BECOMING LOS ANGELES

500 YEARS IN REAL TIME

Step into NHM’s new exhibition and you’ll experience how people and the land shaped L.A., from its days as a tiny pueblo to a global metropolis. Enter the 14,000-square-foot galleries featuring an unparalleled collection of artifacts and take in a story only we can tell.

Member Preview Days
Thursday to Saturday, July 11–13
9:30 am – 5 pm

Fellows VIP Reception
Friday, July 12, 6 pm
Join President and Director Jane G. Pisano for a private reception to celebrate the Museum’s remarkable transformation.
To receive your invitation, join the Fellows at NHM.ORG/fellows or call 213.763.3253.

Public Opening
Sunday, July 14

The New Nature of NHM

In this issue of the Naturalist, we are thrilled to celebrate the transformation of the Museum, the opening of the new Nature Gardens, a 3 ½-acre outdoor exhibit, and the indoor component, Nature Lab. With these remarkable exhibits, the Museum has doubled its public space, and the role that has become our signature — communicating science to people of all ages — is growing as well. We have been uniquely equipped to make tough-to-tackle scientific topics captivating for all audiences inside NHM. Now, as we open the doors to our giant living laboratory, the Nature Gardens, we are opening the world of science to even more visitors through our programming. We will expand the reach of our popular citizen science programs, where volunteers observe wildlife in their backyards and schools, and then continue the exploration with the Museum’s scientists. We are launching new nature walks, where visitors will see how every plant was chosen to be a magnet for creatures, both native and introduced. There will be a variety of gardening classes and activities for all ages. Inside Nature Lab, visitors can engage in hands-on activities and meet live animals — all to help visitors understand how life on the planet is changing and why it matters.

That focus on stewardship is also front and center in Becoming Los Angeles. In this new permanent exhibit, we will share stories about how people and the environment interacted over centuries and transformed Los Angeles into the city it is today.

When visitors walk through our new north entrance, the Otis Booth Pavilion, we will connect them as never before to both the nature of the past and the nature living all around them. We hope you will join us.

Jane G. Pisano
President and Director

The Naturalist magazine is a publication of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County and is issued six times a year. As a member benefit, each issue provides a look at Museum exhibits, collections, adventures, research, and events. Through them, we inspire wonder, discovery, and responsibility for our natural and cultural worlds.

Cover photo by Mario de Lopez.
A Celebrity Suit Premieres at Becoming Los Angeles

When Becoming Los Angeles, our new permanent exhibition, opens July 14, there will be many stars among the objects in the 14,000-square-foot gallery. But the “Tramp” costume that silent film legend Charlie Chaplin wore in the 1931 Hollywood blockbuster City Lights will emit an extra twinkle. It is the only complete Tramp costume in existence and this is the first time in decades that it has been displayed. Chaplin donated it shortly after filming the story about a man down on his luck and the flower girl he loves. The iconic Tramp has been seen both as a charming comic figure and a subversive force over the years. A softened version of the Tramp as a quint figure was used in marketing campaigns, including IBM commercials in the 1970s. There was even a Tramp brand of cigarettes. We can thank Chaplin, who donated the costume, for giving the Tramp a good home. 

Member Preview Days for Becoming Los Angeles are July 11–13.

What’s in My Toothpaste?

Of all the glistening eye-catchers in the Gem and Mineral Hall, the one with the most hidden talent might be this fluorite. Eloïse Gaillou, Curator of NHM’s Mineral Sciences Department, which just won the Best Educational Content award at the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show, explained this versatile mineral’s rep: it’s used to make cavity-fighting toothpaste, and helps us see better (thank fluorite for the Tramp costume), and helps in the production of steel. Add a tiny amount of rare earth elements to fluorite and you’ll make it turn blue, violet, red, yellow, and green. But, despite its beauty, it can’t be possessed. Easily scratched and fragile, fluorite is not physically fit enough for everyday jewelry. “Diamonds are forever,” said Gaillou. “Fluorite is not.” But you can catch these evanescent sparklers, alongside their fellow luminaries, in the Gem and Mineral Hall every day of the week.

