



6 April 2020

Greetings, Friends of the Natural History Institute,

First off, and most importantly, we hope that you and yours are staying safe and healthy. That's the prime directive for us all as we face this unprecedented challenge.

As we hunker down into our own worlds, I wanted to reach out and let you know how we at the Natural History Institute have been adapting to this crisis, and how we are hoping to be useful in this extraordinary moment.

As you already know, we have cancelled all our programs through May, and, of course, it's quite possible that program cancellation will extend well beyond that. Similarly, we closed our usually-welcoming facility to the public; this includes our art gallery and our scientific collections. Our staff is working remotely now, but you can still leave a phone message, or send us an [email](#), and we'll get back to you.

So, what now? How can we serve the world and further our mission in this new context that cannot include most of the programmatic contexts that we are so good at – bringing people together, in the field, in the lecture hall, and in the lab? Answering this question will be an ongoing process. I will be honest that I have been no fan of on-line interactions as a substitute for in-person, in-the-field connections. But I'm grateful now that we have these internet-based tools to keep us in contact with one another and to engage the world with ideas, information, and inspiration.

Very soon, we'll be sharing details on some of our new offerings. To give you a sense of what's coming, here are a few of the themes we'll be engaging:

- **HOW WE HEAL** -- We will communicate the latest ideas on the relationship between nature and healing, both psychological and physical. We draw upon, and display, some of our work in facilitating the

confluence of natural history, medicine, and psychology, as exemplified in our November national confluence on Reciprocal Healing. (If you haven't yet checked out our [webpage and videos](#) from this gathering, I encourage you to do so. Never more timely.) I'm in the midst of co-guest editing a special issue of the academic journal, *Ecopsychology*, inspired by the confluence, on reciprocal healing, and we will feature some of this material as it becomes available.

- **WHAT WE BEAR WITNESS TO** – We will assert the importance of bearing witness right now, and provide motivation and opportunities to do so. We'll be encouraging people to pay attention to, and share, observations, whether of the house plants in their apartment, the birds at the feeder outside the window, or the desert bloom in an expansive wildland. We have ideas for a number of mechanisms to encourage this, including online forums and iNaturalist projects.
- **THE NATURAL HISTORY PRACTICE HALL** – We intend to share specific exercises and ideas to help people pay attention, and deepen and broaden their observations. To start this, Bob Ellis and I will draw upon our more than 50 combined years as environmental educators. We hope that others will then join the effort.
- **WHAT DO WE ASPIRE TO?** – We will foster an atmosphere that encourages thoughtful reflection on what our current collapse opens us up to: What world do we hope to create out of this crisis? What do we hope to collectively learn?

Our first tangible (well, as tangible as something online can be!) approach is the creation of an online journal/blog we're calling *Real Ground*, which will invite commentary and contribution from around the world. We're working out the technical interface for this right now, but we hope to be up and running soon!

Also, we're looking in to the possibility of running a few select workshops in an online format.

We'll let you know as these materials become available.

We're also working on an over-arching communications strategy plan, so as to clarify how to best be of use to you. Look for an invitation to participate in a brief survey soon.

Again, let me express my hopes that you all are in safe harbors—and my gratitude for your ongoing support of our work.

We will get through this.

Peace, Tom

Tom Fleischner
Executive Director