

# Grant Museum starts major project to preserve rarest skeleton in the world

25 November 2014



The Grant Museum of Zoology at UCL is undertaking a major project to protect 39 of its rarest and most significant skeletons, some which have been on display in the Museum for 180 years. To help achieve this, the Museum is launching its first ever public fundraising campaign – aiming to raise £15,000 to support the costs of this crucial work.

The specimens include the rarest skeleton in the world: the extinct quagga – an unusual half-striped zebra from South Africa. It is the only mounted quagga skeleton in the UK, and no more than seven quagga skeletons survive globally. The project involves completely dismantling and chemically cleaning the irreplaceable skeleton, and then remounting it on a new skeleton-friendly frame in a more anatomically correct position. The work is intended to secure the long-term preservation of the specimens.

The quagga will be the focus and most involved element of Bone Idols: Protecting our iconic skeletons, a major project of conservation across the Museum's displays. Interventions will range from deep cleaning bones, repairing damaged elements and re-casing specimens through to remounting huge skeletons. Among the 39 skeletons involved, the Museum will be conserving its critically endangered gorilla, Siamese crocodile and Javan rhino, and endangered tiger, chimpanzee, orang-utan and Ganges river dolphin skeletons. These are effectively uncollectable today.

The Bone Idols project has begun with the largest single specimen in the Museum – the skeleton of an Indian rhinoceros, which, like the quagga, is being completely rebuilt after 100 years on open display.

Museum Manager Jack Ashby says "The Grant Museum was founded in the 1820s as a collection for teaching. As a result, the ethos of the Museum today is to allow extremely close access to specimens for our visitors. The Bone Idols project is essential for the Museum to continue to use our collections every day in our fantastically popular programmes with schools and the public, as well as university teaching and research."

UCL evolutionary biologist and presenter of BBC's *Secrets of Bones*, Ben Garrod says "The Grant Museum has an amazing collection of incredibly rare and invaluable animal skeletons. The Bone Idols project is extremely important to preserve and protect these irreplaceable specimens for the long-term future. Resources like this are critical for improving our understanding and enjoyment of the natural world. "

The public will get to see the work in action: as much of the conservation as possible will be performed in the public eye in the gallery. This will shed light on a crucial element of [museum](#) work

which gets little public attention.

The Museum is undertaking its first ever public individual giving fundraising campaign to meet the costs of the Bone Idols project. The Museum has committed around half of the total funds needed, and has received contributions from Arts Council England's Museum Development Fund and the Natural Sciences Collections Association, demonstrating the importance of the work to safeguard these globally important specimens. The Museum is now turning to the public to help raise the remaining funds required to undertake this critical work.

The Grant Museum of Zoology, UCL is open to the [public](#) Monday-Saturday 1-5pm. A link with more details of the project, and how you can support it, can be found below.

Provided by University College London

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