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# Dawnosaurs 2018/19

An impact report prepared for the Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation

July 2019

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# Introduction: a new Dawnosaurs

With the generous support of the Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation, Dawnosaurs 2 got off to a fantastic start in 2018/19. The biggest story of the renewed programme's first year has been the impressive surge in participation we have witnessed.

South Kensington visitor numbers have soared from an average of 458 visitors per event in the final year of Dawnosaurs 1, to an average of 668 per event in the first year Dawnosaurs 2 – a 46% increase. In total, Dawnosaurs has welcomed 3,507 visitors this year – including its first event in our sister museum in Tring – and we are confident that this momentum will continue.

The growing success of Dawnosaurs can be put down to a number of factors, including our continued efforts to publicise the programme and the advocacy of prominent autism services champions such as the Tincture of Museum blog. But the growth of a committed community of regular visitors over time – and the word-of-mouth publicity that this can generate – has undoubtedly been the principal factor driving the programme's success.

It is not an exaggeration to say that we could not have achieved this without the vision and support of the Foundation. From our three-year pilot programme to the start of the second phase of Dawnosaurs this year, the long-term support you have offered our programme has been instrumental in its continued growth.

We hope that the Foundation enjoys this latest report, highlighting the achievements of the programme in 2018/19, and we look forward to updating you over the years to come as Dawnosaurs continues to grow from strength to strength. Thank you.

**Ronel Verwoerd**  
**Dawnosaurs Programme Coordinator**



# Dawnosaurs 2 – Year one update

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Five Dawnosaurs events were delivered in South Kensington between October 2018 and June 2019 and – with the support of the Dawnosaurs team – our sister Museum in Tring also held its pilot Dawnosaurs event, extending the reach of the programme to Hertfordshire.

With the backing of the Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation, Dawnosaurs is now a fully established event on the calendars of families with children on the autism spectrum and other neuro-diverse conditions, and word is spreading. Our average attendance for Dawnosaurs events in London leapt by 46%, while an average of 51% of visitors this year had never been to a autism-friendly event before – suggesting that we are continuing to reach new audiences that have a need for the Dawnosaurs offering. We have continued to evaluate and improve the programme, with some developments this year including:

## Musical activities – hitting the right note

For the final event of Dawnosaurs 1, we trialled the use of a violinist in Hintze Hall to augment the event with an extra sensory element. Following positive feedback from our audience, we acquired the services of hand pan player (pictured to the right) for our most recent four events. Handpans produce a soft, warm sound that is widely perceived as relaxing and non-intrusive, and therefore a good fit for Dawnosaurs visitors. We received strong positive feedback, and intend to continue live music as an on-going element of our core offer.

## Shining a light on *Life in the Dark*

Alongside the special activities we arrange for visiting families, a large attraction of the Dawnosaurs experience for families has been to enjoy our public galleries, shops and cafes as any other visitors would – but within a quieter and more tranquil atmosphere than would be found during normal opening hours. Until this year, however, our popular special temporary exhibitions have not been

accessible to Dawnosaurs audiences. This year, we were happy to be able to incorporate a special temporary exhibition for the first time – the critically acclaimed *Life in the Dark* – for the October, December and February events while the exhibition ran.

The exhibition explored the creatures that thrive at night, in pitch-black caves and deep in the sea – offering visitors an opportunity to enter the worlds of nocturnal animals to discover how they find their way around their environment, hunt, mate and evade predators.



Above: the handpan player performs under the Museum of the Moon exhibit by Luke Jerram.

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Some adjustments were made to the exhibition to tailor it to the Dawnosaurs audience. This included providing the option to temporarily stop the moving lights in the bat cave display, which might distress some visitors, providing light-reflective strips on furniture to avoid bumps, and installing additional up-lighting to make darker spaces of the exhibition easier to navigate.

The exhibition proved very popular with the Dawnosaurs audience – over 70% of our attendees visited the exhibition – and we are keen to open future special exhibitions to Dawnosaurs visitors.



