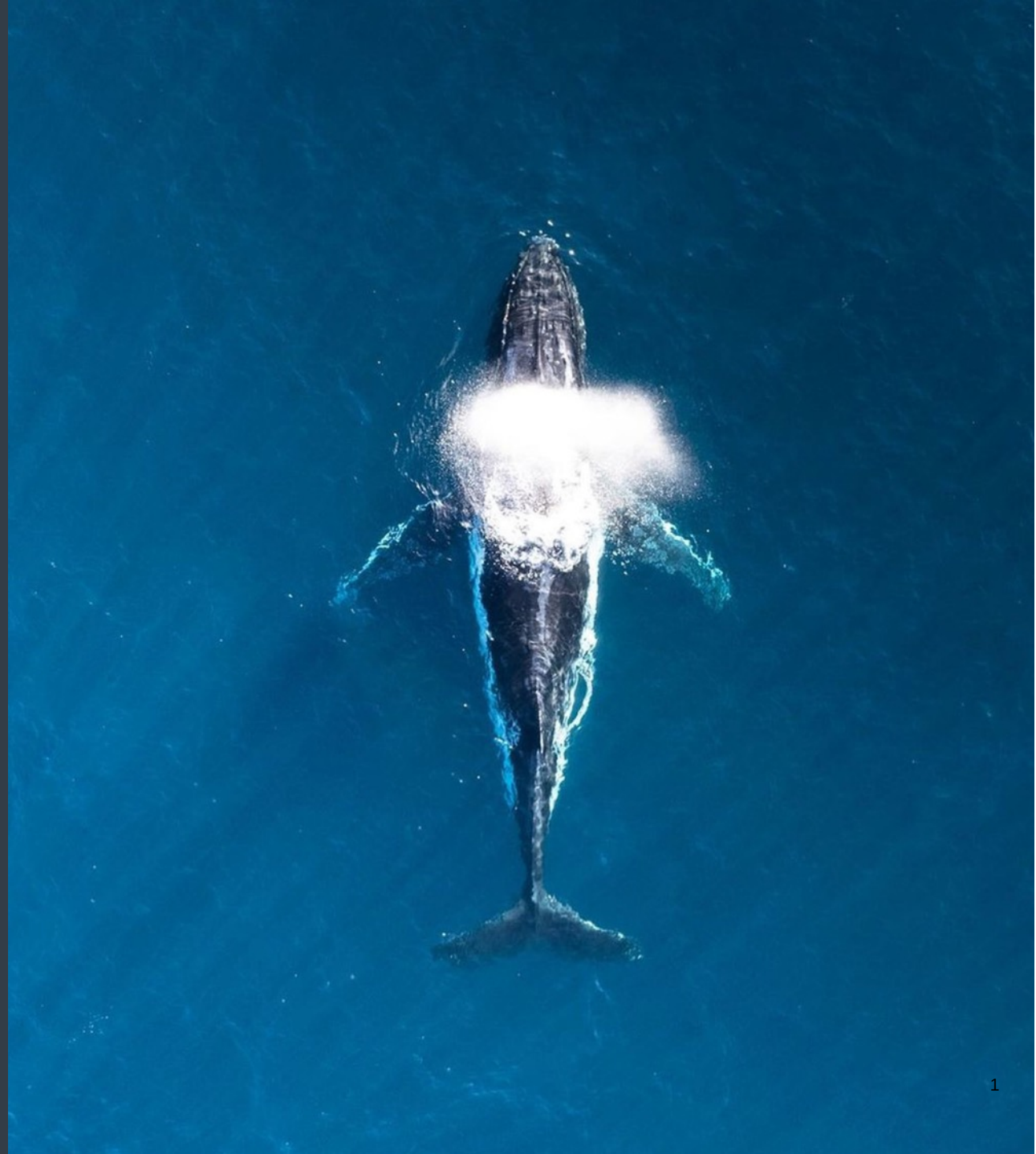


Natural History Museum

AHRC Early Career Fellowships in Cultural and Heritage Institutions 2025



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The Collections and Culture Research Theme

The Natural History Museum's vision for research is to create advocates for the planet by transforming the study of natural history.

Traditionally, NHM Science, including its collections, has faced the Life and Earth sciences. Yet all research disciplines are important in addressing environmental challenges, which requires understanding and engaging with human culture as much as with the natural world. Indeed, these challenges demand the breaking down of simple oppositions between culture and nature

Arts and humanities research is, therefore, an increasingly important aspect of NHM Science. It is supported by the Collections and Culture Research Theme, one of nine Science research themes. Collections and Culture brings interdisciplinary perspectives to the NHM's world-leading collections and to addressing the planetary emergency. It acknowledges that the museum and the science it represents have been shaped by the forces of history, including the history of empire. A wide range of people and cultures, past and present, were involved in generating the collections, but not all those stories are yet known or told.



