National Museums Scotland

Annual Review 2026



Welcome to our Annual Review

Welcome to our 2026 Annual Review, which explores a selection of highlights from our activities over the past 12 months.

A collaborative approach sits at the heart of our work, and this has been a notable year for meaningful collaboration, from loans, research and touring exhibitions to national and international projects.

While we welcomed a record-breaking 3.4 million visitors across our own museums, nearly 90,000 people saw some of Scotland's national treasures in venues around the country as part of our Highlight Loans programme. Further afield, more than 50,000 visitors to Melbourne Victoria Museum saw the Galloway Hoard as it continued its international tour.

In partnership with the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, we are taking the lead in Scotland for a major international project to digitise natural science specimens. Meanwhile a five-year project highlighting Indigenous knowledge came to completion. *Entangled Knowledges* saw us collaborating with an Indigenous-governed team to return knowledge embedded in a historic collection of fish and mammal specimens to the

Menang community in Western Australia.

This year our exhibitions explored extinct prehistoric giants and Bronze Age warriors. We acquired more than 80,000 objects for the National Collection, ranging from an archive of historic tartan samples to a set of rare daguerreotypes which reveal the use of early photography in rural Scotland. And a new display opened at the National Museum of Scotland exploring how the diversity of minerals has increased over time.

We marked 25 years of the National Museum of Rural Life with a colourful parade of 25 tractors and a new, permanent display examining the future of farming. A collaborative doctoral research project with the University of Leicester revealed how Bronze Age tools were used and research carried out with the University of Edinburgh found that a fossil in our collection is a 'new' form of life, distinct from plants or fungi.

This is just a brief overview of our work in 2026, all of which was made possible thanks to the support we receive from Scottish Government and other valued funders, donors, patrons, members and volunteers. Thank you to everyone who has supported us over the past year, and thanks in particular to our wonderful staff. Their teamwork, energy and collaborative spirit make everything we do possible.

Ian Russell CBE, Chairman
Dr Chris Breward, Director



Year in numbers

3,421,658

visitors to our four museums, making this our busiest year on record

30th

birthday of Dolly the Sheep

1,000th

anniversary of a rare brass astrolabe in our collection, made by Muhammad ibn al-Saffâr in 11th century Spain

83%

increase in visits from school pupils living in areas of multiple deprivation after offering 20% of our workshops free to schools in SIMD 1 and 2 areas

50 years

since Concorde's first commercial flight, marked with the acquisition of an archive of material from the journey

300th

anniversary of the birth of geologist James Hutton, celebrated with a new display about his work

271

volunteers involved in our events, programmes, conservation and curatorial work

88,397

visitors saw some of Scotland's national treasures in venues around the country as part of our Highlight Loans programme









EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS

Exploring past and present

From extinct giants and Bronze Age warriors to music and the magic of maths, our visitors were immersed in fascinating stories

Scotland's First Warriors **at the National Museum of Scotland explores the origins and impact of conflict in prehistoric Scotland. On display for the first time in the exhibition is the Carnoustie Hoard – a remarkable collection of Bronze Age objects including a rare spear head decorated with gold. The exhibition is supported**





by Postcode Lottery players.

Giants at the National Museum of Scotland brought audiences face to face with some of the colossal species that roamed the Earth after the extinction of the dinosaurs. Designed and produced by the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, it featured life-sized 3D models, fossils and near-complete skeletons.



The international tour of the Galloway Hoard, the richest collection of Viking-age objects ever found in Britain or Ireland, continued. It was seen by more than 50,000 people at Melbourne Victoria Museum, before moving to the Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney, where a 3D-printed model of a Viking-age ship's prow from our collection was added to the display. The acquisition of the Hoard was made possible with support from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, Art Fund, National Museums

Scotland Charitable Trust and many other generous donors.



Gaelic Week at the National Museum of Scotland in February included an Exploring our Gaelic Collection tour and a talk in English and Gaelic, alongside music in the Grand Gallery.

We coordinated the Scottish Government-funded *Maths Week Scotland*. This year's events focused on the theme *Wild Maths*, exploring how to use maths for everything from solving wildlife crime and tracking bird migration to understanding patterns in the natural world. More than 75 events were held along with online webinars and competitions.

