

“A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.”

International Council of Museums (ICOM) 2007

The first *Newsletter of the National Museum*, published in October 1971, was introduced to the public as a way of bridging the gap between their understanding of the various activities at the Museum, and the actual work we do. Since 1971 the Museum's newsletter has grown from an eight-page black-and-white publication to an almost 50-page colour magazine, but still with the same goal – to introduce the work we do and the importance of our collections to the public.

Collections are an integral part of a museum. However, a bundle of objects does not qualify as a collection. Documentation, maintenance and research on these objects transforms such a bundle of objects into a museum collection.

During the 1970s and 1980s the research departments of the National Museum expanded considerably. Today we have 13 departments with highly trained and experienced scientists doing research in various fields in the natural and cultural sciences. At present the Museum employs 108 full-time staff members, a quarter of whom have postgraduate qualifications (15 PhDs and 12 Master degrees). Thirteen of our scientists are research fellows / associates at various universities, which allow us the opportunity to use their facilities which in some cases are not feasible to have at the Museum, such as scanning electron microscopes or laboratories for genetic sequencing. Five Museum scientists are NRF-rated, three of whom have a B-rating (considerable international recognition for high-quality research and its impact).

Apart from publishing scientific articles in a large number of peer-reviewed international and national journals, Museum scientists have also produced or contributed to the production of books and atlases.

While undeniably important, it is often challenging to link research at the National Museum to issues of current national priority. A number of projects, particularly those related to the Batho Community History Project, do address aspects of redress, nation building and social cohesion. Various other projects include aspects relating to indigenous knowledge, and the Museum is embarking on a programme to specifically incorporate the cultural significance of the various natural sciences disciplines (e.g. birds, mammals, reptiles, insects and plants) into its research and educational activities.

International Museum Day has been instituted by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) with the aim of raising awareness of the importance of museum collections and the research based on these collections. This year the National Museum hosted a successful 'behind the scenes' visit where members of the public could visit two of the research departments. We hope to expand this initiative in future, to spread the message of our work even further.

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