

When scientists play with LEGO: A new creative version of pinned insect manipulator

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This image shows four different sized manipulators shown for comparison
Credit: B. Price

Scientists from the Natural History Museum London are facing the challenges of mass digitization of museum specimens by inventing a creative, functional and most importantly quite cheap way to capture old and fragile specimens.

Whoever said scientists are not creative will think twice at the face of the new LEGO pinned insect [manipulator](#) (IMp).

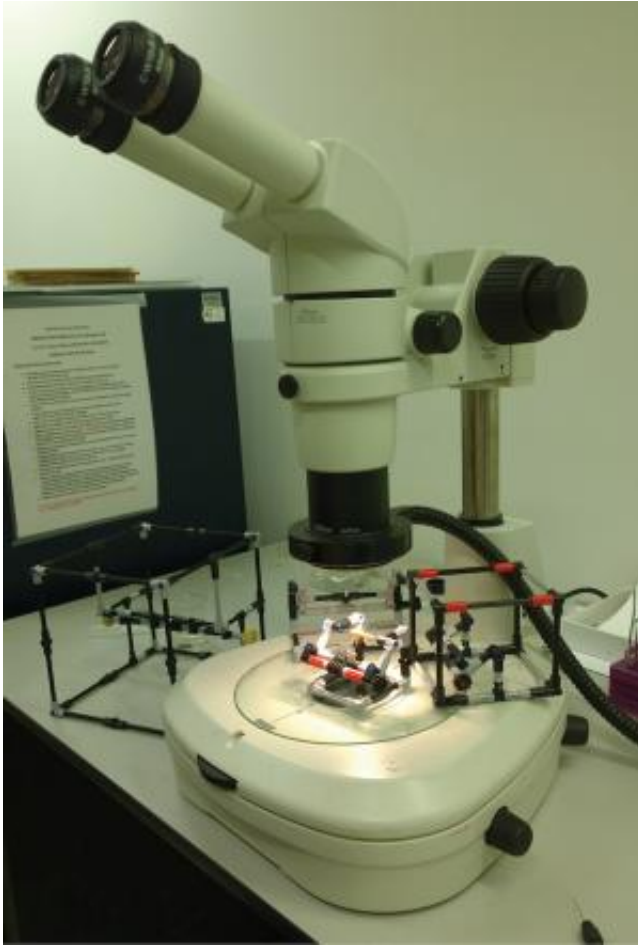
The idea came to life after years of using commercial manipulators which come in standard sizes and set up and are often hard to use with some groups of insects.

Available DIY on the other hand are also not convenient as they are made from materials and tools that are not readily available to everyone. Furthermore most DIY setups are specifically designed for a particular group of insects and may not be of an appropriate size for other insect groups.

So what will make for a good, easy to use and customizable pinned insect manipulator? This is where creativity kicks in for Dr. Steen Dupont and colleagues from the NHM London. To answer the challenges of mass digitization in their day-to-day digitization tasks they invented a pinned insect manipulator (IMp) made entirely of LEGObricks.

The new invention holds several advantages among which are universal applicability, availability, affordability and the opportunity to customization for the need of each case at all times. Most importantly they ensure minimum handling of fragile specimens to take the risks of damage to a minimum.

"We believe the LEGO insect specimen manipulators are a valuable addition to any entomologist's toolbox and that the use of any insect manipulator is in the interest of anyone dealing with valuable specimens as the actual handling of the specimen is reduced to a minimum during examination.", explains Dr. Steen Dupont.



These are the IMp models being used with the micro-IMp holding a specimen positioned for viewing. Credit: S. Dupont

More information: *ZooKeys* 481: 131-138. [DOI: 10.3897/zookeys.481.8788](https://doi.org/10.3897/zookeys.481.8788)

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