

The Natural History Renaissance Continues

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We reflect on the progress made toward fomenting a “natural history renaissance,” which we called for in the first article published in this journal— and the important role the journal plays in this renaissance. We then describe changes in the publishing institution for this journal: the Natural History Network has recently closed its operations, but the Natural History Institute is continuing and expanding efforts at providing resources for the rejuvenation of natural history practice, inside and outside academia. The Journal of Natural History Education and Experience will continue to play a key role in this work.

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Eleven years ago, we wrote with both excitement and determination about the need for a “natural history renaissance” (Trombulak and Fleischner 2007). The *determination* came from the recognition that natural history as a practice and a way of engaging with the more than just human world, despite its critical importance (Tewksbury et al. 2014), was in serious jeopardy of being lost from society at large (Louv 2006, Fleischner et al. 2017). The *excitement* came from the launch of a new initiative – the Natural History Network – whose founders (which included the two of us) believed that the creation of a focused community of natural historians from across the spectrum of practices, including art, literature, sciences, and education, could mark a path forward to reversing this decline.

Since its founding in 2007, the Natural History Network launched a number of initiatives to promote that mission, including (1) a series of regional annual gatherings for natural history practitioners, (2) a collaboration with Prescott College and the University of Washington to create four summits, funded by the National Science Foundation, to design strategies for improving the trajectory for natural history’s place within society and the academy, and (3) a compilation of voices about the importance of natural history in society (The Natural Histories Project, <http://naturalhistoriesproject.org/>).

Yet, the most important ongoing initiative of the Network was the launch of an on-line journal, originally called *Journal of Natural History Education* but now

Journal of Natural History Education and Experience. In the language of classical systems theory (Meadows 2008), the decline in natural history as a practice can be seen as a positive feedback loop, where the decline leads to fewer people willing or able to teach it, which leads to further decline and fewer teachers and further decline ... and so on.

To break this spiral, the goal of the journal was to provide a venue for natural history educators to share their experiences and approaches to introducing their students to ways of engaging with natural history in its deepest sense: “a practice of intentional, focused attentiveness and receptivity ... guided by honesty and accuracy” (Fleischner 2001). The mission of the journal says it all: “to foster a renaissance in natural history education and appreciation by providing a forum for disseminating information on views on the place of natural history in society and techniques, curricula, and pedagogy for natural history education at all levels: K-12, undergraduate, graduate, and general public.”

We write this essay from positions of direct engagement with the journal; one of us (SCT) has been its editor since its inception, and one of us (TLF) served as the founding president of the Network. Our goal for the journal was for it to be available to all – both for reading and for contributing. From its launch with Volume 1 in 2007, the journal has been Open Access to anyone with an internet connection (currently <http://naturalhistoryinstitute.org/journal-of-natural-history-education-and-experience/>), with no page

charges to authors for publishing their work. Yet the journal has also committed to the highest professional standards, with all submissions peer-reviewed to ensure that each article is well written, well argued, and of value to the community of natural history practitioners.

Since its launch, the journal has published articles that describe specific educational practices such as educational design principles (Kolan and Poleman 2009, Fleischner et al. 2013), use of field notebooks (Farnsworth et al. 2014), how to teach ornithology (Trombulak 2009), how to lead extended field expeditions (Farnsworth and Beatty 2012, Sancho and Bidwell 2014), and the use of field stations (Baldwin 2013).

It has also come to include essays on the history of natural history education (Sanders 2016), the value of on-line courses (Varty and Johnson-Fulton 2017) and museum collections (Haberman 2015), how to organize a regional natural history gathering (Clark and Gilligan 2013), and how storytelling links natural history with traditional ecological knowledge (Tallmadge 2011).

And much more.

The journal also publishes two special series. One is “One Hundred and One Natural History Books That You Should Read Before You Die,” introducing (or re-introducing) readers to historically important texts that should not be lost from our awareness and libraries, such as Charles Darwin’s *The Voyage of the Beagle* (Anderson 2011), Donald Culross Peattie’s *An Almanac for Moderns* (Lloyd 2012), and John Madson’s *Where the Sky Began* (Cagle 2015). The other special series is “Why Practice Natural History?,” brief essays from noted practitioners, including Peter Kahn and Patricia Hasbach (2011), Laura Sewall (2011), Clare Walker Leslie (2011), and Gordon Orians (2013), that argue for the importance of our practice.

The journal is proud of having been a venue that welcomes representation of all perspectives and experiences while privileging none.

Yet change comes to all things. The close of 2017 brought with it the close of the Natural History Network. The community of natural history practitioners owes the Network a great deal of thanks for its efforts to promote a resurgence in appreciation for the importance of natural history.

The importance of the journal, however, remains the same. And we are happy to be able to announce that the *Journal of Natural History Education and Experience* has moved to be under the sponsorship of a new

organization, the Natural History Institute, which shares a lineage with the Network.

The Natural History Institute (www.naturalhistoryinstitute.org) was initially founded in 2012 as a public program of Prescott College, which had been a fertile source of several of the Network’s board members. During five years at the college, the Institute developed a series of public lectures and programs, established an herbarium and other scientific collections, curated a natural history art collection, hosted a National Science Foundation-sponsored working group on the importance of field studies (Fleischner et al. 2017), and initiated a research effort to delineate the Mogollon Highlands Ecoregion.

This past summer, the Natural History Institute fledged and became an independent nonprofit, still based in the Mogollon Highlands. Its mission: “The Natural History Institute provides leadership and resources for a revitalized practice of natural history that integrates art, science, and humanities to promote the health and well-being of humans and the rest of the natural world.” In essence, the NHI attempts to model an integrative approach to natural history and to demonstrate that natural history is not “biology-lite,” but instead is something larger and more comprehensive than science alone. NHI aspires to be a place where art, science, poetry, and philosophy seamlessly meld in a practice of open-minded and open-hearted attentiveness to the world we live in. The Institute offers a template for a more holistic approach to learning, and a pathway toward a more hopeful tactic for addressing environmental and social challenges.

Institute programs, in addition to a robust series of public lectures, workshops, and naturalist training programs, will also include natural history exploration further afield, in such places as México and Ecuador, and *Confluences* – intentional gatherings of people focused on solving particular problems or achieving specific goals. For example, NHI is currently engaged with multiple partners in developing a national meeting on the role of natural history practice (broadly defined) in human health and wellness. And its place-based, and collections-facilitated, research on the Mogollon Highlands continues. The *Journal of Natural History Education and Experience* will continue to provide an essential forum for exchange of ideas and techniques to foster the natural history renaissance described in its first article, eleven years ago.

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