Visual and Material Cultures

The Natural History Museum possesses 80 million specimens, extensive library and archives, laboratories (imaging and analysis, conservation, and molecular), flagship advocacy programmes (Fixing Our Broken Planet, and the Urban Nature Movement), public museums and collections across three physical sites (South Kensington, Tring, and Wandsworth), and gardens.

Applicants should connect their research idea to collections and/or activities. How will the museum's physical collections or activities be used to address your research questions?

Key challenges include linking specimens in different parts of the collection and connecting specimens with their paper trails in different libraries and archives, including those at NHM.

Of Earth's many environmental challenges, the Natural History Museum's collections are particularly useful for thinking about biodiversity change and especially biodiversity loss. It is worth candidates bearing in mind that this topic is an emphasis within the museum's approach to the planetary emergency.

Because of imminent collections moves, NHM is temporarily unable to give physical access to specimen collections in some areas, including mammal, non-insect invertebrate (e.g. coral, worms, molluscs, crustacea), ocean floor sediment, and palaeontological specimen collections.



Colonial histories and legacies

If you place the geolocations of the Natural History Museum's specimen collections onto a map it recreates the shape of the nineteenth-century British Empire. The collections have been shaped by – but also shaped – colonial science and attitudes towards nature.

The museum has a set of [principles for sharing our collections](#), which necessitate new research into these difficult histories, alongside collaborative and participatory research which broadens and diversifies perspectives on them.

Recent research includes the connectedness of trade, industry and empire (e.g. whaling, economic entomology and botany); medicine and natural history; maritime exploration; palaeontological excavation; knowledge of enslaved and/or colonised people; and cultures of display (e.g. hunting trophies or exhibitions of empire).

Further possibilities may include histories of mining or extraterrestrial specimens; links across different Earth and Life sciences collections; connections between different places and experiences of empire; or connecting very different points in time (such as contested interpretations of deep and evolutionary time or the use of colonial heritage for sustainable futures).