Insect Week in June 2026 was celebrated with a range of events, including a BioBlitz with the Scottish Ornithologists Club and moth trapping at the National Museums Collection Centre.

Awesome Bricks returned to the National Museum of Flight, encouraging families to get hands-on with LEGO® and help build a giant mosaic of Concorde. The museum also hosted *360 Fest*, a celebration of all things circular with cycle stunts, circus displays and craft activities.





ACQUISITIONS

Expanding our collections

The National Collection continued to grow with objects that capture the past and present, preserving their stories for the future

A unique early Scottish coin has been added to our collections. The silver penny was made in the 1130s during the reign of King David I, who introduced Scotland's first coinage. Until now, Scotland's earliest coinage was all thought to have been minted in Carlisle, under Scottish control. This acquisition shows for the first time that it was also minted in Edinburgh.

More than 550 specimens and samples were donated to us by the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, including a rare species collected by celebrated naturalist Gerard Durrell himself. Many of the world's rarest animals are represented, such as the critically endangered mountain chicken frog.





One of mountaineer Tom Weir's trademark woollen hats is now part of our collection. It was one of the last bunnets knitted for the noted BBC broadcaster by his wife Rhona before his death in 2006 at the age of 91.

An archive of more than 800 historic tartan samples produced by J&D Paton, one of the largest manufacturers of the material in the 19th and 20th centuries, was donated by Stuart Paton – the great-great grandson of the firm's founder – and will transform understanding of Scotland's textile heritage.

A painted screen by artist Josephine Haswell Miller went on display in the National Museum of Scotland after being acquired for the National Collection. Miller studied at Glasgow School of Art, where she later taught, as well as in Paris and London, and in 1938 she became the first female artist to be elected as an associate member of the Royal Scottish Academy. The screen was gifted from the Eric Robinson Collection with support from Art Fund.

A collection of seven daguerreotypes – an early form of photography – revealing Elgin in the 1840s and 50s was acquired. They were taken by Thomas Hutchon and capture the town as it tried to establish itself as an economic hub in north-east Scotland. The acquisition was supported by the National Museums Scotland Charitable Trust – Row Fogo Acquisition Fund, Friends of the Nations' Libraries, Elizabeth Lornie's Charitable Trust and other generous supporters.

87,972 objects were acquired for the National Collection



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF RURAL LIFE

25 years of country life

Dogs, ducks and a focus on future farming helped the National Museum of Rural Life mark its 25th anniversary this year

A new permanent display opened exploring the future of farming and how cutting-edge technology is being used to solve centuries-old problems. *Scotland's Farming Future* focuses on three themes – animal welfare, small-scale food production and large-scale agriculture – and includes new film content as well as objects such as model robots and 'cow fitbits' to track animals' health. Morag the sheep – an important, cloned predecessor to Dolly – is also now on display in the new section. The birth of Morag and her twin sister Megan in 1995 was a vital step in the creation of Dolly a year later. The new display was supported by the Wiseman Family Charitable Fund and by a legacy gift from Ian and Margaret Fleming.

Three new films were created for *Scotland's Farming Future*. These explored how a new generation of crofters in Shetland are raising native sheep and

cattle with a focus on sustainability, how precision agriculture technology is impacting production, efficiency and the workforce on Scotland's arable farms and how researchers in Scotland are working to understand how to make cows happier and more productive.

The anniversary was celebrated with a special day featuring a tractor parade around the museum and its working farm. A 1960 Massey Ferguson 35 which was the first tractor through the gates when the site opened on 4 July 2001 was decorated ahead of the event, which also included a Fordson Major P6 that used to run the museum's threshing mill.

Dog and Duck Day showcased animal skills alongside crafts, games and storytelling. Clever collies herded ducks along an obstacle course including a duck helter-skelter and the day also featured Indian runner ducks and working dogs with their handlers. Family events at the Museum are free with admission thanks to the support of Postcode Lottery players.

The museum's working farm welcomed Highland calves Eigg and Muck in June, named after Scottish islands like their father, Lewis. More than 200 lambs were also born, with new arrivals given special polythene jackets to help protect them from the weather.









