

Natural History in its
Natural Habitat

a disgruntled / meta / irreverent fanzine

By Joe Blogs



A Natural Historian in its
Natural Habitat

- image of the Author courtesy of Rosi Merz

Natural History as we know it today basically started out as rich old white colonialists buying random bits from sailors during the Explorer Era of Catan history (1700's), these 'curiosity cabinets' were sometimes bought whole from one collector to another for substantial sums, building and building until they were millions of specimens strong. These collections became the first national history museum collections transferred to public trust. Think James Petiver and Han Sloan, basically exceptionally wealthy nerds who try to collect and collate, catalogue and define the WHOLE WORLD in some sort of nature hoarding orgy.

To go back even further - that's right I'm not playing this game chronologically, fuck your rules - the first known idea of "natural history" came from ole Pliny, ole Pliny the Elder Pliny the old roman man, classic. This old war-horse got to trot all around the ancient Europe and North Africa on his duties first in the military, & later as proconsul, and had two slaves who would read and write for him him, as he sat around in the bath. Nice work if you can get it, just takes a repressive and bloody multinational empire to sustain... where have we seen that before? Oh yeah, the future.

What did Pliny('s slaves) put in this Natural History? Everything. It was a handy catch all phrase for literally all knowledge. They hadn't invented the word Encyclopedia yet. Botany, zoology, astronomy, geology, but also art, technology, superstition, and anything else he could get his wet hands on. My favorite Pliny the Elder fact relating to natural history is that he died in the eruption of Vesuvius that encased Pompeii & Herculaneum for us to enjoy today... Naturally,, historically.



So what the fuck does Natural History even mean these days? We already have seperate sciences for Biology, geology, Palaeontology, Archaeology, why do we need this antiquated umbrella term?

Early amateur proto-archaeologists of this ilk were known as 'Antiquarians', a term we've thankfully retired to the dustbin of history, makes me think of people who are against the dawning of the age of aquarius, haters.

Let's see what some other, better informed people think...

G.A. Bartholomew, 1986: "A student of natural history, or a naturalist, studies the world by observing plants and animals directly. Because organisms are functionally inseparable from the environment in which they live and because their structure and function cannot be adequately interpreted without knowing some of their evolutionary history, the study of natural history embraces the study of fossils as well as phyiographic and other aspects of the physical environment."

Ok bro, so how is that different to normal ecology, or biology? Surely biologists obsessing about a species would think about studying it in its natural habitat, and consider its evolution... right?

Maybe the 80's were a time of silos



S. Herman, 2002: "the scientific study of plants and animals in their natural environments. It is concerned with levels of organisation from the individual organism to the ecosystem, and stresses identification, life history, distribution, abundance, and inter-relationships. It often, and appropriately includes an esthetic component."

Hmmm... again same problem for me, all of this is kind of covered in the individual disciplines. Nice to add space for beauty, tacked on at the end there, but it doesn't feel very integrated...



An observation of the cuteness of
Ginkgo sepal when applied to the mandibular
gap of *Ratus ratus* and *Trichosurus vulpecula*
- By the author.

T. Fleischner, 2002: "A practice of intentional, focussed attentiveness and receptivity to the more-than-human world, guided by honesty and accuracy."

Wait a second, that last one doesn't sound like traditional science, it sounds like traditional wisdom. In fact, to me it resonates with how our hunter-gatherer ancestors and indigenous cultures thrived for millions of years, by being in relationship with the world around them, and embedded in that world,



When anthropologists (usually rich white kids) studied hunter gatherer cultures (usually from the perspective of the dominant western scientific worldview) they would indeed often find an inconceivably detailed, complex, and intimate connectedness to the natural processes that surround and support them. Anyone read Jean Auel? It has been found that our brains have actually shrunk since our good ole days of being hunter G's. As we downsize our vast internal libraries of interrelation with the natural world into the relative specialisation of farming, and swapping for things that other humans can do*. This has also been correlated with a steep decline in health and wellbeing.

*this is a heinous oversimplification
the part of me that went to uni is
ashamed, but fuck it, Yuval Harari
gets away with it on almost every page.



An experiemental study of how to
live-cook Tauhou (*Zosterops lateralis*), using
prize sorbet-worthy persimmons as bait.

- By the author.

And indigenous people the world over are calling for a deeper recognition of their ancestral ways of knowing, putting science in context as just one of many ways of understanding and interacting with our beautiful home and all the myriad life it supports.

Robin Wall Kimmerer, internationally recognised as a world-leading expert in moss and lichen botany, is a descendant of Potawatomi tribes in the Western Great Lakes region of North America.

"in indigenous ways of knowing, we understand a thing only when we understand it with all four aspects of our being: mind, body, emotion, and spirit. I came to understand quite sharply when i began my training as a scientist that science privileges only one... mind"

- Braiding Sweetgrass.



Eurasian Wren "*Troglodytes troglodytes*"

By Oliver Dack,

Author's private collection

So perhaps the antiquated vaguery of the term Natural History is actually a helpful vehicle for a revolution in approach, and a wholing of things artificially dissected. Natural History has always included an appreciation of beauty, from the delicately detailed sketches of botanists, to the fascination of iridescence on a beetle's carapace.

