



Founded 1974

Constitution

November 2025 Revision

1.0 Name

1.1. ABWAK

The name of the Association is the “Association of British & Irish Wild Animal Keepers”, originally known as the Association of British Wild Animal Keepers, and is abbreviated to ABWAK.

1.2. Definitions pertaining to the Association:

Wild animal – any animal other than that which is domesticated for use by man and used in agricultural, industrial or other purposes.

Wild animal keeper – the keeper of a wild animal, whether employed as a keeper of livestock by a zoological establishment or the keeper of privately owned wild animals.

Zoo professional – any individual employed by a zoological establishment and is thereby involved in the promotion of the conservation of wildlife.

Zoo - Since the founding of ABWAK in 1974 there has been a legal definition under the Zoo Licensing Act (1981) and EU Zoos Directive 2002, as any establishment where wild animals are kept for exhibition to the public (otherwise than in a circus or a pet shop) for seven consecutive days in any 12-month period (with or without charge for admission).

British & Irish – the Association represents keepers throughout the British Isles including the Republic of Ireland, Channel Islands, and Isle of Man.

ICZ – the International Congress of Zookeepers – the global network of zookeepers and zookeeper associations (ABWAK being a founder member)

2.0 Mission and Objectives

2.1. Vision and Mission:

Vision: "To achieve and advance the highest standards of excellence in wild animal care"

Mission: "ABWAK is a membership organisation for those interested and involved in the keeping and conservation of wild animals, which seeks to achieve the highest standards of excellence in animal care through communication, cooperation, training and development."

2.2. Values:

We are the largest association representing animal keepers in Britain and Ireland for whom excellent animal welfare is the highest priority.

We can have a significant impact in welfare issues by bringing keepers and stakeholders together and by being a strong representative and consultative body.

We can make a significant contribution to the training and development of animal keepers thus raising standards and increasing the profile of legitimate captive animal collections.

By developing the skills and expertise of our members we can make a unique contribution to conservation.

Through ICZ we can advance and promote animal welfare and keeper development globally.

2.3. Objectives:

To improve cooperation among animal keepers, both nationally and internationally

To provide, encourage and organise opportunities for the meeting of keepers of wild animals

To improve, through education, the professional competence of all involved with wild animal husbandry

To support the conservation of wildlife throughout the world.

2.4. Powers of the Association

In furtherance of this mission and these aims and objectives, but not otherwise, the Association through its Council shall have the following powers:

To raise funds and to encourage and receive contributions from any persons whatsoever by way of subscription, donation or otherwise, provided that the Council shall not undertake any permanent trading activities in raising funds for the said objectives, other than direct sales of ABWAK publications and branded merchandise.

To do all other such things as shall further the objectives of the Association in keeping with its mission and values.

3.0. Membership

3.1. Categories:

There shall be two categories or classes of membership of the Association:

Professional Members – who shall be employed as wild animal keepers or zoo professionals in the UK or Ireland aged 18 or over. Retired zoo professionals may be granted professional membership status at the discretion of Council (otherwise Associate membership applies). (*Professional members have voting rights*).

Associate Members – for those, aged 18 or over, not yet employed as wild animal keepers or zoo professionals (e.g. students, interns or volunteers) in the UK & Ireland. (*No voting rights*).

All members are subject to the constitution and byelaws and the Council shall, when necessary, determine the category of membership applicants are eligible for.

3.2. Age Restrictions:

Membership is not open to anyone under 18 years of age.

Retired members – there is no upper age limit.

3.3. International Congress of Zookeepers (ICZ)

Upon becoming a member of ABWAK all members shall automatically become members of the International Congress of Zookeepers (ICZ) at no additional fee for the duration of their membership or until the dissolution of ICZ if that should occur within their membership year.

3.4. Duration of Membership

Members are required to pay an annual fee (unless honorary status has been given) and remain members of the Association until the membership fee ceases to be paid, subject to satisfying the membership criteria and conditions. No refunds are given. Refer to the byelaws.

