HOPE for the Future 2019 – 2023

An ambitious three-year project to protect and share Oxford University Museum of Natural History's unique and irreplaceable British Insect Collection.

Museum of Natural History
University of Oxford

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

In numbers

1 million
specimens in the British Insect Collection.

100
volunteers involved in the project.

14,591
total webpage views.

34,607
people took part in public engagement activities.

484
families at Beasties or Besties family show.

12 Move a Million events with **1,722** members of the public relabelling specimens.

1,216
students from **31** schools took part in Discovery Days.

85%
of the **1,492** children and young people who gave feedback said they had found out something new.

560
participants at Age of Nature group sessions for older audiences, with **56%** of participants feeling amazed.

2/3
of Discovery Days students said that taking part had made them more interested in science.

Made possible with Heritage Fund

Supported using public funding by ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

HOPE for the Future

HOPE for the Future was an ambitious three-year project to protect and share Oxford University Museum of Natural History's unique and irreplaceable British Insect Collection. Containing over one million specimens – including dozens of iconic species now considered extinct in the UK – the collection offers us an extraordinary window into the natural world and the ways it has changed over time.

Through investment from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, additional trusts and foundations, and public support the project has preserved and protected 200 years of natural heritage to be shared now and with future generations.

The HOPE acronym spells out the project's aims (Heritage, Outreach and Preservation of Entomology), and is a nod to Frederick William Hope, a founding collector of the Oxford University Museum of Natural History.

The three strands of the project have included:

Heritage

Restoring the Museum's historic Pre-Raphaelite Westwood Room, and creating the Ellen Hope Gallery featuring new permanent displays on British insects.

Outreach

Delivering a wide-reaching learning and community programme at the Museum and beyond; developing skills and inspiring lifelong interest in the natural environment and conservation.

Preservation of Entomology

Rehousing and documenting over one million British insects, supported by volunteers, paid internships and bursary students.

Heritage

The Westwood Room

The heritage strand of the HOPE for the Future project focused on the built and cultural heritage of the Museum.

John Obadiah Westwood (1805-1893) was a renowned English entomologist and archaeologist also noted for his artistic talents. He published several illustrated works on insects and antiquities. He was among the first entomologists with an academic position at Oxford University and in 1861 became the Museum's first Hope Professor of Zoology.

Named in his honour, the Westwood Room is a prime example of Pre-Raphaelite design, which promoted art and architecture inspired by the natural world. When the Museum first opened in 1860, the room housed the Hope Collection of British Insects, and the room's design was intended to reflect this purpose. Colourful wall friezes and insect-inspired details are seen throughout, including the intricately carved fireplace, where the life cycles of Stag Beetles and Hawkmoths were carved by Edward Whelan in their favoured habitats of oak and potato leaves respectively.

With thanks to The National Lottery Heritage Fund, the room has been restored to its original 1860 design and colour scheme, and is now for the first time open to the public.

With beautiful new furniture, AV equipment and teaching microscopes, the Westwood Room is a transformative space for the Museum's learning programme and commercial venue hire offer.

Heritage

The Ellen Hope Gallery of British Insects

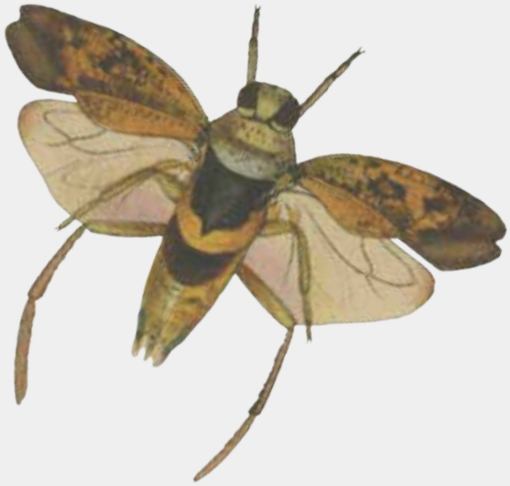
The new Ellen Hope Gallery explores the vital role insects play in our lives, from ecosystem services such as pollination, decomposition, and waste removal, to recycling nutrients and providing food for many other larger animals. However, over the next few decades, as many as 40 per cent of the world's insect species could become extinct. The gallery examines the sharp decline in populations and the actions we can all take to increase numbers and diversity.

Highlights include a newly commissioned film with local residents discussing their connection to insects and efforts to protect insect populations. A digital interactive also uses the illustrations of local artist Katherine Child to demonstrate ways to create habitats for a variety of insects.

