

Research & Collections News

The Occasional Newsletter of the Research and Collections Staff
Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County

re•search (rī-sûrch', rē'sûrch) *n.* **1.** Scholarly or scientific investigation or inquiry. See synonyms at **inquiry**. **2.** Close, careful study. **3.** When performed on collections, the *raison d'être* of all great natural history museums.

March 2009

(covering the months of January and February, 2009)

Collection News

History

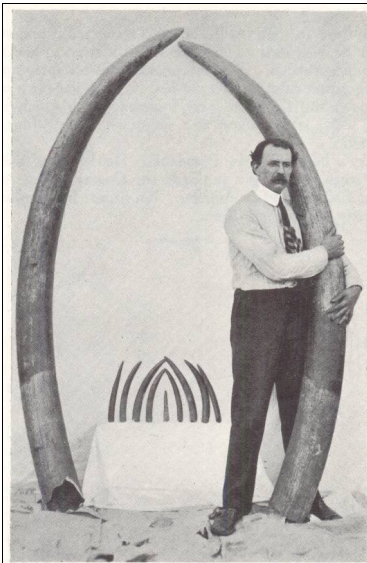
From November 2008 through January 2009, the History Division collected materials in Southern California and Washington, D.C., documenting the historic presidential campaign and inauguration of Barak H. Obama. These materials include photos, ephemera (bumper stickers, newspapers), and 3-D artifacts (buttons, t-shirts, hats), many of which refer to Obama's undergraduate student days at Occidental College.



Echinoderms

During February, the Echinoderms Collection hosted two Mexican colleagues for extended periods: Dr. Francisco A. Solís Marín (Coordinator at the Instituto de Ciencias del Mar y Limnología, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, in Mexico City), and

Ms. Yuliana Rocío Bedolla-Guzmán (Master's degree student in Coastal Oceanography at the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, in Ensenada). Yuliana, who is doing a taxonomic, ecological, and biogeographical study of intertidal macroinvertebrates from the rocky shores of the Mexican Pacific islands, verified specimen identifications, photographed echinoderms, and obtained information on species' distributions based on our collection records. She also used the opportunity to gather important publications relating to the echinoderm fauna of Mexico. Francisco, who has visited the Museum several times, consulted with Gordon Hendler (Curator of Echinoderms) on collaborative projects, deposited type specimens of newly described species of sea cucumbers in the collection, and borrowed specimens for his ongoing research and that of his students.



Mammalogy and Anthropology

The National Geographic Society's Explorer-in-Residence, J. Michael Fay, visited the Anthropology and Mammalogy collections in early February to examine the William Stamps Cherry collections housed in those two departments. In the late 19th century Cherry explored the deepest parts of Africa's uncharted Congo Basin, collecting a wide variety of cultural and natural history artifacts along the way. Many of those objects were on exhibit in the early years of the Natural History Museum and Cherry's family eventually donated them to the museum, including more than 4,000 ethnographic artifacts (housed in Anthropology) and the magnificent tusks of an African elephant bull (now part of the Mammalogy collections). Dr. William Cherry,



GENERAL VIEW OF PART OF THE CHERRY COLLECTION

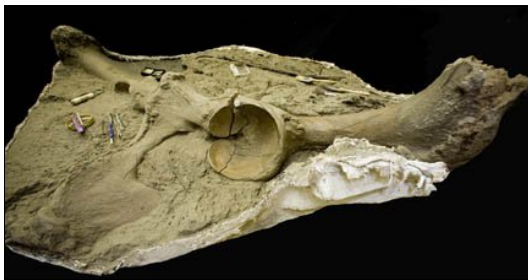
grandson of the collector, and several National Geographic staff joined Fay on his tour of the collections, which was led by Chris Coleman (Anthropology), KT Olson (Anthropology) and Jim Dines (Mammalogy).

Rancho La Brea

Project 23: update from ‘the field.’ Excavators in box 1 have discovered mats of oak leaf litter and complete millipedes (pictured at right) in several grids thus far. This is exciting because it adds yet another important piece to the picture of the Pleistocene environment of Hancock Park. Previously, Pit 91 had yielded only single segments of millipedes and single oak leaves. Weekly updated information can be found on Andie Thomer’s blog <http://excavatrix.blogspot.com>



A sample of millipedes recovered from Box 1.



Zed's pelvis in part preparation.