BioSCAN BEGINS!

Peek between the bushes in the new Nature Gardens starting June 9 and you’ll see what looks like someone’s overnight camping spot. The mini white “tent,” it turns out, is actually a Malaise trap, a clever invention for catching the plentiful arthropods in our new outdoor habitat. This collection device is one of about 30 that NHM’s scientists are setting up between downtown Los Angeles and the Griffith Park area as part of our BioSCAN project, or Biodiversity Science: City and Nature. The goals? To develop a good inventory of L.A. insect diversity, and to see how that differs between urban areas and less-urbanized areas. That’s the reason for the trap’s mini-weather station, which measures air and soil temperatures, humidity, and moistness. That also means that we’ll have thousands of insect samples to sort! Stop in and watch, or volunteer, in the new indoor Nature Lab when the exhibition opens June 9.

Written by Dean Petchoff

Natural History Family of Museums

Page Makes News

World-class photographers, celebrities, and television shows have been drawn to the Page Museum at the La Brea Tar Pits of late. This gorgeous photo of the Smilodon puppet from Ice Age Encounters was taken by Robb Kendrick for National Geographic magazine for a story about bringing animals like saber-toothed cats back from extinction. Our performing arts team had to hold still for a photo, which was developed onsite and involved no photographic trickery.

The New York Times also used the Pleistocene Garden, with its Ice Age flora, as a backdrop for its Hollywood issue. Actress Keira Knightley posed in the garden while Amy Adams took a moody shot inside. The Page Museum also made an appearance which was developed onsite and involved no photographic trickery.

For more information, visit NHM.ORG/nature.

Written by Jessica Portner

Visit NHM.ORG for more information.

Visit TARPITS.ORG

Visit HARTMUSEUM.ORG
Hummingbirds dart between the snapdragon bushes. Dragonflies hover above the pond where butterflies sip nectar from flowering milkweed. When the gates of our new Nature Gardens at NHM open June 9, visitors will see how busy we’ve been, turning 3½ acres of asphalt parking lots into a giant living laboratory and field site where they’ll happen upon Los Angeles wildlife in the Museum’s front yard. They’ll see those same creatures (often hidden from view) that share our homes, yards, schools, and parks.

Amble into the outdoor space through our north entrance off Exposition Blvd., via the footbridge, or through the new indoor Nature Lab, and you’ll be surrounded by more than 300 species of plants. But the flora don’t just look good. Our gardening experts have combined California native plants with common nonnative greenery that have become a typical part of the urban landscape. Each tree and bush couldn’t guzzle too much water and had to provide food and shelter for the shifting contingent of crawling and flying inhabitants. Visitors to this green space, and to its indoor companion, the Nature Lab, will partner with NHM scientists who are studying birds, butterflies, bugs, small mammals, and reptiles. Many have enlisted in NHM’s citizen science projects, and now the Nature Gardens will be a shared field site for visitors, educators, and scientists. A trip to an outdoor-indoor NHM can shift visitors’ perspective, so they see every tree, freeway overpass, or even porch light as a rich habitat.

“L.A. is the largest urban area in North America’s only biodiversity hot spot, and our new Nature Gardens are the place to see the amazing range of wildlife that lives here,” said Dr. Karen Wise, NHM’s Vice President of Education and Exhibits. “Here, visitors can find out what we know about L.A.’s wildlife, what we don’t know, and how they can help us find out, with their eyes, ears, and cameras.”


Your BACKYARD AND OURS

Citizen scientists, of all ages and across L.A., have, for years, been doing just that. They’ve spotted more than 6,000 web spinners as part of NHM’s Spider Survey and found more than 225 lizards for the Lost Lizards of Los Angeles Project (LLOLA). Their finds are helping us piece together which species are abundant, a first step in understanding why some creatures thrive and others disappear. NHM has also begun a new region-wide research project, Biodiversity Science: City and Nature (BioSCAN) to create an inventory of insects in the area by collecting at 30 sites in the region—including the Nature Gardens. We’ve already installed a Malaise trap, a flying insect collection device and weather station, which NHM scientists say will yield discoveries of new species every week.