The gallery is named after Ellen Hope, who in 1835 became one of the earliest female Fellows of the Entomological Society of London. In 1849, Ellen Hope's husband, Frederick Hope, donated his vast insect collection to the University of Oxford, founding the Hope Entomological Collections. Ellen Hope continued to support the collections after Frederick's death. In recognition of her passion for the natural world, the gallery highlights her impact and, by association, the wider role of women in science.


Hemiptera:
true bugs
Over 2,000 species in the UK
Insects in this order feed through a beak-like tube known as a rostrum, which allows them to suck juices from plants or animals.

Outreach



Through HOPE for the Future, the Museum designed and delivered an extensive programme of both onsite and offsite events with families, grandparents, community elders, young people, students, and teachers. The project has encouraged thousands of people to appreciate and understand insects and their relationship to humans, other creatures, and the environment.

By preserving the Museum's British Insect Collection, these iconic specimens can continue to be used for outreach and public engagement, inspiring the next generation of scientists and encouraging a wide range of people to care more for the natural heritage on their doorsteps.

Outreach

Schools

HOPE for the Future's formal learning programme was aimed at schools with higher than average percentage Pupil Premium. All the schools involved in outreach were in the highest 25% of eligibility for Pupil Premium in their county, and all but one in the highest 10%.

Highlights included:

Insect Discovery Days

In a full day of insect-related activities students were introduced to insect orders and the role of insects within ecosystems. They then used their newly acquired skills to find and identify insects in the school grounds. Over the course of the project the HOPE team delivered 58 Insect Discovery Days in 23 different schools and with 1500 children.

> *The children were highly motivated and engaged — lots of relevant and authentic learning based on their observations and the insects their group caught.*
> Teacher

Teacher continuous professional development

Bespoke CPD sessions for teachers aimed to build teachers' confidence in utilising insects to teach areas of the science curriculum.

> *I have become more knowledgeable about the insect world and found it fascinating. In our next classification unit I'll be using these ideas.*
> Teacher

Insect Explorers after-school club

An after-school club at the Museum was aimed at primary school students who do not often get the chance to take part in enrichment activities. Topics included macro photography, microscopy, investigating adaptations, and working with researchers at the Museum. Through these sessions students were encouraged to consider museums and science as relevant to their life choices.

Inspired by Insects after-school club resources

Using a box of resources with four ready-made sessions, partner schools were able to deliver insect-based after-school clubs. Sessions encouraged children to learn more about insects and their classification; explore insects in their local environment; and to conduct an insect investigation. Participants were also given a `hot line' to Museum entomologists, enabling them to ask questions, send insect photographs for ID purposes, and share the results of their investigations.

Crunchy on the Outside

A series of events for 10-14 year olds offered the opportunity to go behind the scenes at the Museum and explore the British Insect Collection. Events included insect macro photography, drawing events, and classifying insects found on the Museum's grounds.

Outreach

Families

Families took part in insect-themed activities across the Museum, ranging from holiday craft activities, performances, and Super Science Saturdays with researchers from the University of Oxford, to relaxed openings giving neurodivergent visitors of all ages the opportunity to explore in a less busy environment with tailored resources.

Highlights included:

Science Saturdays

The Museum ran five insect-themed Science Saturdays, aiming to showcase a selection of research from across the University of Oxford and provide opportunities for scientists to share their work with a family audience. Activities included storytelling workshops, discovering fossilised minibeasts, maggot racing, and science singing with Geologise Theatre.

HOPE insect show: Beasties or Besties?

After piloting elements of a specially-written script at local libraries and in community settings, performances of the HOPE Insect Show: Beasties or Besties? took place at the Museum over October half term 2021, February half term 2022 and during Super Science Saturday. The participatory show told the story of a museum visitor meeting an enormous talking dung beetle who persuades them that insects are friends not foes, and shares the vital role that insects play in food chains, nutrient recycling, and pollination.

Outreach

Towards an age-friendly Museum

As a less engaged audience segment, HOPE for the Future had a key focus on engaging older people aged 70+ years.

Highlights included:

Age of Nature

The HOPE project established an 8-month programme of social sessions for older people. Sessions included bespoke tours of exhibitions and behind-the-scenes, and handling sessions to investigate the hidden stories of the Museum. Conversations took place over tea and cake, ranging from how insects have inspired human inventions, materials, currency, and ideology throughout the ages, to how insects have been impacted by climate change and habitat loss.