Back in the lab, the plaster jackets containing Zed's pelvis and left tusk have been opened. The two 10 ft tusks are the first complete tusks from Rancho La Brea! Early excavations only discovered pieces of tusk up to 1 foot long. Although the jacket has just been opened it appears that the tusk is in very good condition.



Zed's left tusk now on view in the fishbowl.



Collection Manager Chris Shaw and Curatorial Assistant Gary Takeuchi re-mounted two Rancho La Brea cat skeletons for the new Age of Mammals Gallery. Here they are working on the saber-toothed cat with the American lion in the foreground.

Division of Invertebrate Studies

The marine invertebrate group, the MBPC, and our team of hard-working USC work-study students have been bringing the era of snapcap jars in the malacological wet collections to an end. From September to December 2008 alone, 1500+ specimen lots have been transferred from these undesirable containers to museum quality specimen jars; more than 3800 alcohol lots were topped off. Additionally Lindsey Groves did the same work with the oversized gastropods and bivalves in the wet cabinets. A large portion of the entire Malacology collection, including bivalves, chitons, and nudibranchs, will have been rehoused and the entire alcohol collection topped off. In the past six months we have databased a backlog of expedition-collected specimens in Polychaetes, with more than 500 station lots, representing thousands of identified species lots: labels printed, cut, specimens transferred from field vials, specimens and labels matched, and curated to highest museum standards. In Crustacea, great progress was made rehousing and curating dried specimens. Most crabs have now been rehoused in plastic curatorial boxes, and we now have only a few “coroplast” boxes left to make for the odd-sized crusties. With additional curatorial staff (Mary Stecheson) now in place, Invertebrate Paleontology is catching up on curating and databasing its large backlog of fossil type specimens. In the midst of all of this action, Curatorial Assistant Kris Netchy has been lending a hand identifying holothurian ossicles in echinoderms, along with Curatorial Assistant Cathy Groves. Before the semester ends, celebrations will be called for. Many hands have contributed to these milestones and achievements.

History and Seaver Center

The Seaver Center has completed an inventory of a collection of maps, most of which cover the local region. The 400 plus artifacts date from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s, and the inventory reveals many treasures that could serve to fill knowledge gaps among researchers in various disciplines. The inventory would not have been possible without the assistance of Gary Kisor, the volunteer who worked steadily on the project from July, 2008 until February 2009.

A particularly interesting map is an 1853-1855 exploration survey map for a transcontinental railroad route from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, published under Jefferson Davis, Secretary of War. Other items include: several 1957 State Route 7 (Long Beach Freeway) planning maps (the freeway project began in 1953); use distribution charts for recreation, schools, drainage and agriculture in Los Angeles County, published in 1939 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA); another 1939 WPA map on the master plan for land use; an 1877 County of Los Angeles map of judicial townships (before Orange County was created); an 1887 topographical sketch of a proposed harbor at Point Ballona (most likely modern day Venice); 1875 maps on the hydrography of Santa Monica Bay; Los Angeles rental values in 1925; and a survey of asphalt beds in the Rancho La Brea, 1913.

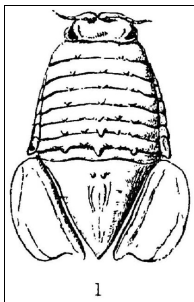
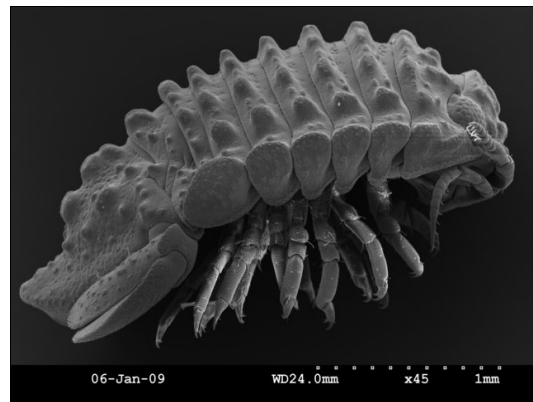
Field Work

Vertebrate Paleontology

In collaboration with Drs. Mikael Fortelius (University of Helsinki) and Håkan Wahlqvist (Folkens Museum of Etnografiska), Xiaoming Wang spent two productive weeks in the Naturhistoriska riksmuseet (Swedish Museum of Natural History) and National Archives of Sweden in early February to work on archive materials of the legendary Sino-Swedish Expeditions (also known as the Hedin Expeditions) in the 1920s and 1930s. As the first scientific exploration in the Tibetan Plateau, this expedition has resulted in a rich vertebrate fossil collection and field documents that still inform us in important ways. The main purpose of this trip is to piece together archival records of field maps and notebooks that pertain to localities of specific fossils collected during the expedition.

