

Life Changing Knowledge

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1 - Ivory armlet

Before 1948

Shilluk, Sudan, Africa

This armlet is worn by men who also distinguish themselves with bracelets and armlets of iron, brass, tree bark, cowrie shells and twisted ambatch, a local shrub.

2 - Silk bag with ivorine handle

About 1920

From the 1850s, the production of early plastics, like parkesine (1856) and celluloid (1870), was driven by a desire to imitate expensive materials, like elephant ivory. In the early 20th century celluloid became popular for bag and purse frames, as it could be moulded, cast and tinted to resemble carved ivory.

3 - Carriage parasol with carved ivory handle

About 1850-1860

Like many mid-19th century objects, parasols were produced by specialist manufacturers using materials imported from all over the world. Ivory carving was often carried out in China and a decorative piece like this one might be imported already carved.

4 - Scrimshaw whale's tooth

Early 1800s

Pacific Ocean

Scrimshaw is the name given to the handiwork of whalers who carved and inscribed designs into the bones and teeth of sperm whales, walrus tusks or baleen, which comes from the mouths of some species of whale.

5 - Baleen plate from a common rorqual whale

Balaenoptera musculus

Found off Teignmouth, Devon

Baleen was traditionally used as whalebone in corsets. It comes from the whale's mouth where it acts like a sieve to filter out tiny animals from the seawater.

6 - Worked whalebone (baleen) strips

Late 19th century

These are dress bodice rather than corset bones, which would have been slightly heavier. The raw baleen was first boiled in preparation, and then thin slivers were cut away. The preparation of whalebones was always a male occupation.

7 - Cotton corset with whalebone

About 1870–1880

Made by Mrs Mill, Watford

Made from layers of cotton fabric, this corset was an essential garment in most Victorian women's wardrobes. The decorative cotton brocade has been carefully cut and stiffened with lengths of flexible whalebone.

8 - Ivory carving of an elephant

Before 2000

Nigeria, Africa

This was acquired as a souvenir. Traditionally, ivory was widely available and traded by kings and chiefs. It rivalled gold and slaves as a major export. Over time the ivory trade decimated the African elephant population.

9 - Ear ornament of feathers and beetle-wing casing

Before 1930s

Shipibo-Conibo, eastern Peru, South America

The distinctive iridescent wing casing of a beetle (*Euchroma gigantea*) and toucan feathers rattle and reflect light to enhance the wearer's appearance.

10 - Bonnet trimmed with bird feathers

About 1885-1887

Velvet gable bonnet trimmed with peacock and egret feathers, and a hummingbird. The fashion for such hats with exotic plumage threatened the survival of some bird species, and led to the formation of the RSPB in 1889.

11 - Skin of red-breasted toucan

Before 1953

Amazon, south-east Brazil, South America

Toucan feathers were frequently used to make body ornaments. Whole skins might be worn as pendants or armbands. The bird skins were processed for trade or kept until they were needed.

12 - Dyed fox fur muff with two masks and tails

1920-1940

Fur was still an essential part of the fashionable wardrobe at the beginning of the 20th century, spurred on by the glamour of Hollywood movie stars. This fur, probably fox, appears to have been dyed to resemble dark Russian sable, the most prized of all furs.

13 - Leopard skin scarf

1955-1975

Probably South African

If not used for coats, many skins were made up into collars, hats, scarves, shoes and handbags to satisfy the demand for fashionable and exotic furs.

14 - Pillbox hat made from leopard skin

About 1955-1975

South Africa

Leopard skin articles were often brought back as luxury souvenirs by tourists visiting Africa. The look was imitated in leopard printed fabrics, a fashionable influence that continues to this day.

15 - Day hat with owl mask and feathers

About 1910-1912

Despite its rather spooky look, this hat was part of a popular trend for bird wing decorations. In some cases, entire bird skins were used. The mask has been made up of tawny owl feathers, with glass eyes glued to the front.

16 - Formal hat trimmed with feathers

1930-1936

This dramatic and elegant felt hat is trimmed with bird of paradise feathers angled to frame the face. Stylish hats like these were intended to be worn with a neat hairdo and a formal suit or cocktail dress.

