



**Prof. Jarosław
Stolarski**

Director
of the PAS Institute
of Paleobiology.
Employed at the
Smithsonian National
Museum of Natural
History in Washington
in 1998–1999. In his
research, he studies
both modern and fossil
coral reefs.
stolacy@twarda.pan.pl

The Upcoming Museum of Natural History in Warsaw

The processes governing the environment around us are complex and interrelated, with seemingly distant issues intertwining with each other. The burning of fossil fuels is linked to climate change, which in turn is causing the extinction of coral reefs and the disappearance of natural fish habitats. Even the influx of migrants to Europe has its root cause in climate change. This is why education and raising awareness are so important, so as to enable citizens to make rational decisions as individuals and as a society.

Scientists in the United States have long understood this need, grappling with populism, climate denialism, and creationist movements. Washington is home to one of the world's most magnificent natural history museums – the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (NMNH). It is a vibrant institution, employing over 70 distinguished scientists and nearly 100 collection specialists, assisted by over 200 volunteers. The natural collections (geological, paleontological, botanical, and zoological objects) have been systematically studied and expanded since the museum's inception in 1910. Currently, they number over 140 million specimens, held in secure and well-managed warehouses. The scientific infrastructure includes well-equipped laboratories and an affiliated marine research station in Florida. Thanks to the hard work of the scientists at NMNH, its exhibits are continuously updated to reflect the latest scientific discoveries. The museum is visited annually by several million people, including American congressmen with their families during the so-called Smithsonian Congressional Nights, where scientists have the opportunity

to convey the excitement of their research and discoveries directly to policymakers, contributing to a better understanding of the role of science in society.

In Poland, a National Museum of Natural History was established in 1919 (around the same time as the Smithsonian Institution), but a museum building was never constructed. Numerous hindrances have included the outbreak of World War II, the post-war reconstruction costs, and later the economic transformation after 1989. Poland is now the only European country without an institution of this profile. Looking at the many examples of natural history museums in Europe and the United States, the recipe for success is clear and well-established: state financial participation providing exhibition infrastructure, the involvement of scientific institutions with unique collections, and a staff of distinguished scientists ensuring the scientific accuracy of the exhibits. In 2023, the Polish Academy of Sciences proposed to the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage a vision of a scientifically vibrant Museum of Natural History. According to the preliminary schedule, the museum is expected to be established by 2030. The plan actually calls for the creation of two institutions: a National Museum of Technology and a Museum of Natural History, which are to be located in the now-empty areas surrounding the National Stadium in Warsaw. Along with the museum, buildings housing institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences will also be constructed here, serving as a research base for the newly established facility. There is no better formula to make the scientific mission of the PAS institutes that hold natural-science collections more understandable and useful to society. ■

In the now-empty areas surrounding the National Stadium (between Aleja Zieleniecka, Skola, and Grochowska streets in Warsaw), a new complex is to be created, including a National Museum of Technology and a Museum of Natural History



MARCIN KWIECINSKI