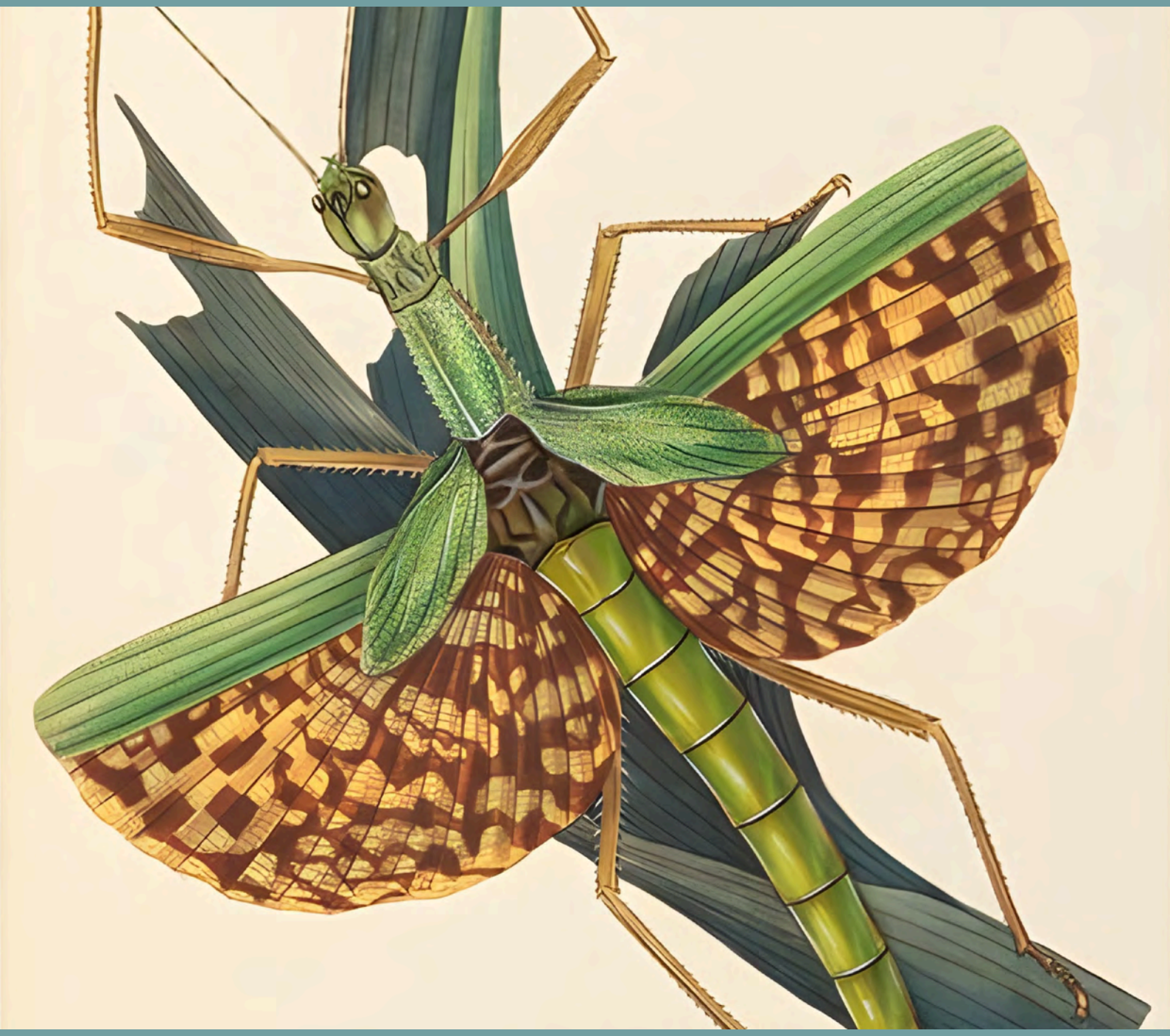
EARLY CAREER RESEARCHER SYMPOSIUM 2026

SOCIETY FOR THE HISTORY OF NATURAL HISTORY



THE SOCIETY FOR THE HISTORY OF NATURAL HISTORY

19 FEBRUARY 2026

Online

The LINNEAN SOCIETY of London

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Cover Image

"Mantis gigas"
from
An Epitome of the Natural History of the Insects of India, and the Islands in the Indian Seas
by Edward Donovan.
London: Printed for the author by T. Bensley, 1800.