4.0. Election and Function of Council and The Executive

4.1. General Council and Executive Committee

The Policy and Strategy of the Association shall be formulated by a General Council (hereafter referred to as the Council), and implemented by an Executive Committee (hereafter referred to as the Executive).

The Council of the Association shall consist of no more than eighteen members of whom four to six shall form the Executive (see 4.6). Members shall be invited to apply for positions on Council and successful candidates co-opted onto Council by the Executive. The membership shall be provided a minimum of 1 month period in which to raise objections to co-opted council members.

Notice of co-opted members shall be given via Ratel and /or ABWAK e-news. Objections received shall be discussed by executive committee and, whether objections are upheld, recorded in the minutes of the subsequent quarterly council meeting.

If two Council meetings within each 12-month period are not attended without reasonable cause and notification, then the Council member concerned shall be deemed to have resigned. Council members must tender apologies to the Chair and Honorary Secretary if unable to attend a scheduled Council meeting, and to give reason why they are unable to attend.

The Executive may at its discretion and by unanimous vote (a) waive the automatic resignation condition for non-attendance; (b) suspend a member of Council giving such a member reason for so doing; or (c) dismiss a member of Council for failing to contribute effectively to the Council's work in furtherance of the Association's aims and objectives (after an appropriate notice of concern and opportunity to address the issue).

4.2. Period of Office

The members of the Council once elected shall hold office until the third annual general meeting from the date of their election subject to termination of office by resignation or otherwise.

A co-opted member can serve for a minimum of one month and a maximum of three months during which the membership has the right to object to their appointment.

A Council member may serve more than one term of office.

4.3. Election of Council Members

A Council of up to 18 members is elected by the membership. A member coopted by the Executive, for whom the membership has been given the opportunity to object and for whom no reasonable objection has been raised is deemed to have been elected by the membership.

When a member of the Council retires or otherwise ceases to hold office, or if there are vacancies, the members of the Association shall be thus notified through ABWAK e-news, social media and/or Ratel and invited to apply to the Executive to fill such positions as may be vacant.

ABWAK Council shall enact a democratic selection process which includes a written application and/or an interview with a minimum of two members of Council (one of which must be an Executive). The successful member shall be co opted on to Council and the membership given reasonable notice to object. Subject to no reasonable objection being

raised, they shall remain in office until their third AGM

Notification of coopted members of Council are to be given in accordance with the byelaws, section 15.

4.4. Re-election

Council members completing their term of office at each third annual general meeting shall be eligible for re-election to the Council. There is no maximum length of service.

To be re-elected, council must first approve the candidacy. The membership shall be provided a minimum of 1 month period in which to raise objections to the council member's re-election.

Notice of the intention of the council member's re-election shall be given via Ratel and /or ABWAK e-news. Objections received shall be discussed by executive committee and, whether objections are upheld, recorded in the minutes of the subsequent quarterly council meeting.

For members of the executive committee seeking re-election, any objections raised by either members or council are discussed only by those on the executive committee against which the objection/s have not been raised.

4.5. Property

The Executive Committee of the Council shall have the power if authorised by the Association at a General Meeting, in the name of the Association to acquire, sell, exchange, mortgage, lease or take leases on any land or buildings to further the objectives of the Association.

Any equipment, resources, merchandise, publications and website, etc., purchased or produced for the Association, and records pertaining to the work of and communication with the Association remains the property of the Association and the Executive will decide who is authorised to hold such property on its behalf. Such property must be surrendered back to the Executive upon request.

The Executive may liquidate any assets of the Association only after a majority vote at a General Meeting of the membership and any surplus (profit) raised, once costs or debts have been paid, must be used to further the objectives of the Association.

4.6. Composition and Powers of the Executive Committee

The Executive shall consist of at least four but no more than six members of Council:

- Chair / Co-Chairs
- Vice Chair
- Honorary Treasurer
- And one to three other Council members as elected by Council (to be chosen for their ability to contribute to on-going work/project and discussions and to be elected to the Executive by Council for a period of 2 years).

The Executive is empowered to exercise the powers and undertake the duties of the Council insofar as is necessary to carry out routine management of the Association.