Crustacea

Just before the craziness of the Spring Semester got underway, the Crustacea Lab (Regina Wetzer, Dean Pentcheff, Kris Netchy, and Adam Wall) launched a mini-expedition to Tomales Bay in Marin County, California, to recollect the type locality of the sphaeromatid isopod *Exosphaeroma amplicauda*. Material from Alaska, Puget Sound, Pt. Fermin (Palos Verdes Peninsula), and possibly even San Diego are all new species. The type material of *E. amplicauda* described by Stimpson, 1857, has been lost. The original 1857 description is



a paragraph long, and the drawing is the size of a postage stamp (at left). USC undergraduate Adam Wall is currently working on describing the new species, having spent his Christmas holidays preparing SEMs of the material in hand. In order to proceed, we need to redescribe *E. amplicauda* and designate neotypes. A good low tide and the isopod gods willing, we were successful on the first beach we reached. Fabulous weather was a bonus. Adam

was also introduced to raw oysters, as we searched for isopods at the upper portion of the bay with special treats from the the Tomales Bay Oyster Company. He was a trooper and did taste the oyster, but he was happier opening them and handing them off to his expedition companions.



Meetings, Workshops, and Presentations

Malacology

The thirteenth annual gathering of the Southern California Unified Malacologists (SCUM XIII), hosted by former Malacology curator Ángel Valdés, was held at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, on Saturday, January 23rd. NHMLAC Malacology staff in attendance included Lindsey Groves and Jim McLean, Malacology associates Pat LaFollette, Phil Liff-Grieff, George Kennedy, Mary Jane Adams, and Hans Bertsch, IP associates LouElla Saul and Bob Stanton, and Malacology volunteers Bob Moore and Shawn Wiedrick.

Rancho La Brea

The Western Association of Vertebrate Paleontologists (WAVP) had their annual meeting in Petrified Forest National Park over President's Day weekend. Presentations were given by Chris Shaw ("Breal de Orocuál and the Rancho La Brea Connection: A new fossil locality in Venezuela"), Andrea Thomer ("Project 23 overview and 3-dimensional data visualization") and Ryan Long ("Rarely encountered bones at Rancho la Brea").

Crustacea

In January, the Crustacea lab hosted the SCAMIT Amphipod Workshop with special guest Dr. John Chapman, organized by Leslie Harris. In Mid-March we hosted a multi-day SCAMIT Cumacean Workshop led by Drs. Sarah Gerken, University of Alaska, and Les Watling, University of Hawaii. This workshop, funded by a NSF-RevSys grant to Gerken, brought together 16 taxonomists and foreign students.

Vertebrate Paleontology

The annual meeting of the Western Association of Vertebrate Paleontologists was held at Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona, from 13 to 15 February 2009. Representatives from our Museum's Vertebrate Paleontology Department included Curator Larry Barnes and Paleontological Preparator Mike Williams.

The yearly Geobiology Symposium was hosted by the Smithsonian Institution on 27 February 2009, and was attended by more than 50 museum scientists, professors, and students. At the Symposium, Lawrence Barnes, Curator of Vertebrate Paleontology, made a presentation (co-authored by Museum Research Associate, Daryl P. Domning of Howard University), about the status and significance of our newly-prepared skeleton of a new



species of paleoparadoxiid desmostylian that will be exhibited in our Museum's new Hall of Cenozoic Mammals. Desmostylians are extinct four-legged marine mammals that were distantly related to seacows and elephants. The skull and articulated vertebral column of this skeleton are pictured above in February with proud Vertebrate Paleontology employees Gary Takeuchi, Maureen Walsh, and Vanessa Rhue, who accomplished the difficult preparation and curation of this amazing specimen.

History

On March 3rd John Cahoon spoke as part of a panel about "Archives and Special Collections" for the students of UCLA's Masters in Library and Information Science program who are focusing on a career in the archival profession. The career panel was sponsored by UCLA's student chapter of the Society of American Archivists. Other panelists represented the Huntington Library, the National Archives, HBO, and the Automobile Club of Southern California.