*Above: a 'relaxed performance' of The Wider Earth play, specially adapted for the Dawnosaurs audience.*

### **Accessing *The Wider Earth***

The Dawnosaurs team were delighted to offer their expertise to help deliver a programme of accessible events as part of the run of the hit stage show *The Wider Earth*, pictured below and to the left, which ran in a custom-built theatre within the Museum's Jerwood Gallery between October 2018 and February 2019.

The stage show, which received glowing reviews in the press, was a partnership project between Trish Wadley Productions, Dead Puppet Society, Glass Half Full Productions in association with Queensland Theatre and the Natural History Museum. The production told the story of a 22-year-old Charles Darwin on HMS Beagle's famous voyage, and featured actors playing alongside beautifully crafted puppets representing the many animals Darwin encountered and recorded – which would go on to influence the development of his famous theory of evolution by natural selection.

The Museum programmed two 'relaxed' autism-friendly performances in January and February 2019. Informed by Dawnosaurs activities, and staffed by Dawnosaurs volunteers, the programme began with a pre-show behind-the-scenes handling event – offering an important opportunity for the audiences to engage meaningfully with this spectacular performance. Following a staple element of the Dawnosaurs programme, a dedicated sensory quiet room for those needing calm was on-hand, and the Mobiloo accessible toilet facility was on-site. The stage show was also adjusted to fit the needs of our audience – with loud noises and flashes of light removed from the play, and houselights reduced by 20%.

Tickets were offered at a reduced price, and were promoted to the existing community of Dawnosaurs attendees. The event sold a total of 264 tickets – with over 80% of the audience having previously attended a Dawnosaurs event.

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## Dawnosaurus @ Tring

We were excited to expand the Dawnosaurus programme to Hertfordshire this year with a pilot Dawnosaurus event at the Natural History Museum, Tring. While the natural history offering of our South Kensington site is unique within London, there are a growing number of equivalent events at other cultural institutions across the capital. Bringing Dawnosaurus to Hertfordshire has enabled many families in the county and surrounding areas to access such a service for the first time.

As with Dawnosaurus in South Kensington, the event was free, and offered children on the autism spectrum and their families the opportunity to enjoy the Museum, free from the hustle and bustle of the general public. The South Kensington team provided training, advice and support throughout the development of the programme.

Held on 5 May 2019, the pilot event coincided with NHM Tring's special temporary exhibition British Dinosaurs – which offered visitors the opportunity to explore the diversity of British dinosaur species and find out about their modern day ancestors through Tring's impressive bird galleries. As Tring does not house permanent dinosaur collections, the name of

the event may be adjusted for future events, but it was useful for marketing the event to use the known brand of Dawnosaurus for its launch.

The event was a great success, welcoming 166 visitors – ten more than attended the very first Dawnosaurus event in South Kensington in April 2016 – 71% of whom had never accessed an autism-friendly event at a cultural institution before. We are currently working towards a second Dawnosaurus @ Tring event for September 2019, and we look forward to updating the Foundation on our efforts in next year's impact report.

## Dawnosaurus – embedding a culture of accessibility at the Museum

A major benefit of the Dawnosaurus programme has been its power to influence our organisational culture – embedding awareness and sensitivity of autism spectrum disorder throughout the Museum through the on-going training and volunteering opportunities that the programme has established.

This year, the Museum launched its Access Vision 2019 – 2021, a strategic document outlining our priorities and action plan for building on our status as an accessible and inclusive institution. The



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Access Vision will focus on three core priority audiences – autistic spectrum audiences, D/deaf audiences, and blind and partially sighted audiences. The vision behind the strategy is for the Museum to become a sector leader in accessibility – embedding inclusion for neuro-diverse, D/deaf and disabled audiences and staff at the heart of our work, and to create a culture of inclusion throughout the organisation. Our experience in delivering Dawnosaurs played an important role in the development of the strategy, and Dawnosaurs will continue to play a key role in its implementation.

### Information sharing

As Dawnosaurs' profile has continued to rise within the sector, we have had more opportunities to share our learnings with peer institutions, academics, and other interested parties both in the UK and internationally.

To date, we have offered advice and consultation to eight UK institutions (including Harry Potter World, Madam Tussauds, the British Library and the Imperial War Museum), two international institutions (LOTEM: Making Nature Accessible in Israel, and the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Poland), and have also supported two MA students

in their autism-related research. These interactions have ranged from more formal consultations and information sharing exercises, to informal advice and discussion over a cup of coffee.

