



Icelandic Museum  
of Natural History

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# The Icelandic Museum of Natural History

## strong roots, uncertain future

Dr. Hilmar J. Malmquist director

Visit to Natural History Museum, London – July 6th 2015

# ...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<sup>2</sup>, second largest in Europe.
- ✓ Use of natural resources is central to the economy – fisheries, hydro- and geothermal power, tourism.

## Uncertain future because of:

- ✓ Political indifference at the parliament level and agenda of present government prioritizing financial cutbacks in wake of the Global Financial Crisis 2008–2011.
- ✓ Cutbacks in public service, health, academic and educational sector, including museums, **especially for The Icelandic Museum of Natural History.**

# ...strong roots...



Benedikt Gröndal  
natural historian (1826-1907)



Björn Bjarnason  
advocate (1853-1918)



Stefán Stefánsson  
botanist (1863-1921)

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*.

# ...strong roots, but nowhere to go!



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.

# IMNH established in 2007



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**.

## The Museum Act no. 141/2011 (106/2001)

- § 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.

# DATABASE – COLLECTIONS

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](http://www.ni.is)).

## Common collection units

### Organisms:

Wet collections (ethanol)

Dry collections

Frozen collections

### Geology

minerals, rocks

drill cores

fossils



## Purrsýnaskáli

**Stærð:** 156 m<sup>2</sup>

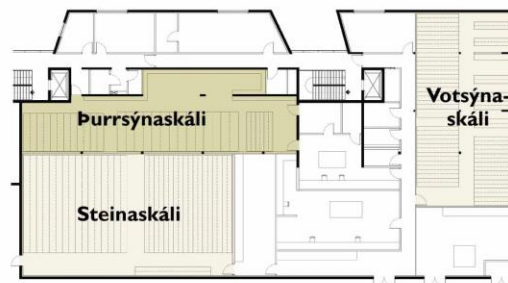
**Sérstakir eiginleikar:** Loftraka og hitastigi er haldið stöðugu allt árið. Engar vatnslagnir í veggjum. Eldvarnarbúnaður sem kæfir eld.

**Safn:** Plöntusöfn, dýrabein, fuglshamir og uppstoppaðir gripir

**Fjöldi sýna:** 195.000. Hvert sýni getur verið eitt eða mörg eintök

Safnkosturinn er mikilvæg undirstaða rannsókna í flokkunarfræði lífvera sem beinast einkum að: breytileika tegunda, lífsferlum, útbreiðslu, þróunarsögu og flokkunarkerfi tegunda.

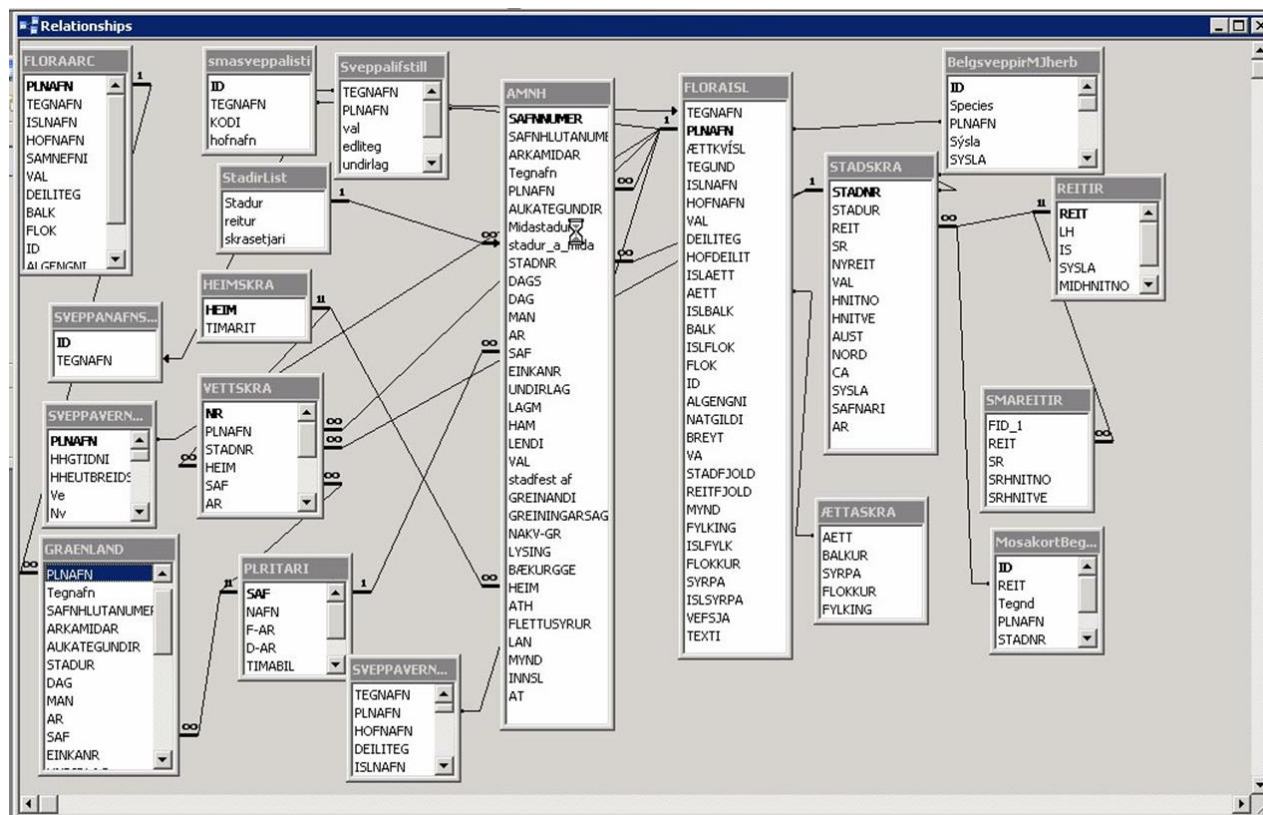
Markmiðið er að tiltæk safnaeintök endurspegli breytileika tegunda og staðfesti landfræðilega útbreiðslu þeirra, jafnt á landi sem í sjó.





