

ZSL AT 200

SCIENCE, SOCIETY AND THE NATURAL WORLD



SHNH SUMMER MEETING, 1-3 JULY 2026

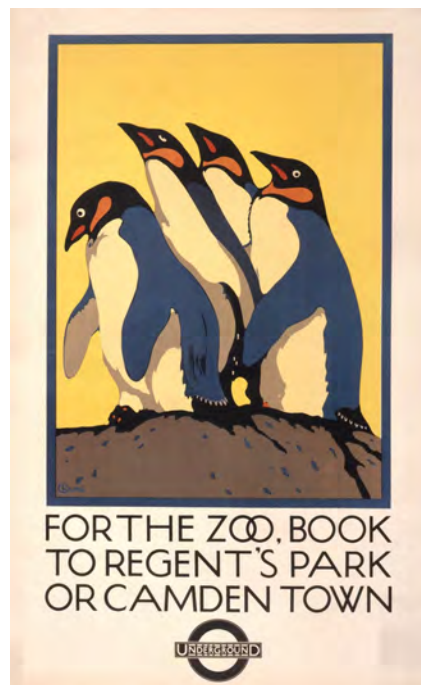
Zoological Society of London
Regent's Park, London, NW1 4RY

THE SOCIETY FOR THE
HISTORY OF
NATURAL
HISTORY

Cover Image

Detail from 'For the Zoo, book to Regent's Park'
Charles Paine (1895-1967)
colour lithograph, 1921

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Programme design: Will Beharrell
v.1.4

PROGRAMME

DAY ONE

9:30 AM

Arrival and Registration

10:15 AM

Welcome, Introductions and Housekeeping

10:30 AM

Panel One

The tumultuous years of the Zoological Club of the Linnean Society of London

Isabelle Charmantier, The Linnean Society of London

An object reptile or how Timothy the Tortoise nearly ended up at ZSL

Stephanie Holt, University of Oxford

11:30 AM

Break (with poster presentations)

12:00 PM

Panel Two

Institutional identity, research, and record: the founding of the *Proceedings* and the *Transactions of the Zoological Society of London*

Beth Gaskell, The British Library

Broadcasting beasts: radio, early television and the Zoo c.1923-1939

Max Long, Lincoln College, University of Oxford

1:00 PM

Lunch

PROGRAMME

DAY ONE, CONTINUED

2:00 PM

Keynote Lecture

'Down pythons' throats we thrust live goats': snakes, zoos and animal welfare in nineteenth-century Britain

Professor Helen Cowie, University of York

3:00 PM

Break (with poster presentations)

3:30 PM

Panel Three

Obaysch and Tanja: zoological stardom and animal identities in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries

Wessel Broekhuis, ARTIS Amsterdam Royal Zoo

Life in death: a living perspective of animals through London Zoo's death books 1870-1900

Daniel Phillips, Independent Scholar

4:30 PM

Break (with poster presentations)

5:00 PM

Panel Four

From specimen to encounter: butterflies, affect, and immersive insect exhibition at the Zoological Society of London

Marlowe McCaffrey, University of Oxford

Deep time encounters at the Zoo, 1880 to the present

Chris Manias, King's College London

7:00 PM

Conference Dinner (pre-booking required)

Côte Brasserie, 26-27 Devonshire St, London W1G 6PL

PROGRAMME

DAY TWO

9:15 AM

Arrival (Introduction and Housekeeping at 9:40)

9:45 AM

Panel Five

Carl Hagenbeck in London: animals and architecture, trade and inspiration, 1864–1913.

Herman Reichenbach, Tierpark Hagenbeck

The London Zoo and the transnational circulation of zoological culture in the Spanish press (nineteenth–early twentieth centuries)

Nuria Benítez Prián, Independent Scholar

Learning from other zoos: the ZSL and its zoo travellers, 1863–1938

Oliver Hochadel, IMF-CSIC (Barcelona)

11:00 AM

Break

11:30 AM

Panel Six

Women in zoology and ZSL: moving on through the twentieth century

Ann Sylph, Independent Scholar

Public gardens, private ambitions: Walter Rothschild and the use of ‘depositing’ within the gardens of the Zoological Society of London

Elle Larsson, University of Westminster

12:30 PM

SHNH Annual General Meeting and Prizegiving

PROGRAMME

DAY TWO, CONTINUED

1:15 PM

Lunch

2:15 PM

Travel Time to Tour Venues

3:00 PM

Collections Tours

We will be offering multiple tour options, detailed below. Further information will be shared nearer the time.

- **ZSL Library**
- **UCL Grant Museum of Zoology**
- **British Library**
- **Angela Marmont Centre for UK Nature (NHM)**
- **NHM Library and Special Collections**
- **Members' Reading Room, Royal College of Surgeons**

Or, remain at ZSL for self-guided visit of heritage points e.g. tunnel, plinths etc.

6:00 PM

Informal Dinner and Drinks at a local pub (TBC)

PROGRAMME

DAY THREE

9:30 PM

Arrival and Registration

9:55 PM

Introductions and Housekeeping

10:00 AM

Panel Seven

The Zoological Society of London: its 200-year history in artworks and artefacts in the Society's Library

Ann Datta, Independent Scholar

Captive subjects: art and photography at the London Zoo, 1828-1914

Daniel Kennedy, Independent Scholar

11:00 AM

Break

11:30 AM

Panel Eight

Julian Huxley at the Zoo, 1935-1942

Joe Cain, UCL Department of Science and Technology Studies

The last Prosector at the Zoological Society of London: William Charles Osman Hill

Carina Phillips, Royal College of Surgeons of England / University College London / Natural History Museum, London

An 'enviable record of "basic research"': institutionalising science at the Zoological Society

Miles Kempton, Christ's College, University of Cambridge

PROGRAMME

DAY THREE, CONTINUED

12:45 PM

Lunch

13:45 PM

Panel Nine

Stars and stripes: what ZSL's long history with giraffids reveals about the many dimensions of its scientific and conservation endeavours

Simon Pooley, Birkbeck University of London

Whipsnade Zoo, a ZSL story: how has the UK's first open zoo influenced conservation breeding and veterinary care

Buffy Beck and Maddie Humfries, Whipsnade Zoo

The role of ZSL in originating and growing the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species

Michael Hoffmann, Zoological Society of London

Craig Hilton-Taylor, IUCN

Simon N. Stuart, Synchronicity Earth

H. Resit Akçakaya, Stony Brook University

Rajan Amin, Zoological Society of London

Jonathan E.M. Baillie, Natural State

Monika Böhm, Global Centre for Species Survival, Indianapolis Zoo

and Sophie E.H. Ledger, Institute of Zoology, Zoological Society of London

3:00 PM

Closing Remarks

3:15 PM

End of Conference

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

'Down pythons' throats we thrust live goats': snakes, zoos and animal welfare in nineteenth-century Britain

Professor Helen Cowie, University of York

In nineteenth-century Britain, captive snakes in menageries and zoological gardens were routinely fed with live prey—rabbits, pigeons and guinea pigs, supplemented (allegedly) by the occasional goat. From the late 1860s, this practice began to generate opposition on animal welfare grounds, leading to a protracted debate over its necessity, visibility and morality. London Zoo became the focal point for much of this discussion, drawing extensive criticism from animal activists.

Focusing on the period c.1880–1914, when the snake-feeding controversy reached its zenith, this paper charts changing attitudes towards the treatment of reptiles in captivity and asks why an apparently niche practice generated so much interest. By looking at the biological arguments put forward for and against live feeding, the paper traces the changing nature of animal advocacy in the late nineteenth century and shows how the shifting character of the live feeding debate paralleled wider trends within the animal welfare movement. It also highlights the different types of knowledge and expertise involved in the debate, as naturalists, veterinary surgeons, zookeepers and humanitarians offered conflicting perspectives on reptilian dietary requirements and animal sentience. I focus on two pivotal moments in the snake-feeding saga, each of which generated extensive coverage in the press: the early 1880s, when the RSPCA campaigned to end the public feeding of snakes with live prey at London Zoo; and the period from c.1902–1911, when the more radical Humanitarian League conducted a sustained campaign against live feeding at the same institution – now carried out entirely in private.

