

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

## RECENT ACCESSIONS BY THE MUSEUM

Bart O'Gara donated to the museum horn and antler mounts of **Fallow Deer** (*Dama dama*), **Elk** (*Cervus elaphus*), and a **Thompson's Gazelle** (*Gazella thompsonii*). These were collected by Bart in England, Montana, Tanzania, respectively. Bart also donated the skull and antlers of a **Mule Deer** (*Odocoileus hemionus*) that had managed to break off one antler sometime before death.

Joseph Dulac also donated several horn and antler mounts, all collected in Montana, including a **Shiras Moose** (*Alces alces shirasi*), **Mule Deer** (*Odocoileus hemionus*), and a **Mountain Goat** (*Oreamnos americanus*).

Elaine Caton brought to the museum the first **Great Grey Owl** (*Strix nebulosa*) added to the collection in over 20 years. It was found as a road-kill along Highway 200 in Powell Co., MT.

Janelle Corn gave to the museum several **Bullfrogs** (*Rana catesbeiana*) and bullfrog tadpoles from her research in the Flathead Valley. A few frogs will be prepared as complete skeletons and the rest preserved in alcohol.

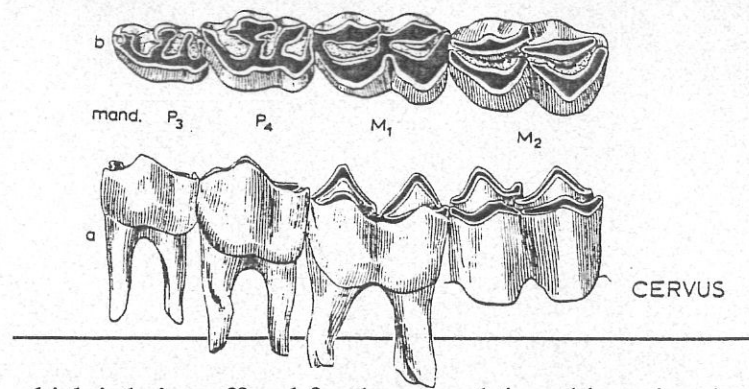
Two **Zebra Finches** (*Taeniopygia guttata*) were collected and prepared as study skins by Cheryl Bregen, of the Museum's Preparation Lab.

Troy Brandt brought in a **Pileated Woodpecker** (*Dryocopus pileatus*) that was found dead in Ravalli Co. This is the first pileated woodpecker added to the museum's collection since 1963.

Jeff Marks arranged for the donation of three **Osprey** (*Pandion haliaetus*) eggs from downed nests in Broadwater and Lewis and Clark counties.

## ZOOARCHAEOLOGY COURSE USES MUSEUM COLLECTION

The museum has traditionally made available a portion of its collections for instruction of upper-level courses. The mammalogy, ornithology, and ichthyology courses have made great use of the teaching collections for many years. Indeed, it would be difficult to instruct such courses without access to such materials. A new course,



which is being offered for the second time this spring, is now making use of the museum's collections. Zooarchaeology is an interdisciplinary course offered through Continuing Education and makes available upper division credits through either biology or anthropology. Taught by Shannon Jung Gilbert and David Dyer, the course emphasizes the identification and interpretation of faunal remains excavated from archaeological sites. Thus the museum's comparative collection of vertebrate skeletons is an ideal resource for the course. Small fragments of skeletal remains are often virtually impossible to accurately identify without access to a museum collection. This collection is used regularly by museum staff and visiting researchers to identify bones from archaeological sites and forensic cases. Now it is also available as an instructional aid for students.

## HOW BIG IS THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION?

We routinely throw out statistics about the museum when doing tours for the public, such as the museum contains over 21,000 specimens (counting the fish and herpetile collection stored on the fourth floor). The response from tour groups is usually a rather blank stare; it's hard to put the figure of "21,000 specimens" in context. So we add that the P.L. Wright Zoological Museum is the largest zoological collection in the state, and one of the primary collections representing the Northern Rocky Mountain region. Also, a past issue of this newsletter (July 1997) discussed how the museum's mammal collection ranked in the top 15% of the 306 mammal collections in the United States, based on the total number of specimens.

This is all very impressive, but still just how big is a collection of 21,000 specimens? Well, if all the drawers were removed from the cabinets and laid end-to-end, and then all the shelves were added, they would form a continual line of specimens 4025 feet long! This is over 3/4 of a mile! If this line of shelves and drawers were laid in a single line, from the door of the Health Sciences Building heading north, it would stretch all the way to the Clark Fork River. This is even more impressive when you consider that one drawer, about 42 inches long, may hold as many as 85 small mammals. Each individual had to be collected in the field, prepared as a study skin, the skull cleaned, the specimen identified, and then cataloged, numbered, and labeled. The museum truly does represent a vast resource documenting the fauna of the Northern Rockies.