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## NatSCA News

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- There was a general consensus that there are not enough labels in the displays. This is partly because standard size labels take up too much space. Some objects are fully labelled; others are not.

Despite these problems, most of the displays look really good. All the new displays will be evaluated and there will be changes made to any displays, which are not working, or could work better.

Kelvingrove Museum re-opens 11 July 2006. A new Museum for a new Millennium

For up to date information, see [www.glasgowmuseums.com](http://www.glasgowmuseums.com)

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### **Paul Richards, Curator of Natural History, Sheffield Galleries & Museums Trust** **Street safari: The next generation**

*The refurbished Weston Park Museum in Sheffield opens in 2006. A key element of the What on Earth! gallery will be the process of field natural history itself. It will provide tools for observation, identification and active involvement in the recording process. Street safari is an HLF funded project to take these concepts out of the museum into a North Sheffield community. It aims to link people, via the museum with experts from the local natural history society, develop skills and provide equipment for the ongoing recording of the area. It is increasing awareness of the value of natural history and presenting opportunities to get directly involved in the scientific process. Street safari has so far proved very effective in not only cascading these skills down to the next generation of naturalists, but has provided significant new biological records for a very under-recorded area of the city.*

#### **Weston Park Museum**

: The city museum has been closed for 3 years, but later this year we will be opening the newly re-furbished Weston Park Museum in Sheffield. This £17m project has largely been funded by £12.1m of HLF money. As part of this process we have had to pack up and move our entire collections, build a new store and totally gut the existing City museum. We return, bigger and better than before with a new natural science gallery called 'What On Earth!' and for the first time a dedicated display about our unique weather station.

When designing the gallery, with the appropriate acronym, WoE, we unsurprisingly began as any of you would with a very similar brief to the strap-line of this conference, "To promote the understanding of natural science and create an increased awareness and fascination of the natural world".

We all try to be unique in our response to this challenge, but that pretty much sums up the foundation of our aims.

The new gallery is divided into 5 main theme areas with the last being Nature Lab:

- Close to home
- Ancient lands
- Weird & wonderful
- The Power of nature
- Nature lab



This has a different style to the rest of the gallery and is the main 'hands-on' bit. In here we look at the process of how to be a field naturalist, through areas called Watch, Identify and Take part.

The first two are self-explanatory.

- *Watch* has binoculars, ID charts, live bees and ants, encouraging visitors to observe the world around them.

There is also a video conferencing area which will allow us make live links to other organisations, field activities or talks such as those presented at the Darwin centre where people in Sheffield can directly interrogate speakers beyond the city.

- *Identify* has resources to help work out what you have seen and how to classify it.

- Resources for identification
- Computer interactive
- Reference collections
- Literature
- Enabler
- Classification

- *Take Part* is where we go one step further and provide the means for people to tell us what they have seen and become involved in the scientific process. It looks at the area of biological and geological recording and provides a 7-day a week, free, access point for the input of information. (A further *Find Out* area offers an output point for data of all kinds). The main interactive in *Take Part* is a new front end to the RE-CORDER 6/classic database called *Nature Notebook*. We have developed this alongside the web-based version of RECORDER with Dorset Software and Luxembourg natural history museum. In a nutshell NN allows anyone, without training to enter a valid biological record directly into the database via a validation process. It can be set up for any area and for any range of species as long as they exist within the taxon dictionary. We have chosen to use 200 species that our local recorders deem to be the most easily identifiable based only on a photograph and brief description.

The reason for our emphasis on recording is very much down to the environmental activity that exists in Sheffield. For those of you that know the city you may be aware that we are not only the greenest city in Britain in terms of our trees and moorland, but also from an environmental awareness point of view, with well over 50 active individual environmental groups. It has also been suggested that we are one of the top 5 most well-recorded cities in the world. (The evidence for which we are working on with the University of Sheffield!) There is therefore a very good infrastructure for field activity, but still many surprisingly under-recorded areas. As anywhere else, there is also a falling uptake of field natural history in younger people and the expertise is rather falling off the end....