Biography

Helen Cowie is Professor of History at the University of York, where she researches and teaches the history of animals and the history of Latin America. She is author of *Exhibiting animals in nineteenth-century Britain* (2014), *Llama* (2017), *Victims of fashion: animal commodities in Victorian Britain* (2022) and *Animals in world history* (2025).

**Please note: the keynote speech will be delivered at 2pm
on the first day of the conference.**

PANEL ONE

ZSL'S EARLY HISTORY

The tumultuous years of the Zoological Club of the Linnean Society of London

Isabelle Charmantier, The Linnean Society of London

The Zoological Club of the Linnean Society of London was formed in 1822 by seven Fellows of the Linnean Society 'desirous of promoting the study of Zoology'. The club was dependent on the Linnean Society for many of its activities, including publication, and the seven years of its existence were relatively fraught, marked by personal feuds, poor attendance, and debt. The Zoological Club was dissolved in 1829, the same year that saw the Zoological Society acquire its charter and become the Zoological Society of London. Many of the Linnean Society Fellows that founded the Zoological Club were also involved in the foundation of the Zoological Society. Based on the Club's archives at the Linnean Society, this talk will look at the short-lived history of the Zoological Club, its role in the emergence of new societies such as the Entomological Society and the Zoological Society of London, and the ways in which naturalists navigated their affiliations and loyalties to different societies while trying to further scientific knowledge.

Biography

Dr Isabelle Charmantier is Head of Collections at the Linnean Society of London. Her research interests and publications include early modern ornithology, Carl Linnaeus, and the history of the Linnean Society.

PANEL ONE

CONTINUED

An abject reptile, or how Timothy the Tortoise nearly ended up at ZSL

Stephanie Holt, University of Oxford

Timothy the Tortoise (d.1794) is (perhaps) the only chelonian to have penned at least one poem, several letters, and two books by (allegedly) her own claw. After her demise just a year after that of her owner, the naturalist Revd Gilbert White (1720-1793), Timothy's shell was preserved and became a treasured possession of the White family. However, a series of letters in 1835-1836 between Georgiana White, White's great niece, and Edward Turner Bennet, secretary of the Zoological Society of London, from 1831-1836, tell the tale of how Timothy almost ended up in the ZSL collections. Starting on the 12th December 1835, this back-and-forth discussion covers a range of subjects, but core to that is what to do with Timothy's shell and would ZSL be the right home for the deceased pet of the eminent naturalist. Arguably White was at a zenith of his fame in the 1830's. His pet features heavily in his *Natural history and antiquities of Selborne* (1789) as both a source of entertainment and of experiment and the 1830's saw a boom in edited editions of this work; assuring the fame of Timothy's shell. In the end it was not to be, and Timothy never made it to the zoo. But all was not lost, she now graces cabinet 12 of the reptile gallery in the Natural History Museum as a memorial to a treasured pet of the renowned naturalist.

Biography

Stephanie Holt is an ecologist and historian with a particular interest in the life, work, and legacy of the naturalist Revd Gilbert White. She works at the NHM in London in the Centre for UK Nature and as a post-graduate researcher for the Curious Travellers Project in the Museum's Library and Archives. She is also a DPhil researcher at the University of Oxford Faculty of History, investigating the networks of naturalists in the second half of the eighteenth century.

PANEL TWO

ZSL OUTPUTS

Institutional identity, research, and record: the founding of the *Proceedings* and the *Transactions of the Zoological Society of London*

Beth Gaskell, The British Library

Four years after the founding of the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), the Society launched its first journal, *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* (1830–1965—then renamed *Journal of Zoology*). This was followed three years later by the founding of the *Transactions of the Zoological Society of London* (1833–1986—then merged into *Journal of Zoology*).

These two publications formed part of a wider boom in the specialised scientific press that took place at the start of the nineteenth century. Like other *Proceedings* and *Transactions* published by learned societies, they acted as a declaration of identity for the Zoological Society, uniting its dispersed membership, and allowing for the circulation of ideas. Many of the key figures in nineteenth-century natural history published in these publications, and they became sites of scientific record and discussion.

This paper will explore the founding of both the *Proceedings* and the *Transactions* of the Zoological Society, calling on information provided by the publications themselves and material from the ZSL archive, particularly the Council minutes and minutes from the Publications Committee. It will look at the decision-making around the founding of the journals and their evolution over time, demonstrating the impact they had. It will also discuss their place within the wider scientific publishing environment and the periodicals marketplace more generally.

Biography

Beth Gaskell is Lead Curator, News and Moving Image at the British Library. Her research interests include the professional press, nineteenth-century journalism, military-media networks, and newspaper and periodical collecting and preservation. Her most recent publication, an article entitled 'Esprit de Corps: Regimental Journals and Belonging', was published in the *Journal of European Periodicals Studies* last year.

PANEL TWO

CONTINUED

Broadcasting beasts: radio, early television and the Zoo c.1923-1939

Max Long, Lincoln College, University of Oxford

This paper explores the ZSL's early relationship with the broadcast medium, focussing on the radio and television broadcasts of Leslie Mainland and David Seth-Smith. In 1923, the *Daily Mail* journalist Leslie G. Mainland staged the first of many radio 'stunts' at the Zoo: Said Ali, an Indian 'mahout' or elephant driver, was dispatched to the studios of 2LO, from where he issued commands which were transmitted via a wireless receiver to the Zoo's famous elephant Indarini, who blatantly ignored the sounds emanating from the loudspeaker. While the stunt may have proved a practical failure, it was a media success, as demonstrated by a contemporary newsreel. Mainland mounted several further stunts of this kind, including live radio 'concerts' from the Zoo using the newly-christened 'radio pram', an early outside broadcasting station that was rolled around the Zoo capturing the sounds of different animals. Mainland soon became a frequent contributor to the BBC's *Children's Hour* programme, where he became the first radio 'Zoo Man'. This role was later taken up by David Seth-Smith, who began his career at the ZSL as the Inspector of Works, and later was the Curator of Birds and Mammals. As well as his regular appearances on *Children's Hour*, Seth-Smith became pioneer of a new medium, when he presented an early experimental television broadcast in 1933.

This paper will trace the ZSL's early engagement with broadcasting media at a time when broadcasting technology was in its infancy. I explore the role of various 'intermediaries' in shaping the depiction of the Zoo in popular culture at this time, situating the broadcasts in relation to contemporary films, books and magazines. Also explored is the emergence of media-specific forms of 'animal intimacy', as well as the Zoo's own shifting attitudes to its representation in the mass media in the 1930s.

Biography

Dr Max Long is a historian of media, science, and the environment in twentieth-century Britain. He is currently a Darby Fellow in Modern History at Lincoln College, University of Oxford, where he teaches courses in modern British, European and World History. Previously he was a Research Fellow in History at Jesus College, University of Cambridge, and a Fellow in Digital History at the Science Museum in London. His work has previously appeared in the journals *Environmental History*, *British Journal for the History of Science*, *Media + Environment*, and *The Historical Journal*. He curates the online resource about early natural history filmmaking Secrets of Nature (<https://secrets-of-nature.co.uk/>).

PANEL THREE

ZSL AND ITS ANIMALS

Obaysch and Tanja: zoological stardom and animal identities in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries

Wessel Broekhuis, ARTIS Amsterdam Royal Zoo (NL)

This contribution will examine the name and fame of zoo-housed hippos that became animal celebrities in their own right and eras: the male Obaysch at London Zoo (1850-1878) and the female Tanja (1960-2009) at ARTIS Amsterdam Royal Zoo (NL).

The arrival of Obaysch in London Zoo has been well documented and researched. Obaysch caused 'hippomania' in 1850, with visitors flocking to Regent's Park in record-breaking numbers, the animal's presence and antics were widely publicised and the animal grew to be a 'national pet'.

Obaysch's influence spread overseas, as mainland zoos aimed to enrich their collection with the species as well. In 1860, the first hippos at ARTIS, a couple named Herman and Betsy, were the zoo's largest investment to date, outbidding the Austrian emperor himself. The two hippos reached animal stardom too and their offspring Herman Jr. was the first hippo successfully raised in human care. The last hippo at ARTIS, named Tanja, was an urban favourite. When she died in 2009, a spontaneous condolence register emerged next to her empty exhibit and her passing even made the Dutch national news broadcast.

