
MUSEUM NEWS

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

Spring 2009

No. 31

Recent Accessions

Dan Pletscher forwarded to the museum a single tooth of a **Mammoth** (*Mammuthus* sp.) that was originally collected from a road-cut in Alaska in the 1940's. This tooth is now on exhibit in the Mansfield Library (see article on Library exhibits).

A **White Pelican** (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) was found floating dead in the Missouri River in Broadwater County and was brought to the museum. Our bird skimmers, Charles Miller and Brandy Wallace, took on the challenge of producing a study skin of this bird – the largest bird they have yet prepared. Come see the results in our Recent Accessions Exhibit on the first floor of the Health Sciences Building!

U.M. staff in the Skaggs Building were surprised last spring when a large bird slammed into their office window! Normally when a bird hits a window it doesn't create much of a stir, however when this large **Blue Grouse** (*Dendragapus obscurus*) hit the window it got their attention! A check of the museum's collection shows that quite a few Blue Grouse have been recovered from Mt. Sentinel over the years, and this isn't the first one to hit a university window.

Other accidentally killed birds that have been recently added to the museum's permanent collection include: **Northern Shrike** (*Lanius excubitor*), **Violet-Green Swallow** (*Tachycineta thalassina*), **Pine Grosbeak** (*Pinicola enucleator*), **Western Wood Pewee** (*Contopus sordidulus*), and a **Nashville Warbler** (*Vermivora ruficapilla*).

Museum Opens New Exhibits

This winter has been a very active time of exhibit construction for the museum! Eight new exhibits opened this spring or are about to. The largest exhibit, National Symbols of Bhutan, was constructed by Phurba Phurba. He is a biologist from Bhutan and is here on a teaching and research exchange to study with Dr. Kerry Foresman, and to learn curatorial and exhibit techniques. The exhibit is in the O'Gara exhibit case on the first floor of the Health Sciences Building. The exhibit is bright, colorful and engaging and has something for everyone! It includes a leopard skin, an herbarium specimen, a Bhutanese archery set, and a Gho – the traditional dress of Bhutan.

We also completed seven exhibits in cases made available to us by the Mansfield Library. The next time you're on the 5th floor of the library, see our new exhibits located by both sets of entrance and exit doors. There is something for everyone here too! There are exhibits titled: Birds of Prey, Skulls and Teeth of Mammals, Overlooked: Small Spring Wildflowers, and the unusual exhibit: "The Museum as an Odditorium". (This exhibit can't be explained, you have to see it!) Exhibits to be completed early this summer will feature Primates and Zooarchaeology. Thanks to Maggie Schirack and Hannah Schremser, our creative and hardworking graduate students for their efforts in bringing these exhibits to life!

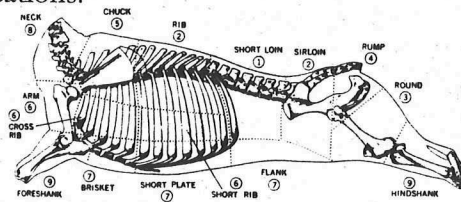


Any Skeletons in Your Closet!?

The Museum is looking for some skeletons! If you know the whereabouts of any skeletons laying about on your farm or ranch (or closet) give us a call! We are now seeking complete or mostly complete skeletons of the following domestic animals: sheep, goat, cattle, donkey, mule, chicken, and turkey. Due to limited space and personnel, we can't accept whole critters for processing but are seeking cleaned or weathered disarticulated skeletons that might be in your fields or forest.

Why would a museum want these skeletons? We are routinely called upon to identify skeletal elements that are found by the public, or that are recovered in archaeological sites and forensic cases. Occasionally the bones turn out to be from domestic animals, and having known skeletons to compare to is an invaluable aid in identification. Also, many wild species have a domestic counterpart that may lead to confusion in identifying the skeletal elements. For example, bison and domestic cattle are very similar in the post-cranial skeleton and can be easily confused without adequate comparative material.

The last couple of years have seen a steady increase in the number of graduate students using the comparative skeletal collection to aid in analyses of vertebrate material from archaeological sites, either for thesis topics or other research projects. When we are working on material from historic sites, as we did recently with faunal remains from the Bannack State Park site, domestic animals are found in abundance. These remains are often cut or sawed if they had been butchered for food processing, or are fragmented from other causes. Often the archaeologists want to know if the individuals were relying on domestic species for their meat, or if they were supplementing their diet by hunting wild species. Having adequate comparative skeletal material is valuable in helping to get the correct bone identifications!



Meet the Staff: David Dyer, Curator; Maggie Schirack, Museum Technician; Charles Miller & Brandy Wallace, Museum Preparation Lab. Phone: 243-4743. Website: www.zoologicalmuseum.dbs.umt.edu

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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