



STRANGE CREATURES

THE ART OF UNKNOWN ANIMALS



16 March to 27 June

Free entry

#strangecreatures

1–5pm, Museum opening hours
Grant Museum of Zoology
Rockefeller Building
21 University Street
London WC1E 6DE

ucl.ac.uk/museums/zoology
[@grantmuseum](https://twitter.com/grantmuseum)



***Strange Creatures: The art of unknown animals* visitor activities evaluation report**

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***Strange Creatures: The art of unknown animals* visitor activities evaluation report**

1. Overview and context

Strange Creatures: the art of unknown animals was an exhibition that brought together 10 researchers from across UCL to explore ideas from their research on animal representation through curated museum displays that used objects from the Grant Museum of Zoology (GMZ)'s collection as well as from other institutions. The exhibition was a response to the display of the George Stubbs painting *The Kongouro from New Holland*, which was on loan to the Museum from the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, as part of a national tour and project called Travellers Tails' funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Art Fund.

Strange Creatures: The art of unknown animals was the largest exhibition the Museum has staged to date, and the events programme was the first time the Museum had run an accompanying programme of events to a temporary exhibition.

This document outlines the findings of the evaluation of the project against the stated aims and outcomes. It is broken down into two sections relating to the visitor activities: the exhibition and the events programme, as outlined in the evaluation plan submitted to the project funders.

The final project report summarising the project and its major outcomes, including key performance indicators and media coverage can be found here:

https://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums/zoology/visit/exhibitions/strange-creatures/strange_creatures_project_report

2. *Strange Creatures: The art of unknown animals* exhibition

2.1 Aims

The aims for the exhibition were broken down for two groups. Firstly **participants** – this group was identified as the UCL researchers that formed the co-curator team, and the Grant Museum of Zoology team. Secondly, the **audience**, which were defined as adult members of the public over 18.

2.1.1 Participants

- To use the loan of the Stubbs painting to facilitate the development of a co-curated exhibition that showcases UCL research
- To provide opportunities for UCL researchers to engage a visitors with their research through a museum exhibition
- To evaluate if a co-curated exhibition and the associated events programme is an effective method of public engagement with research.

2.1.2 Audience

- To reach a new audience, specifically people with an interest in art and its history and art/science
- Visitors will:
 - know that the Grant Museum of Zoology and that it is part of University College London (UCL).
 - appreciate and enjoy how natural history objects have been used to convey ideas about the natural world and our relationship with it today and historically.
 - be aware of the diversity of research that happens at UCL.
 - understand how representation of animals by artists can shape peoples' perceptions of the natural world.
 - have a greater understanding of the role of artists on expeditions and how art can tell us about the past.
 - have engaged in the ideas of discovery, documentation and the natural world and broader links across the collections relating to Cook, exploration, astronomy, the natural world and Australia.

2.2 What happened

Strange Creatures was an exhibition in the Grant Museum which ran from 16th March to 27th June 2015. By examining the world of animal representations, it explored how imagery has been used to bring newly discovered animals into the public eye. Twenty-five displays were developed for the exhibition, plus a trail through the permanent collection linked to extracts from crew's diaries from Captain Cook's *Endeavour* voyage.

Many of the exhibition's displays were developed by palaeontologists and by historians of science, exploration and art from UCL. They investigated the theme of animal representation from the perspective of their own disciplines.

These researchers' stories included medieval accounts of exotic creatures, art from the ages of exploration and empire, sailors who faked "dragon" specimens by manipulating dried fish, contemporary knitted craft taxidermy and twenty-first century reconstructions of dinosaurs based on cutting-edge engineering principles. Together they explored how unknown animals are

communicated to the wider public. The exhibition included a number of animal artworks created by people who had never seen the creature in the flesh.

Strange Creatures centred upon George Stubbs' painting of a kangaroo, loaned from the National Maritime Museum as part of the Travellers' Tales project, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Art Fund.

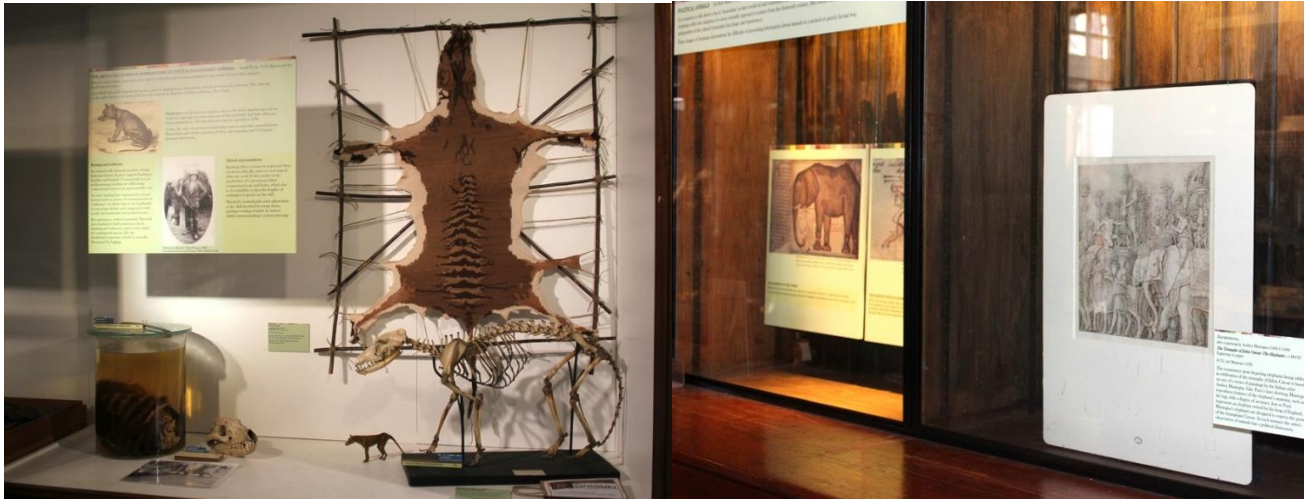


Fig. 1 Displays by exhibition co-curators, PhD student Sarah Wade and Dr. Bob Mills (History of Art Department)