This presentation analyses the public's interest in animal celebrities and what, or whether, they teach zoo visitors about their species. The talk will also shed light on the exhibition *Tanja: Up Close*, (which the speaker curated) about Tanja, zoo history and animal-human relations, discussing what it entails to 'historicise' zoos and providing an example of adding historical awareness to the zoo education narrative.

Biography

Wessel Broekhuis (1993) is a historian specializing in zoo history and works for the Education, Art & Heritage department of ARTIS Amsterdam Royal Zoo (NL). His master's thesis 'Animals brought from every part of the globe' (2019) compared the zoological societies of London, Amsterdam and Antwerp to achieve insight on how these institutions were connected to the colonies of the respective nations and whether embodying an imperialist ideology was an important aspect of early zoos. In his current role at ARTIS Wessel writes, researches, speaks, creates educational content and curates exhibitions on the Zoo's history and zoo history in general.

PANEL THREE

CONTINUED

Life in death: a living perspective of animals through London Zoo's death books 1870-1900

Daniel Phillips, Independent Scholar

Since 1870, London Zoo has recorded the life and death of every animal that lived in the Society's zoological gardens in Regent's Park. These documents—aptly named the ZSL 'Death Books'—remain a fascinating yet underused source of information; each animal is named, noting how they were obtained, the region from which they were acquired, and in some cases the cause(s) of death and how the zoo disposed of individual specimens. The books are a valuable source of information which account for approximately 30,000 individual animals that lived in the zoo in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Using the ZSL's death books, the paper argues that the ZSL's collection underwent significant changes between 1870 and 1900, with the constantly evolving selection of animals reflecting wider societal interests and changes. The selection of animals shifted from a bird-based collection to a reptile-based one by 1900. Similarly, there was a drastic shift in animal acquisitions, moving from South American to African procurements. However, to understand these changes in scientific interest and global trade networks in any great detail, historians must look closer at the lives (and afterlives) of 'less-charismatic animals' mentioned in the death books. From red-footed squirrels presented from Liberia to rough-billed pelicans purchased in Mexico, this paper delves into the hidden lives of the animals that made up the majority the zoo's living collection, exploring the day-to-day life and death struggles of individual animals to investigate the wider contexts of the ZSL's constantly changing collection.

Biography

Daniel Phillips is an independent scholar and, throughout his PhD, was the Visiting Scholar at the Zoological Society of London. He completed his PhD at the University of Exeter in 2024, investigating the history of London Zoo between 1847 and 1903. He explored how the zoo shaped nineteenth-century understandings of the natural world, including the institution's role in the production of zoological knowledge, the personnel and social networks within zoos, and the relationship between the zoo and empire in the nineteenth century. He is currently working to transform his thesis into a monograph entitled, *The Zoological Society of London: Empire, science and animals in the nineteenth century*.

PANEL FOUR

ANIMAL INTERACTIONS

From specimen to encounter: butterflies, affect and immersive insect exhibition at the Zoological Society of London

Marlowe McCaffrey, University of Oxford

'Not the roaring of lions not the antics of monkeys, but the dainty feeding of the butterflies today attracts many people to the Zoological Gardens.'
- *The Washington Post*, 27 August 1922

From its first Insect House in 1881 to the 2006 launch of Butterfly Paradise, the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) has exhibited insects for over a century. Within these spaces, Lepidoptera have emerged as prominent entities. By the early twentieth century, seasonal butterfly displays had become regular attractions, with later developments culminating in free-flight, walk-through environments that departed markedly from vivarium-based modes of display.

This paper examines the history of Lepidoptera at ZSL as a catalyst for a shift in zoological exhibition: the movement from the distanced specimen toward immersive multispecies encounter. While zoo historiography often privileges charismatic megafauna, butterflies at ZSL generated a distinctive form of 'insect love' (Raffles 2010) that demanded new architectures of display and visitor comportment.

By tracing ZSL's trajectory from nineteenth-century collections to free-flight houses, I argue that these new environments function as 'affective infrastructures' (Knox 2017). Unlike bounded mammalian enclosures, butterfly houses require bodily restraint and sensory attentiveness from visitors, who become co-inhabitants of a fragile climatic assemblage where spectacle depends on ethical proximity rather than mastery. Drawing on archival records and scholarship on multispecies relations, this paper explores how ZSL's exhibitions recalibrated human-insect relations. In the context of ZSL's bicentenary, the butterfly house emerges as a pioneering experiment in cultivating intimacy at the heart of contemporary conservation and zoological exhibition ethics.

Biography

Marlowe McCaffrey is a DPhil Anthropology candidate at the University of Oxford, co-funded by the ESRC and St John's College. His research focuses on moth and butterfly collecting, collections and conservation in the UK to rethink biodiversity, scale, hope and ideas of 'natural history' amid ecological crisis, drawing on ethnography with museums, citizen scientists and conservation organisations. He previously completed a BSc and MRes in Anthropology at UCL, is the recipient of the Rosa Morison Prize, the Anna Sturm Law Prize, and the UCL Alumni Scholarship, and is the founder of the Oxford-based BritAnth Network.

PANEL FOUR

CONTINUED

Deep time encounters at the Zoo, 1880 to the present

Chris Manias, King's College London

Dinosaurs and other prehistoric animals are a common feature of many zoos today, whether as toys for sale in the gift shop or as menageries of large animatronics. But these recent developments connect with a longer history, where zoos and their animal inhabitants have been conceptualized as possible entry-points into past worlds and the history of life.

This paper will look at some of the ways that animals, environments and architecture in zoos have been thought about as reflecting deeper evolutionary and palaeontological histories. It will focus primarily on London Zoo but also bring in examples from zoos in the Americas, continental Europe and Australasia. The talk will avoid the more obvious examples of zoo dinosaur parks, to examine more emotive and cultural connections. It will think about how the zoo's elephants, hippos, rhinos and hyenas have been presented as spectral reminders of times in recent geological history when similar megafauna lived across the northern hemisphere. Meanwhile, writers and zoo administrators like Julian Huxley and Richard Lydekker tried to explain evolution through observations of zoo animals. Artists interested in reconstructing prehistoric animals would sketch and model zoo animals, using them to artistically revive their evolutionary relatives. And naturalists (and some zoo administrators) imagined that creatures like the chalicothere, *Myiodon* and mokele-mbembe may still survive in distant parts of the world, and could potentially be bought back to the zoo. Across all of these, palaeontology merged with modern natural history, casting the zoo into the world of the deep past.

Biography

Dr Chris Manias is Reader in the History of Science at King's College London. He is a specialist in the history and broader cultural role of the human, environmental and deep time sciences, from the late-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century. He has written two books, *Race, science, and the nation: reconstructing the ancient past in Britain, France and Germany* (Routledge 2013) and *The age of mammals: nature, development and paleontology in the long nineteenth century* (Pittsburgh 2023), and edited the volume *Palaeontology in public: lost creatures, deep time and popular science* (UCL Press 2025).

PANEL FIVE

ZSL AND GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

Carl Hagenbeck in London: animals and architecture, trade and inspiration, 1864–1913

Herman Reichenbach, Tierpark Hagenbeck

Celebrated by the British press during his lifetime as ‘the king of zoos’, ‘the king of animal dealers’, ‘the king of wild-animal trainers’, Carl Hagenbeck (1844–1913) remains one of the most ubiquitous figures in the history of zoological gardens and parks, the wild-animal trade and the circus. In recent years, his success as impresario of what he called ‘anthropological-zoological spectacles’ but have come to be known in English as ‘human zoos’ has gained him more notoriety than fame. Yet his lasting legacies, the zoological ‘panorama’ he patented in 1896 and the zoological park in Hamburg opened to the public in 1907 provided the template for the modern immersive zoo.

Hagenbeck visited London for the first time in March 1864 as the teenaged apprentice son of a Hamburg animal dealer. Over the coming decades, he travelled to Britain almost monthly. The London dealers Charles Rice (1841–1879) and Herman (1841–1885) and William Jamrach (1844–1923) became important collaborators. The Zoological Society of London originally became a customer in 1868, acquiring from Hagenbeck the first black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) seen in Europe since Roman times. In the twentieth century, Hagenbeck’s novel *Tierpark* would provide inspiration for new habitats at both Regent’s Park and Whipsnade. Carl Hagenbeck was the only animal dealer to have ever been awarded the Society’s Silver Medal. He also once contemplated the establishment of a rival zoo in Crystal Palace Park and found in the process stimuli for his own Tierpark in Sydenham’s Geological Court.

