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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

A Fresh Look at the World of Birds

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There is something fascinating about seeing birds up close as it is during this recently opened exhibition. Animals that usually appear as fleeting figures in the sky, in a city park or high above the mountains suddenly reveal an astonishing variety of colours, shapes and sizes. At the Naturhistorisches Museum Vienna, visitors can now experience this diversity in a completely renewed setting.

The museum has reopened its bird halls 29 and 30 with the new permanent exhibition “Frisch gemausert. Die Lebensräume der Vögel” (“Freshly Moulted. The Habitats of Birds”). The extensive renovation has given the historic rooms a new life. More than 1,000 bird specimens were cleaned, carefully groomed and, in some cases, newly prepared by the museum's taxidermists. The historic display cases were restored, the floors renovated and the electrical system modernised. Even the historic ceiling paintings have been carefully preserved.

Hall 29 begins with a simple question: What makes a bird a bird? Visitors are introduced to their characteristic features, their evolution and their importance within ecosystems. The exhibition then turns its attention to Central European habitats, including cities, parks and floodplain forests. Typical species are presented alongside their environments, allowing visitors to see how closely birds are connected to the places they inhabit.

Hall 30 expands this perspective from Austria to the wider world. Elaborate displays transport visitors to environments including the Arctic and mountain cloud forests. The specimens are no longer simply objects behind glass; they become part of carefully constructed habitats. This makes the enormous diversity of birds particularly striking, from tiny hummingbirds weighing less than two grams to the enormous Somali ostrich.

But “Frisch gemausert” is not only a celebration of birds' beauty. The exhibition also addresses habitat loss, desertification and the effects of human activity on biodiversity.

The exhibition's lighting is another highlight. Carefully positioned illumination draws attention to individual birds and details of their plumage while creating different atmospheres throughout the halls. The combination of historic architecture, restored display cases, traditional taxidermy and contemporary exhibition design gives the rooms a distinctive character. With its impressive collection, thoughtful design

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and accessible scientific content, the renewed bird halls offer much more than a traditional museum display. “Frisch gemausert” turns something familiar into something worth looking at again, reminding visitors just how extraordinary the birds living around us, and across the world, really are.

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