In an attempt to halt some of these declines and as a means of taking the gallery out beyond the museum, we developed *Street Safari* with funding from the HLF *Your Heritage* fund. It is basically Nature Lab on the road. Before nature lab itself existed! It also serves a function in providing some display elements for the gallery through community produced material and research results.

The primary aims of Street safari are to:

- empower local communities** in the understanding and recording of their immediate local environment,
- develop skills** required for recording biological information,
- provide community based workshops** to cascade skills from experienced naturalists down to children, local groups and individuals,
- deliver ongoing community input** into WPM and to the wider scientific community,
- develop the relationship** between the Sorby NHS, SGMT and local communities to enable a co-ordinated approach to skills sharing.
- promote WPM** as a central point of contact for the society.

And to **carry out natural history recording** in an under-recorded part of a well recorded city and to feed these records into the database at the City Ecology unit.

Street safari has been running for just over a year, with its own 3-day a week project officer, Peter Clegg. The project is working within one of Europe's most deprived areas, to the north of the city. The process has been to attempt to offer a wide influence across all ages and interest levels in the area, refining down towards specialist training and recording events by the end of this year.

During the two years we have been moving SNHS activity from the more traditional (and safe!) peak district side of the city to holding more events within reach of the community in north Sheffield. We have held guided walks, moth trapping, garden bug hunts, craft events, children's university courses, and specific re-

ording projects within school grounds, private gardens and allotments. It has introduced the concept of biological recording, why we do it, why they should do it and how, by getting involved, they can experience the work of a real scientist. This has produced thousands of new records including new species for the north of England

The year ahead has more walks and specific identification training and workshops, training for local teachers in the Education action zone and the provision of a 'legacy' unit for the community which will ensure that the equipment and materials as well as the skills will be left behind when the funding comes to an end. This will include the Nature notebook software, which can be run on a laptop and taken directly out to record in the field. A display within the gallery will promote the work of street safari within the museum.

Unfortunately due to building delays we have not had a museum while most of this is taking place, but this has helped us to resist the opportunity to ferry people across the city and instead have had to bring the museum to them.

Once open, one element, which will directly link the two, will be the flexible community display boards that will be in the gallery. The first two displays will be produced by our community groups to present the results of their recording projects in north Sheffield. This will hopefully draw some of our street safari audience to Sheffield 10 and show S10 what they're missing in wild north of the city.

The main question you could be asking is, "Have the street safari participants really encountered the museum or even the SNHS?" Although some use has been made of the museum specimens, we have primarily been looking at our data collections with Street Safari and the real natural history beyond the museum. I don't really care to be honest whether they've consciously been aware of it as a museum project or not. My concern is for inspiring a generation and selling a personal involvement message. Getting a non-traditional natural history audience to "Take part".

...But the reality is that the museum profile has been raised enormously, rather miraculously considering there isn't one! They have now made links with the staff and Sorby NHS, contributed to the collections, made a direct contribution to the displays and experienced the essence of the gallery without ever crossing the threshold.

They've influenced and shaped the interactives and added a great deal of knowledge to the datasets. But I will only really be satisfied, if I see further records generated from that community without our direct prompt. Ultimately I would be more pleased if I start seeing active naturalists emerging from that community in years to come, than if 50 new people visit the museum.

A key aim of the WoE gallery was to inspire in people a desire to look at the real thing, with less emphasis on facts and information giving. Street Safari is allowing us to go out and through sharing our own enthusiasm, inspire people exactly where they are. And instead of us just giving them information, they are giving it to us. By working in North Sheffield and talking to the people there we have discovered some of the most fabulous wildlife sites in the city and been able to put it into wider context so that the locals can appreciate it more. But also so that other parts of the city can realise that there is more to this area than drugs and murder.....And I suppose we may get some extra visitors.

Street safari could be easily applied as a model in other towns and cities. We hope to produce a report that includes more than just results for HLF, but also timelines, resources and tips for anyone wishing to do something similar and improve on it. Ideally we would like to continue spreading Street safari to other areas of the city. We have a few funding irons in the fire and it remains to be seen whether we will be able to continue in the future. But from this year we will at least finally have a base from which to launch.