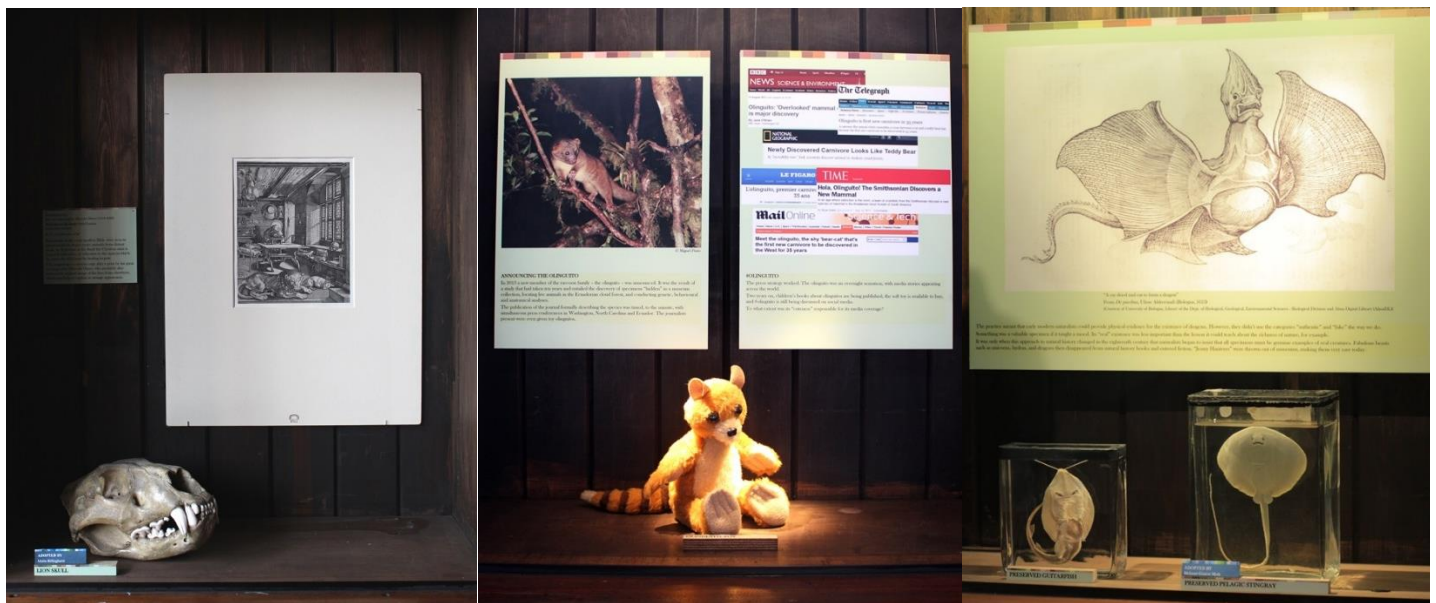


Fig. 2 Displays by exhibition co-curators, Dr. Andrea Fredericksen (UCL Art Museum), Jack Ashby (Grant Museum of Zoology) and Dr. Simon Werrett (Department of Science and Technology Studies).



Fig. 3 Displays of kangaroo specimens from the Grant Museum of Zoology Collection, a volume of Captain Cook's journal from UCL Special Collections and print of Death of Cook from UCL Art Museum.



Fig. 4 Displays by exhibition co-curators, PhD student Misha Ewen (Department of History), Dr. Anjali Goswami and Dr. Andrew Cuff (Department of Genetics, Evolution and Environment) and Professor Margot Finn (Department of History).



Fig. 5 Displays by exhibition co-curators Dr. Chiara Ambrosio (Department of Science and Technology Studies) and Mark Carnall (Grant Museum of Zoology)

2.3 Facts and figures

9570 people visited the exhibition during normal opening hours.

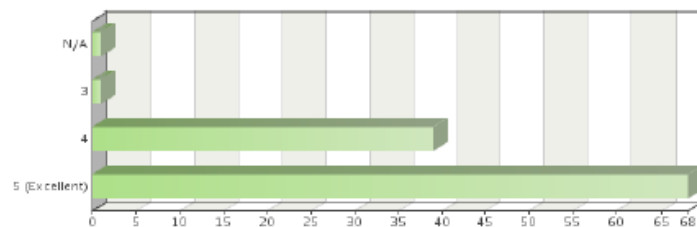
The total cost to mount the exhibition was around **£3300**, for mounting, graphics, set-dressing and image reproduction. The costs associated with the incoming loan of the Stubbs painting were not included as they formed part of the Travellers' Tails project.

10 UCL researchers formed the co-curator team, from **six** different UCL departments including UCL Science and Technology Studies, UCL History of Art, UCL Genetics, Evolution and the Environment, UCL Earth Sciences, UCL Art Museum and UCL History.

2.4 Exhibition audience evaluation themes

The team of Explorer Volunteers carried out 112 scripted interviews with exhibition visitors. The results of the evaluation are based on their responses.

2.4.1 How would you rate your experience of the exhibition?

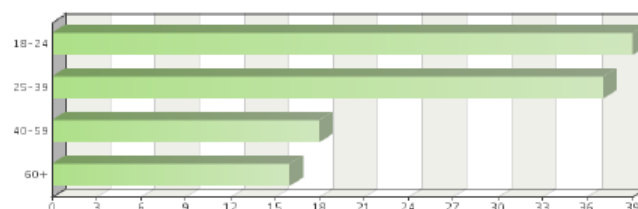


Frequency table

Levels	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency	Adjusted relative frequency
N/A	1	0.89%	0.92%
3	1	0.89%	0.92%
4	39	34.82%	35.78%
5 (Excellent)	68	60.71%	62.39%
Sum:	109	97.32%	100%
Not answered:	3	2.68%	-
Total answered: 109			

2.4.2 Demographics

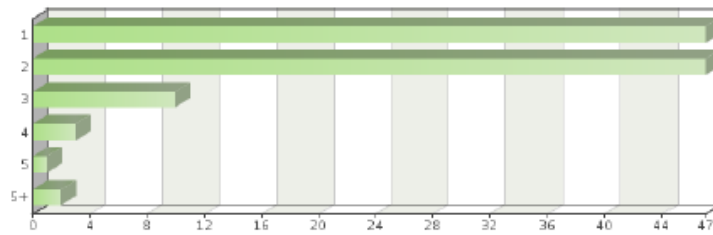
Which age group do you fall into?