We have been delighted to see the growing provision of autism-friendly events, and hope to find further opportunities to share our experience and learnings with peer institutions in the future.

### Spreading the word

We continue to promote Dawnosaurs through the Natural History Museum website, and have updated our Dawnosaurs webpage this year, while we promote upcoming events and activities to our community of regularly visiting families through a growing email list – with some families further promoting the programme through their own networks and blogs.

In addition, in May 2019, we had the opportunity to promote Dawnosaurs @ Tring on the Aylesbury local radio station *Mix 96*. The station captures the local Tring audience, and played an important role in drawing attention to the new event to local visitors. The station also further promoted the event on their website: <https://bit.ly/2YnBfEe>



# Dawnosaurs 2 – year one evaluation

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In order to gather information about our visitor's needs and expectations for the programme, we continue to periodically evaluate Dawnosaurs activities. This year, for our South Kensington audience, we carried out a general feedback survey with 36 responses, a post-event survey with 79 participants, and ten in-depth qualitative phone interviews with willing Dawnosaurs guests. For the Tring pilot event, we were able to gather 15 post-event survey responses, and carried out four in-depth phone interviews.

Some key findings, which will help us refine and further improve the programme, included:

## Overall impressions

- 94% of respondents in London and Tring gave four or five star ratings to their Dawnosaurs experiences, with 94% of London respondents reporting that the event either met or exceeded expectations.
- While the sample size was considerably smaller in Tring, only 68% felt that the event met or exceeded their expectations – possibly reflecting the pilot status of the Tring event as compared to the more developed and longer-running London event.

## What visitors liked in London

- The most popular event for London visitors was 'Ranger Stu', as has been the case in past evaluations. This was followed by visiting the Dinosaur Gallery and the Investigate centre.
- The overall quieter and less crowded spaces of the Museum was drawn out as a major benefit of the event.
- The provision of pre-visit information including sound clips was drawn out as being particularly useful.
- Most families noticed and liked having music in the galleries during Dawnosaurs.

## What visitors liked in Tring

- For our Tring audience, fossil handling was the top activity, followed by exploring the Museum and the British Dinosaurs exhibition.
- As in London, the overall quieter and less crowded spaces was the greatest benefit.
- Pre-visit information packs were also drawn out as being useful by the Tring audience.
- For first-time visitors (three quarters of respondents fell into this category) the Museum itself was a pleasant surprise, and they were impressed by the breadth of the collection.

## Where we can improve in Tring

- The Sensory Room in Tring felt too crowded for some, and more like a playground than a quiet space.
- Some families would like a broader range of activities.
- Some families commented that they would like the Café to be open on arrival.

## Where we can improve in London

- The Ranger Stu activity has become very popular, and the queuing that has resulted from this has caused anxiety for some children.
- Some families commented that better wayfinding could be provided to the Sensory Room and the Meet the Scientist activity.
- The opening of the Museum to the broader public was found to be overwhelming to some families, and an alert 15-20 minutes before the Museum's official opening time was suggested.

We will work to address these concerns, and capitalise on this positive feedback, as we continue to refine the Dawnosaurs programme in the coming months and years.



## Dawnosaurs 2 – year one at a glance

Activity programming							
Event Date	Ranger Stu	Scientist	Hands-on	Art	Music	Theme	Mobiloo
<b>South Kensington</b>							
21-Oct-18	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Dinosaurs	Y
08-Dec-18	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Rocks and gems	Y
10-Feb	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Dinosaurs	Y
28-Apr	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Minibeasts	Y
22-Jun-19	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Urban Wild-life	No
<b>Tring</b>							
05-May-19	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Dinosaurs	Y

Attendance statistics						
Event Date	<5	5 to 11	11 to 15	Adults	Total	First time at an autism-friendly museum event
<b>South Kensington</b>						
21-Oct-18	130	197	50	359	736	56%
08-Dec-18	91	160	38	310	599	53%
10-Feb-19	123	199	63	352	737	55%
28-Apr-19	118	171	46	322	657	44%
22-Jun-19	60	178	45	329	612	48%
<b>Tring</b>						
05-May-19	25	50	15	76	166	71%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>547</b>	<b>955</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>1,748</b>	<b>3,507</b>	<b>Average 55%</b>

