

Press conference on the anniversary exhibition “Good Collecting – Bad Collecting. 150 years of the Natural History Museum Vienna”

The 150th anniversary is an occasion for the Natural History Museum Vienna to take a critical look back at its own history. The desire to collect and the joy of discovering and exploring, which still drives scientists to this day, contrast with the dark sides of collecting and the collections. This resulted in an exhibition that breaks with the usual viewing habits.

On **Tuesday, 28 April 2026**

Location: **Lecture hall of the NHM Vienna**, Maria-Theresien-Platz, 1010 Vienna

Entry: from 10 a.m., start: **10.30 a.m.**

[Translated by eTranslation]

Opening remarks

Dr. Katrin Vohland, Director General and Scientific Director, NHM Vienna

Speakers & Guided tour of the exhibition

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Mathias Harzhauser, Director of the Geological-Paleontological Department

DDr. Martin Krenn, Director of the Archive for the History of Science

Dr. Anna E. Weinmann, Curator of Micropaleontology, Geological and Paleontological Department

Mag. Agnes Mair, Department of Science Communication

and

Martin Schnabl, MA & Benedikt Haid, MA, Exhibition Design, Implementation & Graphics,
breadedEscalope

About the exhibition

On 29 April 1876 Emperor Franz Joseph I founded the Natural History Museum Vienna in the legal sense with his signature, on 30 April 1876 he appointed the geologist Ferdinand von Hochstetter as his first artistic director. At that time, the building of the museum on Vienna's Ringstraße was already under construction – in August 1889 it finally came to the ceremonial opening.

Today, with more than 30 million objects, the house houses one of the most important natural science collections in the world. The NHM Vienna is a unique archive for the origin and development of the earth and life. It documents the history and structure of our planet, shows the diversity of life on Earth and provides insight into human development. Like no other natural history museum, it explores the entire spectrum of nature in the past and present using biological, geological, paleontological, mineralogical, anthropological, prehistoric and cultural-historical objects.

The 150th anniversary is now the occasion for the NHM Vienna to take a critical look back at its own history. The desire to collect and the joy of discovering and exploring, which still drives scientists to this day, contrast with the dark sides of collecting and the collections.

Some objects seem janus-headed, because they are scientifically unique and at the same time burdened by their problematic acquisition context. Were the famous 19th century expeditions an honourable attempt to increase knowledge and attract exotic objects to the imperial collections – or was a colonial agenda the real motivation? How were objects that came to the house illegally during the Nazi period dealt with and how are pieces that came into the collections in an ethically questionable way to be evaluated? Depending on the point of view, an object acts as a sober carrier of scientific information or as a manifestation of questionable collection methods. Depending on the perspective, a collection object is both materially valuable and of little scientific interest. Conversely, an inconspicuous, tiny insect can be a world unique, the loss of which cannot be offset in money.

This ambivalence, manifested in the NHM Vienna and its collections, is the leitmotif of the exhibition and shapes its architecture and design. The team of designers of breadedEscalope and Benedikt Haid deliberately took unexpected points of view in order to illuminate and contextualize the collections or selected objects in an unusual perspective. This resulted in an exhibition that breaks with the usual viewing habits and expectations and, despite the complex themes, lets the curators feel the intense and often loving connection with 'their' collections. Because it is only through the scientists and the application of new methods that new questions arise that show the importance of the collections for our modern knowledge society.

In the cabinets, the history of the house has been discussed since the first beginnings under Maria Theresa and Franz I. Stephan von Lorraine and iconic moments of the collection are illuminated. From the first collection catalogues to the founding charter of the NHM Vienna signed by Emperor Franz Joseph I and a historical spittoon from one of the showrooms, the arch extends to handprints left by climate adhesives that impressively show the changes that society has undergone over the past 150 years.

Another focal point of the cabinets are the other locations of the NHM Vienna: the Donauauen National Park Institute in Petronell, the Archaeological Research Centre in Hallstatt and the Pathological-Anatomical Collection in the so-called Fool's Tower in Vienna. In the 20th and 21st centuries, artists began to increasingly engage with the museum and its collections, opening up completely new perspectives. From painting and photography to performance and the use of artificial intelligence, the creative spectrum of works will be curated as a separate gallery within the exhibition.

