



<http://www.natsca.org>

## NatSCA News

---

Title: The National Insect Collection: Its Origin and evolution to global accessibility: Evolution

Author(s): Suzanne Ryder

Source: Ryder, S. (2009). The National Insect Collection: Its Origin and evolution to global accessibility: Evolution. *NatSCA News, Issue 17*, 37 - 38.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/144>

---

NatSCA supports open access publication as part of its mission is to promote and support natural science collections. NatSCA uses the Creative Commons Attribution License (CCAL) <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/> for all works we publish. Under CCAL authors retain ownership of the copyright for their article, but authors allow anyone to download, reuse, reprint, modify, distribute, and/or copy articles in NatSCA publications, so long as the original authors and source are cited.

## **The National Insect Collection: Its Origin and evolution to global accessibility: Evolution.**

Suzanne Ryder

*Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London, SW7 5BD  
Email: s.ryder@nhm.ac.uk*

This is arguably the most significant time for the Entomology collection since it moved from Bloomsbury in 1881, with the design, construction and occupation of a new building; Darwin centre 2.

The Darwin Centre is a multi-phased project which is currently seeing the completion of its second phase. The Darwin Centre so far is physically made up of 2 new buildings, which provide high quality collections storage and impressive new research and curation facilities. The concept behind the project is to provide the best possible space to house the vast collections at the Natural History Museum as well as making museum science more accessible to the public by showing what science we do behind the scenes.

The two phases of the Darwin centre programme create a new life sciences complex at the Natural History Museum with three equally important aims:

- To safeguard the world's finest collection of animal and plant specimens by replacing antiquated and insecure storage with modern purpose built facilities using the latest designs in environmental control, pest management and security
- To create modern, high quality research facilities for our ever-advancing scientific research
- To reveal what is currently hidden by actively encouraging visitors to explore our collections and interact with curators and researchers.

The overall vision is to improve the care and active curation of our collections, deliver high quality relevant research whilst showcasing our collections research and impact through new and compelling ways of engagement. To ensure innovative and leading edge opportunities for visitors to participate, interact, question, comment and continue their exploration and relationship; onsite and pre- and post-visit as well as supporting scientists in sharing their expertise and passion with audiences and to get feedback, both scientific and social.

Darwin Centre phase 1 was opened 2001 and houses the Museum's spirit collections the majority of which is part of the Zoology collection. It provides behind the scenes tours and daily talks to the public by the resident scientists.

Darwin Centre 2 is now in standing in the footprint of the old Entomology block. Building work for this started in 1936 but wasn't completed until after the war in 1952, it was then demolished in 2005. The Entomology collections since then have been temporarily rehoused across the Natural History Museums sites.

The new building is glass structure surrounding a cocoon designed by C.F.Moller Architects. The building provides 16,000 metre square of space, the cocoon is 8 storeys high and 65 metres long, it is made of reinforced concrete finished with venation plaster. The cocoon is a metaphor for keeping the collections safe and a place where knowledge of the natural world will be developing and growing.

Darwin Centre 2 will house collections and staff from two life science departments, Entomology and Botany. The Entomology collections are currently being moved into the building and will comprise of approximately 17 million specimens in 127,000 drawers and includes approximately 180,000 type specimens. Associated with these collections there will be 60 core funded staff and more than 70 scientific associates, students and postdoctoral researchers. 3 million specimens, including 70000 type specimens, of flowering plants and gymnosperms c. 50% of the total Botany collection are also being relocated in to the new building. This comprehensive collection with worldwide coverage will be rehoused into 62,000 shelf spaces. With the botany collection, 25 core funded staff and approximately 40 Scientific associates, postdoctoral researchers and students will also occupy this building.

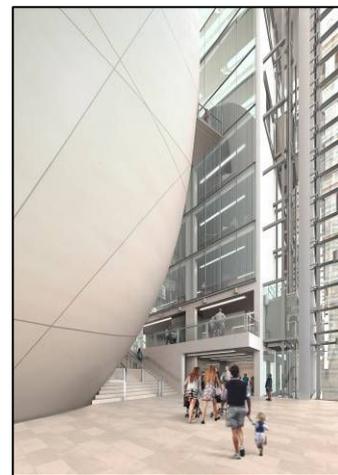
The Public offer will increase public engagement with our science thereby enhancing public understanding

of science. This will be achieved through the 'Explore tour' the David Attenborough studio and the Angela Marmont Centre for U.K. biodiversity. The explore tour will be a self guided tour passing through much of the building with windows into the collection areas and views into the molecular laboratories. There will be interactive games and other features presented on this tour. The David Attenborough studio will be a multi-purpose space. It will offer interactive shows, Nature Live programmes and between programmes a 'chill out' mode where visitors can see and hear images of nature around them. Nature live programmes will continue to give visitors the opportunity to meet the scientists, debate topical issues and discover how our collections help us to understand natural biodiversity. The Angela Marmont Centre for UK biodiversity will be for visitors with special interest in British biodiversity. It will house UK collections (although not all UK material), accessible synoptic collections of UK species, enquiries service (e.g. Insect Identification Service) and provide a space for scientific societies where members have a UK interest (meetings, workshops).

The Botany and Entomology collections are some of the most vulnerable collections housed at the museum as they are particularly at risk to pest damage so this building has been designed with close consultation to curation and conservation staff to build in many features to protect the collection from damage. The collections will benefit greatly by being rehoused into a new high quality, environmentally controlled storage facility which provides good security, housing and pest control. The new building will also have 10 –15% expansion space for future development of the collection.

The move, for the Entomology department at least, has obviously been disruptive to everyone, both staff and visitors alike but we have been able to make the most of this unique opportunity by standardising the collections. We have gone from dozens of different cabinet and drawer types to just three for the whole collection. This allows complete flexibility with collection reorganisation and it makes sure we don't have separate main and accessions collections or supplementary collections.

This is a very exciting time for us at The Natural History Museum although it has at times been a difficult journey but from a personal point of view, as someone that has just move into the building, the facility is great for the staff and more importantly for the collections. It officially opens in September so please do come and see it for yourself.



The giant cocoon; the new Darwin 2 centre at the Natural History Museum.