

NATURE SOCIETY (SINGAPORE)
MINUTES of the 67th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Held on Saturday, 22 May 2021 on Zoom Video Conferencing platform

At the appointed start time of 14:00 hrs, only 41 members (excluding outgoing Exco members) were present and the start was duly delayed by 30 minutes to see if a quorum of 60 could be reached. In accordance with the Society's Constitution, the meeting commenced at 14:30 hrs with 70 members present, excluding 9 outgoing Exco members, and 7 other members who joined later:

OUTGOING EXCO MEMBERS PRESENT

Shawn Lum (President)	Bhagyesh Chaubey (Hon Treasurer)
Ho Hua Chew (Vice President)	Albert Liu (Member)
Morten Strange (Hon Secretary)	Lester Tan (Member)
Evelyn Ng (Assistant Hon Secretary)	Goh Ter Yang (Member)
Veerendra Patwa (Assistant Hon Treasurer)	

MEMBERS PRESENT

Ngo Kang Min	Gemma Koh	Tomy Ng	Pandian Parthasarathy
Agnes Sng	Bian Tan	Verena Deasi	Adrian Silas Tay
Kathy Xu	Andie Ang	Law Ing Sind	Amy Choong Mei Fun
Andrew Lin	Samantha Ang	Anuj Jain	Vinayagan Dharmarajah
Amy Tsang	Ng Bee Choo	Cheng Li Ai	Keita Sin
Huang Ningxin	Peter Connell	Fangqi Twang	Sankar Ananthanarayanan
Lisa Lim	Alfred Chia	Tan Beng Chiak	Prof. P N Avadhani
Dillen Ng	Eva Villamayor	Yap Wee Jin	Gerald Tay
Timothy Pwee	Sandra Chia	Ian Chew	Movin Nyanasengeran
Geraldine Lee	Sung Mei Yee	Tan Gim Cheong	Liew Kai Khiun
Chiok Wen Xuan	Chow Mei Peng	Martin Kennewell	Karminder Singh Walia
Kua Kay Yaw	Cornelius Foley	Karl Png	Raghav Narayanswamy
Leong Wei Peck	Lee Chiu-San	Yeo Seng Beng	Subha Narayanswamy
Tan Hui Zhen	Kerry Pereira	Leong Kwok Peng	Vilma D'Rozario
Pary Sivaraman	Faizah Jamal	Margaret Hall	Liak Teng Lit
Geoffrey Lim	Felicia Wee	Tony O'Dempsey	Nick Baker
Goh Si Guim	Low Zhi Hao	Marcus Chua	Shamla Jeyarajah Subaraj
Shivaram Rasu	Tan Hang Chong		

Arrived after 14:30 hrs.

JJ Brinkman	Law Ingg Thong	Yong Ding Li	Veronica Foo
Wong Kwai Yeok	Kee Jing Ying	Natasha Nraina	

Apologies for not being able to attend the meeting received from:

Benjamin Szeto	Lee Ee Ling	Bernie Tan
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Staff and interns assisting the Zoom meeting:

Joseph Lim	Casey Chia	Eunice Tan	Engracia Toh	Zachary Chong
Sung Mei Yee	Kerry Pereira			

WELCOME FROM THE PRESIDENT

Between 14:00 and 14:30 hrs, Zoom hosts Ngo Kang Min and Sung Mei Yee together with Kerry Pereira and Joe Lim ushered to last of the members onto the platform, Albert Liu and Lester Tan helped out with the Zoom technique; Mei Yee explained the rules about how participants should address the meeting from the room and conduct themselves technically and socially. Morten Strange clarified that the original plan of conducting a hybrid AGM, partly online and partly from the NSS Sunflower offices, was changed last minute to a fully online meeting, due to the Covid-19 heightened alert situation. He expressed hope that the next AGM, in May 2022, could be conducted in person at the newly renovated NSS headquarters. At 14:30 hrs, Shawn Lum welcomed all members present and started the meeting off.

1. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 2020 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Minutes of the 20 May 2020 AGM had been previously circulated to all society members and were also made available onscreen allowing all meeting participant to scrutinize them further. There being no comments or corrections from the floor, Leong Kwok Peng proposed a motion that the Minutes be accepted and Evelyn Ng seconded the motion; the motion was unanimously accepted by members.

