The 18th Century
A Journey through Time to the 18th Century

An ordinary day on the way to work. You sit there behind the wheel, perhaps driving down the motorway, glancing at the wide fields and uniform lines of spruce trees. Suddenly you start to think about the way the landscape has been changed by man since Linnaeus’s time. Unknown human destinies from foregone times spring up in your mind’s eye. You are fascinated by the thought that the 18th century, and its people, are not so far away after all. The only thing that physically separates them from you is a number of revolutions round the sun. The place is the same, it is just a different year.

At that very moment, the car seems to dissolve into a strange mist and you find yourself standing in the middle of the landscape, at the edge of a meadow. Full of curiosity, you let your eyes wander round. Perhaps you recognise the outlines of the landscape, the same old hills that have always been there on the left of the motorway, where you have driven so often before. Otherwise everything is different. The uniform field and forest surroundings have been replaced by a much more varied landscape, where small meadows and fields lie among forest groves and wetland. A landscape of soft lines, so peaceful to rest your mind in.

All of a sudden Linnaeus appears before you. A youthful man dressed in 18th-century clothes: a long-armed linen shirt and tight waistcoat, breeches, shoes with broad buckles. “Follow me,” he whispers with a smile. “Let me show you what the landscape looks like in my time.” Before you can say a word, he starts to talk eagerly about a farming landscape marked by ancient forms and old-style implements. Your eyes follow some wooden fences that wander along, like the border between outfields and infields. The principle is the same wherever
you are in Sweden: the cattle graze freely in the forest or in open pastures (the outfields) while the cultivated fields and meadows (infields) are fenced in to stop the animals from coming in. This is a cultural landscape that demands plenty of work, dating back to the early Middle Ages, even as far back as to the Viking Age.

Not a trace of the motorway. Instead, the beautiful meadow stretches out at your feet, full of colourful flowers of every sort: mountain arnica, milkwort, quaking-grass. Linnaeus walks carefully among the plants, showing and explaining, moving easily and smoothly. His enthusiasm is evident. “The meadow, my friend, the meadow! Remember it. Very important for the survival of mankind!” he says. Then he raises his arm and points to a nearby field where barley is growing. The corn has not ripened yet, but you notice that it is not growing as densely as you are used to. And the barley has to share the field with a lot of flowering weeds like poppies and cornflowers. The whole field seems to be shining with bright colours. How beautiful, you think, but at the same time you know that this poor yield will mean a lean existence for the people who have to live off the land. Linnaeus explains that they can also grow rye, oats, peas, flax, hemp, buckwheat and in some places wheat as well.

Suddenly a shiver runs down your spine. There are voices behind you. Your heart beats faster and you turn round quickly. Less than 50 yards away there are a few low, unpainted wooden cottages with turfed roofs. You had not noticed them before but now they are undoubtedly there. They stand close together – five small farmsteads consisting of simple dwellings, barns and several storehouses. You smell the sour, acrid smell from the hamlet – from the pigs, the hens, the dunghill, sweaty people. These impressions mingle with the smell of newly-cut hay and the smoke from the fireplaces in the cottages.

Now you see the people. A group of men and women approach the cottages. They are carrying scythes and rakes, wiping the sweat from their brows with horny hands. Behind them is a newly- scythed meadow. The grass is spread out on the ground to dry for a few days before it is piled up into haystacks. A few ash trees and lime trees also stand in the meadow, their leaves and twigs providing extra fodder for the cattle. Your first instinctive desire to hide has gone – no one can actually see you. Out of the corner of your eye, you seem to see Linnaeus nodding encouragingly. Full of curiosity, you draw closer to the cottages and the people.

Some of them have gone home, but three of the men stand talking. Their voices sound slightly angry. “Now just you remember not to tether your cow in the meadow even though we've cut the hay,” one of them says. “We all have to wait until the barley is harvested. Then we can let out all the cattle together so that they can graze freely on both the field and the meadow,” another one adds. The third man is quite a bit younger than the other two. He stands with his arms folded and glares at them. “All right, but does it really matter so much if my cow chews the cud a bit out in the meadow a while? After all, I'll tether her up so she can't go off into the field. Then there won't be any damage done to the corn.”

