The Icelandic Museum of Natural History

strong roots, uncertain future

Dr. Hilmar J. Malmquist director

...strong roots, uncertain future...

Strong roots because of:

- Long historical background – precursor to the museum founded in 1889.
- Nature is prominent in Iceland – extensive wilderness, ice and fire, lava, waterfalls, birdlife. Small community, only 326,000 people, living on a large island, 103,000 km$^2$, second largest in Europe.
- Use of natural resources is central to the economy – fisheries, hydro- and geothermal power, tourism.

Uncertain future because of:

- Cutbacks in public service, health, academic and educational sector, including museums, especially for The Icelandic Museum of Natural History.
The Icelandic Natural History Society founded 1887–1889 in Copenhagen/Reykjavík. An NGO for the general public.

.....precursor to The Icelandic Museum of Natural History, established in 2007, and its sister-institution, The Icelandic Institute of Natural History, established in 1951.

The main objective of the NGO was, and still is, to:
...„maintain a permanent exhibition on Icelandic nature for the nation...“

Most founders studied at The University of Copenhagen with access to University Zoological Museum, The Royal Natural History Museum and, from 1862, The Zoological Museum.
During 1889–2008 the precursor to The Icelandic Museum of Natural History was relocated EIGHT times – all the time more or less in unsufficient facilities.

In spring 2008, the exhibition facilities at Hlemmur, then under The Icelandic Institute of Natural History, were closed.
The Icelandic Museum of Natural History operates under its own Special Act and The Museum Act no. 141/2011 for Icelandic museums in general.

Act no. 35/2007 for The Icelandic Museum of Natural History

§ 1. The Icelandic Museum of Natural History is the property of the Icelandic state and one of three Central Museums in Iceland. A public, non-profit institute.

§ 2. Objectives: shed light on nature in Iceland, natural history, use of natural resources and nature conservation, by informing the general public via exhibition and other means of media, including printing and e-publishing. The Museum shall collect, record and preserve natural items and data on nature, and undertake research within its field. The Museum shall collaborate closely with its sister-institute – The Icelandic Institute of Natural History.


§ 1. The purpose of the law is to promote the preservation of the Icelandic cultural and natural heritage, ensure its future, provide the public with access to it and enhance knowledge about it and its place in global context.

§ 3. Museums shall aim for increasing the quality of life for people by enhancing understanding of evolution and status of culture, art, nature and science.

§ 8. There are three Central Museums: The Ntl. Art Gallery, The Ntl. Museum, and The Icelandic Museum of Natural History. The Central Museums are leading institutions at national level, shaping a coherent museum policy within their respective fields, providing counsel to other museums and promoting cooperation between them.
IMNH has its own collections/databases in addition to the collections/databases of its sister-institution – the scientific backstop – Icelandic Institute of Natural History (www.ni.is).

**Common collection units**

**Organisms:**
- Wet collections (ethanol)
- Dry collections
- Frozen collections

**Geology**
- minerals, rocks
- drill cores
- fossils
Computerized database/collections – research tool – management – media
Relational databases, specialized CRUD system (copy, record, update, delete)
Yearly spendings by the Icelandic Museum of Natural History in 2008–2015, only 0.14–0.20 million Euros!

8 x less than Ntl. Art Gallery and 20x less than National Museum!
...meager funds – unequal status...

The Icelandic National Audit Office has issued two reports on The Icelandic Museum of Natural History – January 2012 and May 2015

Main instructions issued by NAO to the Parliament:

1) Put money into the activity so the museum can meet with its constitutional obligations, else change the constitutional foundations – the law.

2) Finish policy making for IMNH

3) Solve conflicting tasks between IMNH and IINH.
Autumn 2012: Ntl. budget of 3.5 m Euro start-up capital for standing exhibition in the Pearl.

Spring 2013: Rental agreement for 15 yrs for the Pearl signed between State and Reykjavík City.

- Close to city center
- On top of Öskjuhlíð hill
- 5.000 m² (3100 m²)
- 4 floors, 25 m height
- Rotating restaurant
- 300-500.000 visitors/yr!

BUT NO!
The succeeding government annulled the appropriation. and had other financial priorities.
The PEARL/new business model!

PRIVATE INVESTOR
Landsbréf Icelandic Tourism Fund 1 SCA/CVA. Shareholders include Icelandair Group, Landsbankinn bank, and Pension Funds.
Out: Start-up capital (~2 m Euro) + maintenance.
In: Income (admission fee).

REYKJAVÍK CITY
Owner of the building Pearl.
Out: New 2nd floor + renovation.
In: Rental income.

ICELANDIC MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Out: concept, ideology, objects, design.
In: Income for service, renewal, maintenance.

PEARL - Private Limited Company
Out: Paying for design and putting up the show and IMNH for concept and service. Paying Reykjavík City rent for the building and revenue to the Private Investor.

Likely scenarios:
150,000 visitors * 7 EUR = 1 m. EUR
300,000 visitors * 7 EUR = 2 m. EUR
exhibition – education – Icelandic nature

GEOLOGY: young island – plate boundaries – volcanic activity – lava fields...

Eruption at Holuhraun lava field, NE Iceland, starting August 29th 2014. Still active.

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exhibition – education – Icelandic nature

FRESHWATER: geysers – glaciers – lakes – waterfalls – wetlands...

Hraunfossar waterfall and River Hvítá, W-Iceland.
Water of spring-fed and glacial origin. © Kristján Jónasson
Blue whale
*Balaenoptera musculus*
Stranded at Ásbúðir, N-Iceland, 23.8.2010.

Length 23.7 m
Max breadth 9.5 m

FAUNA: marine fish and mammals – birds – arctic fox ...
exhibition – education – Icelandic nature

MAN & NATURE: agriculture – fisheries – raw energy ...

Cod-fisheries in Iceland
...the future is exciting, but uncertain!

THANK YOU!