

AHRC Collections & Communities in the East of England Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP)

PhD Studentship: Colonial Natural Historical Collecting in the South Asian Indian Ocean

- Start date: 1st October 2024
- Pre-application online information session for interested applications: 16th April, 10am BST (UTC+1) [Register your interest](#)
- Application Deadline: 12 May
- Interviews will take place online on Tuesday 11 June

The University of Cambridge and its Museum of Zoology are pleased to announce a fully-funded collaborative doctoral studentship from October 2024 under the AHRC's [Collaborative Doctoral Partnership \(CDP\) Scheme](#).

This project will be jointly supervised by [Professor Sujit Sivasundaram](#) and [Jack Ashby](#) together with [Dr. Charu Singh](#) and [Professor Sam Brockington](#). The student will undertake research at both the University Museum of Zoology and the Faculty of History at the University of Cambridge, while also having access to the Department of History and Philosophy of Science and the University's Herbarium. They will become part of the wider cohort of CDP-funded students across the UK.

We want to encourage the widest range of potential students to apply for this CDP studentship. We particularly welcome applications from Black, Asian, Minority, Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds as they are currently underrepresented among doctoral students in these research areas. As this project focuses on South Asia and the Mascarene Islands, candidates applying from countries in South Asia and the Indian Ocean are especially encouraged. This is especially so, given the project's formal aim to generate dialogue on its key research questions between the global South and Europe.

Please contact cc-ee@fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk if you would like this document in an alternative format.

Project Overview

The University Museum of Zoology and Cambridge University Herbarium have exceptional collections from South Asia and the Mascarene Islands (taken to include Mauritius, Réunion and Rodrigues). These collections have underpinned scientific research into evolution, extinction and natural history, but their human social stories have yet to be explored.

This region is of massive importance to the European colonial story. It has some of the world's most celebrated animals and plants, from tigers to dodos and rhododendrons and tea. Such specimens in our collections represent how colonial histories and environmental histories became tied to the same processes, and how natural history practices reinforced and were reinforced by the workings of empire. This project will shed light on the entwined human and environmental costs of the colonial project.

Together with the team of supervisors, the successful candidate will develop a project to interrogate the history of these collections or some parts of them with respect to colonialism and Indigenous, local and indentured practices and contexts. The following questions indicate some of the directions of possible research:

- How did colonial collectors work in amassing this material? Who did they work with? What was the nature of these relationships? How have these contributors been credited and rewarded?
- What are the links between practices of natural history and troubling or violent colonial history? What does this say about the entwined human and environmental costs of the colonial project?
- To what extent did colonial narratives shape how the collections came together – what are the broader historical circumstances behind the collections?
- Did models of colonial resource-exploitation differ between zoology and botany collecting?
- How were new theories, new disciplinary structures and new modes of knowledge shaped by these collecting practices?
- How did the definition of species, animals and kinds relate to ideas of race, gender and other variables of identity, which were projected across the human/animal divide?
- How might the Indian Ocean be seen as a terrain of natural historical collecting and imagination?

The precise regional/national and taxonomic focus can be moulded by the student. The student will be supported in choosing their focus-collections. The student may possibly engage with scientific and resident communities in the region to understand their viewpoints, and how the research project is impacted by legacies of historic scientific collecting for European institutions.

The outcomes of this project will be significant. They have the potential to help shape how the natural history museum sector grapples with understanding its colonial legacy; as well as extending the University's inquiries into the legacies of enslavement and empire through its museums. A principal aim of such work is to ensure museums are better serving the societies in which they are embedded, and those whose collections they hold – by engaging audiences with their histories honestly, and demonstrating that a far greater diversity of people were involved in the history of science – and society – than has traditionally been acknowledged. In this way it is hoped that more people will feel represented by museums. The doctoral student will also contribute to scholarship and augment the knowledge held about these collections.

Cambridge's natural history collections have always supported pioneering scientific research, but their potential for researching imperial cultural history is only just beginning to be realised.

Please find further details about the University Museum of Zoology collection at the end of this document.