PROGRAMME

ALL TIMES GMT

9:25 AM — *Welcome*

9:30 AM — *Session One*

Identifying plant species in museum collections: developing new methods of documentation at The Fitzwilliam Museum
Kimberly Glassman, The Fitzwilliam Museum and University of Cambridge

Evolutionary aesthetics: stylistic divergence in hand-painted zoological wall charts, c.1900
Evelyn Klammer, University of Vienna

Publishing and illustrating natural history in Victorian and Edwardian Britain: Lovell Reeve 1840–1920
Sophia Kamps, Royal Holloway, University of London, and Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

11:00 AM — *Break*

11:30 AM — *Session Two*

Echoes of a lost museum: herpetological collections sent by Barbosa du Bocage from the Lisbon Museum to the British Museum (Natural History)
Diogo Parrinha, University of Porto

The Victorian fern album: rehabilitating women's contributions to nineteenth-century pteridology
Eleanor Gillespie, University of Portsmouth

Natural history exhibitions as conservation capital: game animals of the Empire (1932) and the making of East African game reserves
Charlotte Wood, University of Cambridge and Natural History Museum

PROGRAMME

1:00 PM — *Lunch*

2:00 PM — *Session Three*

Himalayas pearl forgotten: meteorological monitoring and knowledge dissemination in Yatung Customs' borderlands
Qian Chen, Shandong University of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Needham Research Institute

Curious gentlemen and a virtuous tree: naturalists and sassafras in the colonial Chesapeake
Sierra S. Roark, University of North Carolina

Chinese species in the Jardin d'Acclimatation: Dabry de Thiersant's natural history network and local faunal knowledge, 1862–1868
Clement Qiang Huang, York University

3:30 PM — *Break*

4:00 PM — *Session Four*

Butterfly bodies: insect preservation and the limits of commodification in early modern natural history
Stephanie Reitzig, Columbia University

Local knowledge, local remedies: healing earths in Robert Plot's *Natural History of Oxfordshire*
Sandra Liwanowska, University of Cambridge

Putting *Archaeopteryx* in its place: avian fossils as spaces of knowledge in the evolutionary sciences
David E. Lawrence, University of New Mexico

5:30 PM — *Closing Remarks*

SESSION ONE

Identifying plant species in museum collections: developing new methods of documentation at The Fitzwilliam Museum

Kimberly Glassman, The Fitzwilliam Museum and University of Cambridge

In recent years there has been an increase in cross-institution and interdisciplinary research centred around museum collections. In the plant humanities, scholars have been promoting building connections between the herbaria, museum, archive, and library. In my role as Research Associate of Botanical Collections at the Fitzwilliam, I have been working to add categories of documentation to our online catalogue of botanical drawings to facilitate a search through our collections based on the name of a plant. Inspired by plantillustrations.org and other similar projects, I have worked to identify the binomial taxonomic nomenclature of the plant subjects in the collection along with their colloquial names and, where possible, their indigenous names. As we have over 3,000 drawings in our collection, I have started with a subset which prioritises documenting single-subject drawings of plants (as opposed to composites) with the aim to expand the scope in the second stage of the project.

This mode of documentation redirects agency to plants and allows us to focus on telling more plant stories. For example, by identifying the South African flower *Amaryllis belladonna* within our collection of botanical drawings, I have tracked its appearance in European art and connected it with specimens at the Cambridge Herbarium. In this talk, I will explain the how I identify plants in the drawings collection through a series of case studies. In doing so, researchers will be able to use these fields to facilitate their search of a flora and more easily make connections between collections, such as herbaria.

