

PRESS RELEASE

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UK'S OLDEST MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY COMPLETES BIGGEST REDISPLAY PROJECT IN ITS 165-YEAR HISTORY

**Over 3,000 objects installed including the first ever
dinosaur to be named**

The Museum of Natural History, University of Oxford, home of the first named dinosaur, announces the completion of a historic redisplay project with new installations showcasing three Oxfordshire dinosaurs. Supported by Biffa Award, the new completed displays open from 20 July and mark the final phase of 'Life, as we know it' – an eight-year programme to transform the presentation of the Museum's collections to visitors.

The 'Life, as we know it' project has seen the installation of 48 new displays in 24 state-of-the-art showcases themed around Biodiversity, Ecosystems, Evolution, and Earth. Together, these exhibits encompass the intricate relationships between our planet and life. The redisplay has involved the movement and conservation of thousands of Museum specimens to stage them in a fresh, bold design within the stunning main court and unique Victorian building.

Dr Gavin Svenson, the Director of the Museum of Natural History, said:

"Life, as we know it" has been a long-term effort to rethink how we present the natural world to our visitors, and it is a pleasure to see that vision now fully realised. The new displays bring together thousands of specimens to tell some of the most important stories in science, from the history of life on Earth to the extraordinary diversity of the natural world today. We hope they will inspire curiosity, encourage discovery and help visitors of all ages see their place within the wider story of our planet.'

At the heart of this final phase of 'Life, as we know it' is *Megalosaurus*, a Jurassic dinosaur discovered in an Oxfordshire quarry in Stonesfield in the late 18th century. It became the first dinosaur ever to be scientifically named when University of Oxford Professor William Buckland presented its fossilised remains to the Geological Society of London in 1824.

Megalosaurus - meaning 'great lizard' - is recognised as kick-starting the study of what would collectively come to be known as dinosaurs ('terrible lizards'). Measuring nine metres in length and weighing around a tonne, the fossilised remains of the world's first dinosaur – including the iconic lower jawbone – will form part of the new prehistoric ecosystems displays.

Alongside *Megalosaurus* will sit a related genus, *Eustreptospondylus*, a predatory dinosaur discovered in Summertown, Oxford, in 1870. This cousin of *Megalosaurus* will be exhibited for the first time as a fully articulated skeleton, using a combination of original fossil material, digital modelling and 3D printing, created in collaboration with the University of Chicago.

These new dinosaur displays conjure the deep past of Oxfordshire where rocks contain a prehistoric landscape frozen in time. Around 166 million years ago, during the Jurassic period, dinosaurs crossed a vast muddy plain leaving behind fragments of skeletons, fossilised remains and hundreds of footprints that would eventually turn to stone. A 'dinosaur highway', excavated at a farm in Ardley, Oxfordshire in 2024 by experts from the Museum, made headlines worldwide. Several different dinosaur footprints were revealed during the dig, including the distinctive three-toed claws of *Megalosaurus*. A 60-metre-long sequence of *Megalosaurus* footprints cast from fossilised prints can also be seen crossing the lawn in front of the Museum.

The new exhibits will track the history of our planet, showing how life and Earth exist in a dynamic relationship, each shaping the other. Visitors can experience a tactile connection to these themes through a series of touchable mineral specimens, as well as a new installation, *Mirror Moon*, created by artist Luke Jerram. The one-metre diameter polished steel sculpture presents a reconstruction of the Moon's surface, formed using accurate topographic data from NASA. Visitors will be able to feel every crater, valley and mountain.

This final phase of 'Life, as we know it' also includes an innovative new digital interactive, *Prehistoric Diver*, which recreates ocean ecosystems from the Jurassic era and even further back in time to the Cambrian period, an age of rapid evolution 500 million years ago. *Prehistoric Diver* will explore these lost worlds, placing visitors at the helm of a virtual submarine scanning the seas for ancient lifeforms.

Founded in 1860 as the centre for scientific study at the University of Oxford, the world's first purpose-built museum of natural history now holds the University's internationally renowned collections of natural history specimens and archives. Housed in a much-loved neo-Gothic building, the Museum is free to enter, and its growing collections underpin a lively programme of research, teaching and events focused on the sciences of the natural environment.

The final phase of 'Life, as we know it' has been generously supported by Biffa Award, a fund that helps to build communities and transform lives across England and Northern Ireland as part of the Government's Landfill Communities Fund. Previous phases of the redisplay project were supported by the FCC Communities Foundation.

Rachel Maidment, Grants Manager of Biffa Award said: 'We are delighted to have supported the final phase of the Museum of Natural History's '*Life, as we know it*' redisplay project through the Landfill Communities Fund. This ambitious programme will help visitors of all ages explore the story of life on Earth, while improving access to nationally significant collections and creating lasting benefits for communities. Biffa Award is proud to fund projects that build communities and transform lives, and this remarkable new display is a fitting example of that mission in action.'

Professor Irene Tracey CBE, FRS, FMedSci, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, said: 'Oxford's gardens, libraries and museums are among the most visible ways in which the University shares its research and collections with the wider public and were enjoyed by a record 3.8m visitors in 2025. Last year alone, more than 877,000 people came to the Museum of Natural History, making it one of the most visited university museums in the world. The completion of 'Life, as we know it' is a remarkable achievement that brings together cutting-edge science, outstanding collections and

public engagement, helping new generations of visitors explore the history of our planet and the extraordinary diversity of life upon it.'

NOTES FOR EDITORS

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Museum of Natural History, University of Oxford

The Museum is free to visit. For more information, head to www.oumnh.ox.ac.uk and follow @morethanadodo on social media.

About the University of Oxford

Oxford University has been placed number one in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings for the tenth year running, and number three in the QS World Rankings 2024. At the heart of this success are the twin-pillars of our ground-breaking research and innovation and our distinctive educational offer.

About Biffa Award



Since 1997, Biffa Award has awarded grants totalling more than £200million to thousands of worthwhile community and environmental projects across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The programme administers money donated by Biffa Group Ltd through the Government's Landfill Communities Fund. www.biffa-award.org

About Landfill Communities Fund / Scottish Landfill Communities Fund



The Landfill Communities Fund and Scottish Landfill Communities Fund - any waste that is discarded which cannot be reused, reprocessed or recycled may ultimately be disposed of in a landfill site. To encourage the re-use, recycle and recovery of more value from waste and use more environmentally friendly methods of waste disposal, Landfill Tax is charged on each tonne of waste sent to landfill. Landfill Operators (LOs) are able to redirect a small proportion of landfill tax liability to support a wide range of community and environmental projects in the vicinity of landfill sites through the Landfill Communities Fund (LCF) and Scottish Landfill Communities Fund (SLCF). The LCF is regulated by ENTRUST on behalf of HM Revenue & Customs, and the projects are delivered by enrolled Environmental bodies (EBs). The SLCF is regulated by SEPA on behalf of Revenue Scotland and projects are delivered by Approved Bodies (ABs).