Benefits and Opportunities

This collaborative PhD studentship offers the opportunity to develop skills and experience for careers in the creative and cultural sectors, supporting a pipeline of staff into the museum and cultural sector.

As the CDP programme emphasises work-based skills, the four years of funding (or up to seven years part-time), includes PhD research but also development activities including placements

(usually 3-6 months or equivalent for part-time students), as applicable to meet the successful student's needs. At the outset of their PhDs, students will complete an individual training needs analysis and plan. This is a unique opportunity to gain a wide range of transferable professional skills, which may include public engagement and interpretation of collections, as well as the opportunity to help develop the emerging field of decolonial practice within the natural history museum profession.

The successful candidate will be registered with the Faculty of History at the University of Cambridge, one of the best universities in the world for postgraduate study.

The University of Cambridge offers a diverse range of facilities and support services to its students. With over 100 libraries, nine specialist museums, and extensive [welfare services](#), you will have every resource you need to make the most of your time here.

At the University Museum of Zoology, in the Faculty of History, and as part of the Collections & Communities in the East of England (CC-EE) Collaborative Doctoral Programme (CDP), the student will become part of a vibrant cohort of collaborative doctoral researchers. The prospective student will have access to the natural history collections community of practice focused on decolonial practice, led by the University Museum of Zoology.

CDP students also benefit from a dedicated programme of UK-wide [CDP Cohort Development events](#) delivered in tandem with the other museums, galleries and heritage organisations affiliated with the AHRC CDP scheme.

Details of Award

CDP doctoral training grants fund full-time studentships for four years or up to seven years if studied part-time. This time period will include development activities and relevant work experience placements.

The award pays tuition fees up to the value of the full-time home UKRI rate for PhD degrees. The Research Councils UK Indicative Fee Level for 2024/2025 is £4,786.

The award pays full maintenance for all students both home and international students. The UKRI National Minimum Doctoral Stipend for 2024/2025 is £19,237, plus a CDP maintenance payment of £600 year.

Further details can be found on the UKRI [website](#)

The student is eligible to receive an additional travel and related expenses grant during the course of the project courtesy of the University Museum of Zoology worth up to **£2,000** per year for four years, or pro rata for part-time students .

The project can be undertaken on a full-time or part-time basis.

The fee gap between the home and overseas fee rates will be covered by the University through internal co-funding for international candidates.

If you have a disability, you may be entitled to a Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) on top of your studentship. DSA helps to cover the cost of any additional support that a person studying for a doctorate might need as a result of a disability, mental health problem or specific learning difficulty. You can read more about DSA: <https://www.ukri.org/publications/disabled-students-allowance-dsa-framework/>

Eligibility

We welcome applications from both International and UK (home) students.

To be classed as a home student, candidates must meet the following criteria:

- Be a UK National (meeting residency requirements),
- or Have settled status,
- or Have pre-settled status (meeting residency requirements),
- or Have indefinite leave to remain or enter

Further guidance can be found here - <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/UKRI-030221-Guidance-International-Eligibility-Implementation-training-grant-holders-V2.pdf>

Applicants should ideally have or expect to receive a relevant Master's-level qualification, or be able to demonstrate equivalent experience in a professional setting. Suitable disciplines are flexible, but might include History, Archive Studies, History of Science/Natural History, or Geography.

Applicants must be able to demonstrate an interest in natural history and the museums, archives, library and heritage sector and potential and enthusiasm for developing skills more widely in related areas.

If you can demonstrate competence in a language relevant to the area of proposed study, this will be an advantage.

As a collaborative award, students will be expected to spend time at both the Faculty of History and the University Museum of Zoology, as well as the University Herbarium.

NB. All applicants must meet UKRI terms and conditions for funding. See: <https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/grant-terms-and-conditions/>

Application Process

All applications will need to be made through the University Graduate Application Portal: <https://www.postgraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/how-do-i-apply>

A step-by-step guide, including for the Application Portal is at the end of this document. This includes an indication of the key skills and experiences required for the project.

An online information session will be held on 16th April at 10am BST (UTC+1). This is an opportunity to hear more about the project and the application process. Following a presentation, there will be the chance to ask questions in 1-1 surgery slots. Please register in advance to attend or receive the recording: [Register your interest](#)

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to an online interview with the supervisory team and representative from the CC-EE CDP consortium on Tuesday 11 June.

