
MUSEUM NEWS

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

Summer 2011

No. 33

Museum Catalogs the 20,000th Specimen

The museum reached a milestone this summer when we cataloged the 20,000th specimen into our collection! On 15 June our former intern and now volunteer Emily Graslie had the honor of cataloging a study skin and skull of *Microtus longicaudus*, the long-tailed vole, into the museum's catalog. The first catalog entry was made in 1947 by Philip L. Wright, and documents the skull of an elk. The museum existed for many years before 1947 but the current cataloging system wasn't started until then.

This 20,000th specimen is a "typical" museum specimen in some ways and unusual in others. The long-tailed vole is common and found throughout much of Montana. It was collected as part of a 3-year study of small mammal diversity by the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP). We have prepared and cataloged over 350 small mammals from this project so far (see 2010 newsletter for more information). The specimen consists of a museum study skin and skull. It was collected in Mineral Co. Montana, near Sheep Mountain in a riparian habitat on 1 July 2010. However this specimen is somewhat unusual since it's the first documented record of this species from Mineral Co. It was long thought to live there but had never been documented before. Now Mineral Co. can be shaded in on its range map! There have been a large number of these county records discovered since we began cataloging this MNHP collection. In addition to the standard skin and skull, this specimen also has 5 fetuses. These were preserved in alcohol and are now available for a wide range of research projects.

The museum now has over 20,000 specimens of birds and mammals, 1000 separate specimens for teaching, and over 3000 fish, reptile, and amphibian specimens.

Recent Accessions

The first record of the **Freshwater Jellyfish** (*Craspedacusta sowerbyi*) from Montana was given to the museum by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Though we are primarily a vertebrate collection, the museum is acting as a repository for this unusual specimen. This small jellyfish does have tentacles with stinging cells but is not harmful to humans. It can be seen in the first floor display case.

Birds recently donated for the permanent and teaching collections include a **Flammulated Owl** (*Otus flammeolus*) from Ravalli Co., a **Clark's Nutcracker** (*Nucifraga columbiana*), and a **Red Crossbill** (*Loxia curvirostra*).

Recently acquired mammals include a **Pygmy Rabbit** (*Brachylagus idahoensis*), a **Bushytail Woodrat** (*Neotoma cinerea*), and the skull of a **Bobcat** (*Lynx rufus*) that was killed by coyotes.

Another Way to Donate!

When people first see the museum the usual reaction is "Wow! This is amazing! What can I do to help the museum!?" The primary way to support the museum and to further its goals is to join the Friends of the Philip L. Wright Zoological Museum. If you haven't joined yet, see the last page of the newsletter for a membership form. Now we also have another more immediate way to donate: we have installed a donation box just inside the door of the museum. This is for cash and check donations, and so far we've received gifts from visiting researchers, tour groups, artists, and casual visitors. So the next time you're near the museum, stop by and unload all that extra change in your pocket!

A Plea for Action

By Emily Graslie

As our world has progressed into a far advanced technological state, one highly dictated by the immense amount of information shared by computers and the Internet, we have lost the value of the humble hands-on ways of learning. Museums today are strongly leaning towards exhibits that showcase gigantic interactive screens rather than tangible examples for comparison. The museums of my youth have always been underfunded, but humble and proud things that have maintained the same fantastic specimens and cast skeletons throughout the decades. The purest source of information is the specimens itself, which is what The University of Montana Philip L. Wright Zoological museum can offer us.

I recently read that the Musee' d'Orsay exhibition at the Hangaram Art Museum in Seoul is featuring the likes of Vincent van Gogh's popular *Starry Night* and Monet's water lilies on display – on LCD Samsung 1080 ppi display. How does seeing a reproduction of the original even compare? How can one get a sense at all of Vincent van Gogh's brilliant depth of texture and color if they are viewing it on a television screen? There is something inherently lost in that experience.

Museums with big budgets seem to think they are going after what people want: kids love video games and people love watching television, so if you put those in an educational environment, they will become engaging to the viewer simply on principal. It is in my experience that we go to a museum to see something else, something that is not accessible to us already in our homes. We go to have a memorable experience.