> *We cannot stress enough how important we find these sessions and the opportunity they provide to meet new people in an active learning environment. They really are a highlight to our month.*
> Participant

HOPE Explorers: intergenerational grandparent programme

In partnership with 'Flo's – The Place in the Park', the HOPE team delivered monthly sessions for grandparents and mature carers who look after young children. Together with those in their care, participants examined specimens in the Museum's collection, searched for insects in 'Flo's – The Place in the Park' Nature Escape space and logged findings in a 'Bug Journal', created solitary bee hotels, and scattered bee friendly wildflower seeds. Participants received HOPE Explorer Packs to unpack with children - including craft activities, information booklets, and insect-themed recipe cards.

Evaluation showed that as a result of the sessions participants were more aware of local habitats and keen to protect them:

> *Over the series I feel that the relationship with insects has embedded itself into my mind and I've noticed over the series that my granddaughter (18 months) has become more trusting about seeing and holding insects.*
> Participant

Age of HOPE: pioneering outreach with Age UK Oxfordshire and Men's Shed Oxford

Partnering with Age UK Oxfordshire, the HOPE team worked with the LGBTQA+ community group in Barton and Men's Shed Oxford – a local social group for older men who take part in workshop activities, aiming to reduce loneliness in later life, social isolation and support wellbeing. Participants visited the Museum for live insect handling, behind-the-scenes tours, and activities. Sessions covered insect-focussed reminiscence, insect identification and raising awareness of locally led conservation initiatives.

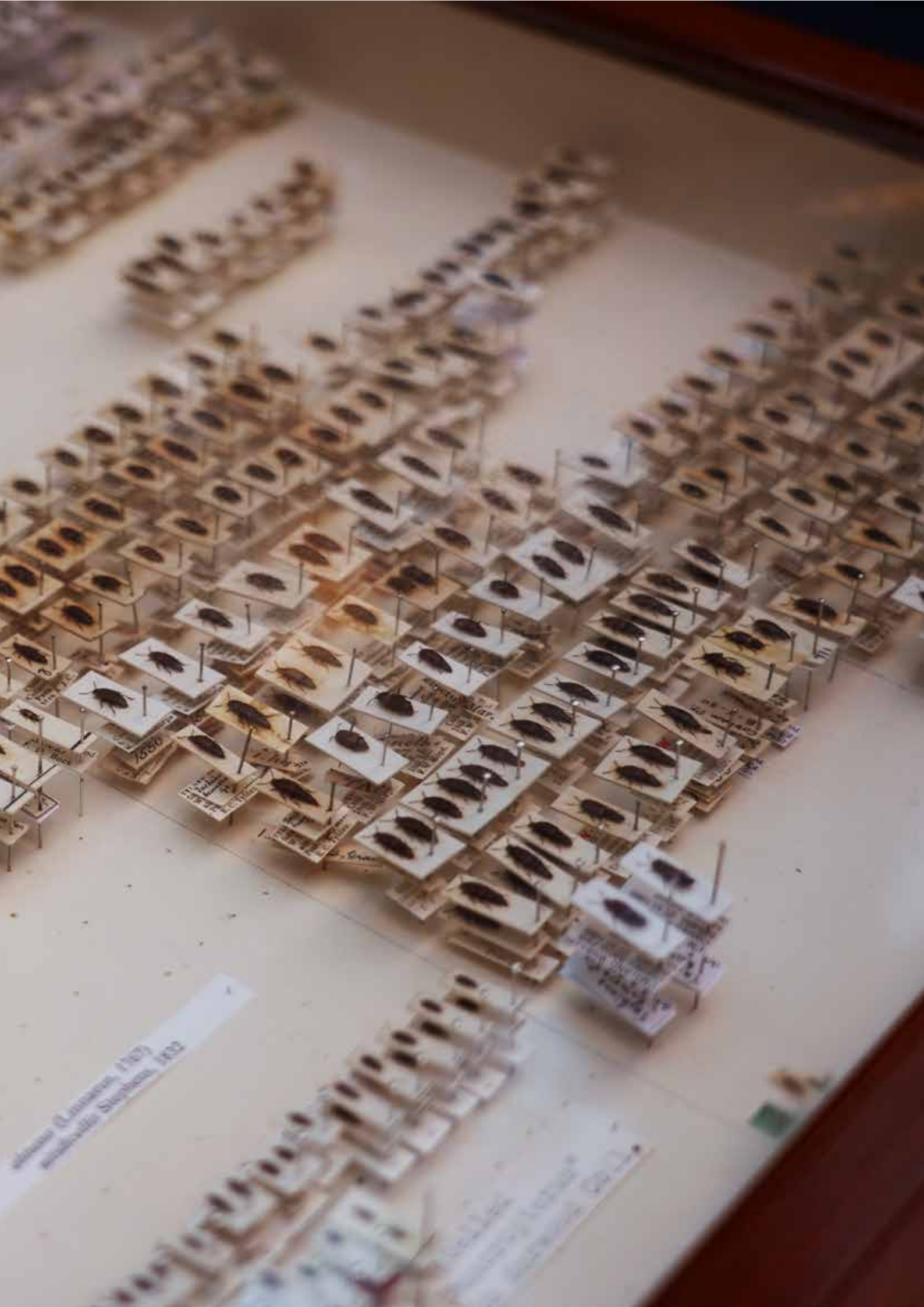
Qualitative evidence from participants revealed that the activities with Age UK made a marked and, in some cases, profound difference to their wellbeing and confidence, reducing loneliness, alleviating feelings of bereavement and social isolation, and inspiring them to do new things.