Frequency table

Choices	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency	Adjusted relative frequency
18-24	39	34.82%	35.45%
25-39	37	33.04%	33.64%
40-59	18	16.07%	16.36%
60+	16	14.29%	14.55%
Sum:	110	98.21%	100%
Not answered:	2	1.79%	-
Total answered: 110			

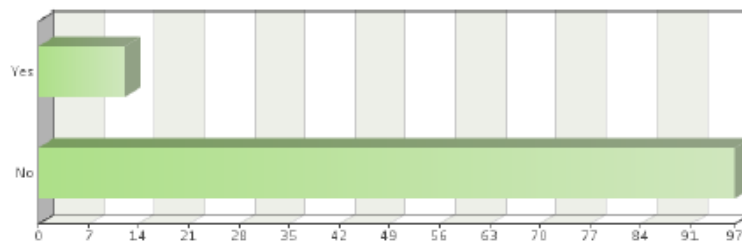
How many are in your group today?



Frequency table

Choices	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency	Adjusted relative frequency
1	47	41.96%	42.73%
2	47	41.96%	42.73%
3	10	8.93%	9.09%
4	3	2.68%	2.73%
5	1	0.89%	0.91%
5+	2	1.79%	1.82%
Sum:	110	98.21%	100%
Not answered:	2	1.79%	-
Total answered: 110			

Are you a UCL member of staff or a student?



Frequency table

Choices	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency	Adjusted relative frequency
Yes	12	10.71%	11.01%
No	97	88.61%	88.99%
Sum:	109	97.32%	100%
Not answered:	3	2.68%	-
Total answered: 109			

2.4.3 Visitor outcomes

Questions in the visitor interviews led by the Explorer Volunteers were designed to provide evidence to demonstrate whether the stated audience outcomes (see 2.1.2) were met. Prior to the exhibition the Museum has not carried out visitor studies on “normal” museum visitors during opening hours, so unfortunately comparisons to visitors outside of the exhibition period cannot currently be made.

2.4.3.1 To reach a new audience, specifically people with an interest in art and its history and art/science

83% of respondents had never visited the Museum before.

The areas of visitor interest were not successfully captured by the interview questions.

2.4.3.2 Visitors will have a greater awareness of the Grant Museum of Zoology and that it is part of University College London (UCL)

Normal visitor figures were up 65% on the same period in the previous year, which is due in part to significant media coverage around the exhibition. This is good evidence that visitors now have a greater awareness of the Museum.

76% of respondents already knew that the Grant Museum of Zoology is part of UCL, prior to their visit.

2.4.3.3 Visitors will gain an understanding of the diversity of research that happens at UCL.

10 academic co-curators were involved in developing content for the exhibition. Due to the high-level of engagement with the displays, it is safe to infer that this understanding was implicit.

A number of respondents mentioned the range of exhibits.

Visitor comment: *"I was surprised by the variety of departments that contributed"*.

2.4.3.4 People will have a greater understanding of the role of artists on expeditions and how art can tell us about the past; and People will have engaged in the ideas of discovery, documentation and the natural world and broader links across the collections relating to Cook, exploration, astronomy, the natural world and Australia; and Visitors will have gain an understanding of how representations by artists of animals can shape peoples' perceptions of the natural world

When asked "What do you think the value of sending artists on scientific expeditions is?" 53 out of 92 respondents made a comment placing a high value on the role of artists because artists provide a perspective/detail that photos/specimens/descriptions cannot. E.g. *"Still relevant, helps portray animal and elaborate on scientific ideas"* and *"Communicates the animal"*.

However, 19 of the 92 respondents believed that the historic value of artists in scientific discovery has been replaced by photography. Only one made the point that photographers can be artists.

Many visitors made comments eluding to a belief that there is tangible difference between the ways artists and scientists see the world e.g. *"Yes [artists are valuable on expeditions], scientists only think in one way"*.

Many comments about artists being able to record the context of a discovery, rather than see it in isolation "back home". E.g. *"[expedition artists are] Great value, not everything can be understood in the lab."* And *"... scientists are more interested with quantitative/scientific data whereas artists would be able to record the visual representation in detail"*

Several noted the role of artists communicating the discoveries in a more engaging way than the alternatives.

2.4.3.5 Visitors will have a greater appreciation for the role natural history collections can play in helping explore the past.

95% of respondents answered "Yes" to "Do you think the use of specimens in the displays helped to communicate some of the ideas that the researchers were trying to present?"

2.5 Exhibition participant evaluation themes

A questionnaire was completed by the academic co-curators following the exhibition. The results of the evaluation are based on their responses.

2.5.1 Participant outcomes

The questions were designed to provide evidence to demonstrate whether the stated participant outcomes (see 2.1.1) were met.

2.5.1.1 To provide an opportunity for UCL researchers to engage a public audience with their work through a museum exhibition and a live events programme; and To use the loan of the Stubbs painting to facilitate the development of a model for co-curated exhibition that showcases UCL research.

All of the responding co-curators were emphatic that these aims were met, stating appreciation for the opportunity to work with the Museum to frame details of their research in an accessible way to non-specialists, and to work in a genuinely cross-disciplinary team to deliver a single but diverse output.

