



Linnaean Narratives in Uppsala 1778-2028

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May – July 2026

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Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778) is famous for his advancements in botany, most notably his introduction of binomial nomenclature. Especially in his native Sweden, as well as in the Netherlands, where he received his doctorate, Linnaeus is commemorated in remembrances, collections and eponyms. While earlier research has already traced reception histories of Linnaeus, the upcoming commemorative year 2028 calls for a critical reflection to our relationship to Linnaeus today and tomorrow. This is especially important because some of his ideas, beliefs and actions are increasingly sensitive, such as his colonial and quasi-racial thoughts and practice. At the same time, Linnaeus's esteem of local wildlife can inspire our reappraisal of native flora and fauna and draw attention to the urgency to restore a balanced biodiversity. In May to July 2026, I assessed how Linnaeus as a controversial historical figure can remain a valuable example to address contemporary issues. Here, I share some proposals to better attune the heritage narratives to contemporary demands. The full report of my conversations, site visits and literature research is available upon request.



Linnaean Gardens



Hammarby



Gustavianum



Linnaeus Trails



Sävja

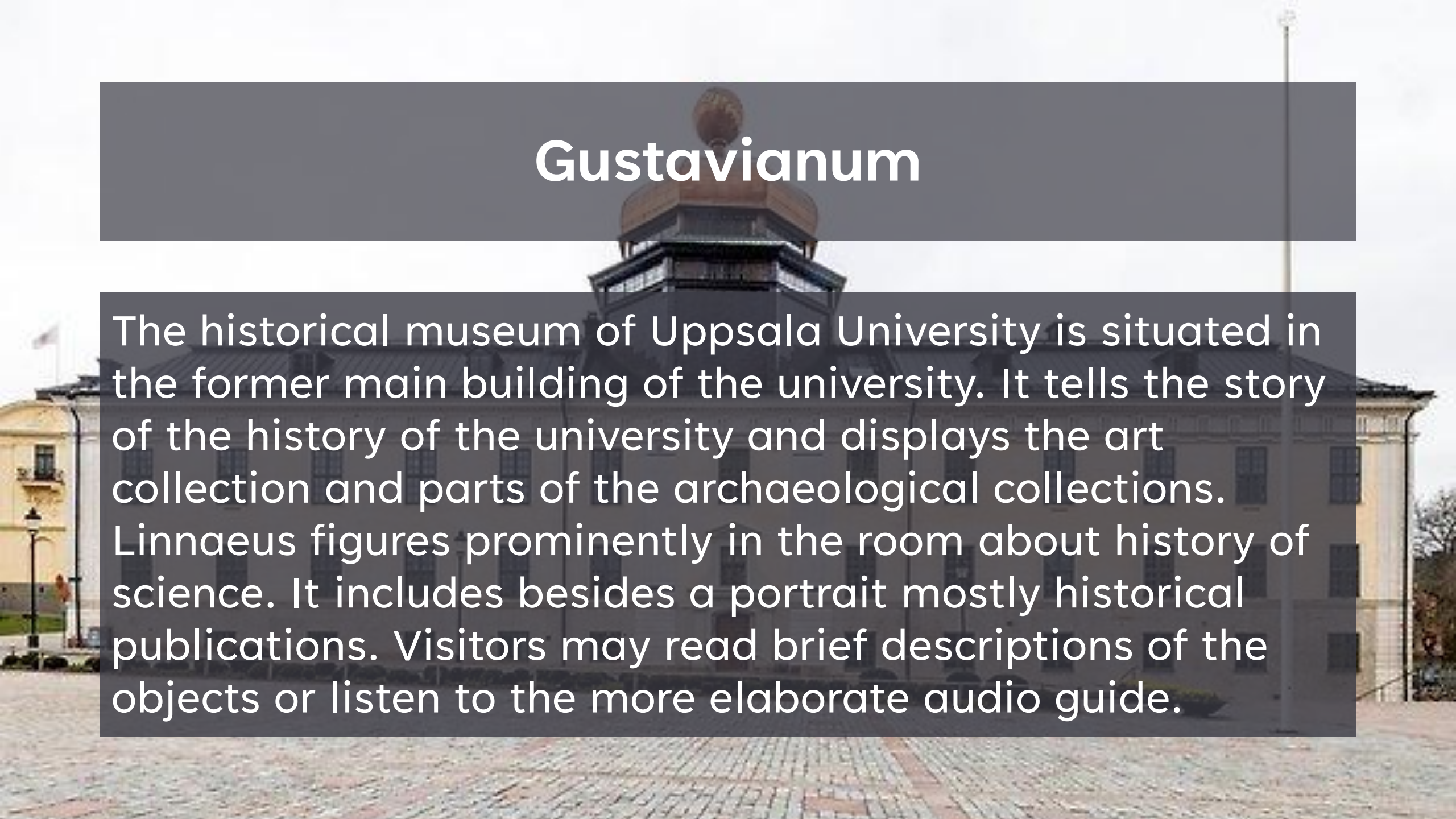
Linnaean Gardens

The house where Linnaeus lived as a professor, and the adjacent botanical garden together form the Linnaeus museum. The house reflects the eighteenth-century state and objects from Linnaeus's possession are on display. The exhibition in the orangery provides the visitor with information about Linnaeus, the botanical garden and eighteenth-century botany. The botanical garden is reconstructed to Linnaeus's times. Visitors can join a tour through the garden and the house.

Hammarby

Linnaeus's summer residency outside Uppsala consists of the main house, two wings and Linnaeus's natural history museum, amidst multiple gardens and a cultural reserve. Visitors can access the outdoor areas on their own, can peek into the museum, and can join a guided tour through the house. Linnaeus's study and bedroom are still in their original state, while other parts of the house reflect the state in which Linnaeus's wife Sara Lisa lived.

