

MUSE U.M. NEWS

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NEWS AND INFORMATION FROM THE PHILIP L. WRIGHT
ZOOLOGICAL MUSEUM - THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA



RECENT ACCESSIONS BY THE MUSEUM

Angela Concepcion-Willmot brought to the museum a **Barred Owl** (*Strix varia*) that was found dead on top of the snow along the Sawmill Gulch Trail in the Rattlesnake Wilderness.

Garry Kerr donated a **Northern Pygmy Owl** (*Glaucidium gnoma*) that was killed by a dog in Missoula, and a **White-tailed Jackrabbit** (*Lepus townsendi*) that has been prepared for the comparative skeletal collection.

A severely fractured and healed pelvis of a **Deer** (*Odocoileus* sp.) was collected and donated by John Mitchell. The right innominate was completely fractured, probably from being hit by a car or from a fall, and has partially fused to the left innominate during healing.

Jeff Marks has recently arranged for the acquisition of several birds for the museum, including an **American Woodcock** (*Scolopax minor*) found dead in Helena; a **Black-throated Blue Warbler** (*Dendroica caerulescens*) from Great Falls; a **Trumpeter Swan** (*Cygnus buccinator*) that had hit a power line near Choteau; and a **Northern Shoveler** (*Anas clypeata*) and **Ruddy Shelduck** (*Tadorna ferruginea*) from the Freezeout Lake Wildlife Management Area. The Ruddy Shelduck is the first example of this species in the museum.

A complete **Llama** (*Lama glama*) skeleton was collected and donated by Mary Ann Donovan. This is an important addition to the comparative skeletal collection. Llama bones will no doubt be showing up in forensic cases in the future as llamas become more common in Montana.

A skin and skull of the **Northern Grasshopper Mouse** (*Onychomys leucogaster*) from Hill Co., MT was collected and prepared by Paul Hendricks. This is the first record of this species in the museum from Hill Co.

NEWS ITEMS FROM THE MUSEUM

The Zoological Museum has opened its first permanent **exhibits** at the Nature Center at Fort Missoula. The museum continues its partnership with the Montana Natural History Center by providing specimens for the Center's new exhibit space. The Nature Center hopes to acquire a much larger space which will allow us to do even bigger and better exhibits in the future.

We have completed a major reorganization of the museum's **mammal collection**. Over the last several years we have been reorganizing the collection according to the most recent and accepted classification system. Also we have put all new acid-free cardboard trays in each drawer, and have lined each drawer or tray with archival Ethafoam. Every specimen is now resting on an acid-free, padded surface rather than on acidic wood or old cardboard trays. Also, the specimens are now arranged in numeric order by catalog number within each taxon. So please be sure to return a specimen to its proper location if you remove one from a drawer! The final step is to create a typed inventory card for each tray or drawer.

The **Museum Tour Program** is set to resume this fall. Interns recruited by the Montana Natural History Center are selected and trained by the museum to conduct tours of the zoological museum and preparation lab, and to conduct other educational programs. During 1999-2000 over 110 people, mostly school groups, received tours. To schedule a tour call the Montana Natural History Center at 327-0405 or Dave Dyer at 243-4743.

A report written about the museum in approximately 1971 and titled "Status of the Museum" has some interesting comments in it. "The facilities available are on the verge of becoming **overcrowded**...The most pressing storage problem involves the skull room and space for boxed skulls and skeletons." This could have been written today, almost 30 years later!

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has recently loaned to the museum a full mounted **skeleton of an elk**. This mount was formerly on exhibit at the Elk Foundation and needed a new home when storage space became a problem. This beautiful mount has been very useful already, in the zooarchaeology course and when doing identifications of bones.

Peter Pyle, in his recent book "Identification Guide to North American Birds", makes a good case for continued **support of museum ornithological collections**. The author examined over 25,000 museum specimens in the preparation of his book. Please see the reverse of this newsletter for the full statement.



NOTES OF INTEREST

A NOTE CONCERNING SPECIMEN COLLECTIONS

The author spent approximately 1000 hours in museum collections (80% at the California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco), and examined over 25,000 specimens in preparation for the second edition of this guide. The value of these specimens (most of which were collected in the 1800's and early 1900's) in providing and checking the information presented here cannot be overestimated. Currently, however, many ornithologists assume that there is little left to learn from specimens, and funding for museum collections and the staff to run them are steadily decreasing (see Parkes 1963; Phillips 1974a, 1986, 1991; Winker *et al.* 1991; Browning 1995; Remsen 1995). But there are still vast amounts to learn, as exemplified by the expanded sections on molt in this guide (see also Pyle 1995a, 1997b, 1997c, in press; Pyle *et al.* 1997; Pyle & Howell 1995). Although data on specimen tags, especially concerning sex, should be interpreted with some caution (see Clench 1976, Parkes 1989a), users of this guide, including all banders, birders, and other ornithologists, are strongly encouraged to utilize specimen collections in answering questions about identification, molt, and plumage in species of interest, and to support the continued maintenance of museum collections.

Although continued random collecting in North America is no longer necessary, the full utilization of collections will point out areas where judicious collecting to answer specific questions is warranted. Additional specimens can always help with existing questions, however, and banders and birders are strongly encouraged (with the appropriate local permits) to save specimens that perish during banding operations or are found under windows or on the road (see Phillips 1974a, Jett 1991), to carefully note the date, location, and any other pertinent information, and to donate them to the nearest museum collection.