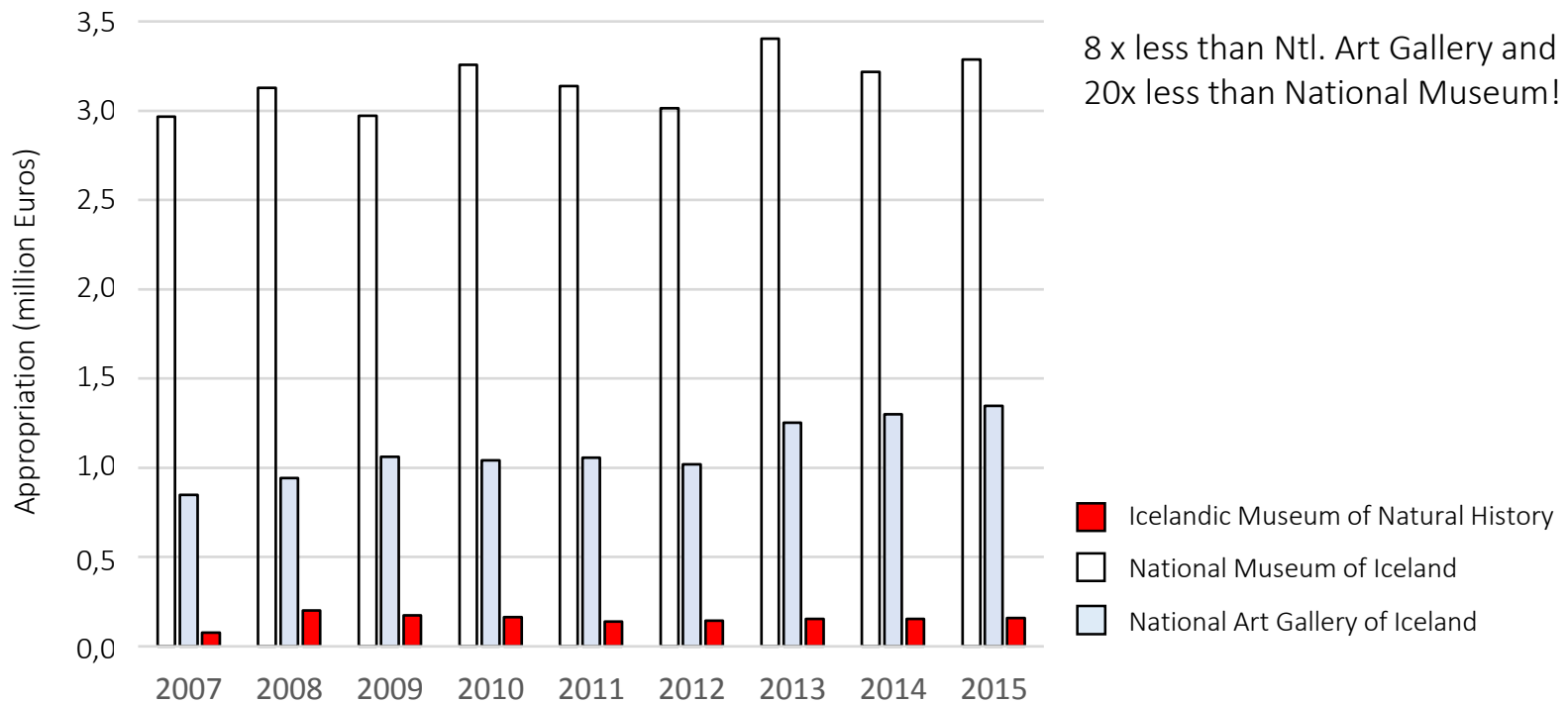
# DATABASE – COLLECTIONS

Computerized database/collections – research tool – management – media  
Relational databases, specialized CRUD system (copy, record, update, delete)



# ...meager funds...

Yearly spendings by the Icelandic Museum of Natural History in 2008–2015, only 0,14–0,20 million Euros!