NATIONAL WORKING

Working together

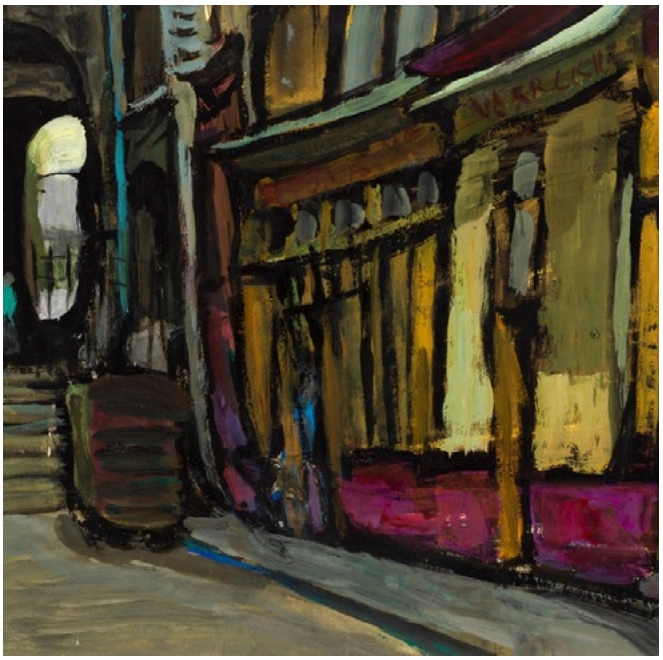
By sharing knowledge, experience and support with colleagues in other organisations, we have helped to build a stronger and more resilient sector

The National Fund for Acquisitions awarded 38 grants totalling £111,535 to 21 organisations to help them develop their collections with objects worth £364,614. This included £4,656 for Surgeons' Hall Museums to support the commission of *Eleven Surgeons* by Kirstin Mackinnon. Part of a drive to address gender imbalance in the collection, the painting depicts nine recipients of the Hunter Doig Medal, which recognises excellence









among female Fellows and Members of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. A further six grants worth £34,919 were also allocated.

New online resources were published to help organisations work more sustainably. These included advice on carbon management planning, tips for sustainable collections and a *Sewing Hope: Quilts for Climate Change* toolkit.

A grant of £10,000 supported the acquisition by Glasgow Life Museums of a collection of artworks by Scottish artist Rachel Maclean, including four video works.

A grant of £5,700 was made towards the acquisition by Glasgow Life

Museums of a collection of paintings, drawings and ceramics by Florence Jamieson (1925–2019) during the centenary of her birth.

A Pacific barkcloth workshop at the National Museum of Scotland was led by artist Cora-Allan from the island of Niue. It enabled participants from the sector to gain a deeper understanding of Pacific barkcloth in their museum collections and best practice in its care and conservation.

Curating and Researching Archaeological Human Remains from Scotland was delivered as part of the UKRI-funded Scotland's *Archaeological Human Remains Collections* project. Held at the Collection Centre in partnership with Historic Environment Scotland, participants from museums around Scotland discussed best practice and resources for the curation of archaeological human remains, including ethical approaches to their display and research.

Scottish Culture Comms Conference at the National Museum of Scotland brought together over 160 representatives from the heritage and culture sector to share insights on engaging with the media. It fostered knowledge exchange through panel discussions, presentations and case studies.

The online event *Approaches to Participatory Practice and Remuneratio*n aimed to build confidence around how to credit and recognise participants who bring their own lived experience and expert knowledge to museums practice.





CONNECTING COLLECTIONS

Connecting with collections

Enabling more people to engage with our collections has helped uncover new perspectives and a deeper understanding of the objects in our care

Care home resident Mary Davidson Smith was reunited with a childhood outfit a century after she last wore it. Mary was born in Seoul where her Korean nanny made her a traditional outfit (*hanbok*) including a winter hat, striped silk jacket, trousers and purse. The items that she donated to the national collection are











on display in the *Patterns of Life* gallery at the National Museum of Scotland.

