



Annual Review 2025

WELCOME TO OUR ANNUAL REVIEW



Our museums are places of inspiration. Our spaces, collections and programming inspire curiosity, creativity and learning among our audiences, while our people are inspired to make connections and discoveries through research and partnerships. In our 2025 Annual Review, we are pleased to share with you some of the activity and achievements which have inspired us over the last 12 months.

We welcomed more than 3.2 million visitors across our museums, making this our busiest year on record. We are proud to share the National Collection with such a large and broad audience.

As ever, our work has been incredibly wide-ranging. This year our exhibitions explored the lives of primates and the search for a COVID-19 vaccine, while our acquisitions included two Bronze Age hoards, a calculator used in the first moon landing and the largest freshwater pearl found in modern-day Scotland.

We marked 50 years of the National Museum of Flight with a free weekend, our natural scientists revealed Scotland's earliest recorded and most

complete dinosaur fossil, and we published an online resource telling the Gaelic stories behind some of our objects.

New facilities were installed at the Collection Centre to expand storage capacity and research access for human remains. And we extended the reach of our workshops for schools in areas of multiple deprivation as well as for special and additional support learning schools.

This is just a snapshot of our work in 2025, all of which was made possible thanks to the support we receive from Scottish Government and other funders, donors, patrons, members and volunteers. Thank you to everyone who has supported us over the past year. We wish to extend a particular thanks to our staff, whose commitment, enthusiasm and talent inspire us every day.

Ian Russell CBE

Chairman

Dr Chris Breward

Director

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS



3,220,496

visitors to our four museums, including record breaking years at the National Museum of Scotland and the National Museum of Rural Life

219

volunteers took part in our events, programmes, conservation and curatorial work

131,100 miles

which will be travelled by the new Museum Tram between Newhaven and Edinburgh Airport until summer 2027

390

objects went out on loan to 21 venues in Scotland and around the world

58 grants worth £187,702

from the National Fund for Acquisitions to develop and enhance 5 museum collections across Scotland

134

museums across Scotland supported through training, loans, acquisitions, grants and projects

Telling new stories



Our exhibitions brought visitors face to face with endangered species and revealed uniquely Scottish experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic

Monkeys: Our Primate Family opened at the National Museum of Scotland in June 2025, exploring the lives of our closest animal relatives and examining how they have adapted to survive in different habitats.

As well as bringing visitors face to face with some of the most endangered primates through more than 50 taxidermy specimens, it revealed ongoing conservation efforts to protect species around the world.

The exhibition was first held at the Museum in 2016 and has since been seen by more than half a million people in six countries including Finland, Australia and Spain.

“I found it very interesting. All the facts about primates amazed me.”
Iris, age 11

Injecting Hope: The Race for a COVID-19 Vaccine presented the science behind the search for a COVID-19 vaccine.

Through more than 80 objects acquired during the peak of the pandemic, it told the story of the rapid research, development and delivery of the medication.



The exhibition shared uniquely Scottish experiences, including voices from the African diaspora in Glasgow on vaccine hesitancy in the community.

Injecting Hope, which ran from January to April 2025, was part of an international tour presented by the Science Museum Group.

The Lewis chess pieces were redisplayed in October to allow visitors to see the iconic objects in full. Ten of the medieval gaming pieces were given a new case, allowing their backs to be viewed for the first time.

The chess pieces were also given a more prominent position at the entrance to the *Kingdom of the Scots* gallery at the National Museum of Scotland.



Audubon's *Birds of America* continued its tour in the USA when it opened at the Houston Museum of Natural Science in Texas in March. Visitors had the opportunity to see dozens of detailed illustrations from one of the world's

most famous rare books. *Birds of America* by John James Audubon (1785-1851) took 12 years to complete and is celebrated for its dramatic life-sized depictions of every bird species in North America.



Treasures of the Viking Age: The Galloway Hoard took one of the most important archaeological finds of this century to the South Australian Museum in Adelaide.