The first man, a tall fellow, throws up his arms. “But it isn't the corn we're worried about, Nils. It's unfairness we're talking about,” he says. “If your cow stands a few days in the meadow, there'll be less grazing for the other cattle. Your plots are your own, but the pasture belongs to all the farms in the village!” After a few
minutes more of discussion, the younger man seems to agree with the other two. They all walk off in different directions. You yourself walk up to one of the cottages. The dust whirls up from the ground in the heat of the summer day. Hens, pigs and geese run round your legs. Just behind the nearest barn, there is a small, fenced-in cabbage patch, where the family can grow vegetables, onions and cabbage.

Inside the cottage it is gloomy. Not much daylight comes through the small window, but the flames from the fireplace light the room up a bit. This is where a man and his wife, their three children and a servant girl and a farm-hand live. During the cold winter months their home has to make room for the farm’s hens and lambs, calves and piglets. The cottage consists of one large room. Benches and beds are fixed along the walls. A big, square table dominates the spartan furniture. Food is cooked in a large cauldron that stands on a trivet over the open fire. If you do not look after your fire properly, you risk being fined. There is a great risk of the hamlet suffering from a fire when the buildings are so close together and are built of wood.

It feels a bit smoky and musty inside, but you decide to sit down all the same on one of the wooden benches by the table. Linnaeus sits beside you and asks if you have ever thought how many noises there are at night time in the winter on these small farms. “Thump-thump-thump-thump. Thump-thump-thump-thump,” he says in rhythmical quadruple time and looks quite pleased at your surprised expression. He explains that the dull and rhythmic thuds come from the threshing in the barn. When the corn is harvested, it has to be threshed to separate the husk from the grain. The next moment, the mist clears and you see Linnaeus giving me a searching glance. “Now you have to thresh when it is dark because the daylight needs to be used for other jobs. That means you often start threshing as early as three o’clock in the morning. That is why the rhythmical thuds echo through the darkness of the night.

Linnaeus gives me a searching glance. “Now you have to make careful notes while I tell you about work on the farm,” he says. And he explains that the work is intensive in the fields in the spring. The soil has to be ploughed, evened out and weeded with a harrow and then sown. After that, you have to take care of the fields that have lain fallow so as to prepare them for the autumn sowing. And the meadowland has to be cleared in the spring so that the grass will grow as well as possible. Bushes have to be cut down earlier in the year so that you can gather the branches together to burn. Hedges and ditches have to be maintained early in the summer.

In July and August, it is time to mow the meadows. When autumn is approaching, it is time for harvesting. Mowing and harvesting are the most demanding jobs in the year.

Another searching glance from Linnaeus. “Did you get it all down?” he asks. You nod and put your notebook and pen back in your bag. You smile a little secretly as he leans on the rough wooden table in the light of the fire behind him. “You know what – now it’s my turn to show you something. Come along to a modern farm and you’ll see how modern agriculture works,” you say. In the next second that strange mist spreads in the cottage and at first you wonder a bit anxiously where Linnaeus has gone, but then you hear his voice behind you. A little arrogantly, but also delighted, he says: “Modern? Who decides what modern is and where it is? But all right, let’s try.”

The next moment, the mist clears and you see Linnaeus again – sitting now in the driver’s seat of a modern combine harvester. He gazes wide-eyed at the instrument panel and all the levers round the seat. He cautiously fingers a few small knobs above his head, leans forward over the steering wheel and looks down at the seven-metre-wide cutter bar in front of the machine. “No, I’m not joking. This machine both cuts and threshes when you drive it across a field. You explain that the cutting bar cuts off the corn stalks, after which the heads are fed into the machine and threshed in a

“When you sit there in the summer, listening to the cuckoo and all the other birds singing, and the insects buzzing, when you look at the gleaming, brightly coloured flowers, you are quite overcome by the incredible inventiveness of the Creator.”
cylinder, so that the husked grain is collected in a tank while the rest is blown out of the back as a yellow trail of straw. “What a magnificent saving of time and effort!” Linnaeus exclaims in wonderment. My colleagues at the Academy of Sciences should have seen this!”

