



THE SOCIETY FOR THE HISTORY OF NATURAL HISTORY

Registered Charity in England and Wales No. 210355

**Minutes of the
Annual General Meeting
held on
Wednesday, 16 July 2025, at 15:00 BST
via Zoom video-conferencing**

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

1. In attendance

Jack Ashby (President, in the Chair), Will Beharrell (Secretary, minutes), Lynda Brooks, Isabelle Charmantier, Caroline Cornish, Helen Cowie (Trustee without Portfolio), Josh Davis (Social Media and Communications Secretary), Peter Davis, Theo Detweiler, Gina Douglas, Clemency Fisher, Elle Larsson (Meetings Secretary), Bill Noblett (Vice-President and Treasurer), Malgosia Nowak-Kemp (International Representatives Secretary), Lee Raye, Geraldine Reid (Awards and Grants Secretary), Maggie Reilly (Book Reviews Editor), Malini Roy, Anne Secord (Editor), Cam Sharp Jones, Elaine Shaughnessy (Newsletter and Website Editor), Cheryl Tipp, Sergio Zagier.

2. Welcome from the President

Attendees were welcomed by the President.

3. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from David Maberley, Jo Hatton, Arthur Lucas, Jeanne Robinson, and Ray Williams.

4. Minutes of the AGM held on 4 July 2024

Following a unanimous vote of the members present, the minutes of the previous AGM were accepted as a true record, with no corrections.

5. Report of the Trustees for 2024

Members in attendance were referred to the Report of the Trustees and Statement of Financial Activities for 2024. The President thanked Council for their hard work in 2024, and the members for their continuing support. Trustees were invited to expand on their reports, and comment was invited from the membership.

Following a unanimous vote of the members present, the Report of the Trustees and Statement of Financial Activities for 2024 was accepted.

6. Election to the portfolios of Council and election of Trustees

There being no contested positions, per Byelaw 10(d) the following individuals were deemed elected as trustees and to the portfolios of Council (where applicable), each being for a term of three years.

Name	Portfolio
Will Beharrell	Secretary
Joshua Davis	Social Media and Communications Secretary
Elle Larsson	Meetings Secretary
Geraldine Reid	Awards and Grants Secretary
Anne Secord	Editor
Nathan Smith	Trustee without Portfolio

7. Any other business

Jack Ashby reported on the implementation of an online-only membership option, which has long been a request of the membership. He also noted that Jo Hatton has decided not to stand for re-election as a trustee this year. Jack thanked her warmly for her long service to the Society.

8. Presentation of Awards for 2024

Geraldine Reid provided a brief introduction to the Society's awards. She then read the following citations, and the recipients in attendance gave brief presentations on their work, and a few words of thanks.

The Founders' Medal

The Society is very pleased to announce that our [Founders' Medal](#) will this year be awarded to David J. Mabberley, Director Emeritus, Botanic Gardens of Sydney, Emeritus Professor, University of Leiden, Emeritus Fellow, Wadham College, Oxford, Fellow of the National Botanic Garden of Wales and Chairman of the International Association for Plant Taxonomy's General Committee for Plant Nomenclature. The Founders' Medal is awarded for substantial contributions to the study of the history or bibliography of natural history.

David Mabberley is a botanist, writer and educator. His researches largely concern the evolution, systematics, ecology, nomenclature and cultural significance of plants, particularly tropical trees, and have always concentrated on those of economic significance – including mahoganies, apples, grapes and, particularly now, citrus – in the light of the devastating disease now threatening the future of the citrus industry. Among a number of international research projects, he is working with Leipzig botanists on a molecular phylogeny of part of the mahogany family; with New Zealand and other botanists on the origin of the cultivated apple, using molecular techniques; and with Spanish botanists on a phylogenetic analysis of plants used by humans. A prolific researcher and world traveller, David has conducted extensive fieldwork across many countries, making significant botanical discoveries and collecting specimens that have contributed to our understanding of plant biodiversity.

He has received numerous accolades for his significant contributions to horticultural science and plant taxonomy. Among the awards he has received are the José Cuatrecasas Medal for Excellence in Tropical Botany and the Peter Raven Award (by the American Society of Plant Taxonomists 'to a plant systematist who has made successful efforts to popularize botany to non-scientists'), both in 2004. In 2006 he was awarded the Linnean Medal of the Linnean Society of London and, in 2011, the Robert Allerton Award for Excellence in Tropical Botany of the National Tropical Botanical Garden, USA. He is a Corresponding Member, American Society of Plant Taxonomists (since 1999) and Fellow, Indian Botanical Society (since 2015). Notably, in 2016, he was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in recognition of his exceptional service to the field.