# What Dawnosaurs means to the families and children that access the programme

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As with previous years, the Dawnosaurs team has been moved by the glowing feedback we have received from many of the families who attend our events. We have shared some edited highlights with you below, to demonstrate the value of the events that your funding supports to those who access them:

“A huge thank you for such a wonderful morning on Sunday. My son is eight and he finds situations which are very busy and noisy quite stressful. It was an absolute joy to have him proudly lead me around the Museum and show me his favourite exhibits, including his all-time favourite ‘exhibit’ – the gift shop! Thank you for allowing our family to access the wonderful treasures of the Natural History Museum!”

“I am writing to thank you for the Dawnosaurs event that was run yesterday. It was exceptionally well-organised, and the staff were incredibly helpful. My youngest son loves dinosaurs, but finds crowds of people overwhelming, so the Dawnosaurs event was ideal in allowing him to explore and enjoy the Museum. At one point during the morning he started to become agitated, which we were able to help him regulate by taking him to the sensory room.

Throughout the morning, as a family, we felt relaxed and able to enjoy each other’s company as my son was remarkably calm, and there was no fear of people staring and judging our son’s behaviour. Instead, there was a lot of understanding between families and the staff present. I would like to thank you for the thought and effort that was put into organising the event. It is hugely appreciated.”

“I brought my family to Dawnosaurs last Sunday and I’m writing to you to thank you for making this possible, and for creating such a wonderful event. I have three sons, two of whom are autistic, and we could never have ventured to the Natural History Museum during its normal opening hours – it’s just too busy and noisy. For me, this was doubly a shame – some of my most treasured childhood memories are of visiting the NHM with my parents. My youngest son is very interested in dinosaurs, so to be able to stand in front of T. Rex with no one else around was a privilege and a blessing. Everyone we met during the course of the morning was kind, considerate, engaged, and helped make us feel truly welcome. It must be a burden to have to get up early on a Sunday morning to open the Museum, but let me assure you that – as far as this family is concerned – we are truly grateful.”



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“I just wanted to thank you for that Sunday morning. Our grandchild enjoyed the day tremendously, and he is still talking about it. I had to promise to go again with him. Please put my name down for a special Sunday in the autumn!”

“I was very impressed that the Natural History Museum emailed sound clips to be played alongside the visual guide – including the sound of the T rex, an evacuation announcement, and the sound of hand driers. Little details like this really do make a big difference when planning a day out, as the more predictability we have prior to an event, the better the experience for my son. Thank you SO much for arranging these events. My son is a total animal obsessive, he adores coming to the Natural History Museum, but there is no way he could cope during opening hours. We tried once before, and even after waiting patiently in the long queue, he saw the crowds in the hall and he wouldn't come in.”

“Thank you for such a wonderful morning. I can't remember ever doing anything so fantastic with my children! My son (although loud) loved every moment, and it was such an enriching and exciting experience for him and my daughter. It was well worth the early start, and we'd love to come to the

next one! I've been screaming from the rooftops about how incredible it's been, and have also signposted you on a local SEN parents support page to raise awareness of your Dawnosaurs events. Many thanks once again. I hope we are lucky enough to be able to attend another in the future.”

We were also delighted to receive a range of positive feedback following the special 'relaxed performances' of The Wider Earth, including:

“The show was absolutely wonderful, and my autistic daughter and I were absolutely mesmerised with all the special effects, the amazing puppets and brilliant acting.”

“Enjoyed the show and my son really enjoyed it which, given he has had problems in theatres and cinemas previously, was a real bonus.”

**As the Dawnosaurs programme continues to grow, on behalf of these families as well as the Museum, we extend our most sincere thanks to the Lord and Leonard Wolfson Foundation for their continued generous support of this vital programme.**





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**Contact:**

Megan Turnell

Trusts and Foundations Executive

+44 (0)20 7942 5990

[m.turnell@nhm.ac.uk](mailto:m.turnell@nhm.ac.uk)