The Executive has the power to co-opt others to the Council should there be less than 18 elected members, who shall be members of the Association, in order to fulfil its objectives.

The Executive has the power to engage external advice and support when or if it is considered appropriate to further the aims and objectives of the Association.

The Executive has the power to engage external facilitators, trainers or speakers when or if it is considered appropriate to further the aims and objectives of the Association.

The Executive has the power to suspend or expel a member of Council or a member of the Association in accordance with the disciplinary procedures (section 8). And to reclaim all ABWAK property, resources and records from that person.

5.0. Officers

All officers (Council Members) of the Association are volunteers and are not employed by the Association or entitled to any remuneration other than for minor expenses in accordance with the Association's byelaw 5.

5.1. Chair and/or Co-Chair

A Chair or Co-chairs of the Association shall be elected (by majority vote) from within and by the Council and shall remain in office for three years subject to termination of office by resignation or otherwise until his/her successor is elected.

5.2. Re-election of Chair/ Co-Chair

The Chair /Co-Chair shall be eligible for re-election following any term of office.

5.3. Voting Rights of Chair

The Chair or one of the Co-Chairs or his/her nominated deputy (Vice Chair) shall preside over General Meetings, meetings of the Council and of the Executive, and shall have an additional or casting vote in the event of an equality of votes.

5.4. Vice Chair and Treasurer

The Council shall appoint from within its elected members, the Vice Chair and Treasurer who are automatically also members of the Executive. They shall serve for 3 years and are eligible for re-appointment following each term of office subject to remaining elected members of the Council. (The Vice Chair position may be left vacant if there is a Co-Chair in post).

5.5. Council Roles

To further the aims and objectives of the Association, the Council, with leadership from the Executive, shall allocate roles to individual Council members. These roles shall be defined to meet the current needs of the Association and can be combined where appropriate, but may include: Secretary, Membership Secretary, Symposium Secretary, Website Coordinator, Editor, Grants Officer, Training & Development Coordinator, Publications and Merchandise Officer, Keeper Liaison, Ambassador Support Officer.

5.6. Ex-Officio Roles (Non-Council)

The Executive in consultation with the rest of Council, may appoint ex-officio roles to support the objectives of the Association. Such roles shall also be volunteers and not eligible for remuneration other than agreed expenses. These roles may include roles normally considered as part of Council at a time when there is no-one elected to Council (and no vacant positions for co-option) with the skills or time to undertake such a role.

Additionally, Council shall appoint 'ambassadors' from within the Association's membership to promote ABWAK and its work.

6.0. President, Vice President(s) and Patron

6.1. Election of President

The President of the Association shall be nominated by Council and elected by the membership at the AGM and shall remain in office subject to resignation or otherwise until the AGM in the fourth year following election.

The President may serve more than one term, and only upon nomination by Council. However, they are eligible (as a paying Professional member of the Association) to stand for election to Council at any time other than when in post as President.

No serving member of Council can serve as President unless they resign their Council position.

6.2. Removal of President

The President may be removed as a member under clause 8.1 or by decision of the members at a General Meeting

6.3. Honorary & Advisory Vice President

The Council may appoint one or more Honorary Vice Presidents in recognition of work with or for the Association and such persons so honoured retain that designation for life, unless they bring the work or name of the Association into disrepute, upon which their honorary position will cease by majority decision of the Council.

Council may also appoint one or more Advisory Vice Presidents, serving for a period of 2 to 4 years, as decided upon by the Executive, to assist with advising upon and promoting the work of the Association. Advisory Vice Presidents may resign or be removed from position under clause 8.1. or by majority vote of Council.

6.4. Patron

The Council may appoint a Patron chosen to support the objectives of the Association and whose appointment raises its profile. The Patron may act as an advisor, and/or attend meetings. The Patron need not be a member.

The Patron shall stay in post until such time as they wish to relinquish that position or are asked to step down by Council.

6.5. Expenses of President/Vice President and Patron

The President, Vice Presidents and Patron shall not be entitled to remuneration. Expenses may be granted by unanimous vote of the Executive to enable the post holder to attend a specific event or activity on behalf of ABWAK.

