



**THE SOCIETY FOR THE HISTORY OF NATURAL HISTORY**

Registered Charity in England and Wales No. 210355

**Minutes of the  
Annual General Meeting  
held on  
Thursday, 13 June 2023, at 13:30 BST  
at Thinktank, Birmingham Science Museum**

*c/o* The Natural History Museum  
Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD, UK

## **In attendance**

Will Beharrell (Secretary, minutes), Helen Cowie (Awards and Grants Secretary), Peter Davies, Gina Douglas (President, in the Chair), John Edmondson, Elinor Gwynn, Stephanie Holt, Rachel Jennings, Elle Larsson (Meetings Secretary), Miranda Lowe, Catarina Madruga, Henrietta McBurney, Charles Nelson, Bill Noblett (Treasurer and Vice-President), Lee Raye, Maggie Reilly (Book Reviews Editor), Jeanne Robinson (Membership Secretary), Brad Scott, Anne Secord (Editor), Elaine Shaughnessy (Website Secretary), Nathan Smith (Trustee without Portfolio).

### **1. Welcome by the President**

Attendees were welcomed by the President.

### **2. Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Sir David Attenborough, Cameron Barber, Isabelle Charmantier, Jo Hatton, Geoff Moore, Pat Morris, Geraldine Reid, Christopher Storey, and Ray Williams.

### **3. Minutes of the AGM held on 30 June 2022**

The minutes were accepted as a true record, with no corrections.

### **4. Report of the Trustees for 2022**

Members in attendance were referred to the Report of the Trustees and Statement of Financial Activities for 2022. Trustees were invited to expand on their reports, and comment was invited from the membership.

Gina noted that the year saw the loss of Gren Lucas, a pioneering conservationist and botanist, and long-standing supporter of the Society. A full obituary has been published in the Linnean Society's magazine, *The Linnean*.

The Treasurer commended his Statement of Financial Activities to the membership. It was noted that Claire Banks has yet to claim her award from 2021.

### **5. Election to the portfolios of Council and election of Trustees**

Members in attendance were referred to Rachel Jennings's nomination to the post of Social Media, Communications and Promotions Secretary (proposed by Elle Larsson and seconded by Elaine Shaughnessy). Following a simple show of hands, Rachel was duly elected and welcomed to the Society's Council.

### **6. Any other business**

The entire Council extended their thanks to Elle Larsson for organising a superb summer conference.

Elaine Shaughnessy offered her sincere thanks to Charles Nelson for his invaluable assistance in editing *Archives of Natural History* prior to the election of Anne Secord as Honorary Editor. Charles returned the compliment, thanking Elaine for her diligent and steadfast support.

## 7. Presentation of Awards for 2023

Helen Cowie provided a brief introduction to the Society's awards.

### The Founders' Medal

Elaine Shaughnessy read the citation.

The Society is very pleased to award our prestigious Founders' Medal to Professor Geoff Moore, Emeritus Professor of Marine Biology at the University of London. Geoff served as President of the Society from 2009 to 2012 during which period several initiatives were brought to fruition, especially the invitation to Sir David Attenborough to become the Society's Patron and, consequently, in 2011, the Patron's Review whereby an outstanding younger scholar is invited to contribute a review essay to *Archives of Natural History*.

Geoff has been a prolific author of scholarly papers on the history and bibliography of natural history. His publications, spanning a period of fifty years, include over 260 refereed papers on diverse topics including ecology, taxonomy, pollution and conservation; many in collaboration with colleagues and research students. His principal professional research interests lie in fisheries and marine ecology, so he is very well-informed about the history of work on marine natural history in waters around Great Britain. He has been especially interested in those naturalists who have been notable for teaching and writing and the institutions to which they belonged, and by extension, in broadcasters and writers and illustrators of "popular" natural histories.

Accepting the award *in absentia*, Geoff wrote:

*I am really sorry that I cannot be with you all to say thank you in person for the award of the Founders' Medal. I was quite overwhelmed when I heard the news of the Council's decision, which came out-of-the-blue. I am humbled to feel that my name should now be listed among such an illustrious list of former winners. Without sounding too much like an Oscars recipient I would like first to give credit to my family: to my long-departed parents for allowing me to follow my boyhood dreams, to my wife and children for tolerating interminable second-hand bookshops (Judy wonders if there is a medal for long-suffering wives?). They do all have amphipods named after them though.*

*My contributions to the history of natural history have been purely self-indulgent and curiosity driven. I have always had the feeling that I was born in the wrong century and have a great fascination and regard for the nineteenth-century naturalists. Their work was truly remarkable. We all stand in the shadow of these pioneers, whether we recognise it or not*

*So thank you again, one and all. I shall treasure my medal always, if still wondering about my being really deserving of it.*

### The President's Medal

Gina Douglas read the citation.

SHNH is delighted to award the SHNH President's Award 2023 to Victoria Dickenson for her work on the Gwillim Project: Women, Environment, and Networks of Knowledge and Exchange in Early Nineteenth Century Madras. The Award recognises an individual or team's contribution and impact in promoting and improving accessibility, inclusivity and diversity to the study of the history of natural history.