17 - Dress hat made of fur felt

About 1833

This bicorne hat is probably made of beaver fur imported from North America, and trimmed with silver 'lace' and wire tassels. It comes from a dress uniform worn by a High Sheriff of the county.

18 - Fan made from tortoiseshell

About 1650

Holland or France

Slivers of tortoiseshell have been slotted through a painted vellum leaf, a sheet produced from specially prepared calfskin. Usually made for royalty and the aristocracy, early European folding fans were copied from Japanese and Chinese originals.

19 - Ostrich eggshell earrings

1980s

South Africa

Ostrich eggshell is a popular and valued material, traditionally used for body ornaments. The earliest known jewellery in Africa, dating to about 7000 BC, is made from ostrich eggshell.

20 - Hairpin with kingfisher feathers

19th century

China

This fragile hairpin has a tiny spring behind the ornament, making it wobble when the head moves. The pin's body is covered with kingfisher feathers. A fashion for such hairpins led to a decline in kingfishers in China.

21 - Hair comb made from synthetic 'tortoiseshell'

About 1920

Decorative hair combs were popularly worn at the beginning of the 20th century. Early plastics, such as cellulose nitrate, were used to mould products which imitated natural materials, such as horn and tortoiseshell.

22 - Hair comb made from tortoiseshell

1890-1900

Spain or South America

Tortoiseshell was a valuable material sourced from marine turtles like the hawksbill. It could be heated, softened and worked to create elaborate carved ornaments.

23 - Hair comb made from tortoiseshell

Probably 19th century

South America

Large combs supporting a lace veil, or mantilla, were an important accessory to traditional Spanish and Latin American dress. The comb was arranged at the back of the head so it could be appreciated from all angles. The pierced motif of peacocks is commonly used.

24 - Hair comb made from tortoiseshell and coral

Mid-19th century

Coral was highly prized in the 19th century. Imported from Italy in great quantities, it varied from pale pink to the deep red colour preferred from the 1850s.

25 - Hair comb made from synthetic 'tortoiseshell'

Probably 19th century

Demand for tortoiseshell soon outstripped supply.

Manufacturers quickly found ways to mass produce synthetic versions of the natural material, such as for this hair comb.

26 - Turtle shell

Before 1924

Solomon Islands, Melanesia, Pacific

Turtle shell, or tortoiseshell, has long been used in fans, combs and jewellery. In the Pacific turtles were eaten and their shells turned into decorative items or used in medicine. These all led to the turtle's endangered status.

27 - Dress corsage with hummingbird feathers and beetle-wing casing

About 1875-1880

The natural world was plundered to cover this corsage with tiny, exotic specimens glued onto a wired canvas base. There was a growing market for such pieces from about 1870.

28 - Day shoes made from python skin

1920-1930

The use of reptile skins for luxury handbags and shoes continued until the 1970s. However, as with the taste for furs, it reached its height in the early 20th century.

29 - Silk bag with beetle-wing casing decoration

About 1850

Many high quality pieces embroidered with beetle-wing cases were produced in India. They went on to influence decorative fashions in Europe.

30 - Jaguar tooth necklace

Before 1869

Arawak, Essequibo River, Guyana, South America

These necklaces traditionally made from the teeth of the jaguar, wild boar or alligator, were worn only by those who killed these creatures. Wearing the necklace indicates valour, skill and status.

31 - Huia

Heteralocha acutirostris

North Island, New Zealand

The Huia became extinct in the early 20th century. Their feathers were used to make fashion accessories and their habitat was destroyed. Many birds were killed, mounted and added to private and museum collections.

32 - Passenger pigeon

Ectopistes migratorius

Collected in North America

Once one of the world's most abundant birds, living in flocks of millions, they were hunted to extinction to provide cheap food. The last bird, named Martha, died in 1914 at Cincinnati Zoo.

33 - Ivory-billed woodpecker

Campephilus principalis

Collected in the U.S.A.

The ivory-billed woodpecker is one of the world's largest woodpeckers. Due to habitat destruction and hunting this bird is critically endangered and may even be extinct.