7.0. Subscriptions

7.1. Annual Subscriptions

The annual subscriptions for each class of member shall be such a sum as the Council shall from time to time decide. Any increase in subscription will be notified to the members for ratification at the AGM or with 28 days' notice given of an EGM to so do.

Membership categories are as defined at section 3, and in the byelaws, with the additional categories as here defined. The Association may also allow subscription to its journal, RATEL, by non-members and institutions, at such a sum as the Council shall from time to time decide.

7.2. Joint Membership

Where two members reside at the same address the Council may take such reductions in their subscriptions as they may in their absolute discretion see fit and only one issue of each RATEL would be provided.

7.3. Life Membership

Any member who has been a Professional or Associate member for not less than three years may, subject to the consent of the Executive, become a Life member on payment of not less than fifteen times the annual fee in lieu of further annual subscriptions. The Council may limit the number of Life Members to such a number as they in their absolute discretion think fit. The Council may also rescind the benefits to any Life Member if they bring the Association into disrepute.

7.4. Honorary Life Members

The Council shall have the power to elect as Honorary Life Members without payment of any further subscription any member of not less than three years standing who shall in the opinion of Council have rendered exceptional service to the Association or furtherance of its objectives.

7.5. Council Members Subscription

Elected members of Council shall be entitled to claim free membership of the Association during their period of office.

7.6. Employer (Group) Membership

Zoos may enrol named staff as members of the Association and make payment of the annual fee on their behalf. The Council shall offer additional benefits such as a free membership or reduced fee for an agreed number of memberships taken out at the same time. As a professional association membership is tax deductible.

7.7. Membership Applications

All applications for membership of the Association must be in such a form as the Council may from time to time prescribe. Membership is for a period of 12 months and payment of the fee is due with the application. Council reserves the right to request references in support of any application.

7.8. Rejection of Application

The Council may in its absolute discretion refuse to admit any person as a member of the Association without giving any reason for its refusal.

Any applicant who is found to have been convicted under the Animal Welfare Act or other related legislation or to have received a formal caution for animal related offences will have their application refused.

7.9. Refund of Subscription

Upon acceptance as a member/subscriber and of the payment, the fee is non-refundable.

7.10. Changes in Member Status

Where a member changes status during the year, (e.g. is an Associate and gains employment in a zoo; or is a Professional member and leaves employment of a zoo) the appropriate category of membership should be applied for on renewal. The member remains in the category of membership paid for until the renewal date. Council reserves the right to alter the membership status of any applicant or reject the application in these circumstances if it is not properly notified to the Association.

8.0. Disciplinary Procedures

8.1. Expulsion of Members

Subject to clause 8.2 below the Council shall have power to expel any member who shall offend against the rules of the Association or whose conduct shall in the opinion of the Council render them unfit for membership of the Association (for example by conviction under the Animal Welfare Act or in otherwise bringing the profession of wild animal keeping into disrepute),

8.2. Expulsion Notice

Before any such member is expelled the Executive shall give him/her twenty-eight days' notice in writing (which may be sent electronically) to inform them of the complaints made against them and no member shall be expelled without first having an opportunity of responding to the complaint. The Executive may suspend a member whilst this process or investigation is underway. If after this response the Executive believe there is just cause for expulsion it will be brought to the attention of all Council, which is then required to vote by majority of not less than two thirds in favour of his/her expulsion.

The conduct of any such process shall be confidential. The Association will only confirm if someone is or is not a member. However, in the case of a member publicly bringing the Association into disrepute the Executive reserve the right to state that such a member has been expelled.

Any member found guilty of an offence under the Animal Welfare Act or related legislation shall be automatically expelled from the Association.

8.3. Expelled Members

No member whose membership has been terminated under clause 8.1 hereof or who owes money to the Association shall be introduced by any member as a visitor to any function of the Association and shall not be entitled to re-apply for membership for a period of 5 years. Such a person is not eligible for refund of fees paid for membership or ABWAK activities.