External Funding

Entomology

In February, Dr. Brian Brown, Curator of Entomology, received two grants from the National Park Service for \$23,370. The money is to conduct inventory work for terrestrial arthropods in the Santa Monica Mountains NRA. One grant is to survey hover flies; the other is to search our collection for insect specimens from the Santa Monica Mountains and to capture their data.

Crustacea

Dr. Regina Wetzer, Research Scientist in Crustacea and Director of the Marine Biodiversity Processing Center, and her colleague, Dr. Gary Poore, Museum of Victoria, Melbourne, were funded by the Encyclopedia of Life (<http://eol.org>) to host a workshop at Santa Catalina Island from 2-6 April, 2009. The workshop will bring together the world experts studying Peracarida (nearly 22,000 species of crustaceans that brood their young; those mostly small-sized creatures include isopods, amphipods, tanaids, cumaceans, and a few others). Sixteen specialists from Norway, Australia, Italy, Poland, Argentina, and the U.S. will bring their expertise and strategize how best to unify a definitive single source species list of the Peracarida (34% of all Crustacea!), linking electronic taxonomic and bibliographic lists and PDFs with the goal of eventually getting species pages for every species on Earth.

Vertebrate Paleontology

Dr. Xiaoming Wang received a grant of \$5,000 from the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology to co-sponsor an international meeting on Asian Neogene Biostratigraphy and Geochronology in Beijing in June 2009.

Public Outreach

Vertebrate Paleontology

Center for Chinese Fossil Discoveries

To mark the launch of Center for Chinese Fossil Discoveries, Xiaoming Wang gave a well-attended public presentation on “Expeditions in Tibetan Plateau.”

Sustainable Sundays

On January 11, as part of the Museum’s Sustainable Sundays, Dr Lü Zhi, professor of Beijing University and China country director of Conservation International, gave a presentation entitled: “China: Sacred Lands and Growing Economy.” As introduced by Xiaoming Wang, Dr. Lü is a leading expert on the conservation of giant pandas, and has pioneered politically innovative approach to partner with Tibetan communities and finds the common interests between their spiritual culture and her conservation priorities.

Curators Cupboard Involves Many

Marine Biodiversity Processing Center

Leslie Harris and Regina Wetzer were a quarter of the R&C team that contributed to 28 February’s Curator’s Cupboard. With help from Kris Netchy we shared live invertebrates and algae from L.A. Harbor with Museum guests and Junior Scientists. Kids and adults getting their hands wet in the seawater and peering through magnifying “geek glasses” was the highlight. Barnacles feeding and the wriggling wrighting polychaete worms projected on the large plasma screen went over well. One of the posters prepared for the event was by work-study student Phyllis Sun.

what's in your backyard?

BioBlitz 2008: Malibu Pier

FIELD ACTIVITIES

During a 24-hour species inventory, teams of scientists and volunteers combed over 150,000 acres of the Santa Monica Mountains to discover who lives in our "backyard".

At this event the Natural History Museum marine invertebrate staff logged 114 species in 57 genera in 12 phyla from just beneath the Malibu Pier pilings. Today's samples are from Los Angeles Harbor.

How many species will we find?

COSTAL PILINGS

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Polychaete Worms in the Cupboard

Kirk Fitzhugh, Curator of Polychaetes, also participated in the 28 February Curatorial Cupboard “Citizen Science” event held at the museum. In keeping with the theme of “Citizen Science,” Kirk provided a table display that addressed four common myths about natural history science: (1) science and religion are compatible (in fact they are not - they are contradictory); (2) theories eventually turn into facts (they never do - theories always remain theories); (3) it’s all about theism versus atheism (no, agnosticism is the most rational position in science); and (4) intelligent design/creationism is a legitimate scientific alternative to evolutionary biology (no, as ID relies on theories that lie beyond the scope of the sciences).



Display by Kirk Fitzhugh for the February 2009 Curatorial Cupboard regarding some myths about the nature of science.



Mary Stecheson and visitors to Curator's Cupboard discuss Silverado Canyon fossil specimens.

Malacology in the Cupboard

Lindsey Groves (Malacology) and Mary Stecheson (IP) teamed up for Curators Cupboard on Saturday the 28th of February and exhibited Turonian (Late Cretaceous) specimens collected at the popular Silverado Canyon fossil site. Many of the specimens were collected by field trip participants and graciously donated to IP.

