

Q: When was ACRES founded, and why did you want to set up ACRES?

"ACRES was founded in 2001. Back then, I was an undergraduate at NUS and I noticed animal cruelty happening in the zoos. Yet, in those days, people weren't talking much about animal cruelty. Setting up ACRES was about mobilising people, bringing like-minded people together and starting a movement. 17 years later, ACRES has grown and animal welfare isn't just an individual goal anymore – otherwise, I have failed."

Q: Were your parents supportive of your decision?

"Like all parents, they hope the best for their children. Back then, I was bringing home about S\$500 per month. Obviously, my parents weren't supportive of my commitment to ACRES. However, I would say that while my dad wasn't supportive of my advocacy for animal welfare, my father still had my back because I was his son and I thank my father for that."



Mr Ng has been an active advocate of animal welfare since young. SOURCE: INTERVIEWEE

Q: What was one memorable incident during your 17 years in ACRES?

"Only one? Haha there were so many of them! But I would say my encounter with Blue, a vervet monkey left a strong impression. Blue was part of an illegal pet trade by a sailor who sold him as a pet. Blue was caged as a pet for 5 to 6 years. When we found him, he was all chained up and caged up.. Thankfully, after the rescue, Blue was sent back to Zambia and introduced to Toni, another rescued vervet monkey. They got along really well and had two children. He died years later but at least, he was born in the wild and died in the wild. Perhaps the most important lesson we can take away from Blue's incident is that while his predicament was a result of human actions, his eventual return to where he came from was a testament that through our collective efforts, humans can right the wrongdoings we committed. So it's time for us to come together, to do the right thing!"

Q: Why did you choose to join the politics?

"Being a part of the civil society, we lobby people together for a particular cause. But being a politician allows me to effect change on a larger scale, and at a faster pace. The ability to make changes at mass scale and for diverse issues was what affirmed my decision to join politics."

Q: Do you think it is ever possible to strike a balance between environmental sustainability and economic growth?

"I believe anything is possible. As a country, we definitely need to move forward. But it is vital for us to establish the middle ground too. For example, with the current construction work in Mandai, we need to ask ourselves what are the measures put in place to reduce the number of roadkills in the Mandai area. We need to put thoughts and efforts to mitigate the potential environmental issues whilst ensuring we continue to move forward in terms of our development. Really, what are the implications and at what cost? The building of an ecobridge, for instance, may not be an effective measure if careful planning isn't done prior to the execution. I mean, if the process of building the bridge has already dispersed all the animals, and with animals dying in roadkills, what purpose does the ecobridge serve then?"

Q: Do you think the collection of individual efforts is sufficient to result in a large enough change, or do you think the future lies in the hands of the government, to make big and fast changes?

"I think it has to be both bottom-up and top-down. Both the citizens (individual) and government must work together. In today's society, people are generally more aware of the dire situation we are in. Some businesses are doing their parts to mitigate the existing environmental issues, but the government should start taking the lead. For example, the government can take the lead to implement a policy of charging consumers on plastic bag usage?"

Q: Do you think taxation will work?

"There are many countries imposing taxes on plastic bags use. Why can't we try? We are not banning the use of plastic bags entirely. We are charging consumers to reduce plastic bags usage. I have seen consumers putting their items inside plastic bags, and then inside their recycle bags. If we were to charge each plastic bags for 10cents, I am sure consumers will request to not take the plastic bags or take less. The concept of using plastic bags is ingrained in most people. Maybe with taxation, we will be more proactive to ask for one less, if not no plastic bags at the counter."



Mr Ng hopes to see the elimination of rescue centres. SOURCE: INTERVIEWEE

Q: What are your end goals?

"I have no end goals. I will continue to listen with my ears and speak up. I want people to know that they have a voice in parliament. For now, I can act as the bridge between the government and the civil society. My position allows me to see the situation on both sides, to establish the middle ground more quickly to better effect large-scale changes. As for ACRES, I am gradually taking a step back. I have been running ACRES for 17 years now, it is time for our younger staff members to lead and take us to the next chapter. But while other animal welfare charity may focus on improving their rescue statistics every year, what we hope to see in ACRES, is the elimination of rescue centres. Because when rescue centres are no longer necessary, it would suggest that animals in the wild are no longer threatened."

Q: What advice do you have for young advocates out there?

"Speak up constructively, offer solutions and don't give up!"