Biography

Herman Reichenbach is Archivist of Tierpark Hagenbeck in Hamburg since January 2023. Originally a zookeeper, he subsequently read Chinese studies and the history of science at Hamburg University, becoming a documentalist and fact-checker, now retired, at the Gruner + Jahr group of newspapers and magazines and an occasional writer for *Geo* and *Stern* magazines. Reichenbach is author of a dozen papers and omnibus chapters on the history of zoos and was a regular contributor to *International Zoo News* from the late 1990s until its demise 2016. From 2017 into 2020, he was Honorary Editor of *Archives of Natural History*.

PANEL FIVE

CONTINUED

The London Zoo and the transnational circulation of zoological culture in the Spanish press (nineteenth–early twentieth centuries)

Nuria Benítez Prián, Independent Scholar

This paper examines the role of the London Zoo and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) in the construction and international circulation of a shared zoological culture between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Drawing on an analysis of Spanish periodical press, including general, illustrated, and specialist newspapers and magazines. The study explores how zoological knowledge associated with the ZSL circulated transnationally through texts, images, and narratives, and how it was locally appropriated and reinterpreted within different urban contexts.

Rather than treating the zoo solely as a site of animal display, the paper shows how the London Zoo was represented in the Spanish press as a space of scientific observation, experimentation, public education, and spectacle, as well as a model of zoological management and modernity. Particular attention is paid to the media prominence of ‘star animals’ such as Obaysch the hippopotamus and Jumbo the elephant, debates surrounding animal welfare and enclosure design, and the cultural impact of primatological displays on the early popular reception of evolutionary ideas.

The paper introduces the concept of zoological culture to describe the set of knowledge practices, representations, and emotional engagements with animals that extended beyond expert scientific communities to broader urban audiences. Historiographically, the study contributes to scholarship on scientific networks, cultural mediation, and inter-urban matrices, highlighting the ZSL as a key, though not exclusive, node in the formation of transnational zoological imaginaries.

Biography

Nuria Benítez Prián is a zooarchaeologist and historian, specialising in animal palaeopathology and zooarchaeological studies. She researches the circulation of zoological knowledge, animal collections, and human-animal relations in early modern Europe, with a focus on Madrid’s Casa de Fieras. She has participated in interdisciplinary projects and is co-author of *De Real Casa de Fieras a Parque Zoológico* (Dykinson, forthcoming).

PANEL FIVE

CONTINUED

Learning from other zoos: the ZSL and its zoo travellers, 1863–1938

Oliver Hochadel, IMF-CSIC (Barcelona)

In the course of the nineteenth century the number of zoos increased from one to over a hundred, situated on all five continents. Information exchange among these institutions was crucial in order to master the challenges of zoo keeping. 'Zoo travellers' visited other zoos to collect information on how to transport, feed, house and cure 'exotic' animals in captivity. They published reports, books, and articles in specialist journals and the general press, exchanging 'best practice' examples.

Many of those zoo travellers hailed from the Zoological Society of London, including some of their presidents. Philip Sclater undertook dozens of journeys to European zoos in the last third of the nineteenth century. The 'reconnaissance journeys' of Charles Peel (1903), R. I. Pocock (1904) and Peter Chalmers Mitchell (1913) are also noteworthy. In the interwar period emissaries of the ZSL mostly visited zoos in the US and Germany, indicating a shift as regards which zoos were considered worthy of emulation.

Drawing on both, published material as well as archival material from the ZSL, this paper will ask: what did those zoo travellers 'discover' when exploring other zoos? What features or problems did they zoom in on? In what ways did they compare the London Zoo to the zoos visited? Did their reports trigger any kind of reforms 'back home'?

This paper will argue that zoo travellers exerted a strong networking effect on a European (or even global) scale between zoos well before zoos organized themselves in supranational associations (starting in 1935).

Biography

Oliver Hochadel is a historian of science and since 2012 a tenured scientist at the Institució Milà i Fontanals for the Research in Humanities in Barcelona (CSIC). He has published numerous articles on the history of the zoo in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, addressing topics such as the publics of the zoo and the question whether the zoo was a site of scientific research. One of his case studies is the early history of the Barcelona Zoo. He is also writing a book on 'The emergence of the Global Zoo around 1900', highlighting the role of non-European zoos.

PANEL SIX

ZSL AND WELL-KNOWN FIGURES

Women in zoology and ZSL: moving on through the twentieth century

Ann Sylph, Independent Scholar

At a previous SHNH meeting (jointly with the Library and Information History Group) I presented a paper on women and zoological art and illustration, whilst at a Royal Society meeting in 2025 I presented a paper on women in zoology during ZSL's first 100 years. This paper presenting an overview of women in the twentieth century will provide a sequel to these previous papers.

This paper will provide an overview and outline women's scientific involvement with ZSL during the twentieth century. It will include their publications in the ZSL's *Proceedings and Transactions*; employment at ZSL as Curators and researchers; ZSL's awards for scientific contributions; involvement in ZSL's governance as Trustees and members of Committees.

Women have been able to join ZSL from 1827 onwards, the twentieth century saw the number of qualifying with degrees in zoology dramatically increasing owing to changes in education, whilst World War I widened the opportunities for women at ZSL and in society. This was a period when there was a large increase in the number of published research papers by women.

The celebration of women's contribution is one of six 'themes' during ZSL's bicentenary in 2026, emphasising the significance of the role of women within ZSL, in zoology and conservation.

This paper outlines some of my ongoing research to uncover the contribution of women to ZSL and the development of zoology and conservation science as well as their involvement with ZSL.

Biography

Ann Sylph is the former Librarian at the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) where she had responsibility for the library and archives. These collections support ZSL's purpose to inform, inspire and empower people to stop wild animals going extinct. She has a particular interest in the contribution of women to the development of zoology, the history of marine zoology and historic 'sciart'." Ann has a BSc in Ecology and an MSc in Information Science. She is a Chartered member of CILIP.

PANEL SIX

CONTINUED

Public gardens, private ambitions: Walter Rothschild and the use of 'depositing' within the gardens of the Zoological Society of London

Elle Larsson, University of Westminster

A Fellow of the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) from at least 1891, Lionel Walter Rothschild (1868–1937) is best known for the private zoological museum he founded in Tring, Hertfordshire. Yet the museum formed only one part of a much larger zoological enterprise in which the ZSL's gardens in Regent's Park played a crucial, if often overlooked, role. This paper examines Rothschild's multi-faceted use of the zoological gardens to advance his own zoological enterprise and the resulting entanglements with the ZSL's day-to-day operations.

Central to this relationship was the practice of 'depositing'—the temporary placement of privately owned animals within the zoological gardens. Through this system, Rothschild secured temporary accommodation for a wide range of animals, many of which were ultimately destined for the taxidermist and later display in his museum. Others became the focus of his taxonomic investigations, most notably cassowaries, with the zoological gardens functioning as an extension of his own private zoo at Tring Park. For the Society, meanwhile, deposits helped mitigate persistent challenges of high mortality rates and escalating acquisition costs. However, these benefits were often short lived, and the arrangements themselves were complicated by the competing aims of the depositors and the institutional priorities of the ZSL. This paper argues that the ZSL was frequently left with limited leverage in the face of depositors' demands and expectations, even though in the case of Rothschild, its zoological gardens played a pivotal, if under-recognised, role in establishing Rothschild's scientific authority and enabling the broader success of his zoological enterprise.

Biography

Dr Elle Larsson is a historian of science, specialising in the history of natural history and history of animals. She completed her PhD, 'Collecting, Curating and the Construction of Zoological Knowledge: Walter Rothschild's Zoological Enterprise, c.1878–1937', at King's College London in April 2020. Her current research interests include natural history networks, zoo history and exotic animal ownership. She has published on these subjects in *Archives of Natural History*, *Centaurus* and *Museum History Journal*. Elle devotes her time to her role as Meetings Secretary for the Society for the History of Natural History and as co-founder of the Animal History Group.