2. PRESIDENT'S REPORT

President Shawn Lum presented the President's Report for 2020 and shared the highlights of the report onscreen for meeting participants to follow; the full report is available online at the NSS website. Shawn began his presentation in his usual warm and passionate style by giving thanks to all members of the Society for their efforts during a difficult year, but singled out Professor N. Avadhani, who was in attendance, for his long-time commitment to first Malayan Nature Society and now NSS.

In his summary, Shawn focused on the major conservation efforts by the Society during 2020, and especially Conservation Committee chair Leong Kwok Peng's work to secure a green future for the Clementi Forest area. 2020 was also a milestone year in legislation terms; major amendments to the old Wild Animals and Birds Act (now re-named the Wildlife Act) were passed in Parliament, and although the act was proposed by Louis Ng (of Nee Soon GRC), much of the groundwork was done in previous years by prominent NSS members, as well as staff Kerry Pereira. At his presentation in Parliament, Louis Ng dedicated the new act to long-time NSS member and naturalist supreme, the late R. Subaraj who passed away in 2019. Covid-19 restrictions curtailed many of the Society's traditional activities in 2020; however, members, volunteers and staff responded by expanding our online activities towards the end of the year to include virtual nature walks and talks as well as a new Instagram account drawing new voices into the nature conservation movement towards the end of the year.

Other significant developments in 2020 included the plant and wildlife surveys in Panti Forest Reserve in Johor, where NSS members played a significant role co-operating with the Malaysian Nature Society as evident from the report published in the excellent *Malaysian Naturalist* Sep-Nov 2020 issue. Funding for the *Every Singaporean a Naturalist* (ESN) project was secured in 2020 from the Wildlife Reserves Singapore (WRS) Conservation Fund, funding the project for three additional years.

Looking ahead, Shawn stressed that in general the window for protecting what is left of the natural world everywhere is closing. It is not good enough for Singapore to protect its own environment, if the rest of the region continues to deteriorate. Therefore NSS should be prepared to work with our Asian partners in BirdLife International and with others such as WRS and the National University of Singapore including the Asia-Pacific Centre for Environmental Law. NSS aims to be part of the wider civil society in Singapore and will continue to work with like-minded organisations on a case-to-case basis in a spirit of inclusiveness to promote our goals. A recent apparent attempt by outside hackers to steal private data from the NSS website has prompted NSS to work to strengthen our data protection capabilities and in general to improve our IT capacity and the quality of our website going forward.

Finally Shawn gave a warm *thank you* to Bhagyesh Chaubey who will be stepping down from the Executive Committee (Exco) at this AGM, after serving three years as our very effective Honorary Treasurer, during which period the finances of the Society strengthened significantly. Shawn also singled out Ho Hua Chew who is stepping down as Vice President, and he highlighted that Exco has started a leadership succession process to prepare a new team to take over the management of the Society within the next two years.

3. TREASURER'S REPORT

The detailed Treasurer's Report for 1 January to 31 December 2020 was uploaded onto the NSS website prior to the meeting, including Audited Financial Statements. The financial statements had also been examined and commented on by the Finance Advisory Group. During this meeting, Honorary Treasurer Bhagyesh Chaubey shared a summary of results onscreen for participants to study. He briefly covered the main financial highlights of the year which ended with a healthy surplus of \$128,641 and accumulated current assets of \$991,284. Bhagyesh 'shouted out' loudly in praise of Joe Lim, the NSS secretariat's Accounts and Membership Officer and commended him for his work during 2020. Finally Bhagyesh announced that he would be stepping down as Treasurer at this AGM, due to the three-term rule for charity treasurers, but that he would stay engaged with the NSS in some capacity.

From the Executive Committee, Morten Strange added that towards the end of 2020, Exco had a meeting where the financial position of the Society was discussed. During that meeting, it was decided NOT to establish a long-term investment account, a so-called endowment fund, with the Society's substantial cash reserves. That was because the general return on risk-free investments was low in the current economic environment, and also because the Society is already financial well positioned because it owns its own freehold offices and therefore has relatively low overhead expenses. Instead, Exco decided to put the cash of the Society to good use in the coming years, by hiring competent staff and by funding research projects and publications to achieve to goals of the Nature Society.

Margie Hall proposed a motion that the Treasurer's Report for 2020 be adopted and Peter Connell seconded the motion; the motion was unanimously accepted by members.