Gustavianum



The historical museum of Uppsala University is situated in the former main building of the university. It tells the story of the history of the university and displays the art collection and parts of the archaeological collections. Linnaeus figures prominently in the room about history of science. It includes besides a portrait mostly historical publications. Visitors may read brief descriptions of the objects or listen to the more elaborate audio guide.

Linnaeus Trails

Linnaeus took students to the natural areas outside Uppsala to observe the natural environment and collect specimens. The eight trails have been reconstructed and set out for visitors today to step into the footsteps of Linnaeus. Changes in the environment prevent completely accurate reconstructions. Along the way, visitors are informed of the natural environment and Linnaeus through a leaflet, physical information signs and audio fragments.

Sävja

To the south of Uppsala lies another residency of Linnaeus at Sävja. Linnaeus nor his family lived here, but he did have a study and would head to Sävja to study in solitude. He moreover leased a house and the land to a farmer's family and housed soldiers. The estate would remain in the Linnaeus family almost uninterrupted until the 1960s. Today, it is maintained by the local historical society. During art exhibitions in the summer, people can visit a small exhibition and hear more about Linnaeus and Sävja.

The background is a collage of various images. It includes a building with a red roof, a statue in front of a yellow building, a clock tower with a golden dome, a blue and white sign with a circular logo, a white building with a red roof, a paved path, a wooden fence, a cobblestone path, and some dry grass. The text is overlaid on this collage.

Societal and scientific racism

Economical ecology

Ecological literacy

I. QUADRUPEDIA.

Corpus quadrupedum. Pedes quatuor. Femina vivipara, lactiferæ.

II. AVES.

Corpus plumosum. Alæ duæ. Pedes duo. Rostrum ossium.

III. AMPHIBIA.

Corpus nudum, vel squamosum. Dentes nulli: reliqui temporales. Vires nate.

IV. PISCES.

Corpus nudum, pinnis veris instructum, natum, vel squamosum.

V. INSECTA.

Corpus sexis alia eandem loco testum. Caput sexis instructum.

VI. VERMES.

Corporis filiformis ab una parte basi eandem solidæ affixi.