Quotes from the co-curators include

- *I found it very valuable as an experience. I enjoyed translating my research into an accessible (and pithy) format and would like to do more such activities in the future. It also provided a forum for potential future, cross-disciplinary collaboration... I definitely think the co-curator model is one that could work again in future, especially when it involves academics from truly multi-disciplinary backgrounds. (Bob Mills)*
- *It's clear that the exhibition was effective - it brought together many constituencies, generated a definite "buzz" going well beyond the university and served academic and public interests alike. (Simon Werrett)*
- *The exhibition was valuable in that it allowed me to reflect on engaging different audiences with my research and enabled me to raise awareness about the work of an artist I have been researching, who has not exhibited work in the UK before. The exhibition also gave me the opportunity to experience curating an exhibition in a museum context. (Sarah Wade)*
- *It was great that the exhibition brought together colleagues from different departments (Sarah Wade)*
- *I found the experience very valuable in terms of professional development - it has definitely given me the insight and confidence to feel like I could co-/curate an exhibition in the future. (Misha Ewen)*
- *Strange Creatures allowed us a chance to discuss some of the work we do (myself in particular) in a broad context that was seen by thousands of people (Andrew Cuff)*

2.5.1.2 To evaluate if a co-curated exhibition and the associated events programme is an effective method of public engagement with research.

When asked "Was there anything you would like to share with us you found out during your visit?" 50 respondents mentioned information they had seen in *Strange Creatures* Displays.

Typical visitor quotes include:

- *Really enjoyed the toy creature! Creatures are still being found, but need to be suited to Public Relations.... And Australian animals are weird!*
- *The dragons - that people made up specimens - is really interesting*

Another 44 responses were generic positive statements about their visit to the Museum or things they had seen permanent displays.

Typical responses from the co-curators include:

- *It was a fun experience, with value both as engagement (having never been involved in a museum exhibition before as a co-curator), as well as a way to show off some of the work we do which has led to several people since discussing aspects of my research with me. (Andrew Cuff)*
-

3. Strange Creatures: The art of unknown animals events programme

3.1 Aims and objectives

The specific aims for the events programme were broken down for two groups. Firstly participants – this group was identified as the UCL researchers that formed the co-curator team, and the Grant Museum Learning and Access Officer. Secondly, the audiences, which were defined as members of the public: young adults aged 18-24 with an interest in natural history and science and adults aged 24-65 with additional interests in history of art, science and exploration; and also families. The events programme aimed to:

3.1.1 Participants

- Provide opportunities for UCL researchers to engage adult visitors with their research through a live events programme.
- Test new event formats, e.g. 'Lates'

3.1.2 Audience

- Support the delivery of the visitor outcomes for the exhibition, specifically :
 - understand how representation of animals by artists can shape peoples' perceptions of the natural world
 - appreciate and enjoy how natural history objects have been used to convey ideas about the natural world and our relationship with it today and historically
 - be inspired by the GMZ collection and artists' representations of animals to devise their own creative responses
 - know that the Grant Museum of Zoology and that it is part of University College London (UCL)
 - be aware of the diversity of research that happens at UCL
- Reach a new audience, specifically people with an interest in art and its history and art/science
- Engage families from Camden, Islington and Newham

3.1.3 The objectives were to:

- Run a programme of evening events using a variety of formats as well as a drawing event series.
- Run a programme of lunchtime events
- Run a study day seminar
- Reach a total adult audience of 790
- Work with 12 researchers from across UCL, including the exhibition's co-curators
- Run a series of three art-based activities

- Run a specimen-based activities in the May half term
- Reach an audience of 2150 family visitors

3.2 What happened

The *Strange Creatures* events programme that accompanied the exhibition offered ran between 20th March and 27th June 2015. It consisted of 19 events for an adult audience, eight evening events, four lunchtime events, one daylong seminar and seven exhibition ‘tours’. The programme was varied and offered multiple opportunities for audiences to engage with the themes of the exhibition. Alongside the adult programme there three monthly family art activities, one week long specimen-based activity and one week long art-based activity. A summary of the events are below:

- **Skippy the Bush Kangaroo on the Big Screen** – Attended by **87** people, co-curator and Head of UCL Science and Technology Studies, Joe Cain presented episodes of the classic series.
- **Animal Showoff** – a comedy variety night where six animal researchers have just nine minutes to present their favourite animal. This was attended by **69** people. This included the exhibition curator along with two UCL researchers who were not part of the curator team.
- **Draw it Like Stubbs series** – led by an artist and inspired by the techniques of George Stubbs, **92** people attended these three, once-a-month sessions from April to June.
- **Strange Creatures Late** – A late opening of the Museum attended by **181** people with a variety of activities including a live taxidermy demonstration, gallery actor Captain Cook reading diary extracts and arts and crafts.
- **The Great Grant Knit-a-Thon** - **88** participants took part in this 12-hour knit-a-thon facilitated by east London yarning collection Prick Your Finger, inspired by co-curator Sarah Wade’s work on craft in natural history museums and the display of artist Ruth Marshall’s knitted thylacine skin.
- **Looking at Strange Creatures Seminar Day** – Academics such as Bob Mills from the exhibition co-curator team and street artist ATM shared their work in a seminar day attended by **55** people.
- **DINOSAURS! of Victorian London** - Attended by **181** people, co-curator Joe Cain talked about and shared the history of the Crystal Palace dinosaur models.
- **Show ‘n’ Tell lunchtime series** – Exhibition co-curators shared their research in animal representation to **70** attendees over three events.
- **Strange Creatures Tours** – Exhibition curator Jack Ashby gave seven weekly tours of the exhibition on the themes of discovery and Australian wildlife to **100** people.
- **Creating Strange Creatures** – monthly drop-in art sessions for families with a freelance artist where visitors created their own animal art work. In total **753** children and adults attended these sessions
- **Creature Creations** – a week of art-based activities for families during the Easter holidays led by a freelance artist which was attended by **888** people.
- **Kangaroos and Co.** – during the May school holidays **1076** people attended this specimen-based family activity looking at the world of marsupial mammals.



Fig. 6 Families participating in family art based activity, Creature Creations



Fig. 7 Exhibition co-curator Sarah Wade discussing her research during The Great Grant Knit-a-thon and participant with finished knitted sloth



Fig. 8 Ethical taxidermist Jazmine Miles-Long and gallery actor as Captain Cook during *Strange Creatures Late*



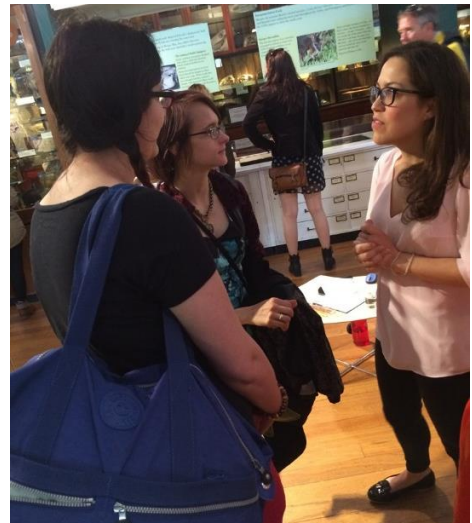
Fig. 9 Participants drawing during the monthly Draw it Like Stubbs series.