PANEL SEVEN

ZSL AND ARTISTIC MEDIA

The Zoological Society of London: its 200-year history in artworks and artefacts in the Society's Library

Ann Datta, Independent Scholar

The ZSL Library has an eclectic collection of zoological art acquired by donation, predominantly watercolours of vertebrates but also including Old Masters, portraits, posters and sculptures. An overview of the collection and the Library's active promotion of its holdings through its catalogue, blogs, exhibitions and conservation will be presented before examining one collection, that of Brian Houghton Hodgson, FRS, FZS.

Hodgson was a British diplomat posted to Kathmandu as the British Resident in Nepal where he lived from 1820–1843. He was a polymath who made outstanding contributions in many subjects, one of them being zoology especially the birds and mammals of the Himalayas, of which he discovered nearly 200 new species and wrote more than 140 papers on them. Hodgson's relationship with the Zoological Society will be presented and the donation to it of his zoological drawings and their value today. Hodgson was an early exponent of citizen science by engaging with and acknowledging the contributions of his Nepalese collectors and artists that led to him becoming the pioneer naturalist of Nepal.

Biography

Ann Datta was a librarian at the Natural History Museum, London until 2004. From 2006–2008 she was art cataloguer at ZSL. She has kept an interest in natural history and written on John Gould and B.H. Hodgson.

PANEL SEVEN

CONTINUED

Captive subjects: art and photography at the London Zoo, 1828-1914

Daniel Kennedy, Independent Scholar

The London Zoo was founded in 1828 and quickly became London's premier site for viewing non-indigenous animals. Not long after, in 1839, photography emerged and evolved alongside the Zoo. While the London Zoo had already established itself as being cooperative with artists working in traditional media (e.g., painting, printmaking, sculpture), photography played a limited role in this practice until the late nineteenth century.

This paper examines the London Zoo as a locus of artistic production and witness to a gradual transition in primacy from traditional media to photography. I discuss the major photographers working in this genre and their methodologies, arguing that the challenging conditions of zoo photography drove innovation, acting as a stimulus for emerging photographic technologies. I provide context for the rise of photography with discussion of artists working in genres like zoological illustration and animal painting. When the Zoo began officially mobilizing photography in the early twentieth century, I argue that the institution took advantage of the ostensible objectivity of the medium to enhance its reputation and perhaps obscure failures in animal husbandry.

Biography

Daniel Kennedy is an independent art historian currently based in Milwaukee, WI. His research interests include animals in visual culture, the intersections of natural history and art, and historical animal studies. He recently completed his MA in Art History at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, with a thesis on art and photography at the London Zoo.

PANEL EIGHT

ZSL AND THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE

Julian Huxley at the Zoo, 1935–1942

Joe Cain, UCL Department of Science and Technology Studies

While Secretary of the Zoological Society of London (1935–42), Julian Huxley used the institution to pursue several types of reform related to what he called 'general biology'. Huxley's goal was to place synthetic, analytical and explanatory work at the centre of the life sciences. In this re-organisation, zoological specifics served only as instances of generic processes. Huxley's campaigning met strong resistance at ZSL. Those 'zoological specifics' in fact were much loved, personalised animals in the zoo, and they had devoted followings. In 1942, Huxley was dismissed as Secretary during an ugly row about what he was supposed to be doing in his job. In part, this was a firm rejection of his 'general biology' approach to the Zoo. The row over Huxley illustrates deeply entrenched factions in the life sciences with competing priorities: objects versus processes, induction versus explanation, and particulars versus generalities.

Biography

Professor Joe Cain is an expert in the history of evolutionary biology, especially Darwinism and evolutionary studies in the twentieth century. Recent projects include: the Legacies of Eugenics project for UCL, use of jokes in science to measure tribal affiliations, romantic collaborations in modern science, and the famous dinosaur statues in London's Crystal Palace. He is a past president of SHNH.

PANEL EIGHT

CONTINUED

The last Prosector at the Zoological Society of London: William Charles Osman Hill

Carina Phillips, Royal College of Surgeons of England / University College London / Natural History Museum, London

William Charles Osman Hill (1901-1975) is most well-known for his contributions to primatology, in particular the monumental eight-volume book series *Primates: comparative anatomy and taxonomy*. But Hill is perhaps less well-known for his work as the Prosector for the Zoological Society of London (ZSL). A position which was first established 85 years before his appointment in 1950, and which was discontinued after he resigned in 1962. During the 12 years Hill spent at ZSL he wrote over 90 publications, including five of the eight volumes of the *Primates* book series. This paper explores Hill's career, the experiences that led him having the skills for the role of Prosector, and the varied and somewhat surprising responsibilities of the position. It also considers why Hill left the role and why the position was discontinued. I discuss how Hill's role at ZSL enabled him to develop his research into primates and argue that his research is still significant to primatology today, some 75 years after its first publication. Throughout this discussion I will highlight the physical legacy of Hill's work which survives in the form of a specimen collection.

Biography

Carina Phillips is Head of Museum Collections at the Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCS). She began her career as an osteoarchaeologist, working with zooarchaeological assemblages and human skeletal remains. Carina moved into museum work 17 years ago and enjoys it so much she hasn't left! Today she is responsible for the care and management of the RCS museum collections. Alongside her day job Carina is completing a PhD at UCL and the Natural History Museum, London, funded by the Hunterian Museum Trustees. This investigates the historical, biological and museological significance of the specimens collected by primatologist W. C. O Hill.

PANEL EIGHT

CONTINUED

An 'enviable record of "basic research"': institutionalising science at the Zoological Society

Miles Kempton, Christ's College, University of Cambridge

Widely regarded today as a world-leading centre for conservation science and higher education, the Institute of Zoology (IoZ) has attracted puzzlingly little attention from historians. Until surprisingly recently, the IoZ was best known not for conservation *per se*, but for its contributions to comparative medicine and reproductive physiology—research programmes which it inherited from two precursor institutes. Funded by 'princely' grants from private foundations, the institutes were to bring knowledge of non-domesticated animals to bear upon questions of global health and population growth. With cutting-edge laboratory facilities, they quickly established distinctive research programmes investigating fundamental biological processes, health, and disease in a host of little-studied organisms. In this talk, I chart the establishment and development of this neglected research infrastructure and culture. In the process I link research programmes to the broader imperatives of a postwar zoological society navigating the end of empire and shifting societal attitudes to collections of captive animals. I conclude by briefly charting the selective repurposing and transformation of the IoZ in the age of conservation biology.

Biography

Miles Kempton is a Junior Research Fellow at Christ's College, University of Cambridge. He holds a PhD in History of Science from Cambridge and works on histories of zoology, visual culture, and conservation biology. His PhD focussed on the postwar nexus of animal behavioural research, film, and TV at London Zoo and his current project examines filmic constructions of the Galápagos Islands from c.1955 to the present.

PANEL NINE

ZSL AND CONSERVATION

Stars and stripes: What ZSL's long history with giraffids reveals about the many dimensions of its scientific and conservation endeavours

Simon Pooley, Birkbeck University of London

My talk will use the living giraffids (giraffe species, and okapi) to discuss the Zoological Society of London's role in collecting, classifying and displaying animals from across the world, and how it interacted with institutional and global networks. It will conclude with reflections on the zoo's role in recent ex situ and in situ conservation through breeding programmes, outreach and research and conservation in the field.

Biography

Dr Simon Pooley is Lambert Reader in Human-Wildlife Coexistence at Birkbeck University of London. He works with ZSL on a Hidden Histories programme and has been a Visiting Researcher at ZSL Library and Archives. He is author of the recent book *Discovering the okapi* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2025).

PANEL NINE

CONTINUED

Whipsnade Zoo, a ZSL story: how has the UK's first open zoo influenced conservation breeding and veterinary care

Buffy Beck and Maddie Humfryes, Whipsnade Zoo

Since opening in 1931, Whipsnade Zoo has revolutionised how zoo animals are cared for. With 100 years of ZSL pioneers and research behind him, Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell added his vision and determination to turn a derelict rural farm into a visionary open zoo. With historic buildings and enclosures seamlessly integrated into its natural surroundings, the zoo does not shy away from its history, it celebrates it. Without pioneering figures such as Oliver Graham Jones and Joan Proctor, the zoo wouldn't be able to provide the veterinary care or house extinct in the wild species. From *Partula* snails and boxer pupfish to white rhinos and cheetahs, Whipsnade Zoo sits proudly in the record books with its breeding success and conservation work. We take you through the early years of the zoo's first arrivals, how they were cared for and the characters (both animal and human) on site at the time. With technology, veterinary science and wildlife research consistently progressing, we provide examples of enclosure design and veterinary inventions from ZSL's archives, which improved the welfare of the animals not just in the past, but to this present day. With 10 extinct in the wild species currently housed at Whipsnade Zoo, we finally share inspiring stories of saving species from the brink of extinction.