“And there is the ox of our days — the tractor,” you say, nodding at a corner of the building. You are in the garage of a farm that grows corn. You explain to Linnaeus that modern agriculture is very specialised, far from the world of subsistence farming. You go in either for crop farming or for cattle farming. In other words, a grain farmer has to buy his milk and cheese like any other town dweller. “By the way, can you guess how much milk a modern cow produces a year?” Linnaeus shakes his head with a smile. “In my days it was about 600 kilos a year, though a third of that went to the calves,” he replies. “Now we are up at about 8000 kilos on average,” you say. “And you don’t milk by hand any longer. There are machines that do that too,” you continue.

You also talk about two new concepts in agriculture, the production of environmental services and the high-tech GPS system. The GPS system is a technique that, by means of satellites, provides exact information on where you are on earth. This technology is in its infancy in agriculture but can be used to better adapt the amount of fertiliser that is spread over different parts of the fields instead of spreading the same amount everywhere. The production of environmental services means that farmers are paid via state grants to take care of the landscape, so that, for example, there is less leaching of nitrates into the sea and the landscape is kept open with a richer diversity of species. “So farming land is no longer used only to produce food for survival,” you say.

Linnaeus waves his hand in protest. “Wait a minute! I can’t keep up with you!” His quill races across the page. “A lot to note down, isn’t there?” you comment. For the first time you notice a frown of concentration on his forehead. For a moment you are seized by a feeling of sympathy. What an upset it must be to face a completely new picture of the world! “Seriously, though, you ought to know that we wouldn’t have had all these modern inventions if it hadn’t been for all the work you did in your time, Linnaeus,” you say encouragingly. We’re building the same house, so to say, but a few storeys higher.”

Linnaeus straightens up, his brown eyes sparkling. “That was well said,” he replies with a smile. “But that wasn’t what I was thinking about.” He takes a deep breath, looks thoughtfully at you and scratches his chin. “I’m very impressed by everything you have achieved, but what worries me a little is how you have managed to look after all this in a balanced way. Remember that mankind….” In mid-sentence the words suddenly seem to vanish. Without warning, the thick mist surrounds you, you fumble in the dark, but Linnaeus has gone. The next moment, you look in confusion around you and realise that you have just parked outside your office.

How might the conversation have continued if it had not been so abruptly interrupted?
Righ up to the present day, we have environments from Linnaeus’s time with us, standing out like small oases in the modern agricultural landscape. Some of them are almost invisible, forgotten, in the care of a farmer who protects the cultural heritage in return for an environmental grant from the European Union, but also perhaps in his own interest. Other areas are looked after by idealistic groups or have been set aside as nature reserves with protective regulations and conservation plans. What is it that makes these areas interesting to preserve?

Landscapes with rich biological diversity

These landscapes have in common that they belong to a time when the wild flora provided grazing and winter fodder for animals and that they often have a long, continuous history. Hay meadows and natural pastures are landscapes that tell of a time when mankind supported itself without artificial fertilisers, fossil fuels and cultivated fodder. Meadow cultivation was developed as early as the Iron Age when the climate deteriorated and there was not enough pasture to feed the animals in the winter. The grass had to be saved as hay and meadow cultivation was essential.

A rich biological diversity has developed in the interaction between man, grazing animals and the wild flora and fauna. Meadows and natural pastures are among the landscapes with the richest range of species in Sweden. What is it that gives them this biological diversity?

