, and professional advisers and was considered to be the 'gold standard' of modern UK charity governance. SL outlined the process followed to update the byelaws, starting with an internal working group making recommendations to Council, a consultation with the Fellowship, a formal ballot of the Fellowship and finally the approval of the Privy Council. One of the aspects the Code was that to try and ensure the right balance of 'new blood' and experience trustees should not serve more than nine years in total unless there were exceptional circumstances.

One of the challenges considered in the Governance Review was that Council struggled to get the skills it needed from the Fellowship alone. It was common practice in charity governance for some trustees to be selected rather than elected, with some charities having 100% selection. The most recent Governance Review concluded that 50/50 was the correct balance. Simon confirmed that Fellows could be selected or elected, so Fellowship continued to be the core basis of Council and would never be in the minority. The move to 50% selected would be implemented over a number of years. The 2021 byelaw changes had included a transition period, otherwise more than half of Council would have been required to immediately step down. To prevent this, the 2021 Byelaws included a clause that existing Council members would be deemed to be in their first term of office which is where the suggestion of the limit not being applied retrospectively had come from, and why some previous Trustees who have served multiple past terms were able to stand for election between 2021 and now. However, the 2025 Byelaws removed the transitional arrangements as they had served their purpose. The removal also ensured that the same rules on term limits applied to all Fellows, whereas the transitional arrangements meant that Council members in place during the previous review were treated differently than other Fellows.

In response to a question about the resignation of Matthew Gould, the Chair advised that ZSL was unable to share information about an ongoing internal matter. Council were focusing on supporting the Executive and the new Interim Chief Executive Officer and ensuring a smooth transition in leadership.

In response to a question about changes to the Giraffe and Zebra paddock at London Zoo and whether the space continued to be suitable for those animals, Malcom Fitpatrick replied that the main change had been the removal of the moat around the paddock. Whilst this had been an aesthetically pleasing feature its removal had enabled the space to increase by over 30%. Giraffes were no longer bred at London due to the limited space; however, London was fulfilling an important role for the European Breeding Programme by providing a transitional home for young males ahead of moves recommended by the breeding programme.

In response to a suggestion of a dedicated Fellows focus session, the Chair advised that the 2026 Fellows' Day would be held on 16 May 2026, and encouraged Fellows to share any ideas they had for fundraising in the meantime.

In response to a question as to why ZSL did not have donation points that accepted cash, Owen Craft advised that cash donation could be made at all ZSL shops and catering outlets.

In response to a question as to why ZSL provided play and other attractions for children, Owen Craft replied that these aspects were important to support the overall zoo experience. The inclusion of play increased visitor dwell time making it important from a commercial perspective and built an overall positive experience for visitors and contributed to value for money from a membership perspective.

In response to a question about the high cost of entrance to the zoos, Timon Drakesmith advised that during the summer ZSL had run a limited time 30% off promotion that had been reasonably successful, and during the autumn half term there had been an offer of £10 entry for children. The marketing team were looking at potential promotional techniques and discounts for 2026 in expectation of a difficult year. However, in terms of value for money, ZSL's zoos offered an amazing experience, and at the same time the cost of entry contributed to ZSL's vital conservation work and mission.

12. CLOSING ITEMS

There being no further business, the Chair closed the meeting.