34 - Heath hen

Tympanuchus cupido cupido

From north-eastern U.S.A.

Hunting by humans and feral cats caused the extinction of the heath hen. This bird was a subspecies of the greater prairie-chicken which has also become extremely rare.

35 - Eskimo curlew

Numenius borealis

Possibly collected in Canada

Until the late 19th century millions of birds migrated from North to South America each year. But increasing agriculture in the prairies and hunting led to a dramatic decline, so that the Eskimo curlew is now critically endangered, and may be extinct.

36 - Carolina parakeet

Conuropsis carolinensis

Collected in North America

The last wild Carolina parakeet was killed in 1904, and the last captive bird died at the Cincinnati Zoo in 1918. Many factors contributed to this bird's extinction, including habitat loss and its popularity as a pet.

37 - Talaud black bird-wing butterfly

Troides dohertyi

Collected in Sulawesi, Indonesia

This particularly dark species of bird-wing butterfly is found only in the Talaud and Sangihe islands of Sulawesi. It is at risk of extinction because it only inhabits such a small area.

38 - Avalon scrub-hairstreak

Strymon avalona

Collected in California, U.S.A.

This small species of butterfly is found only on Santa Catalina Island, California. It has one of the smallest ranges of any American butterfly and faces extinction.

39 - Wallace's golden bird-wing butterfly

Troides croesus

Collected in Maluku, Indonesia

The name of the famous biologist Alfred Russel Wallace is given to this beautiful and endangered species of butterfly. He wrote about it in his book *The Malay Archipelago*, published in 1869.

40 - Andaman crow butterfly

Euploea andamanensis

Andaman Islands, Indian Ocean

Formerly considered a subspecies of *Euploea core*, a common Asian butterfly, this butterfly is now classified as vulnerable on the I.U.C.N. Red List of Threatened Species.

41 - Arion blue butterfly

Maculinea arion

Collected in Switzerland

This species of butterfly became extinct in the U.K. in 1979. It has since been reintroduced. Its complex life cycle requires a particular species of ant to care for its caterpillars underground.

42 - Xerces blue butterfly

Glaucopsyche xerces

Collected in San Francisco, U.S.A.

This was once common in San Francisco, but has not been seen since 1941. Possibly the most famous extinct American butterfly, it was the first from the U.S.A. to die out due to habitat loss.

43 - Alcon blue butterfly

Maculinea alcon

Possibly collected in France

This endangered species of butterfly has a very complex life cycle. Once the caterpillars have fed on marsh gentian leaves, they trick ants into taking them into their nest and feeding them.

44 - Swallowtail butterfly

Luehdorfia japonica

Collected in Japan

A rare butterfly from Japan.

45 - Antimachus swallowtail butterfly

Papilio antimachus

From Congo and Zaire, Africa

This is the largest species of butterfly in Africa. It is also one of the world's most poisonous butterflies, so it has few natural predators. Its greatest threats are habitat destruction and collectors.

46 - Emperor of India butterfly or 'kaiser-i-hind'

Teinopalpus imperialis

Collected in India

This rare butterfly species is now protected by Indian law. However, it is still hunted illegally because collectors will pay such a high price for it.

47 - Land snails

Various species

Hawaii, Japan and other locations

These land snail shells form part of Miss J. E. Linter's extensive collection of over 14,000 shells. They were bequeathed to RAMM in 1909. Miss Linter was born in Teignmouth and started to collect in the 1880s. Some of the species in her collection are now very rare, or even extinct.

48 - Père David's deer

Elaphurus davidianus

Collected in northern China

Charles Peel shot this deer at a time when the species still existed in the wild in China. Today they survive only in zoos, game reserves and private collections. There are no natural populations of Père David's deer.

49 - American bison

Bison bison

Elk Island National Park, Canada

The American bison was once very common and could be found in enormous herds in the grasslands of the U.S.A. and Canada. However, they were hunted to near extinction in the 19th century.

50 - Bornean orang-utan

Pongo pygmaeus

Collected in Borneo

The Bornean and Sumatran orang-utan are both endangered species. Human activities such as development and deforestation are responsible for their rarity. The big game hunter Charles Peel collected this young specimen.