# ...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.

# The PEARL becomes available!



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 m<sup>2</sup> (3100 m<sup>2</sup>)
- ✓ 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, ideaology, objects, design.  
*In:* Income for service, renewal, maintenance.

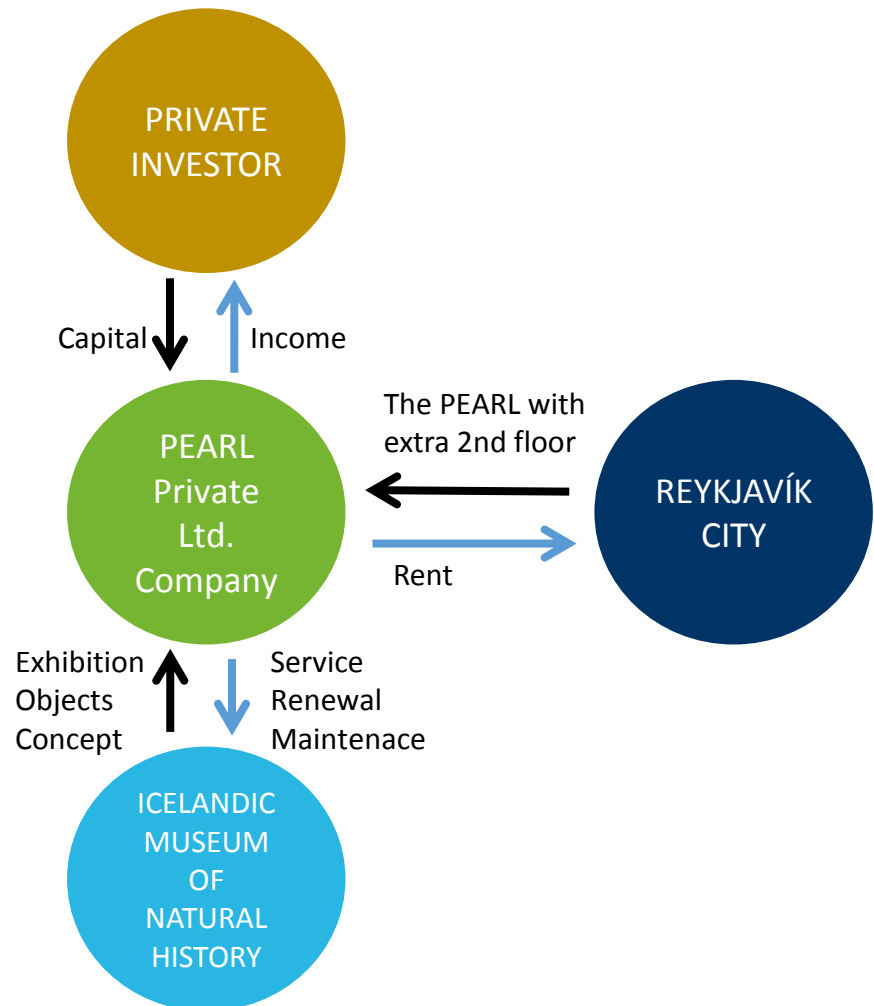
## PEARL - Private Limited Company

*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.

