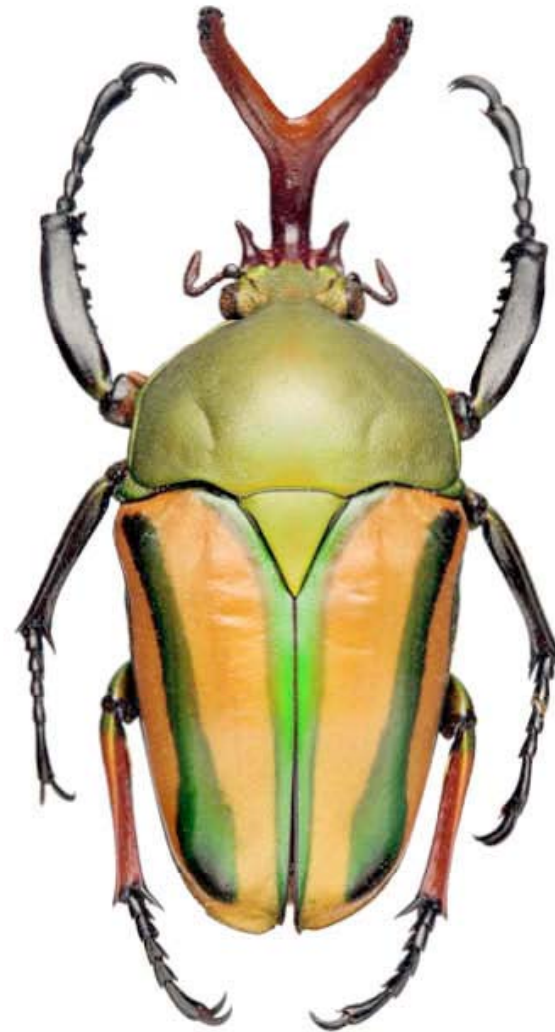# NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

Developing a learning research agenda: Bringing museum learning practitioners and academics together

Emma Pegram and Brad Irwin (NHM), Jen DeWitt (King's)

What would you like to know to improve learning for visitors in your institution?

Why are we interested in a learning research agenda?

- Learning in natural history museums in UK is **under-researched** and under-theorised

- Understanding learning impacts of informal learning environments continues to be a **hot topic**

  – Wellcome Trust 2012 Review of Informal Science Learning in UK strongly emphasised the need for a collaborative research agenda and a systematic approach to evaluation

  – Heath & Davis 2013 Evaluating Evaluation 2013

- **The knowledge-base issue**

  – "the modal (most common) value for how many individuals had read each publication was zero... The most read article had been read by less than 50% of these key practitioners" *(Wellcome Trust, 2012, p.5)*

Building a Collaborative Learning Research Agenda for Natural History Museums

Aims

- Develop a **network** of academics and natural history learning stakeholders

- Promote the potential contribution of **natural history museums** to academic learning research and theorisation;

- Develop a tailored **learning research agenda** to be reflected in both professional and academic

- Support **collaborations** between academics, natural history museums and UK funding agencies

Building a Collaborative Learning Research Agenda for Natural History Museums

Seminar 1: The Research Landscape
Thursday 28 November 2013, 9.45–15.45
at the Natural History Museum, London

You are personally invited to join the Natural History Museum and King's College London for a ground-breaking series of seminars to develop a learning research agenda for natural history museums in the UK.

Across six seminars over two years, we will bring together museum learning practitioners and pre-eminent cross-disciplinary academics to unpick the complexities of learning in rich natural history environments and develop a learning research agenda for the field.

This event is sponsored by ESRC.

For more information visit:
www.nhm.ac.uk/learning-research-agenda
@NHM_learn
#learningresearchagenda

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

S1: The Research Landscape (Nov 2013)

S2: Adopting a Research Culture (Mar 2014)

S3: Developing a Research Study on Authenticity (Jul 2014)

S4: Collaborations around Authenticity: Implications for Practice (Nov 2014)

Building on work on learning research agendas from the US... A research agenda for learning in natural history museums (CAISE 2014)

- – Communication between scientists and the public

- – Collections and learning from objects

- – Learning in natural history domains

- – Facilitation and mediation

How would a learning research agenda benefit the sector?

Why a learning research agenda?

Benefits

- Issues around impact

- Institutions valuing learning research

- Enabling organisational change

- A common language

- Research can take practice somewhere you hadn't considered

Barriers

- Time

- Access

- Priorities

- Value of carrying out research

- Complex language of research papers

- 'Short-term-ism'

What we've learned about developing a research and practice culture from working with researchers (1)

- Boundary crossers (who like each other)

- Institutional value for exploration and risk-taking

- Common conversation about big ideas and important little bits

- Synergistic, non-competitive place in the community

- Opportunistic and nimble

- Patient

- Culture needs constant care and feeding

- (Money is not necessarily the best thing to start with….)

(Crowley 2014)

What we've learned about developing a research and practice culture (2)

- Having support from the Director who sees value in research

- Having a strategy to be able to share with others and refer to when things getting a bit lost

- Having an externally funded programme provided resources but more importantly kept us focused

- Recognising that it was a long-term process that involved investment from senior management (working with external experts) in terms of time and commitment

(Pringle, 2014)

How can you address some of these barriers (how might a learning research agenda support your efforts)?

www.nhm.ac.uk/learning-research-agenda