Speaker biography

Kimberly Glassman is the Research Associate of Botanical Collections at the Fitzwilliam Museum and a Postdoctoral Affiliate of Newnham College, University of Cambridge. Kim's PhD research at Queen Mary University of London and Kew Gardens investigated Quebec women who worked with Kew's first director on the Flora Boreali-Americana (1829-1840). Kim has published on women's work in nineteenth-century botany, Indigenous knowledge of North American botany, and how to read nineteenth-century Floras. Kim is a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London, visiting researcher at Kew Gardens, and part of the Natural History Humanities Initiative in the Collections-Connections-Communities research group in Cambridge.

SESSION ONE

Evolutionary aesthetics: stylistic divergence in hand-painted zoological wall charts, *c.*1900

Evelyn Klammer, University of Vienna

At the Department of Evolutionary Biology at the University of Vienna, around 700 hand-painted zoological wall charts have been preserved, making it one of the largest collections of its kind in Europe. In my dissertation, conducted within the research project AMAZE -Associated Media of Austro-Hungarian Zoological Education, I examine these objects, their genesis, and their broader contextualization.

Many of these charts were created around 1900, when Vienna was a major centre of evolutionary discourse. At that time, zoology at the University was organized in two institutes—alongside a separate chair for "Zootomy"—each led by committed supporters of evolutionary theory: Karl Grobben (I. Institute) and Berthold Hatschek (II. Institute). Despite this shared commitment, the two men differed greatly in background and professional orientation. Whereas Grobben, a Catholic German-Bohemian, was a comparative zoologist with a strong emphasis on systematic anatomy, Hatschek, a Jewish follower of Ernst Haeckel, focused on development and morphology. Both relied on specially commissioned teaching charts to convey their ideas.

In my contribution, I will briefly outline the scope and characteristics of this collection and then compare charts that can be attributed with high certainty to either Grobben or Hatschek. Notably, the stylistic differences between the two groups are striking, even though personnel records indicate the same illustrators worked for both institutes. I will use the symposium to discuss possible explanations: Do these differences stem from the professors' private environments, from a deliberate desire for aesthetic demarcation between scientific schools, or from their divergent disciplinary orientations?

Speaker biography

Evelyn Klammer is an art historian and visual culture scholar whose research examines how images shaped identity and knowledge in the European (Early) Renaissance and the nineteenth century. She held a pre-doctoral position at the Technical University of Vienna and has worked at several museums, including the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien. She is currently pursuing a PhD in the History of Science at the University of Vienna, where she studies historical wall chart collections at the Institute of Evolutionary Biology as part of the interdisciplinary research project AMAZE - Associated Media of Austro-Hungarian Zoological Education.

SESSION ONE

Publishing and illustrating natural history in Victorian and Edwardian Britain: Lovell Reeve 1840–1920

Sophia Kamps, Royal Holloway, University of London, and Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Lovell Reeve was the leading natural history publisher of the mid-Victorian era, responsible for a diverse range of publications in the field, including periodicals such as Curtis's Botanical Magazine, publications for popular audiences, and specialist works of enduring significance. Lovell Reeve's publications are the result of a complex system of labour and market dynamics, with the publisher working as intermediary and facilitator of illustrators, writers, printers, and scientists to produce volumes that were then consumed by both specialists and lay audiences.

My PhD research brings together an archival analysis of the economics of publishing natural history based on the Lovell Reeve papers at RBG, Kew, with a material culture focus on book production, from the creation of elaborate hand-coloured lithographs to the innovative trade cloth bindings used for Reeve's Popular Natural History series. Through an emphasis on production process and materiality, I explore the tension between the book as a commodity, a scientific tool, and a work of art. Reeve's archive at Kew, along with manuscripts of Reeve's books and periodicals, presents exciting new evidence about the visual culture of botany, print economies, and gender and labour in the field of illustration. My paper will report the results of my initial, data-driven survey of Lovell Reeve's publications and economic ledgers at RBG, Kew, establishing the strategies used for natural history publishing and the breadth of Reeve's subject matters and audiences. My paper will also explore the process of illustrating and hand-colouring natural history books as documented in the publisher's archive.