9.0. The Constitution and Byelaws

9.1. Powers to Alter the Constitution

The Council shall have power to alter the rules of the Association and to fix the amounts payable as subscriptions for membership of the Association but any such decision or alteration shall only continue in effect until the same has been confirmed at the AGM or by a Special General Meeting convened for the purpose.

9.2. Creation of Byelaws

The Council shall have power to make byelaws for regulating the conduct and affairs of the Association provided always that the same are not inconsistent with the rules of the Association.

The Executive shall have power to make byelaws for regulating the conduct and affairs of the Association but any such byelaws must be presented at the next Council meeting for ratification by majority vote.

Each member shall be entitled to receive a copy of the Constitution and the byelaws which are binding on all members. These, and any proposed changes to these documents will be available from the Association's website or any other means that Council deems to be appropriate.

9.3. Member-Instigated Changes to Constitution and Byelaws

Any member of the Association may propose changes to the Constitution and Byelaws subject to obtaining support from not less than ten members in writing and submitted to the Executive, for discussion and proposal at the AGM or a Special General Meeting (as described in Section 10).

10.0. Meetings

10.1. Annual General Meeting

A general meeting of the Association shall be held in every year not later than the 1st day of December to transact the following business:

- To receive and if approved to adopt a statement of the Association's accounts to the end of the preceding year.
- To consider and if approved sanction any duly made alteration of the rules
- To elect members of the Council
- To appoint an auditor or auditors if recommended by Council
- To deal with any special matter which the Council desire to bring before the members and to receive suggestions from the members for consideration by the Council.

Notice convening the AGM shall be made to members not less than twenty-eight days before the meeting and shall specify matters to be dealt with. This notification to be made by means that Council sees fit in order to reach the membership, e.g. one or more of: RATEL, social media, website, email e news letter, any objections raised and recorded in minutes..

10.2. Special General Meetings

A Special General Meeting may be convened at any time by the Council after requisition in writing signed by not less than ten members specifying the object of the meeting for any of the following purposes:

- To consider and if approved sanction any duly made alteration to the rules.
- To deal with any special matter which Council may desire to place before the members.
- To receive the resignation of the Council or to remove any member or members thereof from office and to fill any vacancy or vacancies caused thereby.
- To deal with any special matter which the members requiring the meeting may desire to place before the Association.

Council must acknowledge receipt of such a request within 28 days of receipt, and notice convening a Special General Meeting shall be given by means considered appropriate by the Council not less than 28 days before the meeting and shall specify the matters to be dealt with. The meeting must be held within 3 months of the request at an appropriate location.

10.3. Council Meeting Quorum

At Council meetings eight shall form a quorum providing at least two are also members of the Executive.

10.4. Executive Meeting Quorum

At Executive meetings three shall form a quorum.

10.5. General Meeting and Special Meeting Quorum

At general meetings twelve professional members plus three Executive members shall form a quorum.

10.6. Voting

All voting will be made by a simple majority with the Chair or one of the Co-Chairs or in their absence the Vice Chair having an additional or casting vote in the event of equality of votes except under item 8.2. (two thirds majority of Council) and 11.1 (three quarters majority of members present).

Votes on pre-announced resolutions may be made in writing where members are unable to attend the meeting. Such 'postal votes' must be made in accordance with the byelaws.

10.7. Associate Members Voting Rights

Associate members may attend general meetings but they shall not be entitled to vote.

10.8. Life and Honorary Life Members Voting Rights

Life and Honorary Life Members shall have full voting rights at meetings of the Association.

10.9. President & Vice President & Patron Voting Rights

The President, Honorary & Advisory Vice Presidents and Patron, have no voting rights.

11.0. Dissolution

11.1 Dissolution of the Association

The dissolution of the Association may be effected by a resolution passed by three fourths majority of the members of the Association present at an AGM or Special General Meeting convened for that purpose and of which notice has been served upon every member for the time being of the Association at his/her last known address.

In dissolution of the Association, the Executive will be required to make recommendation at the AGM or Special meeting regarding the distribution of all assets and funds and illustrate how such a proposal meets the vision of the Association after any debts have been paid. A three fourths majority vote is required to agree such disbursement of funds and assets.