Fig. 10 Audience members in the Grant Museum for the open mic night Animal Showoff



Fig. 11 Specimens chosen by co-curator Misha Ewen for her Show 'n'Tell Taste Just Like.... event and (left) discussing her research with event attendees



3.3 Facts and figures

Total cost: **£1000** for marketing materials, including printed leaflet and short online marketing campaign on Londonist.com. **£977** on catering for study day seminar and drinks receptions for evening events. **£1508** for delivery of the programme including materials and freelancer delivery for the adult event programme. **£800** was spent on freelancer delivery for the family events.

Over **920** people attended *Strange Creatures* themed adult lunchtime and evening events as well as exhibition tours.

11 researchers, **10** of which were from **five** different academic departments within UCL including Science and Technology Studies, History of Art, Genetics, Evolution and the Environment, History and School of European Languages, Culture and Society. There was an additional researcher from Queen Mary University London.

2717 family visitors took part in our art based and specimen based *Strange Creatures* events.

3.4 Event audience evaluation themes – adults

The evaluation of the events programme was designed and delivered by the Grant Museum's Learning and Access Officer, methods utilised included: feedback forms, photographs, informal conversations, email questionnaire to the participating researchers and reflections by the Learning Officer after the event. Informal conversations with attendees included questions regarding their awareness of the connection between UCL and the Grant Museum as well as their experiences of the event.

In total there were c.100 conversations and 32% response rate for filling in feedback forms.

The results and emerging themes are outlined below and reflect the measures of success outlined in the evaluation plan submitted to the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

3.4.1 Demographics

Demographic data was collected via feedback forms of attendees to the events, in total around 32% of all attendees filled out a feedback form. Figure 12 breaks down the audience profile:

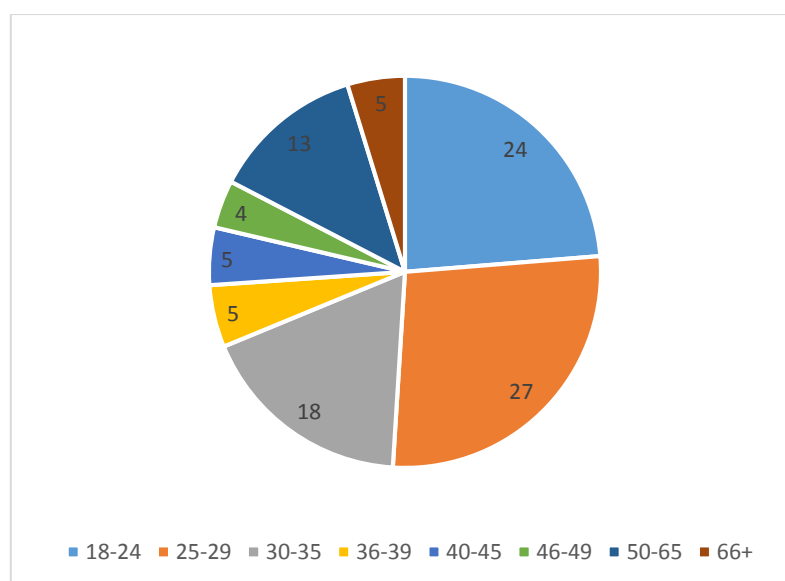


Fig. 12 Age profile of attendees to *Strange Creatures* events

69% of all the attendees were within the age group 18-35, with the 25-29 year olds making up the largest number, which reflects the general demographics of the Grant Museum's events programme. A closer examination of this data outlines the type of events that were successful with different demographics, the events that were natural history themed (e.g. Animal Showoff and Show 'n' Tell: Dinosaurs) were most popular with the 18-24s whilst the events that were themed around the history of science and art (DINOSAURS! of Victorian London and the Looking at Strange Creatures Seminar Day) as well as the weekly exhibition tours which tied into the history of exploration theme were popular amongst the 36-65 year olds. This information suggests that the programme was successful in reaching the audience outlined during the events planning stage.

3.4.2 New audiences

The *Strange Creatures* events programme attracted new visitors to the Grant Museum events programme, with 71% of attendees new to the Museum (Fig. 13):

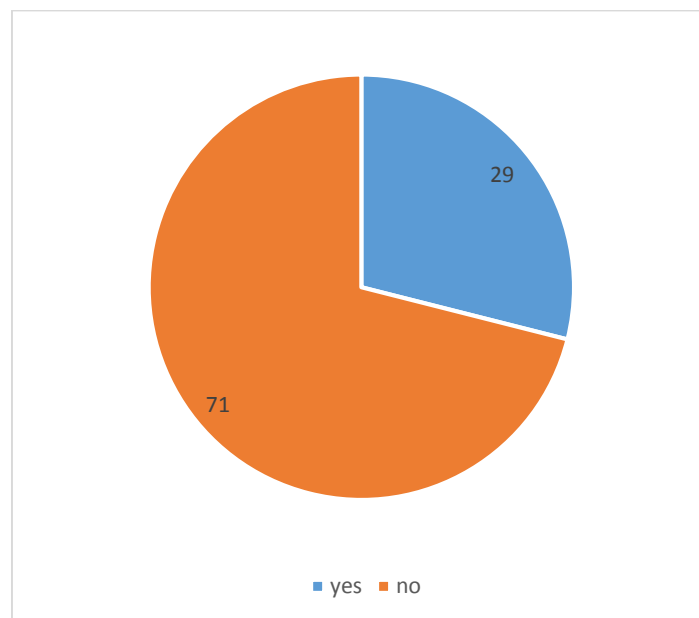


Fig. 13 Have you been to a Grant Museum of Zoology event before?

