Wild Animal Initiative
Board Meeting Minutes

18 Jan 2024

In Attendance (sufficient for a quorum):
● Anam Nguyen (Board Treasurer)
● Cam Meyer Shorb (Executive Director)
● Christine Perry (Board member)
● Josh You (Board Secretary)
● Mitch Neugebauer (Executive Assistant)
● Nik Vetr (Board President)

ORDERS OF BUSINESS
● Introducing Mitch Neugebauer, WAI’s new executive assistant, who started in November and is working closely with Cam
  ○ Previously, Mitch worked for a non-profit advocacy group that helped provide medication, food security, housing, and counseling for uninsured and underinsured patients living with HIV.
  ○ Mitch will be attending board meetings going forward and helping Cam follow up on action items.
● Executive Director report
  ○ Updates
    ■ Cam recently did his most in-depth podcast interview to date on How I Learned to Love Shrimp, and will likely do more podcasts this year.
    ■ WAI is on track to acquire research rights to Swift Creek, which is 100 acres of woodland property in southern Ohio. This is a donation from the owner of this land.
    ■ WAI is working with a nonprofit management consultancy, Mission Realization, to help WAI’s leadership team improve its strategy, decision-making, and people management.
  ○ Strategy
    ■ WAI is planning to attend a movement-level strategy meeting in May with other groups working on wild animal welfare. This meeting will focus on defining field-building success and finding under-resourced strategies.
    ■ Strategy Director Mal Graham is working on a project to better measure WAI’s impact.
WAI is working with Jeff Sebo from NYU’s Wild Animal Welfare program on a position paper that will describe the wild animal welfare field.

Mal is exploring ideas to do research at Swift Creek

Grants

- WAI is finalizing decisions for its Seed Grants program
- WAI is currently evaluating expressions of interest for its Challenge Grants round. Themes will be welfare impact of parasites, and validating indicators of affective/emotional state
  - “Challenge” vs “seed”: Challenge grants are larger grants on high-priority projects, while seed grants are smaller and more exploratory.

Research

- WAI has many manuscripts in progress, on topics ranging from contraception, indicators of welfare, several different physiological welfare metrics, relationship between conservation biology and wild animal welfare, density-dependence and welfare, biologgers, and fish welfare.
- WAI is planning its first field experiment, on house sparrows.
  - Research team is refining methods and trying to make sure the study is adequately powered
  - One goal of this study is to demonstrate what welfare-oriented research looks like.

Outreach program

- Methods workshop: WAI held virtual workshops for external researchers, to introduce wild animal welfare science and methods to measure welfare, and to give feedback to participants’ ideas for adding a welfare aspect to their research
  - Reception was quite good: there was only room for 50 slots, which filled up within four days, and there was a decent waitlist.
  - Throughout the series, participants were quite engaged. People came up with concrete ideas for welfare research that they were excited about.
- Conferences: WAI attended conferences at NYU, the British Ecological Society, and ASAB 2023
  - Simon and Vittoria presented a poster at the British Ecological Society

Policy project
- WAI hired a political consulting firm to study fertility control policies (contraception for pest control) in US cities.
  - Many experts were enthusiastic about the idea and thought policy reform was tractable now.
- Communications
  - End-of-year fundraising raised $28k, more than expected. This includes email marketing and web advertising.
  - Communications team is working on WAI’s annual report.
- Development
  - EOY fundraising: WAI wanted to raise $350k from 25 major donors, and ended up raising 350k from 10 major donors; i.e. more concentrated than expected.
  - WAI did not focus on donor outreach last year, and will be working on that in the coming year.
- Operations
  - WAI has hired several new operations staff, which has been going well.
- Treasurer Report
  - Annual overview for 2023
    - Overall, WAI is in good financial health. WAI has close to $9 million in net assets. Net income was close to $2.9M.
    - Raised almost $1.2M in 2023 outside of Open Philanthropy. Overall, non-OP fundraising was on the lower end of expectations.
    - WAI made $200k this year from investments, which are in conservative investments such as US Treasuries.
    - Expenses: WAI spent $4.4M, which is an increase by $2.6M year-on-year
      - Budget was $6M. The discrepancy is mainly just because of a delay in paying out grants.
    - WAI has about 18 months in runway.
- Executive Director evaluation
  - Board members reviewed and discussed results of a staff survey evaluating Cam’s performance as ED, including a data visualization created by Nik.
- JEDI (justice, equity, diversity, inclusion) update
  - Anam didn’t attend the last JEDI committee meeting. But the committee is continuing work on an anonymous JEDI survey for WAI staff.
  - WAI board members discussed the online anti-discrimination course they took, which they largely found useful and informative.
FUTURE ACTION STEPS

- The board will briefly convene again in between this meeting and the next official meeting in April