4. COMMITTEE AND SIG REPORTS

By the time the AGM started, reports from most of the Committees and Special Interest Groups (SIGs) had already been uploaded onto the NSS website for all AGM participants to study. Therefore, to facilitate a shorter AGM, the reports tabled by Committee and SIG chairs during the meeting were kept brief with just a few slides shared onscreen showing a summary of the respective groups' work during 2020. A common theme running through all the reports was that 2020 had been a difficult year, with mainly online, virtual activities replacing traditional walks and talks and in-person meetings.

From the Conservation Committee: Leong Kwok Peng covered the main nature conservation priorities of the Society including the Tengah Forest, Clementi and Dover areas as well as the 1 million trees planting initiative, and he praised the many new, younger Singaporeans for coming forward supporting nature conservation.

Education Committee: Goh Ter Yang announced that all the education efforts were currently online only.

Membership and Fundraising Committee: Albert Liu shared some visuals onscreen including an updated graph of 30 years of NSS membership numbers showing, somewhat disappointingly, a further drop during 2020 to only 1,138 members. Albert urged all members to participate in a membership drive to reverse this trend, new software to facilitate an automated renewal function was being planned for 2021, as well as the hiring of a professional membership and fundraising officer.

Bird Group: Tan Gim Cheong who took over as BG chair in Jan 2021 paid tribute to his predecessor Lim Kim Chuah for the work he did during 2020. Only two walks were conducted during that year, but the 36th Singapore Bird Race was executed successfully 5-6 December 2020 with more participants than ever.

Butterfly and Insect Group: New chair Dr Ngo Kang Min, appointed in May 2020, reported that insect walks conducted during 2020, in spite of the Covid-19 restrictions, had been so popular that the limited places were snapped up with two hours of the announcement. Moth surveys on Pulau Ubin and butterfly host plant enhancement work had been conducted and would continue into 2021.

Jalan Hijau: Tan Hang Chong reported that 2020 had been a difficult year for the group but that he had been contacted personally by various government agencies to provide advice on how the country can move forward with a greener recovery from the Covid pandemic; he had also reached out with an interview about green issues on SHP Radio FM 89.3. Shawn Lum elaborated that Jalan Hijau had potential to be the link from NSS to other civic groups working on ‘browner’ and broader nature conservation and ecological issues.

Marine Conservation Group: New chair Kua Kay Yaw echoed that 2020 had been a difficult year for the group and only two physical activities had been completed: A coastal clean-up and a Horseshoe Crab rescue event; the rest of the group’s work had been online.

Nature Ramblers Group: This group report was a brief announcement by Programmes and Outreach Officer Kerry Pereira who summarised that all walks and activities had been postponed during 2020; the group would start up activities again in 2021 as soon as conditions allowed.

Plant Group: Bian Tan stressed that he was chair of a small group of members who just loved plants, in 2020 two major activities took place: 1) A field trip to source and identify aromatic plants that could be used to flavour gin and 2) Assistance to the ESN project to help educators identify and appreciate plants. Other activities had been entirely online; Bian stressed that online events in fact required a fair amount of planning and effort to execute.

Vertebrate Study Group: Tony O’Dempsey referred to the online report and announced that he would be stepping down as chair of this group after the AGM, new chair will be Yeo Suay Hwee.

From the floor, member Gerald Tay contributed with some statements about the Dover area development plans, and Leong Kwok Peng invited him for coffee later to discuss this and other conservation issues.

5. ELECTION OF THE 2020-2021 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (EXCO)

By the due date prior to the meeting, a single nomination was received for the nine positions specified in the Society’s constitution:

Position	Name of Nominee	Proposed by	Seconded by
President	Shawn Lum	Goh Si Guim	Kua Kay Yaw
Vice President	Leong Kwok Peng	Evelyn Ng	Shawn Lum
Hon Secretary	Morten Strange	Peter Connell	Nick Baker
Hon Treasurer	Veerendra Patwa	Bhagyesh Chaubey	Leong Kwok Peng
Asst Hon Secretary	Evelyn Ng	Lau Yim May	Goh Si Guim
Asst Hon Treasurer	Andrew Lin	Leong Kwok Peng	Liew Kai Khiun
Member	Albert Liu	Agnes Lim	Liew Kai Khiun
Member	Goh Ter Yang	Leong Kwok Peng	Lester Tan
Member	Lester Tan	Kua Kay Yaw	Shawn Lum

Since no positions were contested, the above members were duly elected to serve on the 2021-2022 Exco. On behalf of the incoming Exco, the President thanked the two newly elected members – Leong Kwok Peng and Andrew Lin – for agreeing to serve.

