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A member of staff poses with a prop of a Hungarian Horntail dragon made for the Fantastic Beasts film series at the press view of Fantastic Beasts: The Wonder of Nature exhibition at Natural History Exhibition in London. — AFP photos



A member of staff poses with props made for the Fantastic Beasts film series.



A member of staff poses with a dinosaur skeleton of a pachycephalosaur, which scientists later named it "Dracorex hogwartsia" to celebrate Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry of the Harry Potter franchise.



A member of staff poses with projection display featuring all the species appearing in the exhibition.



A member of staff poses with props and costume made for actor Eddie Redmayne for the Fantastic Beasts film series.

# FANTASTIC BEASTS TAKE OVER LONDON'S NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

Fans of J.K. Rowling's "Fantastic Beasts" will already be familiar with nifflers, occamy and demiguise while unicorns, dragons and mermaids have been the stuff of legends for centuries. Now London's Natural History Museum has scoured its vast collection for an exhibition to celebrate strange beasts in all their forms, including those created by the Harry Potter author. "Fantastic Beasts. The Wonder of Nature" is a collaboration between the museum, the BBC and Warner Bros, and comes as the venue reopens after months of coronavirus-enforced closure.

The show promises to plunge visitors straight into a world well known to Harry Potter fans, where they learn about the "magizoologist" Newt Scamander, the

leading authority on fantastic beasts. The 2001 book was turned into a hit fantasy film franchise starring Eddie Redmayne, whose costume also features in the exhibition, which runs from Wednesday to August next year. The head of conservation at the Natural History Museum, Lorraine Cornish, said curators looked at the characteristics of Rowling's inventions and compared them with their own collection.

Then from a long-list, they honed the exhibits down to more than 100 specimens that appear in the show. "By taking some of these fantastic beasts that people around the world have enjoyed watching on film or reading in the books, we've been able to highlight some of the fantastic beasts that actually exist in the

real world today," she said. "I think it will really give the audience an extra insight into the amazing world of nature."

### 'Extraordinary abilities'

The first part of the exhibition looks at the animals included in the books such as the niffler, which resembles a platypus and whose penchant for shiny things makes it a good treasure hunter. An occamy is described as a plumed, two-legged winged creature with a serpentine body, while a demiguise is a peaceful herbivore that can make itself invisible and predict the future.

Also featured are dragons, unicorns and mermaids, which are more well-known in public consciousness. A skeleton of an eight-meter-long (26-feet) deep

sea oarfish which fuelled myths of huge sea serpents is featured, as are giant narwhal tusks.

They are exhibited alongside the unicorn hair-infused wands of Harry Potter's friend Ron Weasley, and his arch-enemy Draco Malfoy. Curator Louis Buckley said visitors will also be able to explore "the extraordinary abilities, behaviors and properties of real animals", such as their mating rituals, display and camouflage. A demiguise's impressive ability to disappear has been likened to that of butterflies who can disguise themselves as leaves for protection.

An occamy's capacity to grow or shrink into available spaces is compared to that of Galapagos marine iguanas or pufferfish, which can expand and con-

tract their bodies at will. "The real world is in many ways weirder, stranger and more fantastical than anything in our imagination can cover," said Buckley. "I think there are lots of examples of that within the show. To actually see that... and understand a bit more how amazingly adaptable animals are is truly breathtaking." A total of 12 fantastic beasts from the world of wizardry are analyzed, which the museum hopes will help transform its dusty image and pique the curiosity of newer, younger audiences. The venue has indicated the exhibition will eventually go on tour to a number of countries. — AFP

## World's longest-running TV soap, Coronation Street, turns 60

The world's longest-running TV soap opera, Britain's cosy working-class series "Coronation Street," celebrated 60 years on screen yesterday, defying social changes and the pandemic. Peeling cathedral bells, a discussion in parliament and stamps featuring characters were among the special events marking the anniversary. The series revolving around a corner shop and pub in a fictional town in northern England called Weatherfield was first aired on December 7, 1960.

It was expected to run for a couple of months but it proved an instant hit. Since then the show, with its battleaxe matriarchs, cobbled streets and nostalgic trumpet-led theme music, has kept its place as one of the top-rated shows on commercial channel ITV. Known as "Corrie" for short, a decade ago it became the world's longest-running television soap opera, still lagging behind the 69-year-old BBC radio show The Archers. It vies for ratings with the BBC's darker "Eastenders", set in a fictional east London borough, which is a comparative newcomer at 35.