Preservation of Entomology

The Museum's British Insect Collection spans almost the entire history of British entomology, representing extensive information on the biodiversity of Britain and how it has changed. It is Designated by Arts Council England as being of national and international importance.

These insect specimens, some over 200 years old, urgently needed saving from pests, pinning rust, and the external environment. Through HOPE for the Future the individual specimens were condition checked, relabelled, and transferred to new storage, ensuring the collection meets modern checklist standards for research and study.

HOPE for the Future has enabled more than one million insects to be saved for display, research, and learning. Rare and wonderful museum collections such as this are a vital information bank for understanding the climate and biodiversity crisis, and for understanding the extent of species loss and ecology damage.



Preservation of Entomology

Move a Million

1,722 members of the public were given the opportunity to help in the relabelling and movement of specimens. This series of specialist outreach events opened the collections to the public, making the project visible to local audiences and offering the opportunity to engage with the Museum's collection in a unique way. As an open participatory event, we believe this to be the first time that this activity has been offered at this scale to the public in any museum in the UK.

Half of participants said they already cared about their local natural heritage but participating in Move A Million had increased that. A third of participants said the activity had inspired them to do something new or differently in the future. This included going back to the Museum, looking out for more events and presentations, and looking after insects.

> *I cannot overstate how much the Hope entomology collection now means to me and the impact it has had on my wellbeing and optimism for the future. Thank you to all the Oxford University Museum of Natural History staff for being such kind inspirational people!*
> Move a Million volunteer

In numbers

1 million
specimens relabelled and moved into new storage.

4,000
new drawers

55,000
new unit trays used to store insects.

18,500
pins used in the re-pinning of insect specimens.

12 Move a Million events with **1,722** members of the public relabelling specimens.

Volunteers

The HOPE project was host to a wide and varied programme of volunteering opportunities, from collections work to public engagement activities.

In common with many other organisations, the support of volunteers at the start of the project was severely restricted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to keep volunteers engaged, the HOPE team held online sessions to talk through the various aspects of the project and share stories from the collection. As Covid-19 restrictions lifted, volunteering levels picked up again, with the project totalling 216 days of volunteering.

Over three-quarters of volunteers who took part in evaluation said they had increased their skills, including using collection management systems, software, and microscopes. They also developed skills in research, presentation, and insect identification. Over a third said volunteering had increased their confidence.

216
total days of volunteering.

69
days spent undertaking collections work.

114.5
days spent on public engagement activities.

32.5
days spent in training and socials.

61%
thought volunteering exceeded their expectations.

3/4
of volunteers said they increased their skills.

100% of volunteers learned "a bit" or "a lot".

100
volunteers.


Annie
Volunteer

Covid-19

HOPE for the Future experienced huge challenges to delivery caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. With the introduction of lockdowns and social distancing, issues arose with face to face engagement with communities and visitors, staffing, volunteering, and timescales. However, the Museum successfully adapted to the digital delivery of outreach sessions for schools and families, providing a springboard for introducing 'live' visits when restrictions were relaxed.

Despite the challenges and unavoidable delays during this time, the collections work proceeded steadily, the building works were completed and a huge number of people were engaged in project activities, both on site and off.