We created opportunities for individuals and communities to contribute to interpretation, collecting and understanding of our collections. Consultation took place around Egyptian collections with members of the Egyptian community in Scotland, co-designed with PhD candidate Lama Said and artist Mohamed Tonsy, with support from Glasgow Archaeological Society, James Kinnoch Thomson Bequest. Work also included Greek textiles and dress consultation at the Collection Centre and engagement with African textile collections through Mwamba African women's group.

A range of projects enabled communities to encounter collections in depth while bringing lived experience, cultural knowledge and different perspectives into museum practice. These included a visit by primary school pupils to our audio-visual and photographic collections in collaboration with North Edinburgh Arts and a community visit with a group of Syrians who have escaped conflict and civil unrest to make Bute home, developed with Argyll and Bute Council.

Gather Around the Frame: A Celebration of Hand Quilting engaged more than 4,500 people with a skill that is on the UNESCO Red List of Endangered Crafts. It combined quilting activities, films, family crafts and talks, and created opportunities for visitors to engage with textile traditions through both collections and making.

We hosted several visits in support of our work to better understand the colonial histories and legacies in our collections. This included a delegation from the Chickasaw Nation, who visited the National Museums Collection Centre to see Chickasaw belongings and give presentations on Chickasaw culture and history. We also hosted a workshop on Hawaiian Kapa (barkcloth) led by two Kapa makers, as well as a research visit by Hawaiian feather workers.

22,789 new records published in the 'search our collections' section of our website









RESEARCH

New thinking

Our collections continued to reveal new knowledge and inspire research and ideas about our shared history and the world around us

A 410-million-year-old fossil which defies classification became part of our collection. The *prototaxites* specimen from Aberdeenshire had been thought to be a type of fungus, but new research carried out with the University of Edinburgh showed it to be an extinct evolutionary path of





large complex life which is neither fungus nor plant, and which died out 360 million years ago.



Entangled Knowledges was a five-year project with an Indigenous-governed team which highlighted Menang Nyungar knowledge embedded in a historic collection and returned this knowledge to the Menang community in Western Australia. It explored fish and mammal specimens, sketches and Menang objects collected in the 1840s by Robert Neill, and culminated in a loan of objects and specimens to the Western Australian Museum.



A fossil discovered on the Isle of Skye that revealed a new genus, species and family of Jurassic reptiles was added to our collection. *Breugnathair elgolensis*, a Gaelic name which means 'false snake of Elgol' had snake-like jaws and teeth but the proportions and limbs of a lizard.

British Academy Visiting Fellow, Dr Rachel Silberstein, helped us to diversify narratives around our historical Chinese dress and textiles collection. She identified a group of colourful, printed cottons representing what ordinary people during the late Qing dynasty (1644-1911) would have worn and used. A rare survival, this finding highlights a critical gap between museum collecting patterns and people's lived experiences.

Two books on the history of coins and precious metals were published with free online access. *Silver Beyond Empire*, edited by Alice Blackwell, Fraser Hunter, Andreas Rau and Martin Goldberg, examines the role of silver during the transition from the late Roman empire to early medieval Europe. *Denarii Beyond the Empire*, edited by Fraser Hunter, Arkadiusz Dymowski and Dorota Dzierzbicka, reveals the history of a Roman coin that dominated the ancient world for more than four centuries, focusing on its uses outside the empire.

A collaborative doctoral research project with the University of Leicester is revealing how Bronze Age tools were used. Researcher Hamish Darrah has been using a replica bronze axe head for coppicing – a sustainable woodland management practice involving the cutting of trees – and then analysing the wear on the tool and comparing it to Bronze Age examples.

