

News release



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Museum's plans for fossil sea reptile display receive generous grant boost

Visitors to the Oxford University Museum of Natural History are set to enjoy a new display of large Jurassic sea reptiles called plesiosaurs thanks to a £35,000 grant from funding body WREN.

The money, awarded by WREN's FCC Community Action Fund, will be used to help create a new interactive and engaging display that highlights the UK's exceptional fossil heritage in the form of two of the museum's most important large plesiosaur skeletons. One of these is a rare, short-necked plesiosaur discovered in a quarry near Yarnton, Oxfordshire in 1994.

The project is also supported by a grant from DCMS/Wolfson Museum and Galleries Improvement Fund. Professor Paul Smith, director of the museum, believes the new display will make a huge positive difference to the museum and its visitors. He says:



The Yarnton plesiosaur skeleton being excavated from a quarry in Oxfordshire in 1994.

"This project will provide a real boost to our visitors and reinvigorate our central court. The funding will help increase access to these internationally significant fossils and help preserve them for future generations. It's wonderful that WREN has awarded us this money and we're really looking forward to our new display taking shape over the next few months."

WREN is a not-for-profit business that awards grants for community, biodiversity and heritage projects from funds donated by FCC Environment through the Landfill Communities Fund.

Penny Beaumont, WREN's grant manager for Oxfordshire, says: "We're delighted to be supporting the Oxfordshire Underwater: Fossil Sea Reptiles from the Time of the Dinosaurs project and pleased our funding will make such a difference to so many groups of people. WREN is always happy to consider grant applications for projects that benefit local communities and we're looking forward to this one having a positive impact very soon."

With new display cases, dynamic artwork and digital content, the display will present a picture of central England 165 million years ago: submerged 50 metres underwater in a warm, shallow sea, teeming with animals that are now long-extinct. Visitors will learn how fossils are discovered and collected, how museum scientists investigate specimens using cutting edge technologies, and discover how scientists piece together evidence to understand the evolution of life on Earth.

The new display will open in summer 2018.

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For further information and images:

Scott Billings
Digital engagement officer
Oxford University Museum of Natural History
scott.billings@oum.ox.ac.uk
01865 272 995

Notes to editors

About the Museum of Natural History

Founded in 1860 as the centre for scientific study at the University of Oxford, the Museum of Natural History now holds the University's internationally significant collections of entomological, geological and zoological specimens. Housed in a stunning Pre-Raphaelite-inspired example of neo-Gothic architecture, the Museum's growing collections underpin a broad programme of natural environment research, teaching and public engagement.

In 2015, the Museum was a **Finalist in the Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year**. In 2016, it won the top accolade, Best of the Best, in the **Museums + Heritage Awards**.

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