Applicants are encouraged to contact the supervisory team with informal enquiries about the studentship:

- [Professor Sujit Sivasundaram](#), Faculty of History, University of Cambridge - sps20@cam.ac.uk
- [Jack Ashby](#), University Museum of Zoology, University of Cambridge - jda26@cam.ac.uk

Please contact the CC-EE CDP if you have any questions or concerns about the application or interview process:

- Sarah Villis, CC-EE CDP co-ordinator - cc-ee@fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk
- Sandra O'Neill, PhD Administrator - phd-admissions@hist.cam.ac.uk

Guide to using the Application Portal

1. Register for an account or log in to the [Applicant Portal](#).
2. Search for **PhD in History** and apply now
3. Choose a course start date of 01-Oct-2024
4. First section: **About you**
 - a. Personal Details
 - b. Contact Details
 - c. Nationality & Visa: If you are resident of outside of the UK, please put all your relevant information about your Visa status, [further information on help filling in this section can be found here](#) and more information for [International students can be found here](#)
 - d. Additional information: the information put here is not used in the academic decision to admit you to the course.
 - e. College Membership: all students assigned a college once they are accepted on a course; you can select a preference, but it is not essential.
 - f. This is where you add your academic history details and supporting transcripts. If you do not have a Master's degree, please add all relevant work experience in the employment history and CV section.
5. Second Section: **Course Application**
 - a. Reference Request, add details of 2 references.
 - b. Employment history: add all employment history relevant to this studentship.
 - c. English Language: if you are not a national of an English-speaking country you will be asked to provide scores of a recently taken language test or indicate that you are planning to book an approved language test. If you have not taken a test yet, you will only need to provide the scores if you are offered a place.
 - d. Research (**Important please add to fields as described below**)
 - i. Please say '**Yes**' to 'Do you have any research information to add?'
 - ii. 'Proposed Title' please add: **CDP Studentship: Colonial Natural Historical Collecting in the South Asian Indian Ocean**
 - iii. 'Summary of proposed research project' please add: **CDP Studentship: Faculty of History & Museum of Zoology**
 - iv. 'Name of proposed supervisor' please add: **Professor Sujit Sivasundaram**
 - v. 'Research experience' please add: **All your relevant research experience.**

- e. Other Information, add your CV and career goals into this section.
- i. Additional information to support application: we are committed to ensuring that all candidates are considered fairly and equally for funding. You may use this section of the portal to outline (in no more than 200 words) any individual or personal circumstances that have significantly affected prior educational opportunity and/or attainment, and which have materially affected the preparation of this application. There is no need to include details of circumstances that you have effectively overcome in the past, but you may describe (for example) details of disability, chronic or acute illness, caring responsibilities, educational or socio-economic background, where the impact is recent and/or ongoing. The Selection Panel will then make allowance for this when evaluating your application.
- f. Course Specific Questions
- i. Your proposed course at Cambridge: What subject-specific skills have you acquired so far?
If you are able, among other relevant skills you have, you should include how you would evidence the following:
- Experience of archival work and some training in historical methods.
 - An interest in the history of natural history.
 - A commitment to working in museum contexts or with collections.
 - Competence in a language relevant to the area of proposed study.
- ii. Your proposed course at Cambridge: What general skills have you acquired so far?
If you are able, among other relevant skills you have, you should include how you would evidence the following:
- Ability and commitment to working in a team and taking the initiative with a research project which is interdisciplinary.
 - IT literacy
 - Excellent communication skills, with the demonstrable ability to communicate confidently with colleagues and external stakeholders.
- iii. Sample of Work: Applicants should provide a sample of written work in English. This is usually a thesis or one or two long essays. There is no set minimum or maximum word count for the writing sample(s), we simply recommend that students select one or two pieces of work that best represent their writing style. It is sensible (but not obligatory) to choose a piece of work which is at least roughly in the subject area in which you plan to do research. These could include research articles, or sector- or public-facing outputs, including blogs.
- iv. Research Proposal: Using the project overview above as your starting point, please write a **700-word** proposal of how you propose to develop

a project to interrogate the history of the University Museum of Zoology and Cambridge University Herbarium collections from South Asia and/or the Mascarene Islands. You may wish to specify which country, countries or region(s) your research would focus on. This may set out in draft a set of primary research questions and also highlight any particular objects or materials, including archival sources, which are particularly relevant to the proposed investigation. The proposal will be used as a basis for interview.