A closer examination of the data reveals that the events programme was successful in reaching a new audience for the Museum with those with an interest in art and the history of art/science as the events that had the highest frequency of new visitors were those with a strong emphasis on those themes and practical drawing sessions such as the Looking at *Strange Creatures* Seminar Day, the Draw it Like Stubbs events and DINOSAURS! of Victorian London.

3.4.3 Visitor experience

98% of attendees to the events rated their experience of the events as "Excellent" or "Good" (79% and 19% respectively). Most respondents commented upon how the experience was enjoyable and inspiring, with many praising the UCL researchers for their passion and enthusiasm.

- *Unique topics told with passion and a great sense of humour, great! (Animal Showoff)*
- *Entertaining speeches; full of energy and inspiring (DINOSAURS! of Victorian London)*

- *The talk in the exhibition space was wonderfully engaging- superb! (Show 'n' Tell: Tastes just like...)*

3.4.4 Visitor outcomes

Each of the events in the programme related to some aspect of the visitor outcomes of the *Strange Creatures* exhibition. Analysis of comments left on feedback forms and those made by event attendees during informal conversations along with images of event participants work have been used as evidence to demonstrate against these outcomes.

3.4.4.1 Awareness that the GMZ is part of UCL and of diversity of research that happens at UCL

Informal conversations with attendees to events revealed that many were aware that the Grant Museum was part of UCL. However, events that did not include UCL content, such as *Strange Creatures* at Night, there was a much lower awareness of the connection between the Museum and UCL.

The exhibition and the associated events provided an excellent opportunity for the Grant Museum to share UCL research not traditionally associated with the nature of the collection, such as history of art as well as those subjects visitors would expect from a historic zoological collection such as biological science and history of science. This diversity of the research presented in the programme was commented on by respondents and was a highlight for many:

- *Was very informative and helpful to my research with particular focus on Stubbs painting. Good balance of scientific and historical knowledge. (Exhibition tour)*
- *Much enjoyed the variety of talks (Animal Showoff)*
- *Really interesting talk covering many interesting and diverse topics (DINOSAURS! of Victorian London)*
- *Interesting and differing perspective on sometimes common themes. (Looking at Strange Creatures Seminar Day)*

3.4.4.2 Knowledge-based outcomes of the exhibition, including: how representation of animals by artists can shape peoples' perceptions of the natural world, of the role of artists on expeditions and how art can tell us about the past; and wider themes of exploration, Cook and Australian wildlife.

The ability to determine if the events were successful in supporting the delivery of some of the knowledge-based visitor outcomes for the exhibition is limited, as the comments made by attendees did not necessarily reflect their own understanding of the content. Many of the comments made were highly complimentary of the events but were along the following lines:

- *Very informative*
- *Interesting talk which enhanced the gallery visit*
- *Excellent presentations, very interesting, thank you!*

However, some comments made about events would suggest for some attendees the events managed to provide a new or deeper understanding of some of the exhibition themes, as outlined in the intended visitor outcomes for the exhibition:

- *As an Australian, I really appreciated the chance to see Stubbs "in the flesh" (Skippy the Bush Kangaroo on the Big Screen)*
- *I thought Sarah Wade's talk was superb and made me think about what taxidermy actually means (The Great Grant Knit-a-Thon)*
- *I like the way art and zoology link together (Looking at Strange Creatures Seminar Day)*

- *Would like to see a similar exploration of the relation between the unicorn and the rhino in the 16th and 17th centuries (Looking at Strange Creatures Seminar Day)*
- *Just loved watching the kangaroo (Skippy). I didn't know they could be tamed and for pets (Skippy the Bush Kangaroo on the Big Screen)*

3.4.4.3 Use of natural history objects to convey ideas about the natural world

One area of the events programme, the lunchtime Show 'n' Tell talks with the exhibition co-curators, was praised by attendees for their successful use of specimens, highlighting how their use helped to convey some of the ideas that were being presented.

- *Having specimens out was great (Iron and Bone)*
- *It was great to handle the specimens; also great to be introduced to a new field of study (Dinosaurs)*

The nature of hosted question-and-answer conversation format also allowed visitors to engage in dialogue with the researcher presenting their work, something audience members commented on

- *Really interesting, well hosted, well explained and great to ask questions*
- *A great speaker and plenty of time for questions too!*

3.4.4.4 Creative responses to the collection and artistic representation of animals

The Strange Creatures events programme allowed the Museum to offer more events that were based on art and craft and were participatory in their nature. These were the Draw it Like Stubbs series and The Great Grant Knit-a-Thon. Both received the highest visitor experience scores amongst the attendees and were successful in attracting participants with a range of skills, for example, The Great Grant Knit-a-Thon successfully attracted skilled members of the London Knitters Guild and during the course of the day caught the attention of general visitors to the Museum who joined in and who identified as novices. The Draw it Like Stubbs series was incredibly popular with participants who rated it very highly in terms of their enjoyment, praising both the variety of activities and techniques offered as well as the support from the artist leading the session:

- *I really enjoyed using the different textures for shading.*
- *It's such a wonderful way of engaging with the collection!*
- *Great mix of techniques - variety! Fab to have a bit of coaching / instruction*
- *Lots of practical help*
- *Loved that you had an artist to run the evening as well as a science-based person. Loved the creative hands-on part to the evening*



Fig 14 Creative responses to the collection and the ideas of the *Strange Creatures* exhibition



Fig 15 Examples of the work produced by participants at The Great Grant Knit-a-Thon

3.5 Event audience evaluation themes – families

The primary interest for the family activities as part of the *Strange Creatures* events programme was to understand where families were visiting from and whether they had visited a family event before. This was done by surveying 206 families during their visits, asking if they had visited the Museum before, which borough in London they were from; and how they found out about the event.

3.5.1 Findings

Most families who took part in our family activities (78%) had not been to a family learning event at the Museum before, whilst 22% had participated before (Fig.16). Based on previous surveys conducted during our family activities this is slightly higher than the previous of 13% that had participated before.