History

On January 23rd, a Douglas Fairbanks exhibit opened at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' headquarters on Wilshire Blvd. It is open free to the public through April 17th. NHM's partnership with AMPAS on this project marks the first time that the Academy has co-curated an exhibit with a local institution. It was curated by the Academy and Beth Werling, History's Collections Manager of Material Culture.

Fairbanks (right) was the first screen swashbuckler as Zorro, Robin Hood, and D'Artagnan. He also founded the





United Artists studio and served as the first president of the Academy. Fairbanks was a donor in the 1930s to the History Department, giving props, costumes, and photos—many of which are included in the current exhibit.

Pictured at left is opening night, January 23rd, with Beth and her mother, Marilyn, after Beth conducted two separate tours through the evening's exhibit

Anthropology and the Visible Vault

The Visible Vault, the new home of a good portion of the Anthropology's Latin American collection, had its official opening on January 21st, 2009. It includes most of the items from the Ancient Latin American Hall which closed in September, 2008 for seismic retrofitting, as well as a selection of items from the storeroom that have not been exhibited before. The Visible Vault is both an exhibit and an active storeroom, featuring about 50 representative objects in cases that enable the viewer to see them in a whole new light while also giving the public a behind-the-scenes look at how Anthropological collections are stored with access to their data through large interactive touch screens.



The Aztec Calendar moves offsite.



Theresa Manalo and Kristen Hayashi condition reporting objects in the old hall.

The project included: (1) the de-installation, condition reporting, photography and transfer of almost 600 objects into a space about 1/3 of the size of the original hall; (2) the conception and fabrication of storage mounts for every non-featured object for the exhibit; (3) the creation of

exhibit quality mounts for all the featured objects; (4) the move of several huge and very delicate items offsite (so large they wouldn't fit in the new space!); (4) the first demonstration at our museum of what KE-EMu software can do; and (5) the first use of touch screen technology for multiple users in a museum for a long-term exhibit.... all within a little over 3 months!!



Jennifer Saracino fabricating a storage mount.

This kind of efficiency could have only been done through lots of preparation, hard work, and the cooperation of many people from all over the museum. From R&C, the

Anthropology section and the Registrar's Office worked closely together throughout the de-installation and installation to process the artifacts, create their new housings, and move the items up the 2nd floor.

Of the Anthropology team, Chris Coleman organized the object records, worked with Bill Mertz to transfer Anthropology's data over to KE-EMu, and worked with the photographer, Dan Watson, to get professional shots of multiple angles of each object. KT Olson (with Kristen Hayashi's help in the past) entered all the object data into the database, cleaned, organized and standardized the Visible Vault data and photos for public viewing, designed the appropriate storage mounts for the objects, ordered the materials the objects would need



Chris Coleman, Jennifer Saracino, KT Olson, and a Veracruz figure photographed by Dan Watson.

for the project, and worked with Bill Mertz and Chris Weisbart to create the structure of how the interactive would read EMu's data.

Jennifer Saracino threw herself into a crash course in everything Pre-Columbian so that she could provide the in-depth research that was needed to refine the list of cultures, allow KT Olson to fill in gaps in the data, and to write the Visible Vault label copy. Margaret Hardin provided guidance to Jennifer in her research and managed to find the time to do the preliminary label copy edits.



People from Anthropology, the Registrar's Office, Conservation, Public Programs, Operations, and Crafts Services all working together to move a fragile object.

Of the team from the Registrar's Office, Susan Oshima oversaw coordinating activities between museum sections and the contract construction companies. Kristen Hayashi, who had considerable previous experience working with the collection, managed the de-installation and installation schedule, arranged security and negotiated the assistance that was needed (and MUCH appreciated) almost daily from members of Public Programs, Operations, and Crafts Services. Just about every member of each of those sections provided crucial support (and muscle!) as you can see in the pictures.

At the same time both she and Theresa Manalo helped the Anthro. team with the condition reporting and fabrication of the

storage mounts. Claire Deane ensured the safety of the objects at all times, dealt with all the most difficult artifact moves, and tirelessly removed the tenacious “kid butter” from all artifacts that had been within public reach in the past.



Kristina Lockaby de-installing a figure from up high in the old hall.