Running from February to July 2025, the exhibition gave visitors a glimpse into an interconnected medieval world where cultural identities were in flux and material objects signified power, wealth, spirituality and heritage. Work continues to discover more about the Galloway Hoard and on the eve of the opening in Adelaide, a new translation of a runic inscription

found on one of the silver arm rings was revealed. The writing had been undeciphered but researchers studying the hoard now believe it means: “This is the community’s wealth/property.”

Collecting the past and present



From ancient hoards to marvels from the natural world, our acquisitions ensure we continue to preserve Scotland's history

Two Bronze Age hoards discovered in Scotland were acquired for the nation. The Peebles Hoard dates to 1000-800 BC and contains more than 500 unusual bronze and organic pieces and components. Some of the material has no archaeological parallel in western Europe and could transform our understanding of life in Bronze Age Scotland. A fundraising campaign has been launched to support the costs of conserving the hoard.



The Carnoustie Hoard includes a bronze sword and spearhead wrapped in different organic materials. The sword was discovered in its hazelwood scabbard and the long spearhead has a decorated gold collar – a rare feature for this period. A bronze pin and mount were also found with the weapons. The hoard will go on display in the exhibition *Scotland's First Warriors*, which opens in June.

The largest pearl found in modern-day Scotland went on display at the National Museum of Scotland after being donated to our collection. The Abernethy Pearl was discovered near the River Tay in Perthshire in 1967 and spent decades in the window of a jeweller's shop in Perth. Its 11mm size, perfectly spherical shape and beautiful colour all make it an incredibly rare example. The pearl was bought by retired jeweller Alistir Wood Tait, who donated it to our Natural Sciences collection.



A collection of 26 pieces by the contemporary jeweller Peter Chang (1944-2017) was donated by his partner and wife, Barbara Santos-Shaw Chang and their sons from her personal collection. Once called the “Faberge of the 21st century”, Chang’s work included brightly coloured and flamboyant pieces created from waste plastic.



The National Museum of Rural Life welcomed three new Highland calves at the historic working farm. Male twins Arran and Harris and female calf Iona were born to mothers Ceo and Airgead and father Lewis.



A calculator used by a Scottish scientist to help NASA achieve the first manned moon landing was donated to us. The Facit Model LX machine belonged to Archie Roy (1924-2012), Professor of Astronomy at the University of Glasgow. He worked as a consultant on trajectory calculations for the series of lunar operations that culminated in the Apollo 11 mission that landed Neil Armstrong's crew on the moon in 1969.



Flying high for 50 years



The National Museum of Flight this year celebrated five decades of sharing Scotland's aviation history

On 7 July, the National Museum of Flight marked its 50th anniversary, a landmark moment in the site's journey from a First World War airfield to the home of aviation history in Scotland.

A free weekend of special events was held to celebrate the milestone, offering visitors the chance to see the aircraft on display and explore their stories through expert talks and tours.



The Museum's inception followed the donation of a Supermarine Spitfire in 1971. Unsuitable for display in Edinburgh, it was housed at the former RAF airbase in East Fortune and, after the donation of more aircraft, the Museum opened its doors in 1975.

During its anniversary year, research has uncovered surprising new details of the airfield's past, revealing two air assaults on East Fortune that were kept secret during the Second World War. A handwritten note on an archived document led curators to discover how three bombs were dropped on the airfield in November 1940. Almost a year later, in October 1941, enemy gunners attacked the site from the air. No casualties were recorded.



To help visitors learn more about the site and the collection, audio tours were launched in October 2024. Monthly *Relaxed Mornings* were also held for people who prefer a calmer visit to the museum.

Our popular *Awesome Bricks* event returned in June for a weekend of hands-on LEGO® fun. Other events included a weekend of code-breaking activities supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery, *360 Fest* which celebrated all things circular with cycle stunts and circus displays, and *Sustainable Skies*, which explored the future of sustainable air travel as part of the Edinburgh Science Festival.