The Gwillim Project centres around the life and world of two English sisters in early nineteenth-century Madras (now Chennai), Elizabeth Gwillim and Mary Symonds. Elizabeth and Mary's letters home and detailed drawings, produced during their stay in Madras from 1801 to 1808, provide an immersive portrayal of Madras under East India Company rule. Their correspondence and artwork also provide insight into the landscape, climate, and ecology of the Coromandel coast, documenting birds, animals, fish, insects, flowers, and trees.

Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, the Gwillim Project uses a virtual platform to make text and images accessible to all. The online archive encompasses over 250 images from McGill Library and the South Asia Museum (Norwich), and over

700 pages of the sisters' manuscript correspondence from the British Library, made available under an Orphan Works License. These letters were transcribed by McGill students with ongoing assistance from a network of over 50 researchers in India, Canada, Britain, and the United States, who explained archaic dress terms, translated phonetic renditions of Telugu or Tamil words, and identified places and landmarks. Network members also identified birds, fish and flowers in the over 250 watercolours in the virtual archive, providing contemporary scientific names, mapping distributions, and locating habitats.

As well as digitising and contextualising these valuable resources, the Gwillim project has disseminated its findings through a range of media, engaging with a variety of audiences. A series of nine webinars on YouTube, have, to date, attracted over 22,000 views, the majority from India. In-person events in at the Dakshina Chitra Museum and the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Chennai, have expanded the reach of the Project to schoolchildren, university students, local historians, and birding enthusiasts, while exhibitions of the original watercolours have been hosted by museums in Toronto, Montreal, Norwich and Chennai. A co-authored book, *Women, Environment, and Networks of Empire*, Elizabeth Gwillim and Mary Symonds in Madras, 1801-1807 will be published by McGill Queen's University Press in 2023.

### **The SHNH Natural History Book Prize**

Will Beharrell read the citation.

The Society is pleased to announce that this year's Natural History Book Prize (formerly the John Thackray Medal) is awarded to Henrietta McBurney, for *Illuminating Natural History: the Art and Science of Mark Catesby*. Henrietta McBurney is a freelance curator and art historian. She was previously curator in the Royal Library, Windsor Castle.

The book explores the life and work of the celebrated eighteenth-century English naturalist, explorer, artist and author Mark Catesby (1683–1749). Interweaving elements of art history, history of science, natural history illustration, painting materials, book history, paper studies, garden history and colonial history, this meticulously researched volume brings together a wealth of unpublished images as well as newly discovered letters by Catesby, which, with their first-hand accounts of his collecting and encounters in the wild, bring the story of this extraordinary pioneer naturalist vividly to life.

All the judges agreed that the book was outstanding, noting that it was superbly illustrated, meticulously researched and an absolutely riveting read. McBurney manages to bring Catesby to life and places him within the network of eighteenth-century naturalists, as well as within his own world of colonial America. One judge commented that the book was a "magnum opus".

Accepting the award, Henrietta extended her thanks to the Society, her readers, Leslie Overstreet, Roger Gaskell, and her friends and family.

### **The W.T. Stearn Student Essay Prize**

Helen Cowie read the citation.

We are delighted to announce that the winner of the 2022 Stearn Essay Prize is Cameron Barber, St Andrews University, Scotland, for his paper "Biological Jewels": the Glass Specimens of Herman O. Mueller, and the Forgotten Tradition of the Specimen-Glassblower.

Bavarian glassblower Herman O. Mueller was employed for over forty years at the American Museum of Natural History, New York, in his role as a specimen-glassblower. From 1903 to 1945 he produced over one thousand models of invertebrate organisms that combined beauty, morphological accuracy and exceptional glassblowing. His talent often surpassed that of the famous Blaschkas of Dresden. Mueller enjoyed worldwide fame in his lifetime, yet his life and models have since fallen into obscurity, and few publications record his achievements. In contrast, the Blaschkas are the subject of extensive documentation. To correct this imbalance, Mueller's life and work will be analysed by drawing in the large collection of primary sources in the Research Library of the American Museum of Natural History, the Library of Congress and the Rakow Research Library of the Corning Museum of Glass, amongst others. Mueller's life provides important insights into the now forgotten but once widespread position of the specimen-glassblower, the changing role of

natural history collections in the early twentieth century, and the ways in which the lives of important figures can be obscured by a focus on other, better documented individuals.

Accepting the award *in absentia*, Cameron writes:

*It is an absolute delight to receive the William T. Stearn Prize, an honour for which I am most grateful! Herman O. Mueller's wonderful glass specimens represented a lifetime's work in mastering morphology, taxonomy and comparative anatomy, through the lens of his genius glassblowing learned as a child in Bavaria. It has been splendid to bring his story to a wider audience and the prize has afforded me the confidence that I can produce scholarship of broad interest, which I intend to carry forward into the future.*

## **8. Closing Remarks from the President**

Gina extended her thanks to the membership, and the conference attendees. It was hoped that many would return to the Society's summer conference next year.

## **9. Vote of thanks and close of AGM**

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