Speaker biography

Sophia Kamps is in her second year of a CDA PhD at Royal Holloway, University of London, and RBG, Kew. Her research focuses on Victorian natural history publishing and illustration. She is currently completing a placement at the V&A, working on 19th-century architectural illustration. Sophia was previously the Tiffany & Co. Foundation Intern in American Decorative Arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and led the pilot year of the NEH-supported Woodlawn Stained-Glass Survey, supervised by the Met. Sophia holds an MA in Art History from Queen's University in Canada. Sophia's research is supported by the AHRC and Canada's SSHRC.

SESSION TWO

Echoes of a lost museum: herpetological collections sent by Barbosa du Bocage from the Lisbon Museum to the British Museum (Natural History)

Diogo Parrinha, University of Porto

As part of a nineteenth century scientific network, José Vicente Barbosa du Bocage (1823–1907) regularly sent "duplicate" specimens from the zoological collections of the National Museum of Lisbon to natural history museums across Europe. These duplicates gained exceptional significance following the catastrophic fire that destroyed the Lisbon Museum's zoological collections in 1978, making them the last surviving representatives of its historical holdings. Despite their importance for taxonomic and nomenclatural stability, the full extent of Bocage's duplicate specimens remains poorly documented. Here we present a comprehensive and integrative revision of the herpetological material sent by Bocage to the British Museum (Natural History). By integrating archival correspondence, shipping inventories and specimen metadata, we reconstruct the history of 92 herpetological specimens sent by Bocage between 1864 and 1896. We provide evidence for the recognition of "lost" and previously unknown type material, demonstrating the potential of historical archival data for resolving taxonomic and nomenclatural ambiguities. The value of the collection is discussed in the context of Bocage's scientific career and the production of herpetological knowledge in Portuguese colonial Africa. More broadly, this study highlights the enduring consequences of specimen mobility, institutional loss and colonial collecting practices on the preservation of scientific and historical heritage.

Speaker biography

Diogo Parrinha is a Portuguese biologist currently completing his PhD in Biodiversity, Genetics and Evolution at BIOPOLIS/CIBIO-InBIO, University of Porto. His research focuses on the taxonomy and biogeography of Angolan herpetofauna, with a strong emphasis on the use of natural history collections. Prior to his doctoral research, he contributed to the management and digitization of zoological collections at the National Museum of Natural History and Science in Lisbon. He also maintains a strong interest in the history of science and in the legacy of historical natural history collections, particularly those connected to Portugal's colonial era.

SESSION TWO

The Victorian fern album: rehabilitating women's contributions to nineteenth-century pteridology

Eleanor Gillespie, University of Portsmouth

The contributions of women to the study of ferns, pteridology, in the nineteenth century have been largely overlooked. This paper will consider fern albums as one method of scientific production through which women's contributions can be rehabilitated. Fern albums, both highly visual and scientific, provide evidence of women's study of ferns in Britain and across the Empire. This paper will consider the ferns albums produced by two women: Maria Wright (c.1819-1886), who produced albums in the Lake District in 1851, and Phoebe Jaffrey (1834-1893), who produced albums in Darjeeling in the 1880s. These under-scrutinised sources, containing pressed specimens from the areas around Keswick and Sikkim respectively, exemplify the ways fern albums served as cultural and scientific manifestations for women to collect, display, and categorise specimens. Both Wright and Jaffrey's albums demonstrate sophisticated botanical collecting practices, processes of specimen preservation and the environmental and colonial impacts of pteridology. By considering these albums as scientific objects, this paper will argue that fern albums were a key source of scientific production and dissemination for women pteridologists. They demonstrate the breadth of women's study of ferns across the century and the Empire. They also highlight the importance of looking beyond traditional written sources to explore the significant and wide-ranging contributions of women to botany and natural history. This paper will demonstrate that, by considering sources like fern albums which are regarded as less traditionally "scientific", women's contributions can be rehabilitated and placed within the wider history of nineteenth-century pteridology and botany.