“We always enjoy our visits to the National Museum of Flight but this was another level of fun.”

A visitor to 360 Fest

In November and December, Tyne and Esk Writers ran workshops with writer Eleanor Thom for around 150 primary school pupils. Participants learned about artefacts from the Second World War then wrote poems about what the objects meant to them.

More children have been able to experience the National Museum of Flight thanks to the trial of a free school transport service. The initiative has been funded by a donation from Iain Bartholomew, a volunteer at the Museum, to tackle the financial barriers faced by schools in more deprived areas.



Open to everyone



Our museums are for everyone and our work has helped communities across Scotland engage and connect with objects and the stories they hold

To enable more visitors to enjoy our *Game On* exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland, an accessible evening was held in partnership with RNIB Scotland and Triple Tap Tech. Visually impaired audiences were also supported with a visit to the Museum by a group from Forth Valley Sensory Centre as well as through outreach sessions.

Injecting Hope: The Deaf Experience saw us working with members of the D/deaf community to create a film featuring their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Funded by the Science Museum Group and the Wellcome Trust, it was screened at the National Museum of Scotland and as part of the 2025 Edinburgh Deaf Festival.



Our Community Engagement team ran a new programme of *Museum Pick Me Up* sessions in the Edinburgh Children's Hospital, bringing real and replica artefacts to patients.

During Scottish Archaeology Month, sensory tours of the *Scotland Galleries* at the National Museum of Scotland were designed by dance artist Aleena Ageeva, using movement, touch, sound and smell to explore the spaces.

A celebration at the National Museum of Scotland marked the culmination of a project with the Multicultural Family Base. Funded through the City of Edinburgh Council's Edinburgh 900 – Forever Edinburgh programme, the initiative saw us working with adults to create outfits inspired by our collections, as well as their own heritage.

“A deeply transformative experience which gave me the space to express my creativity while voicing the societal and personal struggles I often kept inside.”

Project participant



The National Museum of Scotland hosted the awards ceremony for *Films of Scotland* – delivered in partnership with the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive, Scottish Youth Film Foundation and VisitScotland – which celebrated films made by young people in response to our collections.



The Edinburgh International Children's Festival opened with a free Family Day of pop-up performances, activities and artist installations at the National Museum of Scotland. There was music and dancing in the Grand Gallery on New Year's Day for *Sprogmanay* and at the *Museum Late*, which saw over 1600 people taking part in ceilidhs over two evenings.

“A real insight into rural life which brought pupils into a world they would never have experienced otherwise. This brought much excitement and a chance to learn outdoors and come face to face with animals and nature.”

P2/3 teacher

In a new initiative, we made 20 per cent of the schools workshops across our museums free for schools in areas of multiple deprivation as well as special and additional support learning schools. Workshops included a butter-making session at the National Museum of Rural Life in which participants discovered where milk, cream and butter come from, learned about the history of butter making then churned and tasted their own butter. Afterwards, they took the Farm Explorer tractor-trailer to meet the animals on the farm.

Sharing our history



Through loans to other organisations, the National Collection has reached wider audiences throughout Scotland and beyond

Objects recovered from a 250-year-old burial on Arnish Moor in Lewis were loaned to the island's Kinloch Historical Society for the exhibition *Arnish Moor Man* in March 2025. The exceptionally well-preserved knitted bonnet and personal belongings were found with the remains of a young man who had suffered a fracture to the back of his head – indicating he may have been murdered. His identity is still unknown, but his belongings provide a rare insight into life in the Outer Hebrides in the early 1700s.