PLANT, WATCH, EXPLORE

The Nature Gardens, designed by Mia Lehrer + Associates, are alive with other activities, too. When the doors of the Haaga Family Rotunda open again to the public, look for a bountiful crop of citrus trees, as well as vegetables and herbs popping out of raised beds and pots. Nearby, in the Pollinator Garden, it’s a butterfly, flower fly, and honey bee wonderland. In the Get Dirty Zone, visitors can poke around in the soil and compost bins and learn about the roly-poles that thrive beneath their feet.

Another Nature Gardens experience is the Listening Tree. Created by artist Alex Metcalf, NHM’s project is the only permanent installation of this work. Look for the silver “trumpets” in the Urban Wilderness and hear the tree soak up water, thanks to an amplification system that taps into its roots. Some Nature Gardens inhabitants are shy or nocturnal. So, we’ve installed motion-capture surveillance cameras, or camera traps, so visitors can spy on creatures in candid moments. A number of others disappear. NHM has also begun a new region-wide research project, Biodiversity Science: City and Nature (BioSCAN) to create an inventory of insects in the area by collecting at 30 sites in the region—including the Nature Gardens. We’ve already installed a Malaise trap, a flying insect collection device and weather station, which NHM scientists say will yield discoveries of new species every week.

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Otis Booth Pavilion Opens, A New Beacon for L.A.

When the glass-encased Otis Booth Pavilion, the Museum’s new north entrance, opens June 9, visitors will experience the monumental—both inside and out. Created with a $13 million donation from The Otis Booth Foundation, the six-story pavilion is an engineering stunner created from 139,000 pounds of glass.

Just as magnificent, though, is what the pavilion was built to showcase: the beloved 63-foot-long fin whale specimen that has been on exhibit inside for decades, now rearticulated to display the grace and power of a whale in the midst of a dive.

“The fin whale skeleton has been a centerpiece here almost from the start,” said Jim Dines, NHM’s Mammalogy Collections Manager. “It’s emblematic of the Museum’s transformation because it’s had a makeover, too.”

The signature specimen was acquired by the Museum in 1926 from the Sea Products whaling station in Humboldt County, and then shipped by rail to Los Angeles. The fin whale, Balaenoptera physalus—the second-largest species of whale—has been on exhibit at NHM since 1944, but has shifted location over the years to accommodate the growing Museum’s exhibition needs. It was first suspended from the ceiling in what is now the Age of Mammals. More recently, visitors saw the majestic specimen in a gallery, now the home of the new permanent exhibition, Becoming Los Angeles, opening July 14.

NHM’S MIGHTY AMBASSADOR

Now the leviathan is in the pavilion, which is equipped with a sound system so immersive that visitors will be able to hear and feel what a real whale sounds like. It will be “diving” in front of 33,600 red, blue, green, and white LED lights—which can create a backdrop of water, or shadows, or video that staffers can program. The rigging and engineering is so complicated that this 7,000-pound skeleton of the “greyhound of the sea,” outfitted with a new armature, was hung first and then the pavilion was erected around it. (Think about framing up a ballroom, then hanging a Tiffany chandelier, and then constructing walls and floors!)

“The Otis Booth Pavilion was always just a hope and a dream,” said NHM President and Director Jane G. Pisano. “It was an architectural rendering that sat on our shelves for years—one that we hoped we’d be able to pay for one day. The Otis Booth Foundation made that dream a reality. It is a beacon to the people of Los Angeles and beyond.”

When visitors make their inaugural trek into NHM’s new Nature Lab, opening June 9, they will discover, within minutes of stepping into the 6,000-square-foot space, how truly wild L.A. can be. Maybe it’s the menagerie of live animals, from harvester ants to a bullfrog, in a dozen glass habitats. It could be the videos of critters that Angelenos uncover (sometimes literally) in their homes, schools, and backyards. Or the other ways a Nature Lab outing inspires visitors to discover and share their experiences about the wildlife flying, crawling, and darting all around them.