The future of The Philip L. Wright Zoological Museum should not be in a gray zone. There is this limbo between not having enough space in the freezers for new specimens to not being able to clean the ones we have because there is no room in the drawers or not enough space in the skull room to put them once they're done. It becomes much more obvious to see the lack of storage during the school year when classes are in session and professors need to use parts of the collection in their lectures. There is also no additional space for storing those specimens separately, nor is there an option to leave them in a lecture hall, so each week they need to be pulled and eventually put back. It becomes impossible to access anything in the cases without feeling like you're playing Jenga with tipping trays full of dozens of *Microtus* or pushing around carts piled dangerously high with skulls. Right now I am finishing cataloging our donation from The Montana Natural Heritage Program, and most of the specimens are ending up in plastic overflow storage bins. Many are county records – newly discovered or reported in a specific county. They don't even get the privilege of being shut up in the old metal cases with the rest of their species, meaning many people won't even see them for months, maybe years, unless they're deliberately looking.

These problems are not the fault of the Division of Biological Sciences or even from a lack of donations from the community and programs like the MNHP, but of The University itself for not making the existence and persistent successes of the Museum known to the community of Missoula and to potential students across the nation. It was not until my senior year that I even heard of our Zoological museum, despite its reputable status of being the largest vertebrate zoology repository between Minneapolis and Eastern Washington. We should be celebrating this unbelievable facility and utilizing it to its fullest, but unfortunately these ideals cannot be met until the UMZM has space to expand into and increased staff. This will not materialize unless there is a definite investment by The University of Montana administrators and the continued efforts of other volunteers and researchers in the community.

I have personally invested myself into the Museum in the hopes that I can finish busy work so we can focus on what the future of the collections is going to be. Right now there are still 3,200 fish in the basement of Schreiber Gym, collecting dust as the alcohol evaporates from the same jars that are in the background photographs of a biology class in Main Hall, 1913. The neglect has not yet become intentional, but I fear that may be the future of this collection unless we can publicize to the community and The University of its obvious importance before this irreplaceable facility is lost to apathy or disuse.

-Emily Graslie recently graduated from The University of Montana with a Bachelors of Fine Arts in Painting. Emily was an intern in our museum during the Spring Semester and now has become a dedicated volunteer and active proponent for the Museum.



Don't Forget to Renew Your Membership!

Just a reminder that if you didn't renew your membership to the Friends of the Philip L. Wright Zoological Museum last year that it's not too late. Dues are \$25 for two years, so if you missed last year go ahead and send in your renewal now to keep your membership current. See page 4 for a membership form.

We need your continued support! We still need each and every member to help support this fledgling Friends group. Also encourage your colleagues, students, and friends to join. Let's continue to support the active acquisitions, exhibit, and research programs of the museum.



Meet the Staff:

David Dyer – Curator

Emily Graslie – Museum Technician

Emma Young – Museum Technician

Brandy Wallace – Preparation Lab

Charles Miller – Preparation Lab

Tess Kreofsky – Preparation Lab

www.zoologicalmuseum.dbs.umt.edu



Storage for large mammal skulls in museum.

Photo by Emma Young



Crowded aisle in museum.

Photo by Emma Young.



Fish collection in storage at Schreiber Gym.

Photo by David Dyer.

YES, I want to become a member of the Friends of the P.L. Wright Zoological Museum!

<input type="checkbox"/> Student Member	\$15	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization	\$100
<input type="checkbox"/> Regular Member	\$25	<input type="checkbox"/> Life Member	\$500
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Member	\$50	<input type="checkbox"/> Honorarium Fund	\$_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Contributing Member	\$100	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Gift	\$_____

Name _____

Address _____

Note that dues are for a period of **two** years! Checks should be made payable to:
U.M. Foundation/Friends of the Museum. All contributions to the *Friends* are tax
deductible to the full extent provided by law.

Send membership forms to: P.L. Wright Museum – Division of Biological Sciences –
The University of Montana – Missoula, Montana - 59812

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Division of Biological Sciences
The University of Montana
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