David Mabberley served as the President of the [Society for the History of Natural History](#) between 1993 and 1996. He was awarded the SHNH Book Prize (John Thackray Medal) in 2018 for his second book on the natural history artist Ferdinand Bauer (1760–1826), [Painting by numbers – the life and art of Ferdinand Bauer](#).

To botanists David Mabberley hardly needs an introduction. His *The plant book*, first published in 1987 – re-titled [Mabberley's plant-book. A portable dictionary of plants, their classification and uses](#) and now in its fourth edition – has become an essential tome for anyone working in taxonomic botany. Historical data are included in the entries in the *Plant-book*, but these merely represent a tiny fraction of Mabberley's accumulated knowledge.

He has produced over three hundred and fifty publications, ranging from plant ecology and systematics to the history of science and botanical illustration. His most recent books include *Mabberley's Plant-book: A Dictionary of Plants, their Classification and Uses* (2017); *Painting by Numbers: The life and art of Ferdinand Bauer* (2017); *Sir Joseph Banks' Florilegium* (2017); [Botanical treasures from Cook's First Voyage; Botanical Revelation: European encounters with Australian plants before Darwin](#) (2019) and [Citrus: A World History](#) (2024).

Mabberley has published widely on the history of science and of botanical art. He is pre-eminently the

biographer of Robert Brown (1773–1858). His definitive biography, *Jupiter Botanicus: Robert Brown of the British Museum*, published in 1985 (Review in *Archives of Natural History* **14**: 89–94), was applauded by the Society's then honorary editor, J. H. Price, who remarked cogently that 'It is impossible for anyone familiar with the carrying out of this form of historical research not to stand in some awe of the sheer quantity of painstaking, often tedious, perusal of background data represented in the final form of work'. (Earlier, Mabberley had contributed an essay 'Robert Brown of the British museum: some ramifications' to the Society's symposium, *History in the service of systematics*, 1981: pp 101–109). That applies with equal force to the recent [The Robert Brown handbook. A guide to the life and work of Robert Brown \(1773–1858\) Scottish botanist](#) (with David T. Moore) and published in 2022 (reviewed in *Archives of Natural History* **49**: 431–432), a collaborative compendium of historical information.

Painstaking research characterizes all Mabberley's publications in the history of natural history. As noted, he has published numerous books, as sole author and as co-author, about (for example) the natural history artist Ferdinand Bauer, Joseph Banks's *Florilegium*, Arthur Harry Church, and *Flora Graeca*. With Annette Giesecke (University of Delaware), he was general editor of Bloomsbury's *A cultural history of plants* (six volumes) published in 2022.

The SHNH recognises his outstanding contribution to the many fields that his interests encompass and his extraordinary research contributions to botany, horticulture and taxonomy and for his significant publication outputs, including natural history, history of science and botanical art in addition to his research interests.

The President's Award

SHNH is delighted to award the SHNH [President's Award](#) 2024 to Caroline Cornish. 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.

In 15 years of research and research facilitation at Kew, and at Royal Holloway, University of London, Caroline has broken new ground in revealing Kew's colonial history, highlighting under-represented voices in Kew's archives and collections, and increasing access and diversity in researchers using Kew's resources. While her best-known work is associated with Kew's Museum of Economic Botany, her impact has been felt throughout Kew, one of Britain's most important repositories of the history of natural history.

Caroline's 2013 PhD thesis fulfils a central element in creating a more inclusive research culture: an openness to engaging with an institution's colonial history through detailed engagement with primary sources and contextualisation in wider imperial history. She is well known for her work with [The Mobile Museum](#) inspired by observations in her PhD on the global circulation of ethnobotanical knowledge and objects, and on which she was the senior research fellow.

Caroline's research has also been directed to under-represented voices, for example in her chapter 'Eleanor Ormerod (1828–1901): entomological specimens presented to the Museum of Economic Botany at Kew Gardens (1875–1880)' in [Women in the History of Science: A sourcebook](#) (UCL Press, 2023), and in recent talks (for example, 'Hidden hands in colonial natural histories' for CHSTM) on her ongoing and truly pioneering work on incarcerated labour in Kew's collections.

