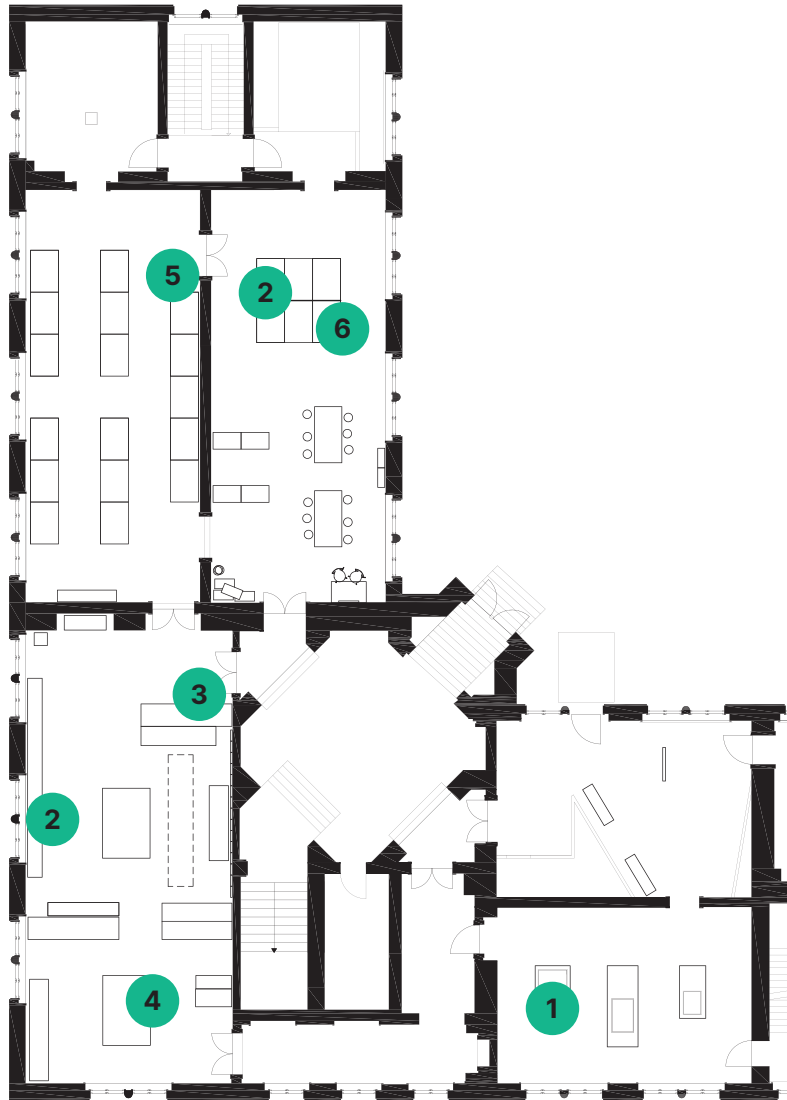


Discover the exhibition

Wild Wonderful World

How we conserve specimens

Some of the museum's objects have been in the collections for over 400 years. How can conservators preserve natural objects so they can last possibly forever? In the exhibition, you can find many examples of creative, curious, and practical methods of conserving objects.



Exhibition floor plan

DENMARK
NATURAL HISTORY
MUSEUM

UNIVERSITY OF
COPENHAGEN

1

Greenlandic herbarium sheets

Pressing and drying plants is a very old and common method of preserving them. The pressed plants can be mounted on sheets of paper with information about what plant it is and where it originates from. This is called a herbarium sheet. Plants stored dry and securely on herbarium sheets can last for centuries. The museum's collection includes more than 2 million herbarium sheets.

2

Whale and elephant in alcohol

To preserve whole animals with organs for extended periods, the best method is to store them in alcohol. This is typically done with small mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and fish. Animals preserved in alcohol need to be regularly refilled as the alcohol evaporates. It can be challenging to preserve very large animals this way due to the amount of alcohol required, but embryos of whales and elephants can easily be preserved like this. A small fetus of a humpback whale appears almost as if it was freshly preserved. An elephant fetus (room 8), over 300 years old, is also remarkably well-preserved!

3

Damaged black coral

The coral was damaged by an explosion from sabotage during World War II. Its unique history led conservators to decide against attempting repairs. There are photographs of the coral from its time in the old exhibitions in Krystalgade before it was damaged. Photographic documentation serves as a crucial resource for conservators to observe the condition of objects, providing insight into whether repairs or reconstructions are needed.

4

Bøje Benzon's taxidermy

The museum's extensive collection of taxidermy animals, donated by Bøje Benzon in the mid-20th century, reflects the era by preserving animals in lifelike and naturalistic poses. When animals are taxidermied, their skins are mounted on artificial bodies, while bones and organs are typically preserved separately for scientific purposes. To maintain their appearance, taxidermied animals require maintenance by conservators and often contain toxins to prevent pest infestations.

5

Skin and bones

The wolf shot in Denmark in 2018 is an example of a decision to taxidermy an animal for exhibition to tell its unique story. However, the wolf's bones, stored separately, are intriguing because they reveal the cause of death: a rib damaged by the bullet that ended the young wolf's life.

6

Dry fish and a wet bat

The participants of the Danish Arabian Expedition arrived in Yemen in 1763. Problems arose due to the country's alcohol prohibition, which prevented them from entering with objects preserved in alcohol. To circumvent this, the scientist Peter Forsskål came up with a creative solution: he pressed the collected fish, similar to pressing plants. Forsskål's fish herbarium is unique due to its age and the special preservation method. He also managed to smuggle a bat preserved in alcohol in his inner pocket, making it one of the museum's oldest alcohol-preserved specimens.