Nature Lab is the indoor companion to the 3 ½-acre Nature Gardens, our giant living, outdoor laboratory, also opening June 9. Together, they mark the Museum’s transformation into an outdoor-indoor NHM, an unparalleled museum of living nature. These complementary exhibits, a public field site and lab, were also created to highlight NHM’s scientific survey of urban wildlife and to showcase NHM’s biodiversity research results as they happen.

“We are inviting people to explore the nature that is all around us, but which few of us ever notice,” said Dr. Karen Wise, NHM’s Vice President of Education and Exhibits. “Most people don’t know that Los Angeles is a part of the only biodiversity hot spot in North America. We’re inviting all Angelenos to put on our nature eyes and ears and get to know our wild neighbors.”

Nature Lab’s experiences convey the extraordinary cacophony of sounds and visual marvels in L.A. More than 200 specimens—from butterflies to a mountain lion—are complemented by live animals in specially built habitats. Interspersed around the lab are hundreds of videos (see NHM’s ornithologist discuss parrots) and still images of creatures spotted by people in the Nature Gardens and around greater L.A. The exhibit’s dozen interactives include a screen for creating urban wildlife soundscapes (pick a cooing bird, add a howling coyote, and mix in the sound of a garbage truck, if you like). On long tables are illustrated “memory maps,” personal recollections of L.A. nature.

Look for one school’s illustration of building a garden.

Nature Lab is bursting with the stories of plants and animals that survive—and even flourish—in the city. Take the massive “dollhouse” that contains a hundred critter cams, and spy on seldom-seen creatures before stopping by!
When our new exhibition, Becoming Los Angeles, opens July 14, you’ll explore a story only we can tell—how the natural environment and people interacted and transformed L.A. over 500 years, from a small outpost of the Spanish empire to a global metropolis. We bring this dramatic tale, full of entrepreneurial bravado, territorial skirmishes, and environmental alteration, to life through artifacts carefully selected from the Museum’s unparalleled collection. Then we display the objects in a modern, interactive 14,000-square-foot gallery of glass and steel.

A lot of the treasures have never been displayed. There’s an inscribed sword from the Mexican War of Independence, a 1902 Tourist automobile (originally manufactured in Independence, a 1902 Tourist auto-mobile (originally manufactured in Independence, a 1902 Tourist automobile), a pump from an L.A. oil field in the 1920s, and Walt Disney’s animation stand built in his uncle’s garage. An equally charismatic star of the show is a larger model. Peer down through the glass case to a miniature downtown L.A. without freeways. You’ll see the greenery of Pershing Square and the red clay Spanish tile roofs of Union Station, miniature palm trees, and even a building advertisement hawking hosiery.

**TAKE A TOUR**

For an interactive, overview tour of L.A., we’ve created some special guides. On the outskirts of the city model are interactive touch pads where visitors can explore 10 geographical “hot spots,” hear an audio voiceover, and watch a slideshow. This time-travel tour may take you back to 1930s-era L.A., or usher you to earlier years or the present.

“We are uncovering layers of history of influential and ordinary people and their stories—some positive, some tragic, and some controversial,” said Dr. William Estrada, the Curator and Chair of History at NHM. The stories are of Hollywood legends, political heavyweights, immigrants, or good places to eat.

“People can experience what happened in a particular place and time, and hopefully find relevance today.”

One memorable fact on the tour is the Old Plaza, across from Union Station, where L.A. was born. It was the public square in the 1820s, when the Mexican ranchero society reigned. Another highlight is Old Chinatown and the extraordinary life of a Chinese immigrant, Tyrus Wong, a now 102-year-old artist and kite maker, best known for creating the background art for the Disney film *Bambi*.