VERSUNDAY

Legacy

Reaching out beyond our walls

The project engaged 34,607 people through a wide-reaching learning and community programme. The evaluation data collected shows that interest in science has increased for children and young people and that they are more interested in museums.

As part of the project the team worked towards establishing the Museum as an age-friendly space through staff and volunteer training and by designing and delivering a range of workshops and events. Qualitative evidence from activities with Age UK showed a marked difference to participants' wellbeing as a result of the project, reducing loneliness and alleviating feelings of bereavement and social isolation.

The project also established new relationships which the Museum will continue to build on, reaching out into communities and schools who had not engaged with the Museum before, including five partner schools with higher-than-average percentage pupil premium.

The range of learning resources created for schools, families, and community groups during the project will continue to be used going forward.

Increasing engagement space onsite

The project has restored and made accessible the historic Pre-Raphaelite-designed Westwood Room, a new multi-purpose space never before open to the public. Having such a flexible, accessible, and usable space has been transformative for the Museum in terms of its wider public engagement programmes and commercial venue hire offer.

The Ellen Hope Gallery's new displays explore biodiversity, habitat loss, and the value of museum collections in documenting these changes and their impacts. The Museum has learned from the experience of interpretation development (including consultation) which will benefit the planning, development and potential funding for future display projects.

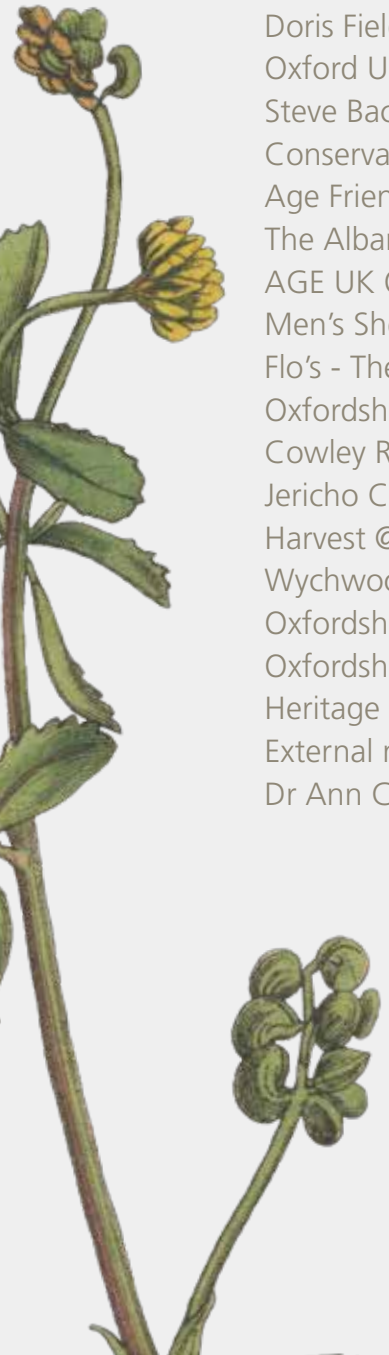
Preserving and interpreting the British Insect Collection

The project has dramatically improved the conservation status of the Museum's British Insect Collection. By the end of 2023 it is anticipated that a total of 1,013,457 specimens will have been re-curated and transferred into new storage. The British insect collection is now organised in modern taxonomic order, making it accessible for engaging audiences and scientific research. The project has been applauded by curators from other museums, commenting that it is a 'flagship' in terms of insect collection conservation in the UK.

Acknowledgements

Oxford University Museum of Natural History would like to thank the following people for their contributions to this project:

The National Lottery Heritage Fund, with special thanks to National Lottery Players.
Arts Council England
Oxford Diversity Fund
Negaunee Foundation
EPA Cephalosporin Trust
Rothschild Foundation
Evolution Education Trust
Doris Field Charitable Trust
Oxford University Estates Services
Steve Backshall
Conservation Optimism, Oxford University Department of Biology
Age Friendly Standards
The Albany
AGE UK Oxfordshire
Men's Shed Oxfordshire
Flo's - The Place in the Park
Oxfordshire Science Learning Partnership
Cowley Road Works
Jericho Comedy
Harvest @ Home
Wychwood Forest Fair
Oxfordshire County Library Service
Oxfordshire Play Association
Heritage Pathfinder
External members of the Project Board: Carole Souter (chair), Kate Arnold-Forster, Dr Ann Childs, Dr Mike Wilson



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