Oxford University Museum of Natural History

**Press Release**

2 November 2023, for immediate release:

New Exhibition:

***FAIR WATER?***

*The Inequality Below the Surface*

21 November 2023–1 September 2024

**From its core to its atmosphere, Earth is soaked in water. But just 3% of this is drinkable and a quarter of the Earth’s population has no access to clean water. With global average temperatures increasing and extreme weather events affecting more people more frequently, water has ever greater power to hold our lives in the balance.**

***Fair Water?,* the new research-based exhibition at Oxford’s Museum of Natural History, offers unique insights into our relationship with this vital element, revealing how communities, scientists and policy-makers are working to create a fairer water future.**

The exhibition tells the story of the complex journey taken by our water, from river source to mouth, rainfall to drinking glass – a process easily taken for granted in the UK. Through the lens of communities in **Kenya, Ethiopia and Bangladesh**, the exhibition examines current approaches to water management and how communities and engineers are working to provide access to drinking water and protection against hazards like floods and droughts.

Visitors are invited to watch how heavy rainfall near a dam sets into motion a string of decisions that keep populations safe from flooding. An engaging design and hands-on experience will immerse people in the world of water and invite them to relate to the experiences of those who face water insecurity. By following the course of a river, visitors will be guided through a broad range of topics from geology to weather prediction and governance, and will see the real objects people use to manage their water. Tools like jerrycans and hand pumps will control a display about water access, and by turning a water wheel, visitors will be able to match pollutants and their sources.

Fascinating specimens from the Museum’s collections will illustrate the effects of climate change and pollution on aquatic wildlife and farming livestock. Skeletons of the vanishingly rare **Ganges River Dolphin, a Helicopter Catfish and a Fishing Cat** will feature in a display about drought and water pollution; while **specimens of British freshwater fish and insects** will demonstrate what ecosystems, and individual species can tell us about the health of rivers.

A striking **photographic series by renowned Ethiopian photographer and contemporary artist, Aïda Muluneh** will be a highlight of the display. Currently starring in Tate Modern’s *A World in Common* exhibition, Muluneh’s series, *WaterLife*, was commissioned by Water Aid and responds to the undeniable impact of life without clean water on women’s lives and futures.

The exhibition has been generated in a collaboration between the Museum and Oxford University’s REACH, a global research programme to improve water security for millions of people in Asia and Africa. **Alice Chautard of the Reach programme, says:** ‘Water is a natural resource, and it's managed by humans, and as for everything that's managed by humans, it becomes a political and ethical issue.’

**Professor Katrina Charles, co-director of the REACH programme, says:** ‘The exhibition represents research from over one hundred researchers, from across the work and diverse disciplines. It shows how research, undertaken with governments, UNICEF and NGOs can tackle these difficult challenges to benefit everyone’.

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PRESS IMAGES:

<https://go.glam.ox.ac.uk/FairWater>

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Exhibition: *Fair Water? The Inequality Below the Surface*

Dates: 21 November 2023-1 September 2024

Open: Daily, 10:00-17:00

Venue: First Floor, University of Oxford Museum of Natural History, Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3PW

Admission: Free, no booking required

[Oxford University Museum of Natural History](https://www.oumnh.ox.ac.uk/) holds an internationally-significant collection of natural history specimens and archives in a stunning example of neo-Gothic architecture. It is home to a lively programme of research, teaching and events focused on the sciences of the natural environment.

[REACH](https://reachwater.uk/about-reach/) is a global research programme funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to improve water security for the poor by delivering world-class science that transforms policy and practice. Living in poverty often means a struggle for water security. Rapid urban growth, unregulated pollution from industry, extreme floods and droughts, lack of reliable and safe drinking water, and increasing damage to water ecosystems threaten economies and undermine the lives of the poor. The research programme has improved water security for over 7 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.