The two main rooms are entirely dedicated to the theme of collecting in its complexity and ambivalence. The grid-shaped arrangement of one hall reflects the idea of structuring and systematizing. The grid nodes are assigned to individual thematic complexes, which show the complexity of the collections in their diversity. The other room gives up this strict structure and, in a literal sense, encourages the change of perspective(s) through some iconic objects.

The digital museum is the end – or the beginning – of the tour. Here, interactive animations project high-resolution 3D models of collection objects and raise the question of whether the digital object can be an adequate substitute for ‘the real’ and what this could mean for the “museum of the future”.

The Natural History Museum by the Numbers

As an additional element, which has been implemented artistically and graphically, the various key figures and annual figures of the NHM Vienna are mentioned.

1889 year of opening
11,354 visitors on the strongest day in the opening year
32,160,000 bricks used in construction
31,045 m² natural stones
34 statues of scientists on the roof (men only!)
64.48 m total height of the building
952 rooms
28 % of the area used for storage of the collection
8,460 m² Area of showrooms
5 basement floors
111 wall paintings on level 1
973,732 visitors 2025
17,905 people on record day 2025
58.4 % visitors from abroad 2025
19 % visitors from Germany
42 % free admission
385 employees in 2025, including 210 women and 175 men
42 people in the visitor service
 Approximately **170** volunteers
52.04 years Average age of department heads
4.64 million emails received in 2025, of which 78.7 % spam
53 people locked out of their account in 2025
 Approximately **30 million** objects in collection
166,500 objects Mineralogy
5,730,000 objects of Paleontology
1.950.000 objects Molluscs, Spiders, Crabs
11,940,000 objects Insects
2,180,000 objects Vertebrates
5,540,000 objects Botany

143,000 objects Anthropology
1,295,000 objects Prehistory
747,500 objects Archive
37,000 objects Tissue Collection
207.171 Digitized objects
100,000 publicly accessible objects
0.005 mm Smallest object, lime algae
27 m Largest object, Diplodocus skeleton
50 tons heaviest object, fin whale
4.4 billion years Oldest object, Jack Hill's zircons
2 grams Smallest mammal, bumblebee bat
67 WC cabins in the main house
22,560 used toilet paper rolls in 2025
80 tons of alcohol for preservation
412 fire extinguishers in the building
160 historical spittoons used to be in the halls
980 trash cans
3,600 different items in the museum shop
26,000 mini toys sold per year
369 kg of tumbled stones are sold per year
Coprolite, fossil "Kacka" as the most oblique shop item
12 % electricity from your own PV system
35.6 % CO2 reduction between 2019 and 2024
2.740.935,58 € Maintenance costs of the building 2024
18 Heads of State in Austria since inauguration
Open **6** days/week

Temple of Knowledge

Originally, the objects of the museum were housed in the Hofburg. The lack of space and fear of fires in the cramped rooms led to the planning of today's museum building. The prominent square on Vienna's Ringstrasse symbolized the high status of science in the monarchy.

The building was designed by the architects Gottfried Semper and Carl Hasenauer in the style of historicism. The magnificent design of the house and its showrooms is inseparably interwoven with the scientific content and the objects shown. The presentation in 39 showrooms follows a scientific system – it has remained basically unchanged to this day.

On August 10, 1889, Emperor Franz Joseph I made the solemn opening of the museum. For the subsequent visit, he took three hours. In a shorter time, a comprehensive visit is hardly possible even today.

The following graphic shows the structural development and floor overview of the Natural History Museum.

Press photos



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Inquiry note

Mag. Irina Kubadinow
Head of Press & Public Relations, Press Spokesperson
Tel.: +43 (1) 521 77-410
irina.kubadinow@nhm.at

Mag. Klara Vakaj
Press officer
Tel.: +43 (1) 521 77-626
klara.vakaj@nhm.at