History of Science 909  
Fall 2015: The New History of Natural History

Lynn Nyhart and Tom Broman  
Thursdays 3:45-6:15, in 2339 Sterling Hall

In the past twenty years, the history of natural history has flourished as an area of scholarly inquiry across many disciplines—history of science, art and visual culture history, museum and material culture studies, and literary studies. This graduate seminar provides an introduction to many of the themes of this new wave of scholarship, especially investigating natural history’s intersections with travel, empire, and commerce; visual and material culture; and scientific practice.

Learning Goals: The goals of the seminar are for you to learn the leading themes and approaches to the history of natural history; to gain practice in analytical and comparative reading, and thereby to develop your critical understanding of history of science as a scholarly discipline; and to become comfortable with seminar-style discussions at the graduate level.

Requirements:
Reading and Discussion: This is primarily a reading seminar. We will be reading a book or 4-5 articles or book sections per week; you should come to each week’s meeting prepared to talk about them.

Discussion-launchers and Think-pieces: Students will be assigned as discussion-launcher (or co-launcher) for one week. To facilitate this, each discussion-launcher is asked to produce a think-piece of 500 words or less, due by 7 a.m. the day of your discussion. Co-launchers will write independent think-pieces. The aim of a think-piece is to raise questions and points for analysis by the group as a whole. You may raise questions, for example, about the cogency of an author’s argument, the kinds and adequacy of evidence used, or broader issues that an author suggests but doesn’t fully address. In weeks when we have multiple readings (which are most of them), you should address broader issues that go beyond a single reading, but you aren’t required to synthesize all the readings.

Writing: Students may choose a writing assignment of approximately 15 pages that is suited to their interests and stage of graduate career: a) a historiographic essay of a leading seminar theme, expanding the list from the common readings; b) a historiographic essay that develops your own theme, covering an equivalent number of books (including some from the core readings, some from outside); or c) a detailed proposal for a research project using primary and secondary sources related to the history of natural history. Students who wish instead to write a primary-source based research paper (e.g. to fulfill a requirement) should consult Lynn or Tom.

Access to readings: individual articles and chapters will be posted on the Learn@UW course website, by week. We will be reading the following whole books, which you should purchase or get from a library:


I. Historiographic introduction: What is/was natural history, and how should we understand it?

Sept. 3: Three Kinds of Historical Projects


Supplementary:

Sept. 10: Classic Articles, Ongoing Themes


Staffan Müller-Wille and Isabelle Charmantier, “Natural History and Information Overload: The Case of Linnaeus.” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 2012, 43:4-15.

II. Practicing Natural History: A Survey through Book-Length Arguments


III. Culture Shaping Natural History

Oct. 15: Natural History and Commerce


Meghan Doherty, “‘Nearly Resembling the Live Birds:’ Approximating Life in Willughby’s *Ornithology*,” chapter ms.


Luis Thiebaut, *Quadro del Perú*, 1797 [color image]

Oct. 29: Natural History, Empire, and Cultural Encounter


Fa-ti Fan, chapters 3 and 4 in *British Naturalists in Qing China*, 61-121.

Nov. 5: Travel, Fieldwork, and “Field Science”


Fa-ti Fan, Chapter 5 and Epilogue in *British Naturalists in Qing China*, 122-160.


[recall/review relevant chapters from Endersby and Kohler]

IV. Natural History as “Culture”

Nov. 12: Popular Natural History: Doing, Reading, Writing


**Nov. 19: Museums I: Early Modern Collections to Modern Natural History Museum**


**Nov. 26: Thanksgiving. Read books!**

**Dec. 3: Museums II: 19th and 20th centuries**


**Dec. 10: Last class: TBA**

Paper due date TBA.