36 new species were named by our researchers









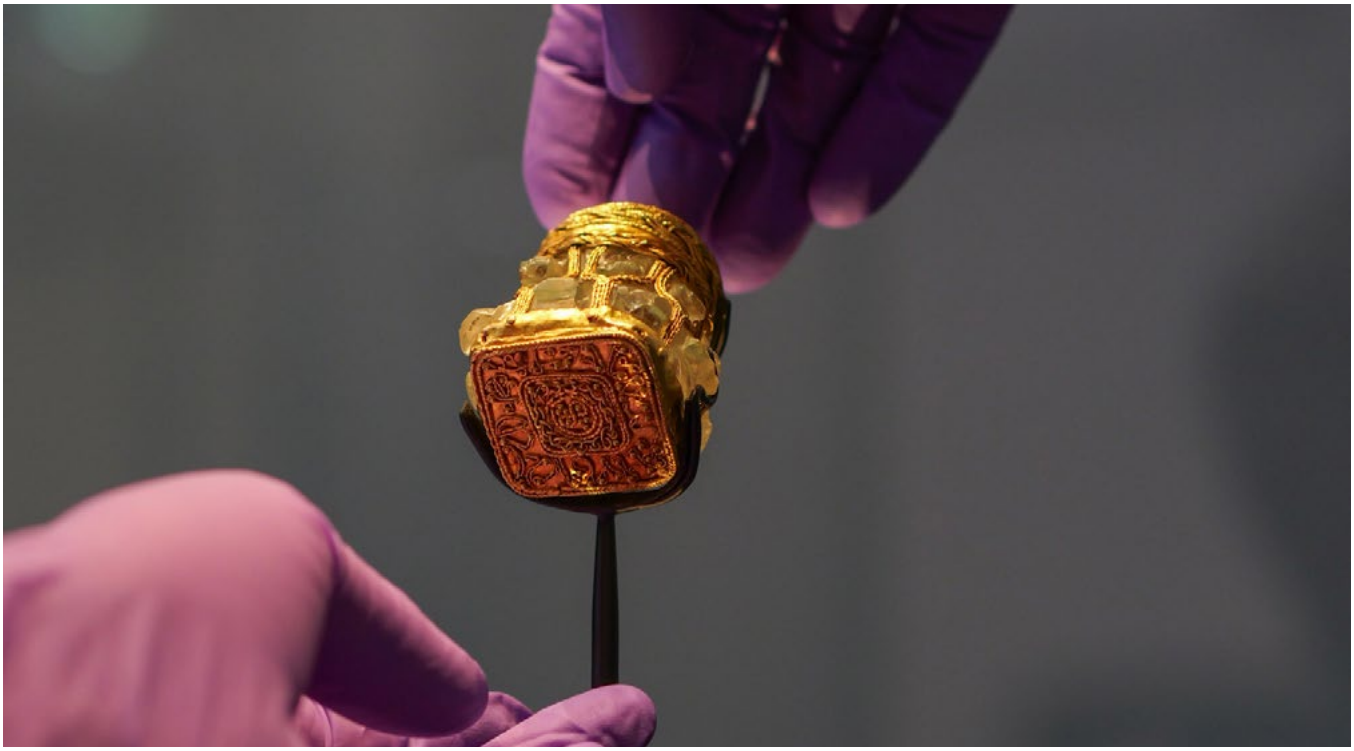
LOANS

Spreading the stories of Scotland

Our collections continued to reveal new knowledge and inspire research and ideas about our shared history and the world around us

Two rare pistols were reunited through a loan to Montrose Museum's *Tartan & Turmoil: The Angus Jacobite Story* exhibition. The late-17th century weapons probably belonged to a wealthy family in the area at the time when it was known as a Jacobite stronghold. The loan was supported by Postcode Lottery players.





A Highlight Loan of a gold and rock crystal jar from the Galloway Hoard went on display for the first time when it was loaned to Kirkcudbright Galleries, near where the hoard was found. The intricately decorated jar bears a Latin inscription that translates as “Bishop Hygauld had me made”. The acquisition of the Hoard was made possible with support from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, Art Fund, National Museums Scotland Charitable Trust and many other generous donors.

Nearly 100 objects from our collection went on display at Orkney Museum, including more than 70 pieces from the Burray Hoard, a pair of bronze ‘tortoise’ brooches and a ring from Orkney’s only gold hoard. Containing more than 140 items of silver, the hoard dates to around 1000 AD.





Roman silver coins from the Birnie Hoard also went on display at the Great North Museum: Hancock in Newcastle as part of the exhibition *Treasures: Hidden, Lost, Found.*

Our Highlight Loan of a silver gilt casket believed to have been owned by Mary, Queen of Scots ended in April after displays at Kirkcudbright Galleries, The Stirling Smith Art Gallery and Museum, and Aberdeen Archives, Gallery and Museums. Almost 72,400 visitors saw the display at the three venues. The acquisition of the casket was made possible with support from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, Art Fund, National Museums Scotland Charitable Trust and other generous donors.