Speaker biography

Eleanor Gillespie is a third year PhD student at the University of Portsmouth. Her thesis considers the contributions of women to the study and culture of ferns across the long nineteenth century. Her research takes an interdisciplinary approach, considering the history of science and gender through a wide range of visual and written sources. She considers women working in Britain and across the British Empire in India, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

SESSION TWO

Natural history exhibitions as conservation capital: game animals of the Empire (1932) and the making of East African game reserves

Charlotte Wood, University of Cambridge and Natural History Museum

Game Animals of the Empire (GAE) opened at the Natural History Museum (NHM) in 1932. A year later, the Convention Relative to the Preservation of Fauna and Flora in their Natural State was ratified. At the time, the *Daily Mirror* published a photograph of IUCN delegates at the NHM posed 'around animals of the type it is desired to protect'. This paper analyses how natural history exhibitions drove practices of conservation, with a focus on nineteenth-century East Africa. Did exhibitions, like GAE, influence conservation politics, and how? John MacKenzie has demonstrated how natural history museums were undoubtedly central nodes for networks of conservationists, through which much of this legislation was formed. He argues big game hunters, their trophy specimens and 'social Darwinist' ideas aligned with practices of natural history to produce 'rational' wildlife management policies. Yet, precisely what was the interplay between representations in museums and conservation practice? Was the style, spectacle and aesthetic of nineteenth-century exhibitions significant in making East Africa's national parks and game reserves? Through provenance research on around 800 African mammals (collected between 1870 and 1960), I show how the NHM conditioned collectors' techniques and material practices of specimen-making over time. I suggest that collectors developed 'exhibitionary' collecting habits which sought to imitate the increasingly homogenous style of specimens accumulating in the NHM's galleries. With GAE, the NHM mobilised these specimens in spectacular displays of abundance to affect international conservation policies and consolidate authority over game reserves in East Africa.

Speaker biography

Charlotte graduated with her BA (Hons) in History from King's College London in 2022, with a focus on African history and museum history. Between 2022 and 2023, she completed the MPhil in Heritage Studies at the University of Cambridge, which centred on natural history museum exhibitions in Tanzania. She is currently a PhD student at the Department of Archaeology at the University of Cambridge and the Collections and Culture Unit at the Natural History Museum.

SESSION THREE

Himalayas pearl forgotten: meteorological monitoring and knowledge dissemination in Yatung Customs' borderlands

Qian Chen, Shandong University of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Needham Research Institute

This paper contributes to natural history through a case study on climate and environmental knowledge in late-Qing Tibet. The Yatung Customs House – established by the Qing government as a Himalayan trading port – operates in a valley where temperatures can plunge to -40°C, with snow persisting for up to six months annually, making winter hazards a recurrent plateau threat. Yatung's meteorological activities originated upon British Indian officials' recommendation, utilizing instruments supplied by the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD). Resulting records were dual-tracked: dispatched to the IMD while also circulating internally within the customs service, facilitating environmental knowledge dissemination in frontier regions. Notably, the Yatung Customs Superintendent voluntarily supplemented local temperature precipitation data with Himalayan snowfall observations. This initiative earned high commendation in IMD annual reports and English-language newspapers, addressing critical gaps in scarce high-altitude climate data. However, despite Britain and America's prioritization of meteorological record-keeping in the 19th-century frontiers, Yatung's data dissemination remained limited. Primarily circulating between the Qing customs service and the IMD, these records were overlooked by contemporary meteorologists for broader climate research. Yatung Customs epitomizes Tibet's modernization trajectory. Its meteorological initiatives—though constrained by contemporary limitations—constituted a pivotal node within the colonial-era global meteorological network. Simultaneously, they represent China's earliest systematic engagement with frontier natural science.

Speaker biography

Qian Chen received her Ph.D. in History of Science and Technology from Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology in 2024. She currently holds a joint appointment as a Postdoctoral Researcher and Lecturer at Shandong University of Chinese Medicine, Jinan, China. Her research focuses on the history of meteorological science and technology, examining interactions among climate, environment, and human health. Dr. Qian is presently conducting research at the Needham Research Institute in Cambridge, UK, where she investigates cross-regional dissemination of natural historical knowledge.