The landscapes are very varied, created partly by natural conditions but also by grazing and mowing that have been practised for a long time. Many small environments can be distinguished here:

- wet dells and dry knolls
- sunny, open places, shade under trees and bushes
- large solitary boulders, stone walls and cairns
- solitary trees and bushes, copses and forest edges
- dominance of poor soil with scattered fertile places where animals have left their dung or trees have rotted.

No plant is allowed to grow large and dominant in pastureland, where grazing animals continuously cut down the high stalks so that the light can penetrate down to the smallest species in the turf. In the cultivated meadows, the plants are cut down by scything instead. This is done in late July when the plants have seeded. After scything, the animals are let out to graze and their hoofs makes it easier for the seeds to get into the ground and germinate.

The greater the differences the land offers, the greater the diversity of species with different environmental
The biological diversity of open land

Biological diversity is discussed here on the basis of Linnaeus's Swedish landscapes. Every area on earth is marked by its natural conditions – climate, soil and so on – and by the influence of human activities, factors that vary across the globe. Apart from the great biological diversity that often exists in untouched environments, other environments gifted with a wide range of species have also developed in the interplay between mankind and Nature. The special character of the environments marked by human culture varies from one part of the world to another, but the conditions necessary for rich biological diversity are usually a richly varied environment with a long history of cultivation. This text is based on Swedish conditions. What environments marked by human culture and rich biological diversity do you have in your surroundings?

needs. A rich range of herbs also provides the right conditions for a rich range of insect life, which in turn benefits many other animals such as birds.

Nowadays, we are able to specialise in many different ways when we cultivate fodder. Modern fodder land can be compared to cultivated fields. The land is flat and evenly humid. There are no trees or bushes, the level of nutrients is kept high with artificial fertilisers and the plants are just a few sown species.

Today, natural pastures and cultivated meadows are maintained mainly for other reasons than fodder production. Here, natural and cultural values are preserved in a landscape that offers relaxation and beautiful scenery.

Pollarding

In the old days, foliage from the trees in the pastures or meadows was also used as fodder. Branches were cut off from the crowns of the trees, saved and used during the winter as food for the animals. Ash and lime were considered to be the trees that gave extra good and tasty fodder. A tree that bears traces of pollarding has holes and decaying parts as well as fresh shoots. Pollarded trees provide a rich and varied environment for many species, in particular insects that live off dead wood.

Fields

In Linnaeus's time, fields also had great biological diversity. Every village produced its own seed for sowing by saving the largest grains, those that had managed best to grow just there. This selection took place year after year and locally adapted species were formed as time passed.

According to Linnaeus's descriptions, weeds could often comprise up to 50 per cent of the field crops. That is worth remembering today, when we can admire a large field of corn with full heads of wheat standing in close rows, more or less without competition from other plants and under optimal conditions. Linnaeus would have been fascinated.
Today we can in principle support 3,000 people with the square kilometre of land that one single person needed to feed him in the hunter Stone Age. The conditions necessary for people to support themselves within an area of land are mainly:

- the natural conditions for cultivation: climate, soil etc.
- the level of technological development: access to nutrients, mechanisation, improved crops
- the political situation: taxes, subsidies, distribution of land, trade etc.

Even though the natural conditions for cultivation may in general be the same, we are no longer equally dependent on them. Technological development means that we have greater possibilities to change these conditions by improving the soil, by using artificial fertilisers, by liming, draining, irrigating and combating undesirable plants, fungi and insects, and by producing weed-free seed that gives high yields. Crops that cannot normally be grown in a certain climate zone or at a certain season of the year are cultivated in greenhouses.

In the 18th century, people were dependent on the natural conditions on the spot, although the possibilities for cultivation could be improved in various ways. The supply of nutrients was directed within and among the various types of land in order to raise production and prevent them from becoming impoverished. In the village landscapes, the land was organised as infields and outfields. The fields and meadows of the infields were divided up into a large number of separate strips that belonged to the village’s farmers. These strips lay together in common areas. The infields were enclosed so that the grazing animals that roamed freely in the jointly-owned outfields were not able to eat the crops.