Pieces by fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli were loaned to the V&A for a major exhibition showcasing her innovation and influence. *Schiaparelli: Fashion Becomes Art* included a wool coat, silk evening dress and several hats from our collection.

A horned pony cap made of bronze that was found in a Scottish bog featured in *Celtic Art Across the Ages*, an exhibition at Harvard Art Museums in Massachusetts. The Torrs pony cap is thought to be more than 2,000 years old and was discovered near Castle Douglas in 1812.









NATIONAL MUSEUMS COLLECTION CENTRE

Protecting our shared history

Conservation has ensured that our collections are preserved for generations to come and can be experienced now and in the future by museum visitors and researchers

Around 900 objects ranging from pottery fragments and leather shoes to metal jewellery and fixings were conserved ahead of the major exhibition *Roman Scotland: Life on the Edge of Empire*. Two carved stone altars discovered at Inveresk had broken into fragments during their long burial and underwent extensive conservation to prepare them for display.

As part of the Scotland's Archaeological Human Remains Collections project, funded by an AHRC RICHeS grant, we are enhancing the storage and documentation of human remains in our collection. Remains from more than 30 sites have been transferred to a new facility at the Collection

Centre, making them available for research, while new radiocarbon dating is helping us better understand the people of Scotland's past.





A three-year programme of conservation on the Bronze Age Peebles Hoard revealed an unexpected silver colouring on some of these unique bronze objects. Analysis found this to be the result of high levels of tin, probably a deliberate technique by skilled craftspeople. Conservation of the Peebles Hoard is supported by the National Museums Scotland Charitable Trust, American Foundation for National Museums Scotland, Pilgrim Trust and many more generous individual donors and trusts, including National Museums Scotland Patrons and Members.

A trailer and van to collect natural science specimens was purchased with the support of the Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund. More than 150 mammal specimens have already been collected across Scotland, including cetaceans, primates, birds, beavers and wildcats.

Conservation at the National Museums Collection Centre is supported by Baillie Gifford.