SESSION THREE

Curious gentlemen and a virtuous tree: naturalists and sassafras in the colonial Chesapeake

Sierra S. Roark, University of North Carolina

This paper traces the relationships between naturalists working in colonial Virginia and Maryland and their engagements with sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*). As European, African, and Indigenous peoples mixed in the Chesapeake, so too did their knowledge, belief systems, and traditions. Their holistic pursuits of well-being display agency and resilience in a period marked by experimentation, movement, and exchange. Challenged by their experiences of North American environments, the English hoped sassafras would remedy their bodies and coffers. While many historians acknowledge early colonial engagements with sassafras and its transformation into a lucrative medicinal drug, many dismiss this plant as a failed commodity overshadowed by tobacco and Peruvian bark. However, historical evidence points to continued use and profitability in shifting cultural and physical environments. This paper follows that history into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, examining the encounters and observations of human-sassafras relationships made by naturalists active in the region. Additionally, I consider the social circles of these curious gentlemen, including patrons, informers, and collaborators. Through inspecting correspondence, publications, and other lines of evidence, I illuminate past entanglements of knowledge systems, healing traditions, commodities, and environment.

Speaker biography

Sierra S. Roark is a PhD Candidate in Anthropology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Trained in Anthropology and History at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and the University of North Carolina, she is an environmental anthropologist specializing in archaeobotany of the American South and Middle Atlantic. Roark examines the impacts of colonial encounters upon botanical knowledge and plant use. Integrating archaeology, ethnohistory, and ethnobotany, her scholarship explores negotiations of well-being through human-environmental relationships and the history of science. Her doctoral research focuses on 17th- and 18th-century plant use in the Chesapeake, investigating exchange, identity, and authority.

SESSION THREE

Chinese species in the Jardin d'Acclimatation: Dabry de Thiersant's natural history network and local faunal knowledge, 1862–1868

Clement Qiang Huang, York University

While the relationship between natural history and informal imperialism in East Asia has attracted renewed scholarly attention in recent years, the involvement of French scientific institutions remains largely understudied. The Jardin d'Acclimatation (established in 1860 in Paris' Bois de Boulogne as part of Haussmann's urban renovation), which included plantations, an aviary, and an aquarium, featured numerous Chinese species—among them pheasants from eastern Tibet, fish from the upper Yangtze, and medicinal plants sent to Paris by the French consul at Hankou, Philibert Dabry de Thiersant (1826–1898). By tracing Dabry's writings, diplomatic correspondence, and contributions to the *Bulletin de la Société impériale zoologique d'Acclimatation*, and cross-referencing them with Chinese sources (gazetteers and medical texts), this article reconstructs the transcultural scientific network in which his natural-history activities were embedded. The Société's transnational network, supported by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, extended into China through the activities of Missions Étrangères de Paris missionaries, who interacted with local hunters and agricultural markets to acquire living animals. I thereby argue that the Société's research must be understood not only as an outcome of French zoological science and gunboat diplomacy, but also as a product of global Catholic expansion and local Asian knowledges. In doing so, the paper foregrounds non-Western, non-secular actors to bring new nuances to discussions on colonial-era transnational history of science and knowledge circulation.

Speaker biography

Clement Qiang Huang is a PhD student in the Department of History of York University under the supervision of Prof. Joan Judge, who specializes in the cultural and transcultural history of knowledge in modern China. His doctoral research examines the intersection of knowledge production, religious missions, and colonial networks, specifically focusing on French Catholic missionaries' naturalist collecting work in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands during the 19th century. Previously, he completed a joint MA in Transcultural Studies at Heidelberg University, Germany and Kyoto University, Japan.

SESSION FOUR

Butterfly bodies: insect preservation and the limits of commodification in early modern natural history

Stephanie Reitzig, Columbia University

Much scholarship in the history of natural history has investigated how insects, as well as other flora and fauna, were increasingly removed from their home environments and circulated as objects for scientific, aesthetic, and commercial ends during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The determinative role of insects themselves in these processes of alienation and commodification, however, has received little consideration. Drawing upon recent ecocritical approaches, I explore how making insects suitable for long-distance exchanges demanded that naturalists control insect death and decay by innovating techniques for killing and storing insects. Insects' surprising endurance, I show, repeatedly confounded human attempts to control and conceptualize insect life. The alienation and commodification of insects thus emerge as precarious processes which entailed constant negotiation with natural things themselves.