A household economy based on a natural cycle

**Stable manure to the fields**

The hay grown in the meadows provided winter fodder for the cattle. The manure that came from the cattle when they were kept indoors during the winter was later used to fertilise the fields. Hay production from the meadows was therefore decisive for the fields’ fertility and the size of the harvest. “The meadow is the mother of the field”. The acreage of meadowland in relation to field acreage could be 3-7 times larger.
Nutrients were taken from deep down in the earth
Meadowland that lies on dry soil has bushes and trees with roots that reach deep down into the earth and bring up minerals and nutrients that would otherwise not be available for grass and herbs that have shorter roots. The nutrients in leaves come to herbs and grass when the leaves fall in the autumn. The bushes and trees in the meadows were said to “plough without a plough and fertilise without fertilisers.”

The effects of clearing undergrowth
When bushes and trees are cleared by burning or cutting, nutrients are released into the soil, either in the form of nutritious ashes or because the fine roots that are no longer needed decay. Farmers in the 18th century took advantage of this effect of clearing undergrowth in meadowland and in temporary slash-and-burn fields. Slash-and-burn cultivation of rye was practised mostly in the western parts of Götaland in the 18th century.

The fertilising effect of the spring floods
Low-lying land that was flooded in the spring and autumn was often used as meadowland. Both the water itself and its content of nutrients helped to increase the hay harvest compared with dry meadows.

Over-exploited landscapes
Production was limited by the amount of nutrients that were naturally accessible in the natural cycle. As the population increased, the landscape became more and more exploited and the land became more and more impoverished and had fewer and fewer trees. By the end of the 18th century, the landscape in some places, especially in southern Sweden, was approaching over-exploitation. The time was ripe for radical changes in traditional farming methods, so land reforms were carried out in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

The revolution of artificial fertilisers
Artificial fertilisers brought a great change to agriculture. Being able to produce nutrients by artificial methods, in addition to those that circulate in the natural cycle, opened up fantastic new opportunities for cultivation. At the same time, cultivated plants were developed by plant improvement and agriculture was mechanised. In the 1950s/60s, artificial fertilisers were sold at a price that led to their breakthrough on a broad front. Meadows and natural pastures were replaced by cultivated grazing grounds. Nowadays, these grounds are ploughed, sown with grass and fertilised. So the wild flora is of little importance for modern agricultural production.

There are still small relics of the old cultural landscapes in our own landscape. They no longer play a major role in food production but are a part of our cultural heritage with rich biological diversity.

Natural pasture: wild flora, no added nutrients
Grazing grounds: sown grass, added nutrients

Many wild species are affected negatively by over-fertilisation. In which environments in your neighbourhood can you notice this, and in what ways are the effects visible? What importance does biological diversity have for you?
Land Reforms

“More attention was paid to the founding of the city of Kiruna, slightly more than a century ago, than almost any other community development in the Nordic countries and now parts of the city centre will be moved. Never before has a Swedish community been relocated in this fashion, making it both an opportunity and a threat no one has yet experienced”, writes the municipality of Kiruna on its web site.

The city of Kiruna, situated in the far north of Sweden, will be relocated within thirty years. This radical measure is necessitated by underground rifts caused by iron ore mining. Yet relocating communities is not a novel phenomenon. The land reforms carried out in Sweden during the late 18th and early 19th centuries had far reaching consequences in large parts of the country and led to the break up of villages and forced people to migrate. The landscape was altered and took on an entirely different shape, compared to what Linnaeus encountered during his provincial journeys almost three hundred years ago.

The land reforms were initiated in 1757. These reforms implied that each farm acquired one contiguous plot of land. This constituted a significant change from the earlier small-scale agriculture, where each farm consisted of multiple narrow and separately enclosed strips of land. The traditional ownership structure, with multiple scattered strips, had developed over centuries. With a growing population, increasing areas, located ever more distantly from the village, were put under the plough and divided into separate strips of land. Farming in this fashion gradually became more cumbersome. Increasingly, there was a desire to break up from the awkward structures of the old villages. The landless population benefited from improved wage labor opportunities.
In retrospect we conclude that these land reforms improved agricultural efficiency. Over time, new inventions and farming practices have resulted in more rational farming. Today, farmers comprise only two percent of the Swedish population.