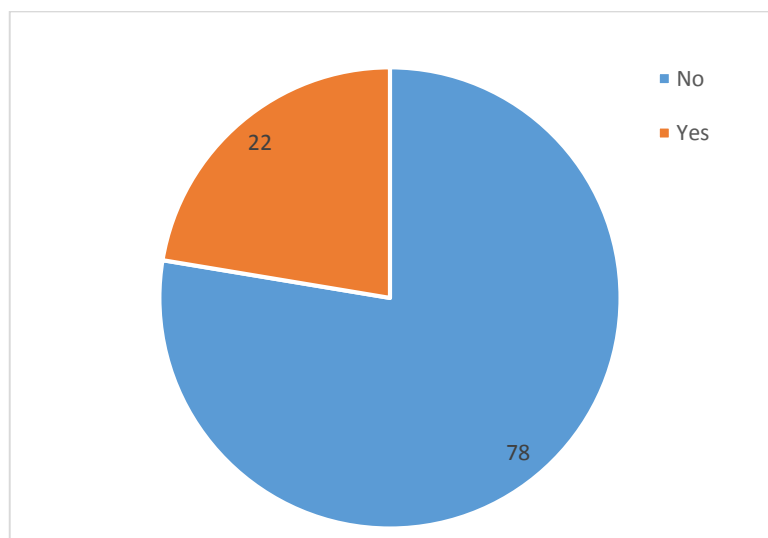


Fig. 16 Have you visited a Grant Museum of Zoology event before?

Over half the families that attended the events were from a London borough, with both Camden and Islington being the most represented amongst participating families, 12% and 5% respectively, which is representative of our usual profile for attendees for family events (Fig. 17).

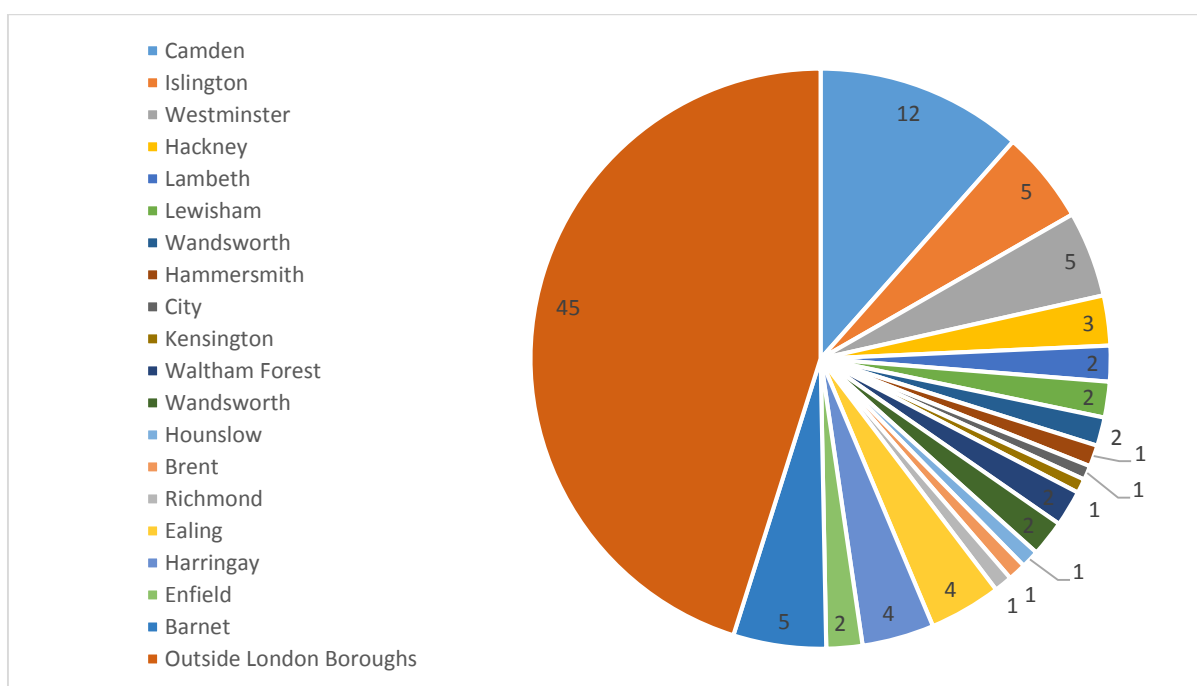


Fig 17 Which London Borough do you live in?

3.5.2 Creative responses to the collection and artistic representation of animals

Families responded positively to the events that allowed them to create their own work with the support of the skilled facilitation by the freelance Museum artists. Below are some illustrations that are representative of the 2D work produced.



3.6 Event participant evaluation themes – Researcher Co-curator team

The *Strange Creatures* events programme allowed the Museum to continue to offer opportunities for researchers to engage the public with their work, as well allowing the Museum to establish new and consolidate existing relationships with researchers from different departments at UCL. All were committed, enthusiastic participants in the events programme. After the exhibition closed a questionnaire was sent to the participants asking for their experiences of taking part in the events programme.

Four of the five co-curators involved in events responded to the questionnaire and on the whole were positive about the experience with many highlighting the personal benefit of running the programme:

- the events programme was a really good way to engage the public with my research and there was a good range of events for us to participate in, if we wanted to (**Misha Ewen**)
- The talk offered me the opportunity to engage members of the public with my research (**Sarah Wade**)

It was clear from the responses that the co-curators valued the programme as an effective method of connecting and engaging with audiences and also communicating their research face to face:

- My public talk during the lunchtime series allowed me to discuss some of my experiences and work from my PhD with the public which allowed them (*the audience*) to ask questions to further enhance their understanding..... (*which*) led to several people since discussing aspects of my research with me (**Andrew Cuff**)
- I enjoyed the 'talk-show' style of the (lunchtime) format and had some good conversations with visitors afterwards. (**Misha Ewen**)

The challenge of translating research for audiences and expanding on the topics of their research in greater depth was feature that the co-curators appeared to enjoy undertaking:

- I particularly enjoyed the study day, which allowed me to expand on my chosen topic and to pitch my research to an informed but non-specialist audience. (**Bob Mills**)

3.7 Event participant evaluation themes – Learning and Access Officer

3.7.1 *What went well?*

3.7.1.1 Exhibition programming

The programme associated with the exhibition was the first example of the Museum developing a programme of events related to a temporary exhibition. The programme allowed us to bring in established formats such as the film nights and lunchtime talk series Show 'n' Tell to support the delivery of exhibition content whilst having a dedicated programming budget allowed gave us the freedom to experiment with event formats to a greater extent than we would normally. For example we tested if we could deliver a "late" format event and learnt lessons (such as staffing capacity and type of activities offered) that will inform how we run the next "late" event. We also looked outside the team for professional inspiration and support in the development stage of the programme with colleagues at the Wellcome Collection generously giving their time to illustrate their programme development methods.