### Liklely 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.

© Einar Guðmann



# exhibition – education – Icelandic nature



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



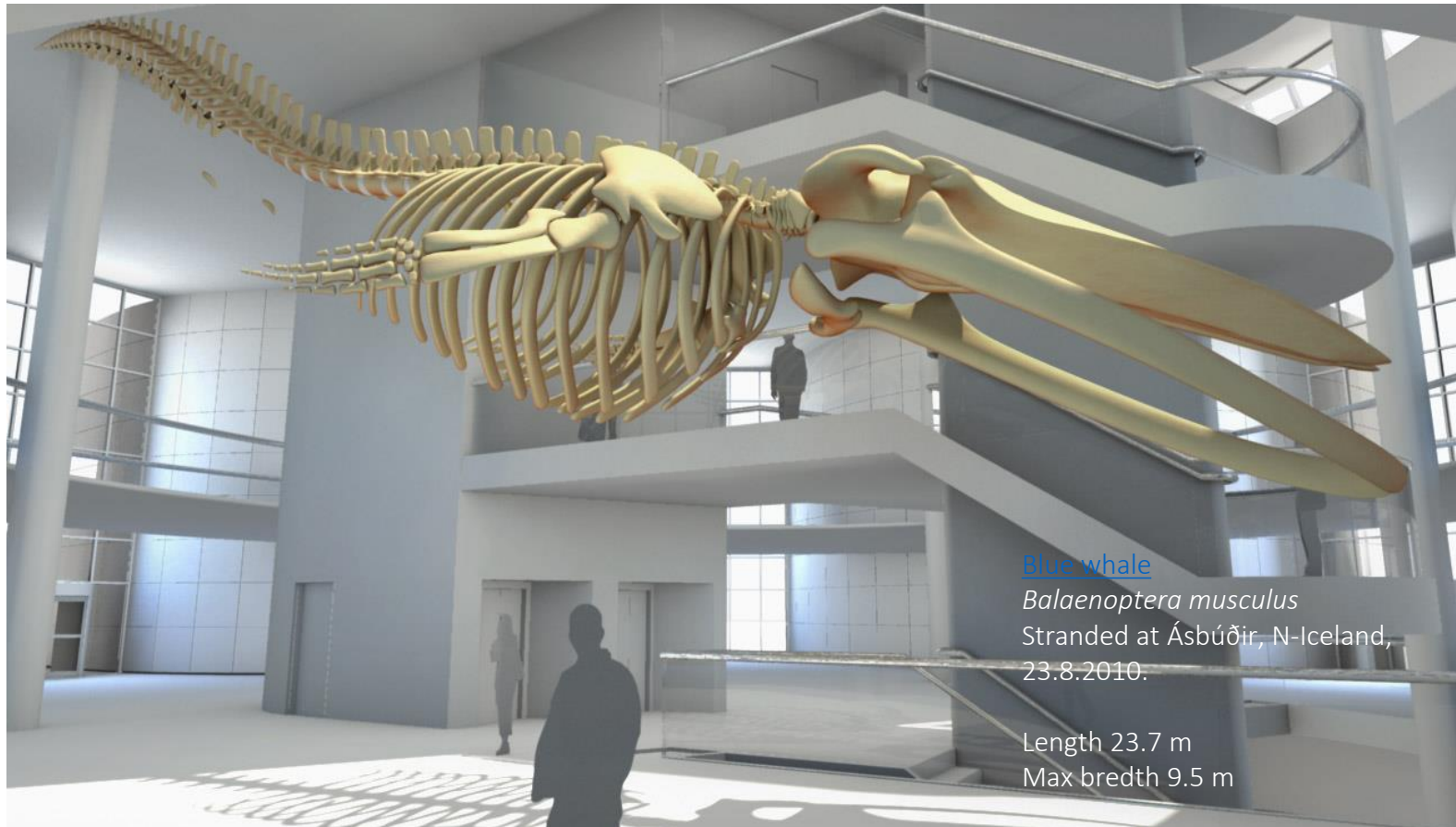
Hraunfossar waterfall and River Hvítá, W-Iceland.  
Water of spring-fed and glacial origin.

© Kristján Jónasson

# exhibition – education – Icelandic nature



FAUNA: marine fish and mammals – birds – arctic fox ...



[Blue whale](#)

*Balaenoptera musculus*

Stranded at Ásbúðir, N-Iceland,  
23.8.2010.

Length 23.7 m

Max breadth 9.5 m

# exhibition – education – Icelandic nature



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





...the future is exciting, but uncertain!



THANK YOU!



*Dryas octopetala*  
The national flower of Iceland