The social consequences of the land reforms are more difficult to disentangle. Rather than being a part of a village work community, each peasant now tilled the land independently. How did the individual peasant experience this separation from the earlier village community?

The documents assembled to ensure equitable land reform constitute a rich source of knowledge about the landscape that is now gone. By comparing maps from different eras, the contemporary countryside can be interpreted and surviving traces from times past tell a story about the earlier landscape. It may be remnants of ancient cultivated lands, pollarded trees with multiple trunks, stone fences and names of, for instance, town sections that reflect earlier land usage.

The maps indicate ownership patterns in the village of Lilla Uppåkra in the province of Skåne, located in the far south of Sweden.

**LAND REFORMS**

At the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century there were extensive land reforms in western Europe. In Sweden the changes in ownership and farming methods took place without any major conflicts. Questions concerning land use and ownership are still burning issues in many parts of the world, often leading to controversy and conflict. What are the conditions in your own country? Find out how the landscape around you has changed over the years.
At Carl Linnaeus’s birthplace in Småland, at least from the 16th century into the early 18th century, they grew almost exclusively barley and rye, alternately. The harvest was small as compared with the present day, varying between about 2.5 and 1.5 times the amount of seed sown. Sometimes they did not even get the amount of seed back. Barley and rye were the dominant cereals in Sweden, while wheat was grown on better soil on the plains.

Linnaeus’s journeys to various parts of Sweden had as two of their aims to list the natural resources and to describe useful methods for agriculture and industry. It was important to increase agricultural production and Sweden’s degree of self-sufficiency, and to reduce expensive imports of goods. The Swedish East India Company, which was established in 1731 in Göteborg, imported tea from China at great expense, and Linnaeus had great hopes of growing tea in Sweden instead. Similar discussions about the balance of trade and the production in Sweden of food and industrial products are heard in today’s political debate.

We often take today’s landscapes for granted. Large, fertile fields, green pastures and forests that provide us with timber and pulp. We consumers hardly notice if it has been a good or a bad year for wheat production. It is no longer self-evident that it is the landscape around us that provides us with food and goods.

In Sweden today, 85 per cent of the population live in urban areas and only 2 per cent are engaged in farming. This is in great contrast to the 18th century, which was a period characterised by self-subsistent households. In the early 18th century, 80 per cent of a total of 1.4 million inhabitants were engaged in farming.

At present, about 10 per cent of the population of Sweden work in the food chain, that is, with processing, trading and cooking. This percentage is small compared with the 18th century, but with the use of modern technology, food can be produced for the rest of the population. Even if Sweden could in principle be self-sufficient in food, it is still dependent on fossil fuels and artificial fertilisers for production. Many foodstuffs are imported, too. The provision of food for a country’s population is no longer determined by its own production capacity but to a large extent by the country’s politics, its economic standard and its global trading policy.

There are goods from all corners of the earth in the grocery stores. Even among products that can be produced locally there are usually alternatives from more distant places in the world, quite often at lower prices. Would you prefer apples from southern Sweden, Spain or South Africa? You can choose from the supermarket’s fruit counter more or less all the year round.

Human communities today consume 20 per cent more of the earth’s renewable resources than the ecological system can recreate. You can compare the percentage of the earth’s resources that a country uses by calculating its so called ecological footprint. Sweden has one of the very largest ecological footprints in the world compared with other countries. Give examples of how the foot print of different countries varies and try to explain these differences. How can we change our lifestyle so that the ecological footprint can decrease?

How can our choice of food affect developments and the environment in the world? Give a few tips on how to make environmentally-friendly choices.

Food from All over the World
Shrimps from the North Sea or prawns from former mangrove forests in Thailand?