John Whiston, the head of ITV in the North, has described Coronation Street as "a guide to humanity with a little bit of comfort blanket thrown in along with a little bit of sharp, northern wit." The show's speciality is "strong women and feckless men", he said. While characteristically English, the show has an international audience too, particularly in Canada, where it has aired on CBC since the 1960s. "Generations of Canadians have grown up with Corrie in their homes," said Sally Catto, CBC's general manager of entertainment, factual and sports programming.

### 'Dramatic flashes'

Coronation Street's national treasure status at home has even seen it play a role in public life. Margaret Thatcher visited the set in 1990 while prime minister. As the daughter of a grocery store owner, she lambasted the corner shop for selling alcohol, the minister for media and data, John Whittingdale, reminisced in parliament last week. In 1998, the boundary between fiction and fact blurred as Labor prime minister Tony Blair said he was ordering an investigation into the case of character Deirdre Rachid, wrongfully jailed for fraud. In real life, Blair's father-in-law, Tony Booth, was a former actor on the show.

Critics have accused the show of losing some of its character and salty humor, and resorting to sensational events to win ratings. "It was always about strong women. Over the past decade they've moved from character to dramatic flashes of action," the Sunday Times critic Gillian Reynolds lamented in August. Indeed the show's dramatic high points have included a tram crashing off a viaduct on its 50th anniversary. Altogether there have been 146 deaths, including 24 murders. Yet the show has won praise for groundbreaking storylines, including the first trans character in a British soap opera, Hayley Cropper, in the late 1990s. Its audience has fallen from its heyday in the 1980s and 1990s, when top-rating episodes would gain over 20 million viewers. Reflecting a wider shift away from scheduled television, episodes now may have seven or eight million viewers, including those watching online. —AFP



Fans gather on the 40th anniversary of John Lennon's death at the "Imagine" mosaic at Strawberry Fields Memorial in Central Park on December 8, 2020 in New York City. — AFP photos



In this file photo taken on May 17, 1971 Music legend John Lennon and his wife Yoko Ono pose for photographers in Cannes 17 May 1971 where they presented their movies 'Apotheosis' and 'The Flu'



In this file photo Yoko Ono speaks during the unveiling of her first permanent US art installation in Chicago, Illinois.

## Yoko Ono urges gun control on 40th anniversary of John Lennon's death

John Lennon's widow Yoko Ono on Tuesday marked the 40th anniversary of the legendary musician's shock murder with a call for gun control. "The death of a loved one is a hollowing experience," tweeted the 87-year-old artist, who still lives in the Dakota building in Manhattan outside of which her husband was shot four decades ago. "After 40 years, Sean, Julian and I still miss him. 'Imagine all the people living life in peace,'" she wrote, quoting the 1971 song she co-wrote with Lennon that became the best-selling single of his solo career.

Ono, who witnessed her husband's murder at close range, also tweeted an image of the former Beatle's shattered and bloodied spectacles, which includ-

ed the words: "Over 1,436,000 people have been killed by guns in the U.S.A. since John Lennon was shot and killed on December 8, 1980." At 40 years old, Lennon had returned to songwriting shortly before his death, having taken a five-year hiatus to raise his young son Sean. The couple was returning home to New York's famous Dakota building across from Central Park, when disgruntled Beatles fan Mark David Chapman shot Lennon dead. "Tell me it isn't true!" Ono cried in horror.

After Lennon's murder, Ono committed to preserve his memory, funding the construction of the Strawberry Fields memorial in New York that's become a point of pilgrimage for fans and mourners across the globe. By mid-morning

Tuesday, a shrine featuring flowers, photos and a small holiday tree had already cropped up on the "Imagine" mosaic that anchors the memorial in Central Park. In her tweet commemorating Lennon's death, Ono included a number of hashtags including #guncontrol now and #end gun violence.

She also hashtagged the National Rifle Association, the powerful US organization that has for decades battled to loosen and eliminate firearms control legislation. Lennon's eldest son Julian, 57, paid homage to his father, tweeting a photo with the message "As Time Goes By..." — AFP



In this file photo Camilla, The Duchess of Cornwall comes out of the Rovers Return Pub during a visit to the set of British television soap opera 'Coronation Street', in Manchester, north-west England. — AFP