From the Public Programs team, Karen Wise created the thematic organization to the Visible Vault, created the list of featured objects with Margaret Hardin and acted as the final word on all decisions. Kristina Lockaby managed the scheduling, contracts, and all other details related to the exhibit’s fabrication. This included the tough task of pushing the construction crew to perform miracles to get the exhibit constructed on time. Chris Weisbart, assisted by Liam Mooney and Leonard Trubia programmed the interactive, a technological mystery that involves mirrors, computer codes and styli attached to retractable dog leashes. Liam Mooney also provided the exhibit’s dramatic lighting and some background research on Pre-Columbian sound-making vessels.

We also worked with numerous contracted companies like Hodgens & Fung who designed the exhibit, Aleida Rodriguez who did the final editing of the label copy, Leon Rodriguez who provided the graphic design for the label copy, ELY Inc. who made all the elegantly indiscernible mounts for the featured objects, and Matt Construction who, with their affiliates, came in at all hours to prepare the space and construct the cases.



Claire Deane befriending a figure from Veracruz, Mexico.

It was a wild ride but thanks to a great team and the collaborative efforts of multiple sections of the museum, the finest of our Pre-Columbian collection can still be enjoyed by the public both in the museum and at home through the museum’s website.

Vertebrate Paleontology

As part of the Museum’s Sustainable Sundays Program, on 11 January 2009 Curator Lawrence Barnes gave a public lecture to an enthusiastic audience. He provided an overview of whale evolution, and then outlined some of the problems that are faced by whales, dolphins, and porpoises in a modern world that forces these mammals to deal with human-induced impacts and climate change.

The Museum's First Fridays program for 9 February 2009 included three public tours of the Vertebrate Paleontology collection and laboratory. Participants that evening included Larry Barnes, Donna Dameron, Daniel Gabai, Kathleen Gonzalez, Debora Lee, Vanessa Rhue, Meredith Staley, Howell Thomas, Maureen Walsh, Mike Williams, and Amber Johnson-Carrol.



Division of Invertebrate Studies Meets with Cabrillo Aquarium Staff

The marine sections of the Division of Invertebrate Studies (Crustacea, Polychaetes, Malacology, Echinoderms, Invertebrate Paleontology, MBPC) along with Su Oh, Brianna Burrows (Public Programs) and Dan Keefe (Education) hosted staff from the Cabrillo Aquarium in February to explore collaborative projects and endeavors and cement a long-standing mutually beneficial relationship between these two marine-oriented institutions. Staff from Cabrillo Aquarium included Mike Schaadt (Director), Larry Fukuhara (Programs Director), Ed Mastro (Exhibits Director), Kiersten Darrow (Curator of Research), Juli Kalman (Curator of Exhibits and Collections), and Josh Olson (Collections Assistant). The event was organized and hosted by Dr. Regina Wetzer, Research Scientist and Director of the Marine Biodiversity Processing Center.

Student Mentoring and Research



Vertebrate Paleontology

Meredith Staley, who is also a Museum Paleontological Preparator for the Cenozoic Fossil Mammal Hall, made her Masters Thesis proposal at Cal State Fullerton in February. Her thesis committee, which includes Curator Lawrence Barnes, gave approval for her to proceed with her research about Early Miocene fossil whales of the Vaqueros Formation in Orange County, southern California.

Gabriel Aguirre, graduate student at the Universidad Autonoma de Baja California, Ensenada, on 26 January 2009 successfully defended his Masters Thesis about evolution of Pliocene fossil Delphinidae (modern dolphins) from the Gulf of California. His

degree was approved by his Committee, which includes Curator of Vertebrate Paleontology, Lawrence Barnes, and UABC professor and Museum Research Associate, Dr. Francisco J. Aranda-Manteca, pictured at right with Gabriel.

Rancho La Brea

Graduate student Abigail Curtis (UCLA) and visiting undergraduate Aisling Galligan from Dartmouth have been measuring specimens of prehistoric coyote and dire wolf from our collection over the last two months. They are investigating the cranio-dental shape evolution in Pleistocene and recent canids from Rancho La Brea. By using specific measurements taken from the skulls they are trying to determine if any significant changes occurred in the morphology of the skulls and teeth of the two species over time at RLB and if these changes can be linked to significant events during the late Pleistocene.



Visiting students to the Page Museum, Aisling Galligan (left) and Abigail Curtis.

Vertebrate Paleontology

Amber-Johnson Carroll, a junior of California State University at Northridge, will pursue a senior thesis on Cenozoic vertebrate fossils under the guidance of Xiaoming Wang. An aspiring paleontologist, Amber is planning to work on some aspects of vertebrate fossils from Tibet.

