

TRUSTEES' MEETING 19 NOVEMBER 2025

No 285

THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

AT A MEETING

ON 19 NOVEMBER 2025

AT 0900

Present

Lord Tony Hall of Birkenhead (Chair)

Cath Caldwell (Board apprentice)

David Craig

Shahpur Kabraji

Professor Yadvinder Malhi FRS CBE

Robert Noel

Mark Read CBE

Professor Katharine Robson Brown

Dr Sarah E Thomas (Online)

In Attendance

Dr Douglas Gurr (Director)

Helen Whitehouse (Chief Operating Officer)

Siobhán Tighe (Chief Financial Officer)

Dr Tim Littlewood (Executive Director of Science)

Jessica Bradford (Director of Collections) for item 4,

Dr Sandra Knapp, Interim Director of Research for item 4

Sarah Long (Head of Registry) for item 6

John Jackson (Head of Science Policy and Communication) for item 6

Heather Bonney (Principal Curator, Vertebrates and Anthropology) for item 6

Dr Sarah Long (Head of Registry) for item 5

Julia Evans (Board Secretary), Ayesha Kamran (Governance Officer), Molly Harrison-Edge (Development & Director's Office Project Officer)

Preliminary Items:

2643 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Professor Dame Jane Francis DCMG FRS and Tanuja Randery.

2644 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REGISTER OF INTERESTS (01a)

Declarations of Interest and changes to the Register of Interests were recorded by the Board Secretary.

2645 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 JULY 2025 (01b)

The minutes of the meeting of Trustees held on 20 May 2025 were confirmed as a true record and signed off by the Chair.

2646 CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair welcomed the Board of Trustees and reflected on matters including Rob Noel's replacement recruitment process.

A morning tour of the Conservation Centre was led by Diana Davis.

2647 DIRECTOR'S REPORT (02a-c)

The Director gave a summary and update on the Operating Plan Quarterly Report highlights and Digitisation/DiSSCo UK, and the National Education Nature Park sponsored by the Department for Education.

National Education Nature Park was showcased with its latest phase of uptake across 8000 settings, with 30% of schools registered across England. Trustees requested updates on this programme, including data and information on geographic reach, to help support and broaden engagement across their networks.

The Director also shared on recent events including the 'Countdown to COP30' event. The Chair thanked the executive team for the event that showcased NHM's capacity as a

central convener with this event working with various offices government departments with a wide network of stakeholders, security and media interfaces.

The Director shared on activities as part of the NHM 150 Programme with Exhibitions and Galleries including Old General Herbarium pop up gallery and temporary exhibition, Jurassic Oceans. The Trustees noted that the highly successful temporary exhibition, Our Story with David Attenborough, will be extended to August 2026

2648 FINANCIAL REVIEW (03a-c)

The Chief Financial Officer (ST) gave a summary of Q2 finances.

ST explained on the granularity of the assumptions in income including forecast of the Self-Generated Income, advance ticket sales in commercial portfolio including retail pop up, public programme and commercial venue hire.

Risks were also discussed around Touring exhibitions and operational requirements and adaptations globally. Trustees also discussed the challenges of partnerships on securing venues and storage considerations, which have an impact on the financial forecast.

Substantive items:

2649 TRANSFORMING THE STUDY OF NATURAL HISTORY (04a)

A paper and presentation were presented by the Executive Director of Science, Interim Director of Research, Director of Collections and Head of Data, Digital & Informatics. The three Directors present gave an overview framed under three headings:

1. The Historical Foundation
2. The Present State of Transformation – Themes and Digitisation
3. The Future: Towards a Planetary Knowledge Base

The team provided an update on the alignment of the Research Themes, the Collections Infrastructure, NHM Unlocked programme, and large-scale digitisation through DiSSCo UK highlighting how these elements interface with the Museum's physical specimen collections and contribute to global digital data to support the development of the Planetary Knowledge Base.

The Director of Research noted that the Research Themes serve as a lens through which

to view the Museum's activity and outputs. The discussion then explored the challenges of transformation within the context of academic inquiry and longstanding working practices, the connections between collections and problem-solving, and the processes used to identify research problems.

The team provided an update on plans for a global approach for natural history collections, highlighting the huge range of data that exist (literature, specimens, observations, genetic data) and the solutions that could emerge from enhanced data connectivity. They also outlined opportunities presented by Large Language Models and AI Agentic systems.

The team responded to questions related to collections, data, digitisation and knowledge graphs, outlining plans for a curated pathway towards building a Planetary Knowledge Base with verifiable sources, as well as updates on science recruitment, funding opportunities and approaches to access and benefit sharing. The Executive Director of Science shared that the G13 visit in January 2026 will be an opportunity to explore this globally with a gap analysis to identify how this will be taken forwards. It was recommended that the joint Science Advisory & Collections Advisory Committee meeting will be the forum to delve into these topics further to review, frameworks, proposals and activity around the team's proposals.

Standing Items:

2650 MAJOR PROJECTS UPDATE (05a)

The Chief Operating Officer summarised the report on major projects and raised considerations on RECODE, NHM Unlocked and PBIF and DiSSCO UK.

2651 QUARTERLY COLLECTIONS REPORT AND REQUESTS FOR RETURN (06a-b)

The Board noted the Quarterly Collections Report and approved the Request for return to proceed with the recommended option.

Items to note:

2652 SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS (07a)

AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

Shahpur Kabraji updated on items including Risk Management policy and process which has now been reviewed by the Executive Board with an updated format of the risk register.

SCIENCE ADVISORY / COLLECTIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Yadvinder Malhi and Sarah Thomas updated on the joint meeting that will be repeated for the next committee scheduled. Items discussed included digital access, collaboration with other institutions and special collections.

INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Rob Noel updated on financial reprofiling, the Wandsworth site in relation to NHM Unlocked, and master planning, with a planned update to the Board in 2026. The COO shared that the Urban Nature Project continued to receive notable awards for its design and delivery, with further nominations upcoming. The Board also noted that the Infrastructure committee had also approved an updated Term of Reference.

2653 EVENT DATES FOR THE DIARY (08a) Event dates for the diary for 2026 were noted.

2654 AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE BOARD MEETINGS

The rolling agenda for future meetings was noted.

2655 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Modern Slavery Statement was approved.

The Chair noted a rebalance of the Subcommittees with the membership. These are proposed as below and were discussed with members.

Yadvinder Mahli will step down from Infrastructure Committee

Jane Francis will step down from Audit and Risk Committee (ARC)

Katharine Robson Brown will join the Infrastructure and Remuneration Committee (RemCo)

Mark Read will join - Remuneration Committee (RemCo) and Nominations Committee (NomCo)

The Chair noted that this meeting marked the conclusion of Cath Caldwell's term as Board Apprentice and expressed appreciation for her valuable insight, experience, and active contribution to the Board's work throughout her two-year tenure.

The Chair thanked the Board and secretariat for their time and preparation, and the meeting ended.

2656 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

- 24 February 2026
- 20 May 2026
- 2 July 2026
- 17 November 2026