

## **Medal Winner Speeches – RSPB AGM 2023**

First we heard from Alastair Fothergill, followed by Dr Amanda Slevin to accept their respective medals.

### **Alastair Fothergill speech**

Thank you,

I am honoured and delighted to receive this medal.

Although over the last 30 years as a wildlife filmmaker, I've grown to love an enormous range of animals and plants, my passion for the natural world began with birds. I was fortunate enough to grow up on the North Norfolk coast which, as all of you will know, has long been an ornithological Mecca. When I was just 10 years old, my parents took me to Minsmere. We're up on the top floor of one of the double decker hides. I was so excited to have seen my first marsh harrier, I stepped back without looking, and fell straight down the hole to the floor below. I was temporarily concussed by hitting my head on the hard concrete, but it was worth it- my parents always loved to tease me that I was a bird nut from that moment onwards.

Over the years, I've been very fortunate to film some very special birds in all corners of our planet but my real passion remains with the birds we have here at home. And that is why I've always been determined to make a series that would do real justice to the natural history of the British Isles. I was behind the original Blue Planet, Planet Earth and Frozen Planet series and felt very confident that, given enough time and budget, the UK had just as much to offer as any of those global series. It took two years to develop the Wild Isles series, and I was absolutely delighted when the RSPB and WWF UK came on board as true co production partners. Without you, the series would never have happened.

Wild Isles aired last March and was a massive success. Each episode has so far attracted over 12 million viewers. This year the only factual show on British television that has surpassed this number was the coronation. If you haven't caught up with it yet, it's still available on iPlayer. On iPlayer, you will also find a really powerful last episode, funded by the RSPB and WWF UK, that features conservation heroes-farmers, fishermen, business leaders and members of the public -all at the cutting edge of conservation. It is a very inspirational film about how people can make a real difference.

The Wild Isles series has been in, in a way, just the shop window for a much wider vision- The Save Our Wild Isles campaign. Here the RSPB, WWF, and the National Trust have partnered up with us at Silverback Films once again. Our ambition with both the series and the campaign was to really move the dial in terms of public understanding of British Natural History. To explain that, though the UK is still globally important for wildlife, we remain in the bottom 10% when it comes to biodiversity loss. The massive audience figure for the series and the extraordinarily positive response we've had to the "Saving Our Wild Isles" campaign so far, encourages us that we may well be well on the way to getting that crucial message across to both the public and politicians.

Thank you very much

**Dr Amanda Slevin speech**

I am delighted to accept this wonderful medal from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds – one of the world's leading environmental charities – on behalf of Climate Coalition Northern Ireland. This award is testament to the deep commitment, passion and care for our natural world shared by everyone within Climate Coalition NI and it recognises the socio-ecological leadership and labours inherent to our collective endeavours.

Until last year, Northern Ireland was the only part of these islands without climate legislation and there were no plans to help tackle the planetary emergency. Worse still, there was vociferous opposition from some sectors around taking appropriate climate action. Seeking to overcome that state of affairs, in January 2020, Northern Ireland Environment Link convened Climate Coalition NI.

In turn, we in Climate Coalition NI initiated the movement behind NI's new climate legislation and I was privileged to serve as the Coalition's Chair for the first two years of our journey. We commenced participative, cross-community collaborations for change, actively including key stakeholders such as cross-party elected representatives, environmental organisations, academics, farming groups, community and voluntary groups, independent legal experts, and many others.

Due to time constraints, I'll spare you the details of that intense two year process and get to the key point that, due to our collective actions, Northern Ireland now has a climate change act and an emerging policy context. Because of our multi-partner collaborations, NI's Climate Change Act includes recognition of the importance of nature-based solutions, the centrality of a just transition, and the need to tackle inequality and break down barriers in our divided society.

Our work means Northern Ireland finally has an evolving framework for socio-ecological action and legal imperatives to transition to a shared future that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. The achievements and impacts of Climate Coalition NI serve as an exemplar of what positive people power for climate, nature and genuine sustainability can achieve.

In the midst of the worsening climate and ecological crises, there is an onus upon everyone to take action. Climate Coalition Northern Ireland illustrates how we can harness diverse knowledge, research, experiences and skills within wide-ranging action in a positive way that can bring change across all levels of society and our natural world.

Yet our journey is far from complete and this medal is a timely reminder of what is possible when we work in partnership for a better future for all species who share our planet.

Thank you