Distinguished Visitors

Mammalogy

Recent visitors to Mammalogy's research collections include: Dr. John Scheibe (Southeastern Missouri State University), Dr. Michael Bell (SUNY, Stony Brook), Dr. Shai Meiri (Imperial College London) and Mr. Gilberto Uribe (Cal State Bakersfield). In early February, staff from the National Marine Fisheries Service's Southwest Region visited the marine mammal warehouse for a collection tour and meeting with Dave Janiger (Curatorial Asst.) and Jim Dines (Collections Manager).

Ichthyology

Michael Newbrey of the Royal Tyrell Museum and Todd Cook from the University of Alberta visited Ichthyology and Paleontology in January and measured shark jaws and teeth for about a week.

Crustacea

Recent distinguished research visitors to the Crustacea included Dr. John Chapman, Hatfield Marine Science Center, Oregon State University; Yuliana Rocío Bedolla-Guzmán, Autonomous University of Baja California, Mexico; Dr. Mary Wicksten, Texas A&M, College Station; Dr. Penny Berents, Head of Natural Sciences Collections, Australian Museum, Sydney; Dr. Peter Castro, California State University, Pomona; D. Christopher Rogers, EcoAnalysts, Woodland, CA; and Drs. Mike Schaadt, Kiersten Darrow, Juli Kalman and their colleagues Larry Fukuhara, Ed Mastro, Diane Alps, and Josh Olsen, all from the Cabrillo Aquarium in San Pedro.

History

Stanley K. Abe, Associate Professor in the Department of Art, Art History, and Visual Arts at Duke University, visited the Museum Archives in February. Professor Abe is researching the history of the General J.W.N. Munthe Collection of Chinese art. This large collection was lent to the museum in 1927 and was partially purchased by the county in 1930. The Museum Archives provided original documents and photographs that revealed new information regarding General Munthe's collection. The photo is of child stars Jane Withers and Bill Benedict with one of the statues from the General J.W.N. Munthe collection, c. 1935.



Malacology



Paul Valentich-Scott (SBMNH) and Gene Coan (CAS) at work in the Malacology collection.

Mike Vendrasco (Calif. St. Univ., Fullerton) spent three days in January and February in Malacology examining the vast holdings of east Pacific chitons and comparing them to fossil specimens from the Pliocene, San Diego Formation. Eugene Coan (California Academy of Sciences) & Paul Valentich-Scott (Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History) visited the Malacology bivalve collection for three days in January.

They are currently putting finishing touches on a lengthy manuscript on the bivalves of the Panamic Province (central Baja California, México to northern Peru). They are also the

authors of the current best-selling book on northeast Pacific bivalves *Bivalve Seashells of Western North America*. Both volumes feature numerous citations and figures of NHMLAC specimens.

Dan Muhs, DeAnna Patterson, and Randy Schumann (U.S. Geological Survey, Denver) stopped in at Malacology on their way to San Nicolas Island, California Channel Islands, to deposit additional fossil material for the IP collection, which will be identified by Lindsey Groves and used for publication purposes. Land snail specialist Lance Gilbertson examined LACM holdings of helicid snails from the area around Baker, San Bernardino County, for comparison to a possible new species or subspecies.

Additional visitors included Yuliana Rocío Bedolla-Guzmán, who visited several collections while here (see below).

Division of Invertebrate Studies

Yuliana Rocío Bedolla-Guzmán (right), a master's student from the Coastal Oceanography of the Autonomous University of Baja California, Mexico, spent the better portion of January and February using at our marine invertebrate collections. She spent long days in Malacology, Crustacea, and echinoderms for her biogeographic analysis of intertidal macroinvertebrates from Mexico's Pacific island rocky shores (subject of her Master's Degree). It was an absolute delight to have her around. As her specialty is mollusks she spent most of her time in the Malacology collection.



Vertebrate Paleontology



Dr. Yoshikazau Hasegawa, Director of the Gunma Museum in Japan, visited the Department of Vertebrate Paleontology on 9 February 2009 to observe our fossil sperm whales and desmostylians, groups about which he has published extensively. Dr. Hasegawa, posing on the right with some of the employees and volunteers of Vertebrate Paleontology, pronounced our new paleoparadoxiid skeleton to be the world's best known example.