Biographies

Buffy Beck and Maddie Humfryes are Engagement Officers at Whipsnade Zoo. It is our job to know a little about a lot. However, in ZSL's 200th year, we find ourselves having to know a lot about a lot. Having studied conservation education and animal behaviour and welfare, we have been science communicators all over the world, with a combined 23 years in the animal and education industry. Having joined ZSL and Whipsnade Zoo nearly 4 years ago, we have been inspiring and engaging thousands of visitors to follow in ZSL's mission, to create a world where wildlife thrives.

PANEL NINE

CONTINUED

The role of ZSL in originating and growing the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species

Michael Hoffmann, Zoological Society of London, with

Craig Hilton-Taylor, IUCN, Simon N. Stuart, Synchronicity Earth, H. Resit Akçakaya, Stony Brook University, Rajan Amin, Zoological Society of London, Jonathan E.M. Baillie, Natural State, Monika Böhm, Global Centre for Species Survival, Indianapolis Zoo, and Sophie E.H. Ledger, Institute of Zoology, Zoological Society of London.

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (hereafter Red List) is the most influential and widely known tool in use in conservation today. The Zoological Society of London (ZSL) has been a foundational architect in the evolution of the Red List, transitioning it from its early days as a qualitative register of species of conservation concern in the 1960s and 1970s into a rigorous, science-based barometer of biodiversity. A cornerstone of this transformation was the late Professor Dame Georgina Mace's pioneering leadership in the late 1980s and early 1990s (then staff of ZSL), to develop the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria. This established objective, quantitative thresholds, based on symptoms of extinction risk such as population size, rate of decline, and small geographic range, to help ensure assessments are robust, transparent, and globally standardized. Since then, ZSL, as a long-standing Red List Partner, has consistently driven methodological innovation to support the use of the Red List in conservation planning, monitoring and wider decision-making. Central to these contributions have been the co-development of the Red List Index (RLI), a critical indicator for tracking temporal trends in extinction risk across species based on genuine changes in status, and now widely used to monitor progress toward international biodiversity targets like the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the Sampled Red List Index (SRLI), facilitating representative assessments for megadiverse but under-studied groups such as invertebrates and plants. This paper will explore these early beginnings, major innovations, and highlight how ZSL has further expanded the Red List's utility through the EDGE of Existence programme and the development of the IUCN Green Status of Species to measure conservation recovery. Through highlighting efforts to bridge primary research with global policy and real-world application, we will highlight how ZSL continues to refine the frameworks essential for safeguarding the Earth's biota.

Biography

Mike Hoffmann is Head of Wildlife Recovery at ZSL where he leads efforts to innovate and implement solutions to tricky conservation challenges. Mike's career is defined by close association with the IUCN Red List: he has played an active role in expanding the coverage of the Red List to new taxa, improving the standards, tools, protocols and guidance that support the Red List process, and advising on its use for conservation planning, monitoring and management. He has helped launch or support several initiatives that depend on Red List data to direct conservation efforts, including at the site (Key Biodiversity Areas) and species level (the EDGE of Existence). He has also pioneered approaches to better quantify the impacts of actions and helped develop the IUCN Green Status of Species as a means of measuring species recovery.

POSTER ABSTRACTS

Mapping natural history networks in India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the ZSL Chapter

Nisha Bhakat, Nature Conservation Foundation, India

The field of natural history has been called a 'network science' which is created, enriched, and sustained by connections and correspondence between a diverse array of people, communities, and institutions. In colonial-era India pre-existing networks expanded, driven by efforts by European officers and institutions to survey, collect, and trade in natural history. Prominent among these was the Zoological Society of London, embedded within this network as an institution of scholarship, networking, and memory-keeping. From textual records at the ZSL Archives and archives within India, this work is a preliminary exercise in mapping the network which has sustained beyond the colonial era. Bringing together records of knowledge exchange between scholars in India and abroad, documentation and publishing of traditional ecological knowledge, correspondence between ZSL and natural history societies in India, to post-independence business deals about the sale of Indian fauna for European zoos: this work through space and time gives glimpses of India's local and global natural history networks over the last two centuries.

Biographies

I am interested in the past and present of wildlife beyond protected areas in India. At NCF, I am working towards digitally archiving publications of the Bengal Natural History Society. I have studied Chemical Engineering followed by a Master's in Wildlife Biology and Conservation at the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS). For my dissertation, I studied how landscape factors and shade-tree management affect birds in the tea dominated landscape of Dooars. After that, I was supported by On the Edge and NCBS Wildlife Program to study endemic shola birds outside protected areas in the Nilgiris. During that time, I also studied the history of *Montecincla* laughing thrushes, developing a keen interest in wildlife history and how it can further current ecological knowledge. Later, I received a Research Fellowship from the Archives at NCBS where I studied contemporary history of the Bengal Florican drawing heavily from Dr. Ravi Sankaran's archived field notes.

POSTER ABSTRACTS

CONTINUED

The role of web archives in preserving the digital legacy of zoology in the UK

Nicola Bingham, Helena Byrne and Nora Ramsey, The British Library

The UK Web Archive collects and preserves websites published in the UK, encompassing a broad spectrum of topics. The entire collection amounts to approximately 2 petabytes (PB) of data. 2026 is also a special year for the UK Web Archive, as it is celebrating its 21st year curating web archive collections.

The archive includes thematic collections that cover a diverse array of subjects and events, ranging from UK General Elections, blogs, and the UEFA Women's Euros 2022, to live art, the history of the book, and the French community in London. Science, society, and the natural world are topics widely represented within the UK Web Archive. The official Zoological Society of London (ZSL) website, zsl.org has been archived on a quarterly basis since July 2014. But it is only since 2026 that we have a dedicated zoology thematic collection.

This poster will illustrate the history of ZSL online and highlights a number of ways in which web archives, in particular the UK Web Archive, can be utilised in zoological research. These include:

- As a preservation tool
- As a point of study as a secondary source
- As a point of study as a primary source.

It is hoped that this poster can enable further discussion on how web archives can be utilised in zoological research. These discussions will then help to develop best practice for enabling reuse of web archives within the research community.

Biographies

Nicola Bingham is the Lead Curator of Web Archiving at the British Library in the Department of Collections. She began her archival career at Tyne and Wear Archives Service before joining the British Library in 2002. Nicola manages the Library's web archiving strategy and the ongoing road map for web archiving capability, ensuring that stakeholders across the Legal Deposit Libraries and other partners have the necessary tools for curating websites according to their own collection development policies.

Helena Byrne is the Curator of Web Archives at the British Library. She is also an independent researcher that specialises in the history of women's football in Ireland. Her academic research outputs are a mix of web archives and sports history.

Nora Ramsey is the Assistant Web Archivist at the British Library. She has previously worked with the Cultural Heritage Shared Research Repository and open access research. Her research interests include epistemicide and epistemic injustice.

POSTER ABSTRACTS

CONTINUED

“A jewel of the capital”: a comparison between the development of the zoological societies and gardens of London (est. 1826) and Amsterdam (est. 1838).

Wessel Broekhuis, ARTIS Amsterdam Royal Zoo (NL)

This poster will illustrate how London Zoo influenced the development of Artis, the oldest public and scientific zoo on the European mainland. The submission will draw comparisons but will also show differences in the ways these institutions have developed.

The Amsterdam Zoological Society *Natura Artis Magistra* - ‘Nature is the teacher of arts and sciences’ - was established in 1838. Its founder, G.F. Westerman (1807-1890), was a member of the Zoological Society Of London. The Society and its Gardens were a direct inspiration for the establishment of a similar institution in Amsterdam. During the 19th century, ZSL was the driving force behind the advancement of zoos and if ZSL was showcasing a before unseen animal or a novelty like an aquarium, ARTIS would incorporate it as well.

