BSAC Diving Conference

The Speakers

Kristina Pedder summarises the talks at a successful Conference that saw presentations from some of diving's great personalities

The 2019 BSAC Diving Conference began with a video to celebrate the role of members and volunteers in the year's activities, which saw a fantastic 3,650 new trainees join our club. Then, to the theme tune of James Bond, host for the day, diver and adventurer Andy Torbet, arrived fresh from his latest project as part of the stunt team on the latest 007 movie.

National Diving Officer Dai Atkins was first up in front of the biggest conference audience in 22 years. He was speaking to 586 instructors and 389 Branch Officers from 319 clubs, and the audience included representatives from BSAC Japan, BSAC Korea and BSAC Thailand and BSAC's sponsors.

Dai talked about the achievements of 2019: from the move to continuous review of the Diver Training Programme to work supporting clubs and HQ's war on plastic. He extolled the virtues of the Regional Coaching Scheme's focus on supplementing club training and encouraged members to get involved as instructors, team members or students on courses, including on five underway Skill Development Courses (SDCs). The diver propulsion vehicle SDC got a special mention as filling a need among members for underwater mobility scooters, which raised a laugh. He put out a call for more technical instructors, and highlighted that technical instructor training events were now part of the Instructor Training Scheme.

Milestones achieved in 2019 included 30,000 divers trained to use nitrox since 2007 and qualifying the 1,000th First Class Diver. The pipeline for 2020, he said, included reviewing BSAC snorkelling materials, supporting university clubs and BSAC centres, backing more expedition diving, and "much, much more".

Buddy talk

Former BSAC Chair, Eugene Farrell, spoke next on scuba diving, BSAC and mental health. We can all see the benefits of taking part in sport for our mental wellbeing, but as a psychologist, Eugene has identified that club diving can help in many different ways. Joining a club brings with it an increase in social interaction and a reduction in loneliness. In our 1,000 branches, we have the opportunity to raise awareness, eliminate the stigma and change the conversation about mental health. Divers will be really good at this he said: they are used to talking, they learn to read body language and can spot when something isn't right. So, be open to talking, he exhorted, share your experiences and be prepared to discuss how people affected can remain involved in your diving activities. Information about the NHS campaign Every Mind Matters was included in delegate packs.

Above: Heinke winners and commended branches take the stage with Phil Harrison

Below: Dai delivers the NDO's report

Catherine Gemmell of MCS

Sustainable theme

Praising BSAC's fight against plastics, Catherine Gemmell, from the Marine Conservation Society (MCS), talked passionately about environmentally-responsible club diving and encouraged divers, who are in a privileged position to actually see the underwater world, to become storytellers and get the message out there for the Ocean Optimism movement. Divers can help to build awareness to get the changes in behaviour that our oceans need by sharing their underwater experiences on social media, she said. Give it a try; you'll be surprised at its reach. Or take some direct action, such as participating in long-established marine citizen science projects Beachwatch and Seasearch, or the Wild Bottle Sighting campaign that aims to build up data on the places plastics end up. MCS is offering BSAC members six months free membership, to be started by 31 December.

Membership news

BSAC Marketing Manager Debbie Powell reported an upturn in 2019's new membership of 12 per cent. The 2016-20 strategic plan to reverse a decline in numbers, and grow the nation's love of diving, is doing okay so far, she said, but retention of members needs more work. Debbie told Conference that clubs and members remain BSAC's strength and will continue to do so. Debbie continued that the next strategic period needs to recognise that our world has changed dramatically and it will continue to change exponentially. She explained we'll need to adapt to become more relevant to the younger generation. Our challenge will be to create an organisation that younger people want to join and engage with, while also retaining existing members. →