Perhaps the analytical tool of science, the cutting up of the whole to understand its parts, ^uusing the mind as a powerful scalpel to slice open and inspect, to describe in finer and finer grains of precision, has accidentally been turned on ourselves. Perhaps the distinctions of biology ecology, illustration, of science and art, of human and animal, us and them, has been the erection of walls, mazes, and ivory towers.

The umbrella term of Natural History then, can be our clarion call towards wholeness in our study of ~~an~~ and connection to the natural world. With mind, **body**, emotion, spirit, and anything else a deep presence draws out of your being.

So get out there my friends, and be a human in all
the wild tenderness that it entails, appreciate and
be curious towards this world and its gifts.

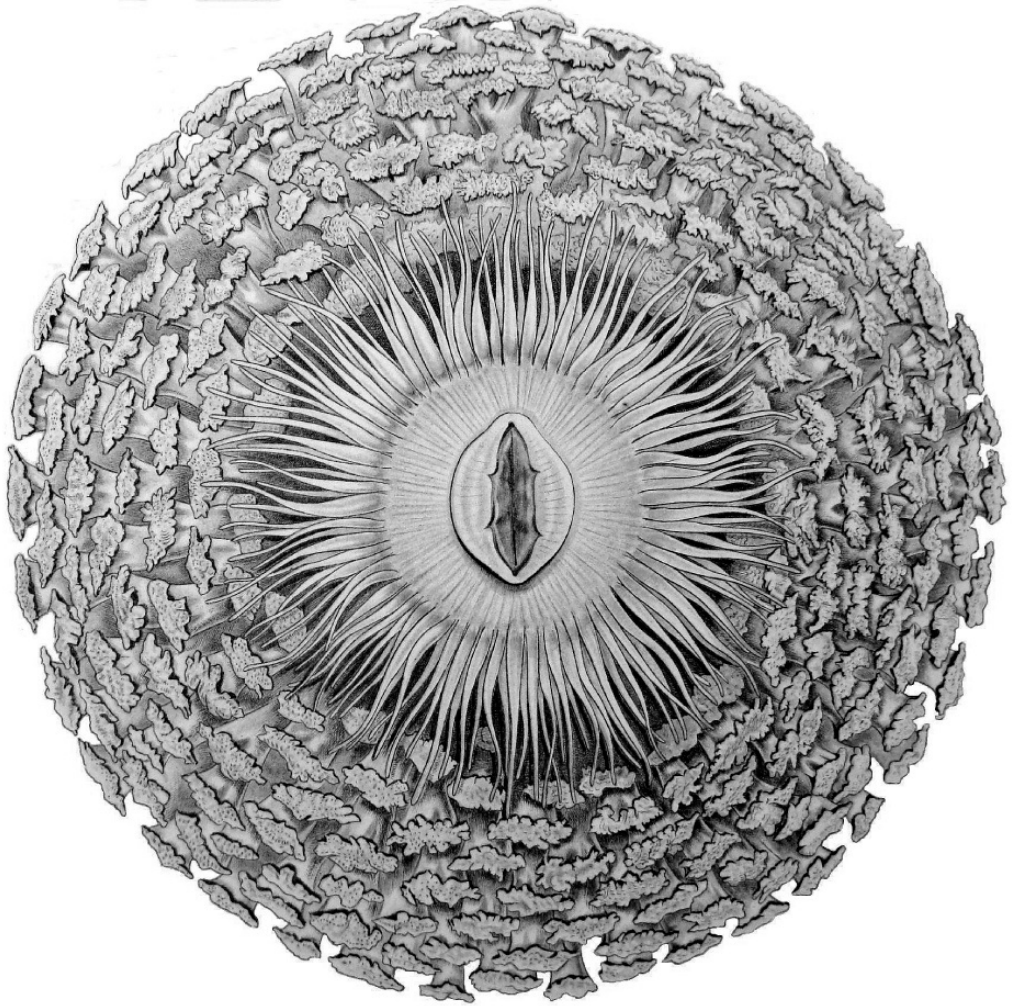
Arohanui,

= Joe Blogs, July 2022

Produced for the Auckland Library
24hr zine competition.

Kōtare in flight
By Chloe O'Leary
Authors Private Collection





Field notes of a Naturist:

There was an anonymous anemone
Who was quite an anomaly
She saw a sea-cucumber feed
And disagreed with her spongy enemy
The anemone ate the cucumber
But it was indigestible to her
And the hallow gerkin
Would not stop twerking
Around in her gastrovascular cavity
It was a deep-sea depravity
Forming a slimy pickled enema
Through our anonymous anemone
Poor dear, let's respect her anonymity.

- Joe Blogs, 2019, originally
published as "The Anemone" on
www.joeblogspoetry.com

- Image from Hoeksema & Crowther
"Masquerade, mimicry and crypsis of the
polymorphic sea anemone..." Contributions
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Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass, 2013

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A Human in its
Natural Habitat (naturist)

- image by the author