6. Third Section: **Funding your study** (Important. Please add to fields as described below)
 - a. The portal states that applications are closed.
 - b. Have you applied for or secured funding for this course – please answer **yes**.
 - i. Funding: select **Other**
 - ii. Funding status: select **I have applied for this funding**
 - iii. Please give details about this funding: please add **AHRC CDP Studentship**
 - iv. Please ignore the other fields.
7. Fourth Section: **Equal Opportunities**
 - a. Widening Access and Participation: Information collected in this section will be used for anonymous statistical reporting.
 - b. Adjustments: If you would like to tell us about any adjustments you may need to help enable us to treat you fairly, please let us know here (e.g. if you are a wheelchair user). [The Accessibility and Disability Resource Centre](#) (ADRC) offers guidance, information and support to prospective students, applicants and current students with any impairment/disability or health condition.
8. Fifth Section: **Summary**
 - a. Supporting Documents
 - i. Academic Transcripts
 - ii. CV
 - iii. Sample of Work
 - iv. Research Proposal as described above.
 - b. Funding Applications: please ignore this (this PhD is fully funded)
 - c. Pay and submit: there is no fee for this application.

Examples of the University Museum of Zoology collection

The precise regional and taxonomic focus can be shaped by the student – archival research can be approached using species, places, events or people as their starting point ([see this post, for example](#)).

The collections are rich, particularly in material from India, Nepal, Singapore, the Malay Archipelago and Mauritius, with strong biases for regions with ties to the former British Empire. The student, could, for example, focus on the networks and collecting practices of a number of people who supplied the museum and herbarium with collections from a specific region, but there are other possible approaches. As an indication of the kind of material available in UMZC, we hold, for example:

- A significant collection of birds and insects amassed by Alfred Russel Wallace in the Malay Archipelago, much of which was collected thanks to Malay collaborators working with Wallace, such as the Ali for Celebes and Baderoon from Sarawak: <https://natsca.blog/2020/10/22/telling-the-truth-about-who-really-collected-the-hero-collections/>
- One of the world's most significant collections of extinct birds from the Mascarene islands (including the world's only Rodrigues parakeet specimens, plus huge dodo and solitaire holdings) sent by a colonial administrator closely linked to the Museum. The dodos, at least, were collected by indentured labourers. These species were lost as a consequence of colonialism. The dodo continues to have a huge resonance in the cultural and national life of Mauritius and its museums.
- A tiger killed by the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, on a diplomatic tour of India in 1875. There is excellent new work by anthropologists and historians of science on big animal-human relationships in South Asia, including themes such as hunting, urbanisation and royal and elite sociability.
- Large collections – particularly birds – amassed by East India Company officers, such as Brian Houghton Hodgson, Robert Taylor and Thomas Horsfield; and individuals linked to the museum of the Asiatic Society of India in Calcutta, and the East India Company Museum in London. See this post about similar collections in the Manchester Museum: <https://natsca.blog/2021/04/22/the-east-india-company-and-natural-history-collecting/>
- The William Benson Mollusc Collection, which consists of land and freshwater molluscs, largely from India. Benson, who lived in India during the early part of the last century, assembled the earliest and largest collection of snails from southern Asia that exists anywhere in the world.
- Material from the Skeat Expedition to the Malay Peninsula; the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition to the Indian Ocean; primates from Borneo and Sarawak collected by Charles Hose, and marine specimens amassed across by Alfred Cort Haddon and John Stanley Gardiner.

These are purely illustrative, and the names mentioned clearly reflect the bias in the archive – centring, as they do, prominent white naturalists. The research questions outlined above would shed light on the way they worked, and who they worked with.