Comparisons will include the similar aims in the respective prospectuses, early contributions to scientific publications, ties with the royal families, connections to colonial territories, views on the capture and display of (dangerous) animals and so forth.

Differences will include the foundation of ZSL as a civil initiative whereas Westerman originally sought royal support; and the explicit aim of ZSL to acclimatize foreign species as game or farm animals was absent at Artis. And although both are historic urban zoos that have stood the test of time, there are key differences nowadays; and although London Zoo is older, the 19th century character of ARTIS has been preserved much better.

Biographies

Wessel Broekhuis (1993) is a historian specializing in zoo history and works for the Education, Art & Heritage department of ARTIS Amsterdam Royal Zoo (NL). His master’s thesis ‘Animals brought from every part of the globe’ (2019) compared the zoological societies of London, Amsterdam and Antwerp to achieve insight on how these institutions were connected to the colonies of the respective nations and whether embodying an imperialist ideology was an important aspect of early zoos. In his current role at ARTIS Wessel writes, researches, speaks, creates educational content and curates exhibitions on the zoos’ history and zoo history in general.

POSTER ABSTRACTS

CONTINUED

Gift giving, animal trafficking, and the limits of Western scientific knowledge in the case of a platypus shipped to Winston Churchill

Harrison Croft, Universität Augsburg

The Zoological Society of London's archival holdings from the Second World War contain a curious file relating to a platypus gifted to Winston Churchill in 1942. Through the correspondence between staff in London and their counterparts in Melbourne – from whence the platypus, eponymously dubbed Winston, had been shipped – the journey of the platypus can be reconstructed. Ultimately, Winston died a week out from landing in Liverpool. However, it is precisely because this experiment in live animal trafficking was unsuccessful that it has drawn the attention of historians of science and the environment.

The case of Winston the platypus is an exercise in soft power akin to the panda diplomacy practiced by China. But this poster's main aim is to apply a scientific lens, rather than a transnational or political one. In doing so, the logbook of the shipboard platypus attendant is examined, which reveals key insights into Winston's likely cause of death. Additionally, by de-privileging Euro-western scientific norms and highlighting the early zoological contributions of Australia's First Nations peoples, it is revealed how the experiment was a hubristic and reckless one.

It is argued that the zoo was a site of spectacle that functioned chiefly to entertain visitors at the expense of non-human welfare and livelihood. The case of Winston is particularly instructive as it brings together scholarship on zoo ethics, international relations, animal welfare, and western scientific knowledge structures as they were understood and practiced in London and Melbourne in the twentieth century.

Biography

Harrison Croft is a Humboldt Research Fellow in Global Environmental History and Environmental Humanities at the Universität Augsburg. There, his research interests are in climate history and more-than-human histories. His PhD research, undertaken at Monash University, Melbourne, examined the changing human, animal, and plant relationships with Birrarung (Yarra River) since the nineteenth century. Harrison has published most recently with *History Australia* and *Environment and History*, and is a postgraduate representative on the Australian Historical Association Executive Committee.

POSTER ABSTRACTS

CONTINUED

From Carcass to knowledge: dissecting the zoo with Richard Owen

Andrea Hart, Natural History Museum, London

After becoming a life member of the Zoological Society of London in 1830, Richard Owen, comparative anatomist, palaeontologist, and then curator of the Royal College of Surgeons, quickly rose to a position of influence within the Society. Elected to its council, he helped establish its evening scientific meetings, advancing its research and publications. Over a career that saw him establish, and become the first Superintendent of the Natural History Museum, London, Owen published more than 600 scientific papers, many in the Society's own publications - the *Transactions* and the *Proceedings*. Central to this work was the Zoo itself as from the 1830s, he began to "apply himself industriously to the dissection of such animals as died under the care of the Zoological Society of London". He would eventually leave medical practice and devote himself full-time to scientific research across animal and fossil life.

This poster explores Owen's scientific practice through the Zoo: its animals, their dissection and description. Using original illustrations and prints from Owen's Drawings Collection, now preserved at the Natural History Museum, alongside published illustrations woven together using the perceptive observations and narratives from his wife Caroline's now-lost diaries, it shows how the Zoo's everyday workings underpinned his influential research.

Biography

Andrea Hart is the Library Special Collections Manager at the Natural History Museum, London where she manages and leads on the development, collection care, promotion and access of the Library's Special collections which include the extensive rare book, manuscript and artwork collections. She has authored numerous books and articles around the Museum's Library collections including those in the Images of Nature series: *Women Artists* (2014), *The Art of British Natural History* (2017) and *Expeditions and Endeavours* (2018), and most recently, a joint publication with Ann Datta, *Birds of the World: The Art of Elizabeth Gould* (2024).

POSTER ABSTRACTS

CONTINUED

Sealed fates: the role of zoos and aquariums in two Pinniped extinctions

Dolly Jørgensen, University of Stavanger

Zoos and aquariums are known as places of encounter with the exotic and rare. In order to procure desirable rare specimens, they participated in the same specimen collection networks as natural history museums. In the early 20th century these networks involved expeditions for specimen acquisition, often targeting the most rare animals for institutional prestige. This paper will examine the history of the acquisition and display of two pinnipeds - the Caribbean monk seal and Japanese sea lion - who both were hunted to extinction in the 1950s. In both cases, the last robust populations of the animals came under pressure in the early 1900s from specimen hunters who acquired them dead for museums and alive for zoos/aquariums. This paper argues that while today we think of zoos/aquariums as having a species conservation aim, historically their aim was specimen conservation without consideration of the negative effect on the species.

Biography

Dolly Jørgensen is an environmental historian whose current research agenda focuses on cultural histories of animals. She is Professor of History at University of Stavanger, Norway, where she also co-directs the Greenhouse Center for Environmental Humanities. Her most recent monograph is *Ghosts Behind Glass: Encountering Extinction in Museums* (University of Chicago Press, 2025). She is one of the new co-editors of *Archives of Natural History*.

POSTER ABSTRACTS

CONTINUED

Origin of the faeces

Tracey Lee, ZSL, London Zoo

In the late 1990s, I collected elephant dung for Turner Prize-winning artist Chris Ofili. In my career at London Zoo, I have been lucky enough to care for some of the planet's most majestic creatures, from Asiatic elephants and black rhinos to pygmy hippos, lowland gorillas and Sumatran tigers, to name a few. My unusual artistic journey began in 2001 when the elephants, whom I'd looked after and loved for 12 years were moved to Whipsnade Zoo. On that night when they had gone and the house was silent apart from the sound of Jos the male black rhino snoring and the sound of me sweeping out the elephant dens for the last time. I found myself crying as I was left with only memories of times gone by. The city of London would never house elephants again. I looked out into the paddock and felt bereft a solitary ball of dung left by Geetha was on the floor, it shimmered in the moonlight the final resident elephant to leave London for her new life in the countryside. It caught my eye and I picked it up. It was the last thing I had left of Geetha, I decided to keep the ball as a keepsake. It was beautiful full of twigs and hay, I had never looked at it like this before.

A little while later, the zoo's last black rhino, Jos, who I also cared for and adored for twelve years was moved to Port Lympne and feeling bereft, I kept his final poo with Geetha's to dry. I later displayed these two "mementos" on canvas, hung them on our bathroom wall and called them The Last Poo at the Zoo. My poo collection grew from there. I have collected poo samples from species which are mostly threatened in the wild and part of important global breeding programmes designed to protect the species' future.

I decided to curate a poo show and called it, 'Origin of the Faeces' it showcases the diversity and beauty of animal dung. The exhibition includes faeces from animals such as a critically endangered gorilla that resembles a giant kebab, a tadpole-like giant Galapagos tortoise poo and even tiny droppings from a caterpillar. As well as getting up close to the poo, visitors can learn about each animal and their poo through an ID card which tells you where they are from, their status in the wild, their diet, country of origin and is supported by photos and soundscapes. Each poo has been dried and carefully preserved using a special technique, which retains the detail and makes them odourless and hygienic to display some are 25 years old.

