

International Women's Day, 8 March 2019.



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The theme of this year's International Women's Day is #Balanceforbetter. But what is 'better'? What does 'balanced' mean? And how might this be relevant to the RSPB and to you?

The implication of this year's IWD theme is that a) there is currently an imbalance in the world and b) a gender balanced world is 'better'. A simple enough premise. But is this true, and what are we talking about exactly? According to dictionary definitions, 'balance' = 'an even distribution of weight enabling someone or something to remain upright and steady', and 'better' = 'more desirable, satisfactory or effective'.

Out of balance

Using this first definition it is clear that the natural environment is currently severely out of balance. From increasingly destructive climate change-related severe weather across the globe to microbeads, lack of balance is negatively impacting not only ecosystems, but the health and wellbeing of human society.

In environmental terms, you could argue that balance is not only 'more desirable, satisfactory and effective' but that remaining 'upright and steady' is the very essence of the definition of sustainability and what we are trying to achieve.

But how does this relate to the topic of International Women's Day — gender and our own balance?

Research

We know from our own research that there are imbalances within our workforce. We don't currently reflect the diversity of the UK population and although we have a good overall gender balance, there are imbalances in pay and in representation in parts of our organisation.

The evidence cited in our own Equality and Diversity workforce review also tells us that redressing these imbalances is essential to our future. More balanced organisations are 'better' at problem-solving and innovation, able to flex to change, attract talent and grow support amongst more customers, supporters and decision-makers than less balanced ones.

So the evidence supports the premise that balance is better for both the environment and organisations, but what does better organisational balance look like? Well for a start it means greater visibility of women in traditionally 'male' roles.

Georgina's story

Over to Georgina Bray, the RSPB's first female Farm Manager.

"Working in the farming and conservation sector, I often find myself standing in a male dominated field, both literally and metaphorically! I find it so refreshing, though, that although outnumbered, women aren't dominated in mentality by men. Whilst it will be a few years yet before women are found in equal number to men in my line of work, the fact that opinions are treated as equal and with respect, regardless of gender, is a big thing for me.

Occasionally I might be questioned about being a young lady seconded to a farm manager role, which can be difficult and takes thick skin and a good reply to change opinion. However, the fact that this is so infrequent shows we are stepping in the right direction.

In the farming press, there are sometimes more young farmers who are female being presented as exemplars in their line of work. In the National Farmer's Union, the president is a female, although she is the first. Personally, I hope for these examples to be much less distinctive in their roles because of the fact that they are women.

The next milestone on this journey of equality for me, would be if I was not so distinctive as a female farm manager at Hope Farm, to write this article. It is an honour to take on this role as the first female, but here's to hoping that many women want to take on similar roles in the future."

How can you help the RSPB #Balanceforbetter?

There are lots of ways we can all #Balanceforbetter and grow the opportunities for us all to achieve our full potential. The Cambridge Conservation Forum Women in Conservation Leadership group of which RSPB is part have made gender balanced and inclusive conferences in our sector a priority and have put together a tip sheet that you can get hold of by emailing eandd@rspb.org.uk.

These include pledging to not be part of single-sex panels by signing up at www.owen.org.uk as several RSPB men, including Martin Harper, Shaun Thomas and Russell Hollinshead already have.

If you identify as female, you could join the RSPB women's group, helping to shape solutions that achieve better balance.

Share your pledges and ideas on our intranet forum and Happy IWD everyone!