At the Pershing Square hotspots, you’ll discover a story about the original Clifton’s Cafeteria, a welcoming eatery during the Great Depression that featured a sign saying, “Pay What You Can.” The Bunker Hill stop unveils the Angels Flight cable railway that ferried passengers just 350 feet to work and shop, one of the model’s quirky transportation tidbits. Dr. Margaret Hardin, NHM’s Division Chief for History and Anthropology, said that when the model was in NHM’s Lando Hall of California History, it was a visitor favorite but was still a little mysterious. “Now we’ve conserved it and activated it with these incredible stories,” Dr. Hardin said, “We decided to make it come alive.”

**Calling All Volunteers!**

Share, explore, and learn at NHM this summer! Hold a 7. rex tooth, learn how to spot a swallow in the air, and discover your own L.A. nature story.

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At Home

A Pizza Patch?
Before supermarkets, many people would grow their own food. In our new Nature Gardens, we are planting ingredients for your favorite meals.

**Our new Nature Gardens and Nature Lab** are buzzing with bugs, birds, butterflies, and small mammals. See how many of these you can find around your home and ours.

Did You Know?

Stars of the Soil
In the Get Dirty Zone in NHM’s Nature Gardens, you can play in and learn all about dirt! Pill bugs, famous leaf shredders, will be there, too.

1. **Also called roly-polies, they roll themselves into balls when poked.**
2. **They shred leaves and food scraps.**
3. **Tiny microbes get to work on discarded shreds from pill bugs, creating good soil.**
4. **They’re not insects! They are related to crabs and shrimps.**

Outside

Your Nature Story
Have you ever looked closely at a bug in your backyard, listened to a bird’s song at home, planted a seed at school, or spotted a lizard on a trail?

Everyone has a story of discovering wild things. What’s yours?

At the Museum

Name That Animal
These crawling, swimming, and burrowing live animals are cared for by NHM’s animal keepers. Read these clues and see if you can match the animal with its nickname.

1. **Joshua** looks like a rattlesnake without the rattle!
2. **Kermit** is cute but toxic to touch.
3. **Dandelion** scurries around with her long-tailed pack.
4. **Esmeralda** looks like a lobster and prefers living in shallow ponds.
5. **Poppy** hides in shell when scared.


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The indoor Nature Lab and outdoor Nature Gardens open Sunday, June 9. Visit NHM.ORG/100 for information about a special Member Preview from 9 am to 12 pm.
Kevin Sharer

Kevin Sharer and I have been living on the East Coast where he recently retired as CEO of Amgen. President and Director Jane G. Pisano. The confluence of natural and cultural so many years. It’s wonderful that though Sharer, now Chairman has exceeded my highest expectations, and I’m immensely proud to have leadership of Sarah Meeker Jensen has been a key part of NHM – including Board President Neftali Camacho and meet scaly lizards for Boys and Girls Club Los Angeles. The Museum’s ability to engage a new generation in a passion for science, medically, and scientifically,”

Manchester University, including Board President

It does everything an evolution!

Becoming Los Angeles:

Supported by

NHM — including Board President

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**NHM Fellows Events**

Join us on a walk through the Nature Gardens to explore the amazing biodiversity of life that also calls L.A. home.

Meet wildlife in NHM's newest garden spaces, and talk with organizations that help support a more sustainable L.A.

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**Nature Walk**

Hang out with our scientists, then go on a scavenger hunt throughout the Museum! A free monthly program for members at the Patron Family level and higher.

**Meet a Live Animal**

Grab your binoculars or bug nets and explore the new Nature Gardens at NHM! Daily programs may include bird walks, bug hunts, tasting in the Edible Garden, and more!

Check the website for schedule updates.

**Member Preview Days**

As a special benefit, members get to see all new exhibits before they open to the public.

**La Brea Tar Pits**

For 3- to 5-year-olds and a participating adult this year. Explore how museums (not just ours) got their start.

**100th Birthday Bash**

For 6- to 9-year-olds and a participating adult this year. Explore how museums (not just ours) got their start.

**Natural History Museum**

The Magazine of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County June and July 2023