Speaker biography

Stephanie Reitzig is a PhD student in History at Columbia University, researching the intersections of gender, art, and natural history in early modern Europe. She has previously published on Maria Sibylla Merian, and her dissertation centres on women and natural history collecting in seventeenth-century Germany, England, and the Netherlands.

SESSION FOUR

Local knowledge, local remedies: healing earths in Robert Plot's *Natural History of Oxfordshire*

Sandra Liwanowska, University of Cambridge

This paper examines the promotion of local healing earths in early modern English natural histories, focusing especially on Robert Plot's *Natural History of Oxfordshire* and, comparatively, the work of John Morton. These authors championed the medicinal value of regional soils—particularly astringent clays—as alternatives to imported substances such as *terra sigillata*, whose widespread appeal increasingly clashed with concerns about authenticity and adulteration.

By situating Plot and Morton's discussions of healing earths within regional descriptions of nature, the paper connects their claims to broader issues of pharmaceutical trade, national identity, and the cultural significance of fertile soil. Their advocacy for local remedies challenged prevailing assumptions about the superiority of foreign medicines, elevating the status of English soils and fostering both national and regional pride. These strategies aligned with the aims of county natural histories, which served local patrons and landowners and emphasized the political and economic value of land.

Ultimately, the paper argues that healing earths were incorporated into early modern natural histories not simply for their loosely defined therapeutic promise, but as a means of reinforcing regional identity and positioning local resources within a global pharmaceutical economy.

Speaker biography

I am a second-year PhD student in the University of Cambridge's Department of History and Philosophy of Science and a recipient of the Trinity College Tarner Studentship. My work examines the cultural and intellectual history of long eighteenth-century science and medicine, with particular attention to natural history, earth sciences, and the relationships between bodies, environments, and identity. My PhD examines perceptions of giants and how extraordinary stature challenged classificatory frameworks, prompting debates about humanity's limits. In parallel I am developing a project on soil-based medicines in early modern England, extending inquiry beyond the Renaissance fascination with the *terra sigillata* tradition.

SESSION FOUR

Putting *Archaeopteryx* in its place: avian fossils as spaces of knowledge in the evolutionary sciences

David E. Lawrence, University of New Mexico

This study situates fossils of *Archaeopteryx lithographica* and other Mesozoic avians as spaces of knowledge that are produced through evolutionary methodologies in the natural sciences. Drawing from Science and Technology Studies and the history and geography of science, I argue fossils are geographic spaces that are manipulated and constructed through museums and disciplinary boundaries which can be traced through time. Through archival and fossil collection research, I investigate how fossil geographies were constructed through evolutionary methodologies and how these fossils spatially communicated evolutionary knowledge in collections and exhibitions and how this knowledge was mediated, circulated and displayed in natural history networks. Far from being passive objects, the fossils of *Archaeopteryx* and Mesozoic avians demonstrated a unique form of geographic space that facilitated the production of evolutionary knowledge among a diverse set of historical actors debating the taxonomic significance and placement of birds. Framing avian fossils as spaces of science demonstrates that evolutionary knowledge is not a universal ontology waiting to be discovered, but a rather a geographical construction dependent on the historical geographies embedded in the methodologies of evolutionary science.

Speaker biography

As a PhD candidate at the University of New Mexico, my research is specialized in the historical geography of science, specifically the historical geographies of palaeontology and museum studies. This specialization seeks to understand how scientific methodologies and museum objects produce geographic space and how these produced spaces influence scientific reception. This research is represented in my dissertation on fossils of *Archaeopteryx* and other Mesozoic Aves becoming spaces of evolutionary knowledge. I have conducted research in both palaeontology and ornithology museum departments and have an active relationship with the Dinosaur Institute of the Los Angeles Natural History Museum.

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