Ruccola salad from Italy or locally grown lettuce?

Noodles from China or Swedish new potatoes?

Baby corn on the cob from Thailand or Swedish corn on the cob?

Steak from Brazil or meat from Swedish pastures?

Apples from Chile or Swedish apples?
Life in the 18th Century

During Carl Linnaeus’s childhood, Karl XII was king of Sweden. After the disastrous battle of Poltava in 1709, he was imprisoned in Turkey but returned to Sweden in 1715, when it was involved in conflicts with most of its neighbours. In 1718, the whole country’s resources were mobilised to attack Norway with an army of 40,000 men. The death of Karl XII in 1718 during this Norwegian expedition marked the end of Sweden’s era as a great power, which had lasted since Gustaf II Adolf (Gustavus Adolphus) had come to the throne in 1611. Sweden lost vast areas of land in the subsequent peace treaties and in the 1720s comprised, apart from the present Sweden, only Finland and two areas in northern Germany. The part that consisted of the present Sweden had a population of about 1.4 million at this time. The country was economically impoverished by the long wars, on top of which there were harvest failures and repeated epidemics of fatal diseases.

This is the background to Linnaeus’s life-long commitment to developing the natural resources of Sweden. On his journeys, he listed natural resources and described activities that could make Sweden more self-sufficient and less dependent on imports of expensive goods. One of the reasons for sending his disciples out into the world was to bring home important cultivated plants from other countries to grow in Sweden.

The period 1718–1772 is called the Age of Freedom because the king’s power at this time was weak and a form of parliamentarianism was practised. Governing power was in the hands of the Council, where the king had only two of a total of 16 votes. The Parliament consisted of the four Estates: the nobility, the priests, the burghers and the farmers. The majority votes of three of the Estates were needed to reach a decision. The Council’s composition was determined by the majority in the Parliament. This was dominated by two parties, the Hats and the Caps, which had contacts with the various great powers in Europe. This meant that Sweden was drawn into complicated foreign conflicts and war against Russia and Prussia. Karl XII was succeeded first by his sister Ulrika Eleonora, who was forced to abdicate in 1720 in favour of her husband, Fredrik of Hessen (Fredrik I). After the death of Fredrik I in 1751, Adolf-Fredrik of Holstein Gottorp became king with his queen Lovisa Ulrika. Linnaeus was in close contact with the royal couple, who commissioned him to catalogue the royal collection of natural objects. Linnaeus soon grew tired of court life but kept up his contacts with the king and queen.

The Enlightenment, the dominant intellectual movement during most of the 18th century, originated in France. Its aim was to free mankind from superstition, and its supporters advocated rational thinking based on human reason. This movement did not have much impact in Sweden, but one of Linnaeus’s disciples, Peter Forsskål, was inspired by the ideals of the Enlightenment to argue strongly for the freedom of the press in a pamphlet published in 1751. This was a very controversial subject at that time.

The influence of the Church was strong and few people doubted the existence of God. God was likened to the Great Clockmaker who had designed all living organisms and worked out a meaningful plan for the whole of Nature.

At the end of Linnaeus’s life, the Age of Freedom came to an end with the coup d’état carried out by Gustav III in 1772. Discontent with the ruling powers was great, which enabled the king to take over power and introduce a number of reforms, but also restrictions on political liberty.

“Tortoiseshell butterfly. The Swedish Flora and Fauna Encyclopedia lists all the 140 species of butterflies in Scandinavia.

Butterflies they dance in Haga, through grey-white clouds of mist, seek their way to their green homesteads and their flowery beds of rest…”

Carl Michael Bellman, Fredman’s Song No. 64

The latter part of the 18th century was also the time of the poets Carl Michael Bellman and Anna Maria Lenngren. Bellman’s ballad on the butterflies in Haga is still sung today. Lenngren praised the egalitarian ideals of the Enlightenment and in her poem “A few words to my dear daughter – if I had one” she writes about the inequalities between men and women.