From the floor, Faizah Jamal stated that she was disappointed to see the lack of leadership renewal in the newly elected Exco and she what had been done to find new faces. This led to multiple comments and a lively discussion on the Zoom chat-room function. Shawn replied that he was agreeable to serve one more year, as well as one additional year after that (2022-2003), if no new candidate for President came forward, after that he was committed to retire from Exco. Morten Strange added that it had been difficult to find a

candidate for Vice President this year and encouraged all members to come forward and serve as office bearers or chairs of the SIGs, and he specifically urged Faizah Jamal to run for President in 2022.

6. ELECTION TO THE FINANCE ADVISORY GROUP

Members of the Finance Advisory Group serve for three years; each year one member steps down and another member is nominated at the AGM. Peter Connell (2019-2022) and Douglas Elliott (2020-2023) continue to serve, but Yip Yew Chong (2018-2021) had completed his three years and stood down. Morten Strange proposed retiring Honorary Treasurer Bhagyesh Chaubey to replace him and this was seconded by Tony O'Dempsey. As there were no other nominations, Bhagyesh was unanimously elected to serve in the group 2021-2024.

7. APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS

Retiring Honorary Treasurer Bhagyesh Chaubey made the case that auditor Tan Eng Sun from Robert Tan Partners PAC had served both effectively and efficiently as the Society's external auditor for the past year, since he was appointed at the 2020 AGM. Peter Connell proposed a motion that Tan Eng Sun be appointed as external auditor for the 2021 financial year as well, Kua Kay Yaw seconded it; the motion was unanimously accepted by members.

Shawn Lum used this opportunity to welcome into the 2021-2022 Exco a new treasurer team: Veerendra Patwa will be Honorary Treasurer, having served one year 2020-2021 as Assistant Honorary Treasurer; new Exco member Andrew Lin will be Assistant Honorary Treasurer, and Shawn wished both all the best in their new roles.

8. VOTE ON RESOLUTION 1

Before the stipulated deadline for submission of resolutions this year (17 April), one resolution had been received calling for chairs of SIGs to be elected during a regular meeting of the respective SIGs. Morten Strange announced the result of the vote, which had to be done by proxy vote before the AGM. 108 votes were cast and counted 20 May at the NSS office by himself and Joe Lim, scrutinised by Casey Chia. 2 votes were invalid, 29 were for and 77 were against the resolution; as such the resolution was rejected.

Co-sponsor Dillen Ng explained the reasons behind Resolution 1 and as part of the 2021/2022 Exco Morten Strange made a commitment that the new Exco would consider if NSS Guidelines governing SIGs and Committees could be improved. He noted that a majority of members and SIG chairs seemed happy with the current guidelines but that a substantial minority were not and promised to take all this into consideration.

SL added that the Society needed a process for dealing with grievances that might arise within SIGs from time to time and suggested exploring options for formalising a mediation mechanism equipped to solve future disagreements, possibly in the form of a mediation committee or task force.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Two members, Sin Yong Chee Keita and Movin Nyanasengeran had proposed an AOB item to investigate and explain why four members had been expelled from the Bird Group (BG) Records Committee. However, in view of a Zoom meeting conducted 19 May between the four and BG Chair Tan Gim Cheong, also attended by Morten Strange, Shawn Lum and Leong Kwok Peng, the two proposers agreed to drop the item. The issue will be dealt with after the AGM by Exco, BG and the four former BG Records Committee members.

No other business had been notified by the deadline prior to the meeting. However, Ningxin Hunag used this

opportunity to inform the meeting that she and others associated with the ESN project were in the process of forming a new NSS Youth Group and she encouraged all members with an interest in this to come forward and help contribute.

CLOSURE OF THE MEETING BY THE PRESIDENT

With the clock approaching 6 pm, Shawn Lum finished the meeting by thanking all participants for their constructive contributions to a successful meeting, both verbally and in writing into the Zoom chat box. He reiterated that our ecological situation was in a serious crisis and that time for solutions was running out. The NSS is needed now more than ever.

Minutes prepared by Morten Strange