NATURAL HISTORY INSTITUTE

NATURAL HISTORY—the practice of focused attentiveness to nature—is as old as humanity: there have never been people without natural history. Natural history field observations have adorned cave walls in France and canyon walls in Arizona, as well as served as the foundation for sophisticated scientific theories in museums and universities in great cities of the world. Natural history represents the integration of sciences, arts, and humanities in a unified approach to understanding the world around us, and plays a central role in a liberal arts education. In recent years, however, natural history has been marginalized—many academic institutions have removed natural history curricula—and shrunk—the arts and humanities have too often been wrung out of remaining natural history programs.

Prescott College has long been recognized nationally as a leader in field natural history. Students have engaged in field study of habitats through North America and beyond for decades—the commitment to the centrality of natural history has never wavered. Recently, faculty, alumni, and students from the college have been at the core of a national renaissance in natural history—deeply involved in the creation of the national NGO, the Natural History Network. The college was co-recipiept of the National Science Foundation grant, “The Natural History Initiative: From Decline to Rebirth;” this project convened a series of gatherings focused on revitalizing natural history. “The Natural Histories Project,” a media program, grew out of these gatherings.

Our next step is the creation of the Prescott College Natural History Institute, which will consist of a program of natural history on- and off-campus workshops and courses, a gallery and meeting space that will allow us to host public events and outreach programs, research collections (both digital and physical), research space for faculty and students, and a natural history lab for teaching. This new Institute will allow Prescott College to build on its long, continuous history and offer more of its distinctive programs to the local and regional community, and to the world at large. The generous donation of a major collection of original natural history artwork, including works by Audubon, Catesby, and many other renowned artists, creates new opportunities for the Prescott College Natural History Institute to lead the way in an integrative, interdisciplinary approach to natural history.