

THRINGS MEETS...

James Cretney, chief executive of Marwell Wildlife



Mark Charter from Thrings spoke with James Cretney to find out what makes him tick, and learn more about Marwell's future plans

Marwell Wildlife is Hampshire's largest zoo, offering a wide scope for conservation and education. As chief executive, James Cretney has channelled the zoo's vision for 12 years. Thrings spoke with him to find out what makes him tick, and learn more about Marwell's future plans.

Running a zoo is no walk in the park, what are the biggest challenges you've faced as chief executive?

When I joined, Marwell was culturally a little bruised. I was the fifth person to run the organisation in ten years, and there were a lot of dilapidated buildings and out-dated animal facilities. Our biggest challenge was to keep the show on the road and build for the future



while staying true to our conservation principles. I also wanted staff to feel confident and empowered. All of which takes time.

What are you most proud of?

Investing in getting great people has been really important in helping the business do better things. Marwell turned over about £11m this year, borne out of investment strategies. We've given more emphasis to our conservation and charitable projects and are probably quite novel in the group of zoos similar to ours. Marwell isn't a donating organisation, we're an implementer. We have a global team of people working on many conservation projects. It's about staying true to that and continuing to grow output. To be ranked 17th in the Sunday Times Best Companies to Work For Not for Profit category is wonderful.

How does Marwell get involved with education? Education is closely linked to our conservation work. We've increased the number of scientists in our team, and we offer a wildlife conservation Master's degree in connection with University of Southampton, now in its fifth year. Also, our Kids Love Nature programme is a

lovely nursery for pre-school children and we have about 46,000 school children visit us every year. Recently, we hosted a delegation from China which was set up with the DTI, aiming to help students understand more about what we do.

What makes your team special?

Marwell is like a community – people fulfil hundreds of different roles. I'm a firm believer that a positive culture doesn't just drive performance, it also ensures an enjoyable working environment. We're very fortunate – our staff spend a lot of time creating a culture in which we want to work, and we have some amazing talent here. I'm also very lucky to have an executive team who are all experts in their particular field.

What's next for Marwell?

As part of our Energy for Life project, next year we're opening a two-storey tropical house powered by energy converted from animal waste. Our aim is to provide a fun way for people to learn more about climate change and how energy works.



We're also researching animal activity, such as why some carnivores do better than others in zoos. We need to understand the reasons for this and ensure our collections reflect that. Our approach is fewer, better housed animals which can be seen as part of larger exhibits. The need to meet visitors' expectations in an increasingly sophisticated market has created pressure. As a result, Marwell is a credible organisation that has a very big place in the local community and that, for me, speaks volumes.

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