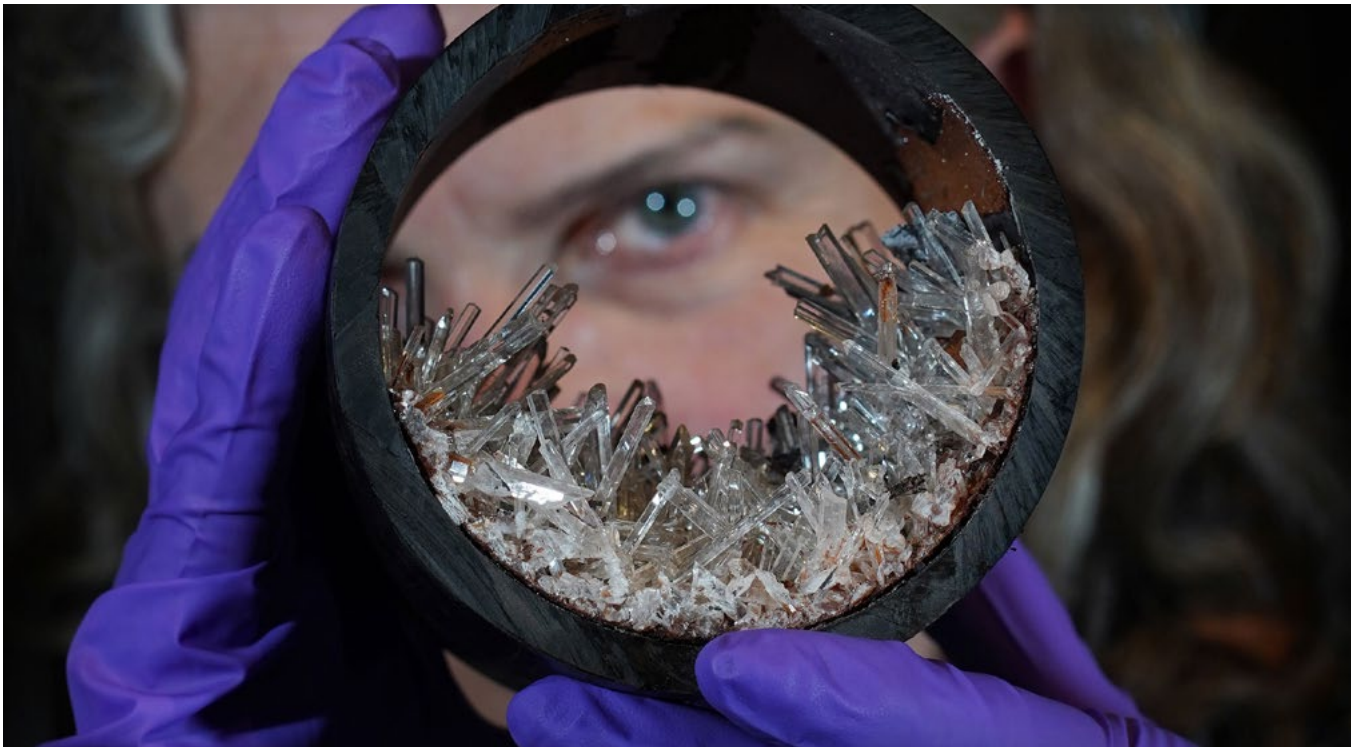
SUSTAINABILITY

Supporting sustainability

Our work has supported action to protect biodiversity and addressed challenges facing the natural world

A major international digitisation project was launched which aims to create approximately 700,000 digital records of specimens in Scotland's natural science collections. Jointly led by National Museums Scotland and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, the initiative will create a network to add Scotland to the Distributed System of Scientific Collections UK (DiSSCo UK). The project will initially run for two years and see approximately 250,000 insects from our collection become digitally accessible to everyone. The records will help researchers track changes in biodiversity through time and deepen our understanding of the natural world.

A team of volunteers cleared encroaching gorse on the Coronation Meadow



at the National Museum of Rural Life to protect the biodiversity on the site. Volunteers carefully removed the bushes, which were then burned in a designated area.

A new display opened at the National Museum of Scotland exploring how the diversity of minerals has increased over time. This includes the imprint humans are leaving on the geological record through activities like mining, waste production and shipping.

Film screenings with accompanying panel discussions, displays and drop-in sessions themed around conservation raised awareness of challenges facing the natural world. *Ash Rise Afternoon* examined Scotland's native ash tree, the challenges of ash die-back and how the material is used in contemporary furniture making. Conservation in Action was an afternoon of short films exploring conservation and environmental stories, held with Edinburgh Communities Climate Action Network and the Edinburgh Conservation Film Festival.



Wild Wings of Hope at the National Museum of Scotland formed part of Black History Month. Launched during the Scottish International Storytelling Festival, it highlighted

the ecological and cultural connections between Scotland and Africa, and included a community access partnership with St Columba's Hospice Care and a workshop with the Royal Entomology Society.

We acquired a selection of objects from MacRebur. The Lockerbie company processes waste plastics otherwise destined for landfill or incineration and adds them to asphalt for roads. This reduces the carbon footprint of road construction, seeks to tackle the global problem of plastic waste and helps to foster a circular economy.

Thank you to our 2026 supporters

We are enormously grateful to every person and organisation who has supported National Museums Scotland this year. Their generosity has made it possible to conserve and research the National Collection, uncovering and sharing the stories that it holds. Their support has also made National Museums Scotland accessible to all through displays, exhibitions and programmes of events and activities, both in person and online.

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† Over the past twelve months we have lost some dear friends and valued supporters of National Museums Scotland. We would like to take this opportunity to recognise the support, advocacy and help over many years of Douglas Home, Elizabeth McKillop and Ian Hamish Leslie-Melville. We thank them for all they have done and the difference they have made to National Museums Scotland.

National Museums Scotland cares for museum collections of international importance, presenting and interpreting them for a broad audience

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National Museum of Scotland
National Museum of Flight
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View our full Annual Report and Accounts at: www.nms.ac.uk/review

A Gaelic language translation of this Review is available at:
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