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Conservation scientist Koh Lian Pin returns to NUS BioSciences

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The award-winning scientist will start a new research centre to develop nature-based solutions to inform climate policies, strategies and actions



The National University of Singapore (NUS) on 20 March 2020 announced that outstanding Singaporean scientist and alumnus Professor Koh Lian Pin will return home to advance his research in conservation science. He will assume the appointment of Professor of Conservation Science, Technology and Policy in the Department of Biological Sciences at the NUS Faculty of Science on 1 April 2020.

Prof Koh is returning to Singapore under the National Research Foundation Singapore's Returning Singaporean Scientists Scheme which seeks to attract outstanding overseas-based Singaporean research leaders back to Singapore to lead research in areas important to Singapore. Prof Koh is the sixth Singaporean scientist attracted back under the Scheme.

"I am extremely honoured to receive this award, and to have the strong support of the leadership team and colleagues at NUS. I am also looking forward to working with stakeholders in the public and private sectors to translate the new science we produce to practical solutions that will benefit wider society," Prof Koh said.

His immediate priority is to set up a new NUS Centre for Nature-based Climate Solutions to spur efforts in tackling the challenges of climate change by protecting and better managing natural ecosystems. The Centre's research will help inform climate policies, strategies and actions in Singapore and the Asia Pacific region.

Professor Chen Tsuhan, NUS Deputy President (Research and Technology), said, "NUS is delighted that Professor Koh Lian Pin has chosen to return to his alma mater to lead strategic efforts in growing competencies and evidence-based science to fight climate change. Given Lian Pin's passion for scientific discovery and his strong desire to solve real-world problems, I am confident that he can leverage NUS' strengths and expertise in different domains of sustainability to create innovative solutions that positively impact Singapore and beyond."

Award-winning conservation scientist

A prominent researcher in the field of sustainability and environmental science, Prof Koh has worked in institutions across Switzerland, Australia and the United States over the last 16 years.

He is the Founding Director of ConservationDrones.org, a non-profit organisation that seeks to introduce drone technology to conservation scientists and practitioners worldwide. He was formerly Chair of Applied Ecology and Conservation at the University of Adelaide, and Vice President of Science Partnerships and Innovation at Conservation International Foundation, a non-profit environmental organisation.

Prof Koh's research focuses on developing innovative science and science-based decision support tools to help reconcile humanity's needs with environmental protection. He is particularly interested in environmental issues in the developing tropics, a region where population growth is most rapid, yet the people are poorest, and where biodiversity is the richest, yet most threatened globally.

He has published more than 130 widely-cited papers and books, including in *Nature*, *Science* and *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* USA. His work has also been featured by international media, including The New York Times, Smithsonian Magazine, Scientific American and Time Magazine, among others.

Throughout his career, Prof Koh has received multiple awards including the Australian Research Council Future Fellowship in 2014, the Swiss National Science Foundation Professorship in 2011, and the ETH Fellowship in 2008. He was also named a World Economic Forum Young Global Leader in 2013.

On his decision to return to Singapore after more than a decade abroad, Prof Koh said, "There is now a groundswell in Singapore to invest in more sustainable models of development, especially in the context of addressing climate change. This is perhaps one of the most critical challenges we will face as a nation. Fortunately, Singapore has one of the most capable, well-resourced and innovative scientific communities in the world. This is the right time for me and my fellow overseas Singaporeans to return home to join the fight against this existential threat."

New NUS research centre to address climate change challenges

Led by Prof Koh as its Director, the new Centre for Nature-based Climate Solutions aims to produce policy-relevant science to accelerate the development of nature-based climate solutions. These novel solutions will provide many additional benefits to society, such as clean air and water, food security and new economic opportunities.

In the years ahead, the Centre will also establish a robust scientific infrastructure to empower government and corporate leaders of Singapore and the Asia Pacific region to respond decisively to climate change.

The Centre's research activities will be organised under five multi-disciplinary programmes:

1. Understanding the impacts of climate change on human and natural systems
2. Identifying nature-based solutions for climate mitigation and adaptation
3. Overcoming barriers to the implementation of climate solutions
4. Prioritising actions for the greatest return on investment and outcomes
5. Leveraging technology to support climate research and actions

This new Centre is expected to be operational by the end of 2020.