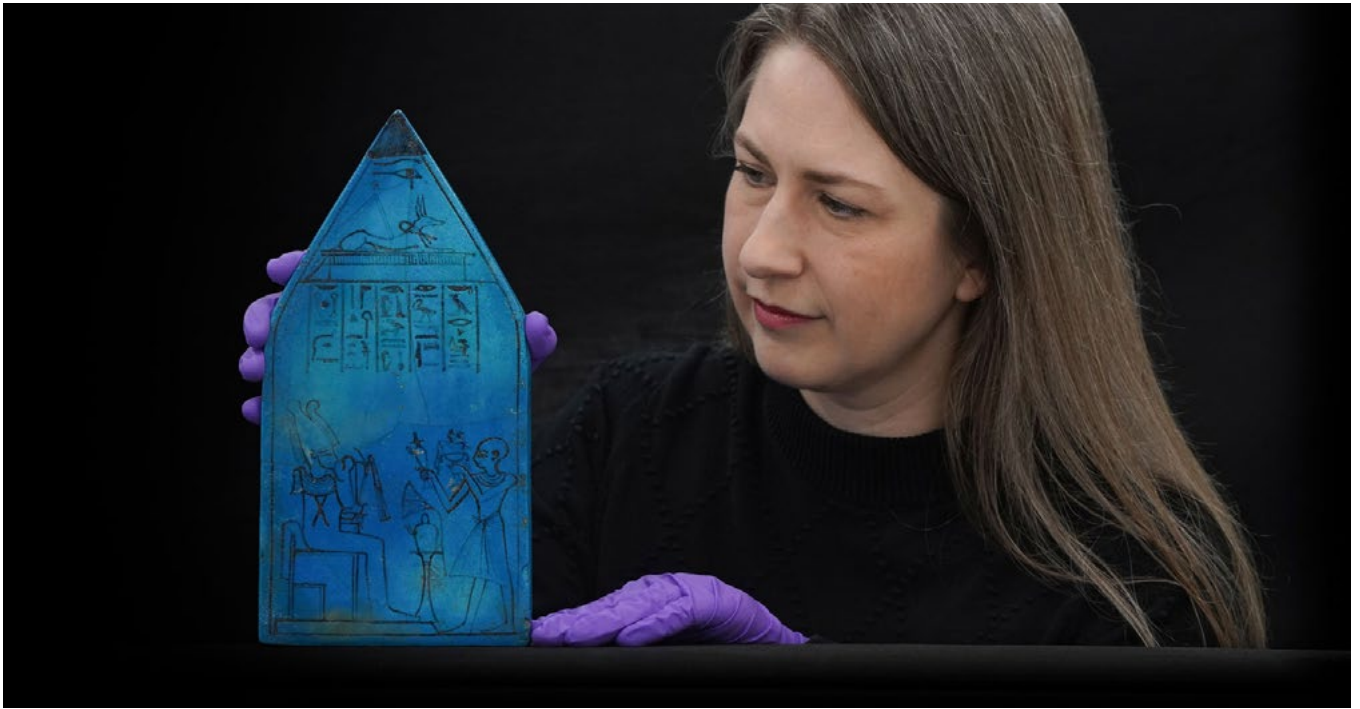


An intricate silver pocket watch given by James VI to one of his favourites, Robert Ker, first Earl of Somerset, was among the objects loaned to the exhibition *The World of King James VI & I* at the National Galleries Scotland: Portrait. The exhibition marked the 400th anniversary of James's

death and charted his remarkable reign through stories of friendship, family, feuds and ambition.

A 350-year-old Iranian tile panel was loaned to V&A Dundee following extensive conservation work to reveal more of its original design. Made of 114 tiles, the panel is thought to have originally been placed in a bathhouse at a royal palace in Isfahan. The conservation project, supported by Art Fund, involved dismantling the 4.5m-wide panel to understand historical restoration work before reassembling it. It was displayed in the exhibition *Garden Futures: Designing with Nature*. Textile Conservation Intern Yubi Coates, whose position is funded by Leslie B Durst and the Clothworkers' Company, also prepared a large Turkish kilim for loan to the exhibition.