For the last two years Caroline's role as Humanities Research Coordinator has enabled her to have a direct influence on Kew's recruitment of PhD students and development of research relations. Not only has she been outstandingly successful in developing funded PhDs in the humanities (currently numbering 21 at Kew), but she has led on developing strategies to broaden recruitment, for example by championing PhD topics that will attract a wide range of applicants. In meetings she will always advocate for applicants with non-standard career paths, often with success. Her own research also models this approach, for example through her long-standing collaboration with the Jute project at the [Stepney Community Trust](#), or her co-leadership of the forthcoming [Gardens and Empires Conference](#) at the British Library. Caroline was also a member of the leadership team for Kew's 2021 History, Equity and Inclusion plan, which has done much to guide the organisation's advances in this area.

The SHNH Natural History Book Prize

The Society is very pleased to announce that our [Natural History Book Prize \(the John Thackray Medal\)](#) will this year be awarded to **Malini Roy, Cam Sharp Jones and Cheryl Tipp** for [Animals. Art, Science and Sound](#) (British Library, 2023, ISBN 9780712354332).

Malini Roy is Head of Visual Arts, Asian and African Collections, **Cam Sharp Jones** is Curator of Visual Arts, Asian and African Collections and **Cheryl Tipp** is Curator of Wildlife and Environmental Sounds at the British Library.

Published in conjunction with a [2023 British Library exhibition](#) *Animals: Art, Science and Sound*, this publication brings together artworks, manuscripts, printed works and wildlife sound recordings which come together in this major compendium of the greatest and strangest representations of animals on record.

Organised into four thematic chapters (Darkness, Water, Land and Air), the book presents eighty detailed case studies highlighting celebrated works. It explores the historical, scientific and artistic importance of each work alongside their provenance and custodial histories, including John James Audubon's *The Birds of America* (1827–1838), Matthew Paris's *Liber additamentorum*, Maria Sibylla Merian's *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* (1705), and Mark Catesby's *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands* (1729–1732), as well as letters from Charles Darwin, Japanese printed works by Hirase Yoichirō (1914–1915), Arabic hippiatric texts and the work of contemporary artists including Levon Biss and Jethro Buck.

Rich, newly photographed, illustrations bring these works to life, while interactive QR technology will allow readers to listen to recordings of the sound exhibits as they read. The bringing together of this range of material for the first time helps to highlight how changing technologies have been employed to record those creatures that surround us throughout history and how humanity has always been fascinated by the animal world.

All the judges agreed that the book was outstanding commenting on what an incredible achievement it was to cover so many items in so many mediums in such a readable and informative manner. One of the judges commented on how they had already used the book since reading as a source of reference already on several occasions. The judges liked the format of the book which is divided into four sections – darkness, water, land and air. They felt this beautifully illustrated book represented a celebration of the richness and diversity of historic publications in zoology.

For those interested in reading more about *Animals. Art, Science and Sound* you can read Zoë Varley's review in the Society's Journal, *Archives of Natural History*.

The W.T. Stearn Student Essay Prize

The Council of the Society for the History of Natural History is delighted to announce that the winner of the [William T. Stearn Student Essay Prize](#), 2024, is '**Hare, Hyrax, and Hart: Biblical Natural History and Hermeneutics in British Expeditions to the Holy Land, 1863-1884**', by **Theo Detweiler**, which was a revised chapter of his **BA History, Arabic Studies Honors thesis at William College, USA**.

Theo is currently at Cambridge University undertaking an MPhil on a Hershel Smith Fellowship. Readers described this as 'a very well-researched essay which offers a valuable re-evaluation of the work of Henry Baker Tristram and his interpretation of mammals in the Holy Land'.

In writing about the award Theo says: 'I am grateful to receive the SHNH William T. Stearn Prize for 2024, commemorating a pioneer in both botany and botanical history. My essay reveals the efforts of Henry Baker Tristram and fellow British naturalists to collect and identify biblical mammals in the late Victorian period. The history of natural history in the modern Middle East is a burgeoning field, and it is an honour to receive this recognition from the Society, whose work I have long admired.'

9. Closing Remarks from the President

The President congratulated the award winners, and thanked all the attendees for coming.

10. Vote of thanks and close of AGM

Following a final vote of thanks, the meeting was closed.

DRAFT