

# NATHIST 2017 President's Report

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October 2017

It gives me great pleasure to present the 2017 President's report for NATHIST. As usual, it has been a busy year, with a wide variety of accomplishments across our membership and through its industry partners.

## *A new look*

In this year, we present the new logo for NATHIST, which was developed by the Secretariat. While we were sorry to lose the salamander emblem that has been with us for over a decade, it has the advantage that it assists in building the visual identity of ICOM. While many historical documents will continue to use the old brand, until they are updated, all new material will incorporate the refreshed identity.

## *The Anthropocene*

The Anthropocene is a term for the concept that humans have had such a profound impact on the Earth and that that impact will be present in the geological record millions of years from now. As well as having strong scientific underpinnings, it has also resonated strongly with artists, historians and sociologists. The breadth of this idea presents a multitude of opportunities for natural history museums, as the strength of this year's conference presentations demonstrates. It is a term that will be increasingly important to our sector and, in response, we are in the beginning stages of establishing an Anthropocene Working Group, headed by Dr. Emlyn Koster, Director of the North Carolina Museum of Nature and Science and a co-opted Board member of NATHIST.

## *Progress in 2016/2017*

This year, we've updated the look and feel our main website <http://icom-nathist.org/>, focusing on readability. It's also the first time that we have had a dedicated conference website. Both have been extremely popular, have (as of October 10, 2017) been responsible for an increase in overall website hits of 39% over 2016 and 46% over 2015. This enormous increase in visitation is reflective of a far greater geographical reach in the activities of NATHIST, especially in the United States which has not historically seen our strongest participation.

## *Conferences*

The NATHIST 2016 conference was held in Milan, Italy, as part of the ICOM Triennial General Assembly. The theme of the conference was *Natural History Museums in Cultural Landscapes*. A special note of thanks goes to Dr. Isabel Landim, Vice President of NATHIST, for organizing the symposium schedule. As part of the conference NATHIST joined with members of UMAC (University Museums) to hold a symposium on display of human remains. This was held at the Lomobroso Museum of Criminal Anatomy in Turin. At the conference, the Board presented the *Draft ICOM NATHIST Conference Planning Handbook*, which will be put up for formal ratification by the membership at the 2017 AGM.

In October, I represented the Wildlife Trafficking working group by launching the white paper *Natural History Museums and Wildlife Trafficking: A Framework for Global Action*. It was announced at the

annual conference of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) conference in Puebla, Mexico, building on the relationship founded by the memorandum of understanding between NATHIST and WAZA.

I was also a keynote speaker at the annual conference of the Society for Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC), introducing NATHIST to their constancy in light of our recent memorandum of understanding. The talk, “SPNHC and ICOM NATHIST: Potentials for Partnership” generated considerable interest in cross-pollination, including the suggestion for a joint conference in Edinburgh in 2020.

### *Projects*

Website consolidation: This year, we retired the websites of the Wildlife Trafficking Working Group and the Ethics Working Group, condensing the news and resources to the main site, in an effort to streamline communication efforts. As part of this activity, we migrated the resources from the satellite websites the main site.

Archive project: We continue to add to the archives of NATHIST, which now stretch back to the very first newsletter in 1978. As time allows, we are creating PDF newsletters out of web content that has appeared on our various sites, as well as news and meeting content that appeared in various formats. Between now and the end of 2018 we intend to reformat the newsletter, incorporating the new branding provided by ICOM. The archive is available on the NATHIST website at this link <https://icomnathist.wordpress.com/archive/>

Platform 2022: We are delighted that the National Taiwan Museum in Taipei has taken over the running of this project and have begun their stewardship with a new dedicated website and increased capacity. The goals of the project have not changed, to promote natural history museums in conversations about sustainable development, and to engage people in activities that foster a deeper connection with nature. This development was commensurate with, and complementary to, the co-adoption of Mr. Shih-yu Hung, the new Director of the National Taiwan Museum, as an interim member of the NATHIST Board, until formal Board elections in 2019.

*The Future of Natural History Museums*: This book, published in partnership with ICOM and Routledge Press, was the result of two conferences. In 2014, we met in Zagreb, Croatia, with the theme “The Future of Natural History Museums” and in Taipei, Taiwan, with the theme “Natural History Museums: Building Our Future.” The first of these two explored the state of the industry, along with attendant philosophical underpinnings of best practice.

In the second, we explored challenges, and the tools that represent solutions. The aim of *The Future of Natural History Museums* is to develop a cohesive discourse that balances the disparate issues that natural history institutions will face over the next twenty to fifty years. In the book, thinkers from around the world, in a range of museums from the largest and most famous institutions to smaller and more nimble ones, will focus on their specialisms, providing their unique perspectives on a comprehensive range of issues.

The book disassembles the topic into various key elements and, through commentary and synthesis, explores a cohesive prediction for the direction of the natural history museum sector. The goal in using this structure is to provide sufficient scope for detailed exploration of key topics from expert voices,

while including overarching perspectives and the chance to combine these elements into a connected whole.

It will launch during the conference and include a panel of some of the authors. All conference attendees are welcome and a copy of the book has been generously provided by ICOM, as part of registration.

### *Looking to the future*

This book, as well as the theme of our conference, point to how much there is still to determine about our operating context and its changes over the next decades. That our climate is indeed becoming increasingly unstable, is evidenced by weather patterns this last season in the United States. Technology is accelerating and the combination of robotics, artificial intelligence and social media create questions not only of visitor expectations but privacy and security. Meanwhile, the fact that museums are visited by 108M people a year<sup>1</sup>, mean that our audience is there and ready to be engaged, and will increasingly seek answers from us. The future of our industry is linked to the future planet and our role has never been more important.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> TEA/AECOM 2016 Theme Index and Museum Index: The Global Attractions Attendance Report