An ancient Egyptian stela was loaned to the Young V&A in London for display in the children's exhibition *Making Egypt*. Dating to around 1295-1186 BC, the decorated monument, was created in faience, which evokes the semi-precious stone lapis lazuli, a favourite among the pharaohs.

The Whithorn Crozier, a late 12th century gilt bronze staff, was loaned to the Whithorn Trust in Dumfries. Croziers were used as a symbol of bishops and abbots and were buried alongside those who held important clerical offices. The Whithorn Crozier was discovered during excavations of the Whithorn Priory bishops' graves.



Inspiring each other



Our work with other organisations in the sector has allowed us to share skills and expertise and helped reveal more stories about collections in Scotland

A national review was published exploring African and Caribbean collections in museums in Scotland and highlighting some of the objects and stories they hold. Nearly 25,000 objects were identified during the 15-month *Reveal and Connect* project, which involved 32 collections and objects from at least 70 countries. The review increased understanding of



the colonial and imperial histories and legacies of these collections. Funded by Museums Galleries Scotland, *Reveal and Connect* was led by National Museums Scotland, Glasgow Life Museums, The Hunterian – University of Glasgow and University of Aberdeen Collections.

“Whenever I attend a National Museums Scotland workshop, I always feel part of a Scottish museum community. This is really invaluable as someone who is still at the start of her career.”

Communities and Crowds, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, is a collaboration between National Museums Scotland, the National Science and Media Museum in Bradford, the Zooniverse teams at the University of Oxford and the Adler Planetarium in Chicago. The project tested hybrid volunteering approaches in collections digitisation, working with local volunteers and the online volunteering community to digitise photographs and provide enriched data.



The National Fund for Acquisitions awarded 58 grants totalling £187,702 to 25 organisations to develop their collections with objects worth £451,700. A further eight grants worth £33,918 were allocated.

Three octagonal silver casters were acquired by Museums and Galleries Edinburgh thanks to a grant of £4,050. The set was made in 1728 by Edinburgh goldsmith Edward Penman (1679-1729).





The Hunterian in Glasgow acquired a 17th century oil painting by Dutch artist Pieter Gerritsz van Roestraten with a grant of £6,990. A *Still Life with Shells and Lizard in a Jar of Spirits* was bought from the artist in the 1690s by Robert Kerr, 4th Earl and 1st Marquis of Lothian.

Dundee Heritage Trust received a grant of £1,100 to acquire an original silver gelatin photograph of the first ascent of Mount Erebus on Ross Island, Antarctica's second-highest volcano. The image was taken by geologist Douglas Mawson in 1908 during the British Antarctic Expedition led by Ernest Shackleton.



Following the publication of the *Treasure Trove Review Report*, we signed a memorandum of understanding with the King's and Lord Treasurer's

Remembrancer regarding the operation of the Treasure Trove Unit (TTU), which is the first port of call for new archaeological finds. Following on from the review, the TTU is streamlining processes and improving engagement with finders and museums.

Through our National Training Programme we delivered 17 events, providing 355 learning experiences to staff and volunteers in 92 museums across Scotland. A new strand in our programme is responding to the sector's increasing engagement with the challenges of environmental sustainability, biodiversity and climate change. Sessions were delivered on topics including enhancing biodiversity at museum sites and engaging communities in conversations about climate change and creative climate action.

Global connections



Our objects hold stories from around the world and working with the communities linked to them deepens cultural understanding and strengthens relationships

The UK premiere of *Faovale Imperium*, part of the Edinburgh Art Festival, was held in the Facing the Sea gallery at the National Museum of Scotland in August 2024. Performed by New Zealand/Samoan comedian James Nokise and DJ Don Luchito, the show was a contemporary response to the colonial histories of the Pacific collections.

“Having events like this in the space and with the collection reminds us that there are always more stories to discover, and a different perspective to understand.”