Biography

After a career spanning 30 years in the animal department, including being Head Keeper of two mammal sections, I hung up my wellies, and I have been in a new role for 5 years as London Zoo's Creative Operative, I produce murals and labels for public areas and back of house areas. When I finally went part-time, it gave me the space to reignite my passion for the poo and I could concentrate on mounting and framing the faeces and my collection grew from 10 framed poos to over 146 exhibits. I wanted the exhibition to not be just about poo but to capture the essence of these magnificent animals in a way that's both educational and eye-opening, it's a celebration of nature's diversity, while also a sobering reminder of the environmental challenges we face today. I wanted the exhibition to encourage people to seriously consider the state of the planet and to think about what they can do to help. Species are dying out all the time at an alarming rate. I wanted the exhibition *Poo from the Zoo* will grab the imagination of children the world over. They're the planet's future.

POSTER ABSTRACTS

CONTINUED

Ian Nairn's London Zoo: anthropomorphism, architecture and animals as London residents

Oliver Marshall, Oxford University Bodleian Art, Archaeology and Ancient World Library

Nairn's London - the seminal work of architectural critic Ian Nairn takes the reader on a tour of 1966 London through his favourite spaces. From churches, shopfronts and parks; these are the best-looking places in London by Nairn's estimation.

The Zoo gets his ringing endorsement as an architectural must-see, in a passage that praises the "bizarre jumble of architecture" - one he feels is "a good match for Nature's Craziness". The buildings he specifies include the neo-Georgian pavilions, galleries, kiosks, Mappin terraces, elephant house, Snowdon's aviary and the favourite of all Modernists, the Penguin Pool.

Nairn treats the zoo like any area of London, and the animals like Londoners. "The Zoo is one of the most under-used amenities in London" he reasons, offering it up as a good space for a catch-up with an old friend and recommends a scotch and soda at the bar. To the flâneur, the zoo is just another part of the city - a space for active and intellectual observing, but for the zoo as a holistic space, rather than going to the zoo to see the animals.

Through the buildings Nairn highlights, and especially in his references to the architects, the zoo becomes rooted in the city. Analysis of some of the buildings he is so drawn to, and the values of their respective architectural styles reveal how the zoo's relationship with its animals have changed, with each era bringing new ideas about how animals should be housed and how people should use a zoo space.

Biography

Oliver Marshall works at Oxford University's Bodleian Art, Archaeology and Ancient World Library as a graduate trainee library assistant. He studied BSc Environmental Science at the University of the West of England and wrote his final year dissertation in 2025 on the history of coal use in Britain and how coal has been represented in art from 1770 to present. He will begin studying for an MSc in the History and Philosophy of Science at UCL in September 2026. He is especially interested in how visual culture and design reflect attitudes towards nature and the environment.

King cobras (*Ophiophagus hannah*) at London Zoo (1875-1939)

Lee Raye, Open University

In 1875 the Zoological Society of London bought a shipment of cobras (*Naja naja*) from Charles Jamrach. Included was a king cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*), the first of these snake-eating snakes to be kept in Britain. Its species was reportedly identified after two of the cobras brought along with it had been eaten – later zoo folklore suggested £25 or £50 of cobras. Over the next few decades ‘the most dreaded of all poisonous serpents’ became a zoo favourite. The species was considered capable of killing an elephant and a special danger to children. Newspaper columns treated London’s king cobras like celebrities, sharing zoo gossip and commenting on meetings with UK monarchs. Expeditions and plantation owners publicised their donations, although ZSL council records and magazine articles reveal how many were brought to London Zoo ‘on deposit’ and also suggest the importance of local women as collectors. The king cobra ultimately proved difficult to keep and especially to feed. Viper-hunters sent hundreds of grass snakes each year from the New Forest, Hampshire and parts of Italy, but animal rights groups found their diet horrifying, and European snakes could not be obtained during the winter hibernation. The Zoo experimented with feeding them rats and eels instead, but some ‘faddy’ king cobras were reportedly only comfortable eating the most expensive snakes from their native regions. In 1939, at the start of World War II, all venomous snakes at London Zoo were beheaded by government order. King cobras are now rarely kept in captivity in the UK.

Biography

Dr Lee Raye FLS is an associate lecturer at the Open University in Wales and a research officer at Bangor University. Their work on wild animals and plants in history and literature has been published in *Archives of Natural History*, the *Herpetological Journal* and the *London Journal*. Lee’s latest book, *Creatures of Story and Song: Tracing Britain’s Lost Species*, forthcoming with Reaktion Books, reconstructs the relationship people in Britain had to species like the wolf, great auk and tree frog before they went locally extinct. Lee is also a surveyor for the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust’s National Reptile Survey.

POSTER ABSTRACTS

CONTINUED

The Society for the History of Natural History at 90

Elaine Shaughnessy and Gina Douglas, Society for the History of Natural History

The Society for the History of Natural History (SHNH), an international society known for its friendliness, provides a focal point for anyone – professionals and amateurs – with an interest in the biographical, bibliographical and social aspects of the history of natural history across all cultures. SHNH holds meetings at regular intervals and publishes the peer-reviewed journal *Archives of Natural History* twice a year.

SHNH was founded in 1936 by a small group of librarians, bibliographers and naturalists who mostly worked at the Natural History Museum in South Kensington. The Museum's staff contained a number of distinguished naturalists whose experience made them authorities in their respective fields, as well as librarians and bibliographers who were international figures. A distinguished group came together to form the Society as The Society for the Bibliography of Natural History.

Over the past 90 years the society has evolved to become a community of people interested the history of all branches of natural history, creating opportunities to connect with a thriving and diverse network covering varied disciplines, professions and research fields. We explore some of the highlights from the Society's 90 year history.

POSTER ABSTRACTS

CONTINUED

ZSL's pioneering masters course: three decades of training conservationists

Chris Yesson and Amber Wyard, Zoological Society of London

In 1994, ZSL and the Royal Veterinary College set up MSc Wild Animal Health to train veterinarians in management of wild animals and the epidemiology, treatment and control of wildlife diseases. In 2003, MSc Wild Animal Biology was established, to provide a version of the course to non-veterinarians. Over the last three decades, these world-class specialist masters courses have trained over 600 graduates from 63 countries. Our students spend most of the course onsite at ZSL gaining valuable experiences with our scientists, vets, zoo-keepers and conservation practitioners.

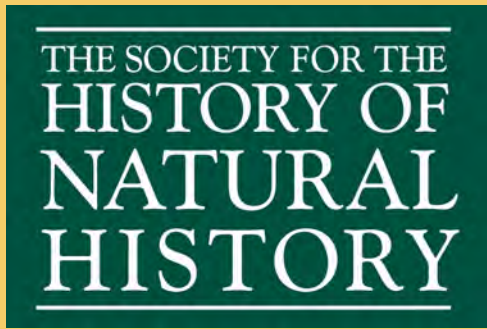
We are proud of the careers of our graduates, including multiple professors, conservation managers, science communicators in our alumni. For many students, their connection with ZSL doesn't end with the course, multiple graduates have progressed to successful careers at ZSL. Many of our alumni now teach on our course.

More than 50 ZSL staff engage with our students delivering teaching, practical support and supervision of research projects. The research project is a significant part of the course, with most students conducting research with ZSL-based projects. These research projects contribute directly to ZSL's science and conservation and have given rise to over 120 peer-reviewed publications. Students' research has varied widely including many studies on zoo animal welfare, wildlife disease, reintroductions and other conservation science. This poster will showcase the value of these courses to ZSL from the perspective of our mission to train conservationists and conducting research. We will present case studies highlighting the breadth and value of our students' work.

Biographies

Dr Chris Yesson is a Senior Research Fellow at ZSL's Institute of Zoology and co-course director of MSc Wild Animal Health / Wild Animal Biology. He is a marine biologist working on benthic ecology and coastal habitat restoration. He has supervised 49 masters research projects.

Amber Wyard is the Wildlife Health Bridge Administrator at ZSL and has an MSc in Zoo Conservation Biology. Her professional background includes working in science communication and education, from preschool to professional level, working in the UK, India and Kenya. Before joining ZSL, Amber worked at Chester Zoo on their education team.



The Society for the History of Natural History is a friendly society for everyone interested in the historical and bibliographical study of all branches of natural history, including their social and cultural aspects, across all cultures

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