3.7.1.2 Understanding audiences

Putting together an events plan with aims and objectives for the programme was an invaluable opportunity for us to step back and reflect on the audience who attend our events programme in general. Through analysis of the data gathered and the reporting to funding partners we have gained a useful insight into our audiences that will help shape events plans going forward such as the events we offer and the marketing methods we employ to reach this audience.

3.7.1.3 Co-curators

The resource of the 10 exhibition co-curators themselves and the diverse research they covered was incredibly valuable to draw upon when developing the events programme, enriching it hugely either by sharing programming ideas or as speakers for events. As highlighted in the visitor feedback the diversity of the programme was something that was mentioned as a feature they rated highly. The model of using combining an exhibition and live events programme is one that we have shared with colleagues within UCL's Public and Cultural Engagement department for potential adoption in future exhibition programmes.

3.7.2 What could be improved?

3.7.2.1 Evaluation methodology

Our methodology for monitoring event attendee's demographic data is fairly robust and the data collected have been useful. However, analysis of the feedback data itself revealed flaws in the questions we asked to be able to effectively evaluate against the aims for the events programme. We can improve this by working with colleagues with UCL who have expertise in evaluation to offer critical advice.

3.7.2.2 Bold programming

We experimented with the events we offered for the programme, trying new formats and learned valuable lessons in how to run certain type of events. However, if we were to do this again we will have greater confidence in our ability to use programming to challenge event attendees own ideas alongside using the programme to communicate content. This could involve looking to best practice from other institutions, borrowing events formats or devising and experimenting with original events to achieve this.

Jack Ashby
Grant Museum Manager

Dean Veall
Grant Museum Learning and Access Officer
July 2015

Appendices

Exhibition evaluation tool

Hello. My name is _____ and I am a volunteer here at the Grant Museum. We would like to find out what people think about the Strange Creatures exhibition and I was wondering if you might help us. It will take about 5-10 minutes but we can have a sit, if you want *{Interviewer: point at sitting area or adapt accordingly}*.

I would like to begin with some basic questions regarding the Grant Museum.

1. Is this your first visit to the Grant Museum? YES NO
2. Did you visit today specifically to see the Strange Creatures exhibition? YES NO
3. Prior to your visit today were you aware that the Grant Museum was part of UCL? YES NO

During your visit did you notice that parts of the Museum had been specially dedicated to a new temporary exhibition Strange Creatures: The art of unknown animals? Yes No

1. Did you visit today specifically to see the Strange Creatures exhibition? YES NO
1. If yes, how did you find out about the exhibition?

The next set of questions concern the *Strange Creatures* exhibition. We had several outcomes in mind when we developed this exhibition and these questions will help us assess if we have been successful in achieving these goals.

6. We opened up our cabinets and drawers to the 10 researchers involved. Which of the following did you enjoy in their display?

Animal Specimens

Text panel

Works of art

Historic documents

Models

Video

7. Do you think the use of specimens in the displays helped to communicate some of the ideas the researchers were trying to present?

8. Are there any other topics you would like to see the Grant Museum of Zoology exploring?

9. Other animals are represented in this exhibition through works of art, taxidermy, models and stuffed toys. What do you think the value of these representations are compared to written descriptions?

What if those representations turn out to be incorrect?

10. Is there anything else you would like to say about your visit today?

11. How would you rate this exhibition? 1 poor 5 excellent

12. Which age group do you fall into?

18-24

25-39

40-59

60+

13. Which borough do you live in?

14. How many are in your group today?

15. Are you a UCL member of staff or student?

Email survey for co-curator team:

- 1) At the start of the project we explained what we hoped your involvement would involve. Do you think this was an accurate reflection of what you were actually asked to do by the end of it? (Did we describe our expectations properly?)
- 2) Do you feel your involvement in the exhibition process was valuable to you, either as an engagement exercise, or as professional development (or anything else)? If so, how? If not, why not?
- 3) What could we have done to make the experience more valuable?
- 4) Below are two aims we had for the project:
 - a. *To evaluate if a co-curated exhibition and the associated events programme is an effective method of public engagement with research.*
 - b. *To provide an opportunity for UCL researchers to engage a public audience with their work through a museum exhibition and a live events programme.*
- 5) From the point of view of what you contributed, were these aims met? (E.g. Did *Strange Creatures* actually provide a platform to showcase your research?) Please expand
- 6) Is there anything else you can tell us about your *Strange Creatures* experience?

Example of Feedback form used for events

EMPIRE OF THE ANTS!					
How did we do?					
How would you rate this evening's event? (please circle)	1 Excellent	2	3	4	5 Poor
Is there anything you would like to tell us about in particular?	_____				

Is there anything we could do to improve the event?	_____				

If you live in London, which borough do you live in?	_____				
<i>Please circle the following answers:</i>					
Have you been to a GMZ event before?	Yes	-	No		
Do you work or study at a university?	Yes	(Work	Study)	No	
If yes, is it UCL?	Yes	-	No		
What age group do you belong to?	18-24	25-29	30-35	36-39	
	40-45	46-49	50-65	66+	
How did you find out about this event?	_____				
Please write your email address if you would like to join the email list	_____				
<small>Data protection act 1998: We will not pass on your information to any other parties.</small>					

Questions asked in the family survey at family events

1. Have you visited the Grant Museum of Zoology before?
2. Which Borough do you live in?
3. How did you hear about this event?
4. How many in your group?