Audience member

Indigenous items from the Americas collections were among objects featured in *Cianlas’s Dòchas I Homesickness and Hope – Stories of Hebridean Emigration* at Museum nan Eilean in Lewis and Benbecula. The loans were supported by the Weston Loan Programme with Art Fund.



In October 2024, a delegation from Uganda National Museums visited the National Museum of Scotland and the National Museums Collection Centre. The reciprocal visit was funded by the World Bank to support the redevelopment of Uganda National Museums. The delegation learned about our approach to conservation, display, research and digitisation while we learned more about our Uganda collections.



An installation by Scottish-Nigerian artist and printmaker Nkem Okwechime launched in August 2025 as part of the Edinburgh Art Festival. *Okolo*, which was part-funded by Creative Scotland, explored the intersection of European and West African identity and featured artwork based on observations and inspiration from visits to the National Museums Collection Centre. Okwechime has also worked with groups of young people from surrounding community groups to co-create responses to the collection.

Following a two-year research project exploring the making of shu, a woollen fabric characteristic of the Chitral region of northern Pakistan, an ankle-length shoka garment and a series of samples showing the production process were acquired for the collection. The project, funded by the Endangered Material Knowledge Programme, explored the effect of climate change on Chitrali culture and crafts.



Indigenous Australian artist Judy Watson's *standing stones, gumbi gumbi*, stone tool (2020), was acquired for our collection with the support of the National Museums Scotland Charitable Trust and is now on display in the Living Lands gallery at the National Museum of Scotland. It is part of a body of work created in response to research trips Watson undertook to British sites of prehistoric significance, including the Ring of Brodgar in Orkney, as well as visits to First Australian cultural artefacts in UK museums.



Uncovering new knowledge



Research inspired by our collections and involving our objects has expanded our knowledge of the world and pioneered new scientific techniques

Information about life in Scotland millions of years ago was revealed in a series of research projects, including the extraction of Scotland's earliest recorded and most complete dinosaur fossil from a shoreline in Skye. Researchers believe it is an ornithomimid dinosaur that lived around 166 million years ago.

The life story of a celebrity chimp was revealed in the first comprehensive osteobiography of a zoo animal – a cutting-edge scientific method that analyses bones and tissue. Western



chimpanzee Choppers starred in the PG Tips advertising campaign in the 1970s after being rescued from poachers in Sierra Leone. She spent more than 40 years at Twycross Zoo and the combination of archival material about her life and osteobiographical analysis provided the most complete assessment of the life of an animal in zoo care.

A study looking at a fossil found in Greenland revealed how some of the first mammals evolved and spread around the world. The fossil was a mouse-sized animal that ate insects, and analysis of its teeth showed how the earliest mammals may have evolved more complex tooth shapes, which later helped them diversify.

A new book by Dr Godfrey Evans, Principal Curator of European Decorative Arts, tells the story of Scotland's lost treasure house, Hamilton Palace, and the incredible objects it once contained. *Hamilton Palace: The Dukes of Hamilton and their Collections*, which was supported by Sir Angus Grossart CBE, explores the history of the now-lost building and examines the world-class artworks it housed, which are now in museum collections around the world. These include the Hamilton-Rothschild tazza and a tea service made for Napoleon, which are now in our collection.

Scotland's oldest known bagpipe chanter, a horn spoon collected by an Austrian aristocrat and a medieval rock crystal charmstone are among 15 objects in our collection which have been published in a new bilingual online resource which tells the Gaelic stories behind them. The stories are the product of a research project, *Tha sgeul ri innse (there's a story for the*





telling), which has led to more than 100 object records being revised to better reflect their connections to the people, places and language of their origin. The project is led by National Museums Scotland in collaboration with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture, and funded by Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Community partners have included Comunn Eachdraich Nis and Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn.