Dr. Michael Newbrey, postdoctoral fellow at the University of Alberta and the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology, and Todd Cook, a graduate student at the University of Alberta, spent the first week of February studying a fossil skeleton of the extinct shark *Squalicorax* from our collections. They are working on a redescription of the specimen

and examined other fossil shark specimens from our collections. To help with the redescription and research of the *Squalicorax* specimen, Dawna MacLeod, fossil preparator at the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology, worked in the Vertebrate Paleontology Laboratory for two weeks at the end of January and the beginning of February. She undertook detailed preparation on the specimen to better define the skull parts and other features of the skeleton.



From left to right visiting researchers Todd Cook (University of Alberta), Dr. Michael Newbrey (University of Alberta / Royal Tyrrell Museum), and preparator Dawna MacLeod (Royal Tyrrell Museum).

Ornithology

Raptor researcher William S. Clark, author of several field guides to diurnal birds of prey, visited the Ornithology Section on 17 February and gave an informal lecture about his recent work on the species status and identification of the Harlan's Hawk (*Buteo [jamaicensis] harlani*) and on the true identity of the enigmatic "Kridler's Hawk" (*Buteo jamaicensis "kriderii"*).

Recent Publications

- Fitzhugh**, K. 2009. Between macro and molecular. *BioScience* 59(1): 85-86.
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Staff Departures and New Staff

Invertebrate Paleontology

Mary Stecheson, Curatorial Assistant Invertebrate Paleontology, joined us on December 1. Sincere apologies go to Mary for our oversight in officially and properly welcoming her in the last R&C Newsletter. Mary has previously worked for IP on an NSF-funded collections grant and knows the collection extremely well. We are all absolutely delighted to have her back. She is spending a significant amount of her time at the “big house,” aka main Museum building (versus the Museum’s offsite IP facilities on South Grand). Her extension is x3380. We have also been reorganizing Room 318 to accommodate Mary and Collection Manager, Harry Filkorn, giving them both a more visible presence onsite. New IP specimen cases will house invertebrate fossil collections that are currently being curated and databased. They will also contain some special objects of pride. Once cabinet and furniture reorganization are complete, we will host a mini-onsite IP open house. Look for our announcement soon.



Miscellaneous

Rancho La Brea

The Page Museum has been buzzing for most of February with the announcement and official unveiling of Zed and Project 23. Thanks to Julia Rivera in Marketing and the Museum’s media consultants at Ruder Finn, we had a huge turnout on Media Day (Feb. 18th) with reporters writing for international and local papers, web stories and TV. More info is available at <http://www.tarpits.org/project23>

History

Dr. William Estrada, History Curator, has been named to the California Historical Records Advisory Board. The CHRAB is authorized under Federal Regulations governing the National Historical Publications & Records Commission (NHPRC). NHPRC is the funding arm of the National Archives. He will serve a three-year term that began January 1, 2009. CHRAB has two principal roles: (1). To act as a coordinating

body for historical records state-wide; (2). Review NHPRC grants from California organizations and make recommendations to the National Commission.

Malacology

With the assistance of part-time imaging assistant Brian Koehler, Emeritus Curator Jim McLean has completed the illustrations for three books in preparation. Support for imaging has been provided over six years by the Packard Foundation and the late Twila Bratcher, a long time supporter of the Malacology program, and more recently by private donors specifically for the completion of illustrations for the project. Collection Manager Lindsey Groves and regular volunteers Bob Moore, Bob Sinclair, and Pat LaFollette are assisting in all phases of work on the manuscripts.



Two books will treat the gastropod fauna of the temperate regions of the eastern Pacific. The first will be *Shelled Benthic Gastropoda of the Northeastern Pacific* (British Columbia to central Baja California); the second is *Shelled Benthic Gastropoda of the Northern Pacific* (Alaska to the Kurile Islands, Russia, also treating the species of British Columbia). A third book, *Revision of World Liotiidae, Recent and Fossil* (Gastropoda: Vetigastropoda), is in preparation. Museum staff members are invited to the Malacology Section to view the progress on each of the book manuscripts.

The R & C Newsletter is issued 5 times per year, in January, March, May, September, and November, by the Research and Collections staff of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Currently the Newsletter is compiled and edited by Dr. Joel W. Martin, Curator of Crustacea and Chief of the Division of Invertebrate Studies. All issues of the Newsletter can be found on the web at: <http://collections.nhm.org/newsletters>