Societal and scientific racism

As part of his systematization of nature, Linnaeus also classified humans (*Homo sapiens*) and distinguished between so-called varieties of humans. He attributed each of these variants (European, African, Asian, American) with characteristics. Today, this designation is sometimes taken as an argument to label Linnaeus as the father of scientific racism. For this reason, there have been calls to erase references to Linnaeus in public space. Although Linnaeus never used the term *race* himself, he did write (negative) stereotypical descriptions of the Other. For Linnaeus and his students, indigenous inhabitants mostly served as source of information and labour, for which they were not or hardly credited.

[illegible]

Lucina.	<i>Lucina apica</i> badius lateratus.	Enthacus.	Triogloides.	Cyprinus.	<i>Cyprinus</i> auratus.	Amur.	<i>Amur</i> ussuricus.	Amur.	<i>Amur</i> ussuricus.
		Carolina.	Carolina.						

Ovis vulgaris. Asinus. Africus. Capra. Camelus.	Lufcinia.	Rehr, gracile sedum. Lingua opea sedum laterum.	Lufcinia. Fledula. Embacu. Troglodytes. Civina. Aeth.	Se. Principalis papaveris octus, quing. 1. caque inhabitat.	Cupei. Aeth. brach. offic. Ficus scutis ferum.	8. Harengu. Spenti. Eucratichia. Aeth.	3. Erythrophthal. Megal. far. B. B.	Acetis. Pala. S. aristata 8. confusae.	Sci.
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[illegible]

Future

[illegible]

Economical ecology

Linnaeus had a keen eye for natural resources during his travels through the country and aimed for effectively using the land's riches. He sought to provide alternatives to importing expensive products such as coffee and tea, by attempting to grow these products locally, or by finding native alternative. Linnaeus's attempts to exploit Swedish natural resources would lead to land dispossession, forced exile and destruction of nature, historically and today in Sweden and more generally globally. The original inhabitants of these areas are often not compensated and had/have to give up on their way of living.

CAROLI LINNÆI
Doct. Med. & Acad. Imp. Nat. Cur. Soc.
FLORA
LAPPONICA
LAPTONIAM
Systema Sexuale
Impensis
Additis
Synonymis, & Locis Natalibus Omnium,
Descriptionibus & Figuris Rariorum,
Viribus Medicatis & Oeconomicis
Plurimarum.

Economical ecology

Present

The audio description for *Flora Lapponica* in Gustavianum explains how Linnaeus utilized Sami labour and knowledge for his own benefit and for the self-enriching endeavours of the Swedish state

Future

The exhibition about Linnaeus's students' journeys in the Orangery can be connected to subsequent exploitations of these same areas and the perspective of native inhabitants can be included. The plants in the Linnaeus Garden can be connected to their utility according to Linnaeus. At Gustavianum, displaying physical items such as iron ore can emphasize the quest for environmental exploitations as one of the prime motivations for natural science. The Linnaeus Trails can reflect on the role of excursions in systematizing nature and searching for potentially useful resources.

Ecological literacy

Linnaeus strongly advocated for multisensorial fieldwork as part of medical and biological education. Students had to go into the fields to observe habitats and collect specimens. Today, many children grow up in urban environments. Consequently, they are less skilled at reading natural circumstances and recognizing flora and fauna. Even if people are ecologically literate, they struggle to understand temporal change, even if research shows drastic changes in climate and nature. This phenomenon, known as shifting baseline, would have been difficult to imagine for Linnaeus, who believed God had created a stable nature that could be studied and understood through observations and systematization.

Ecological literacy

Present

The Linnaeus Trails draw attention to local wildlife historically and today through information signs, leaflets and audio fragments.

Future

The Linnaeus Gardens can challenge visitors to recognize or determine plants in the garden themselves. Hammarby can contrast living and growing up in an urban environment versus on the countryside and the impact hereof on ecological literacy. Gustavianum can reflect on the difference between the contents of *Flora svecica* and *Fauna svecica* if they had been written today. They can moreover reflect on Linnaeus as baseline for contemporary biodiversity assessments.



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If you are interested in the complete report or have any other questions, visit www.sannesteen.nl/linnaeus for more information and contact details.