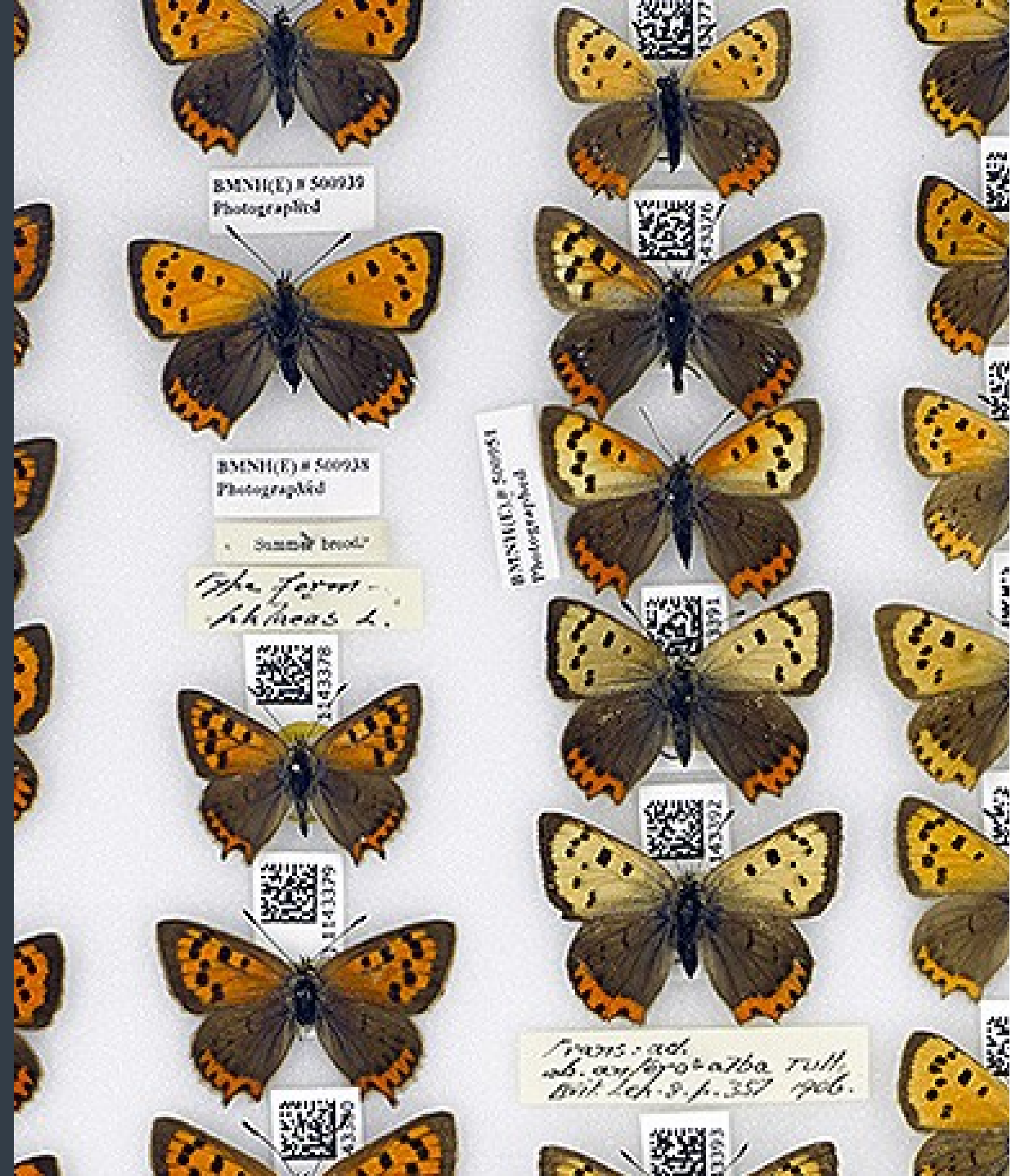
Digital Humanities

The Natural History Museum leads in projects to digitize natural science collections, and in particular the Distributed System of Scientific Collections UK (DiSSCo UK) a large, AHRC-funded project to digitize the UK's 137 million natural science specimens.

This investment in digital infrastructure promises to accelerate understandings of global biodiversity and heritage, bringing scientific, educational, societal, and economic benefits.

Arts and humanities disciplines can play a role in both using and shaping this infrastructure. What is a digital specimen? How can data from nature be humanised? How can it be effectively used in more-than-scientific contexts? How can different global and local audiences – and particularly hard to reach audiences – benefit from this data? How can cultural information be collected, preserved, and connected with specimens? How can the digital and technological literacy of arts and humanities disciplines be enhanced? How can arts and humanities discipline use e-science collections to imagine and foster sustainable futures?

These are some of the intellectual and creative challenges concerning digital collections that candidates might consider addressing through their specific projects.



Marginalised perspectives

The Natural History Museum welcomes fellowship projects that highlight marginalised perspectives in the history and present of natural history studies – from Indigenous knowledge systems to the contributions of women, amateurs, and non-elite collectors and experts. Research in this area stresses the networked nature of science but the unevenness with which its achievements are often claimed and attributed.

The museum is particularly keen to support research that not only deepens understanding of diverse histories but also shapes how the museum engages people today, especially from groups that are currently under-represented in its audience: people with disabilities, people from marginalised ethnicities, and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.



Important information

Contact the NHM and register early interest (as soon as possible) using the following email address: rco@nhm.ac.uk

Even if you know a curator or another person at NHM, please include the email address above, so that the museum can keep track of potential candidates.

In your message, include some information about yourself: when and where you did your PhD, where you are now, and an outline of your research idea.

Candidates suited to the Natural History Museum will have:

- A curiosity about the material cultures of the natural world.
- The ability to navigate, link, and use historical collections within NHM and beyond, and ideally experience of handling physical specimens.
- A willingness to conduct engaged research, sharing the wonders of our collection
- The desire to be involved and provide leadership in the Collections and Culture Research Theme and the wider research community at the NHM.
- A drive to make an environmental difference through research.



Previous project



Cetacean (Re)Sources: re-examining Britain's role in whaling

This environmental history project investigates how British colonial exploration, territorial and administrative expansion, and industrial whaling in the Southern Hemisphere contributed to the Museum's Cetacea collection. The project contextualises relevant specimens within their colonial legacies, reconnecting them with their places of origin as constructed by empire and whaling. It aims to demonstrate the value of environmental history in reinterpreting natural history specimens and reinforce its contribution to understanding and confronting the histories and legacies of wildlife exploitation, biodiversity loss, British Empire and conservation.

Dr Sophia Nicolov

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/research/projects/cetacean-resources.html>



Useful Links:

NHM Science:

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science.html>

Collections and Culture Research Theme:

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/research/themes.html#collectionsandculture>

NHM Collections:

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/services.html>

NHM Library & Archives:

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/services/library.html>

NHM Laboratories:

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/services/facilities.html>

NHM Diversity and Inclusion:

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/about-us/diversity-and-inclusion.html>

Previous AHRC fellowship project at NHM:

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/research/projects/cetacean-resources.html>

NHM Vision:

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/about-us/our-vision-strategy.html>