Do Not Feed The Animals, funded by the Wellcome Trust and led by the University of Exeter in collaboration with National Museums Scotland and the universities of Reading and Roehampton, came to an end in January with a celebratory conference where project partners presented the results of their research. The project investigated why people like to feed animals and what effect that feeding has. Our collection was used in a variety of studies including comparisons of the effects of different diets on wild and captive big cats and chimpanzees as well as urban and rural red foxes.



Care and conservation



Our collection is cared for and researched at the National Museums Collection Centre

Two rare, painted silk banners which were donated to us underwent a pioneering conservation treatment. Conservators worked with a paper-like material placed underneath the 200-year-old banners to draw water and dirt away from them. The banners are decorated with the insignia of the



Wrights and Masons of the Incorporated Trades of Edinburgh, which was founded in 1475 and still exists today. The 400-hour conservation project was supported by the United Incorporation of St Mary's Chapel and Mr and Mrs H B Field.

A dedicated curator has been appointed to our Biobank, thanks to the support of the Negaunee Foundation. Our frozen tissue collection contains more than 10,000 samples from animal specimens donated to our collections and each sample holds a wealth of genetic information that can be used to facilitate fundamental scientific research and support conservation management.



As part of Scotland's Archaeological Human Remains Collections project, funded by an AHRC RICHeS grant, new facilities were installed at the Collection Centre to expand storage capacity for human remains. This will allow remains to be transferred from Historic Environment Scotland, making them more accessible for study. New equipment, including state-of-the-art 3D scanners will increase our capacity to analyse, sample and record human remains and accommodate more research.





A new cargo bike based at the National Museums Collection Centre was introduced to bring hands-on learning and cultural experiences directly to communities across Edinburgh. It is enabling us to deliver accessible creative workshops and interactive object handling sessions with local communities. The bike is completely electric, generating low carbon emissions in its outreach. The project is funded in part by the Edinburgh Airport Community Fund.

A greener tomorrow



We are committed to reaching net zero carbon and strengthening our position as a resource for understanding climate and biodiversity challenges

By 2027, we aim to be well advanced on the path to net zero carbon and we are working to improve sustainability across all our activities. The carbon footprint of our website has been reduced by using modern image formats, reduced font files and minimised code, and now includes a carbon calculator.

Our Colleague Survey on *Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss* revealed an increase in environmentally conscious workplace behaviours and a rise in colleagues choosing lower environmental impact options for business travel. Carbon budgets have been set for travel for each department and a new Travel and



Subsistence Policy has reduced the environmental impact of staff travel.

We are sharing our experience of the path to net zero with sector colleagues. *Carbon Management and Net Zero Planning* was a sector event outlining our approach to reaching net zero, including lessons learned and advice on how participants could engage with this work in their own museum.

Enhancing Biodiversity at Museum Sites explored how we are developing the grounds at the National Museums Collection Centre to foster biodiversity. Surveys have recorded more than 300 plant and animal species at the site and through a partnership this year with Granton Castle Walled Garden, we have built and placed bird nesting boxes to encourage greater biodiversity.



Two public programmes, *Sewing Hope* and *the Agency for World Change Agreements*, helped people engage with the climate emergency and encouraged them to take action creatively. More than 5,000 people took part in the projects, supported by the Scottish Government Climate Engagement Fund and produced as part of Climate Change for All. An online event, *Making Space for Creative Climate Action*, shared learning from the projects.



Collecting Environmental Change was a one-day symposium at the National Museum of Scotland that explored how museums are developing collections and exhibitions that represent the impacts of, and responses to, environmental change.



Events held to mark *Insect Week* included a talk on women in entomology and two family events; *Marvellous Moths* at the National Museum of Scotland and *Moth Hunters* at the National Museum of Flight.

THANK YOU TO OUR 2025 SUPPORTERS

We are enormously grateful to every person and organisation who has supported our work this year. Their generosity has made it possible to conserve and research the National Collection, uncovering and sharing the stories 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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