
The JURICA NATURE MUSEUM Newsletter

Spring 2004

Curator's Corner

We are pleased to announce that the Museum was given a donation to purchase a cabinet for part of the Robert Cooper Collection of Marine Invertebrates mentioned in the last newsletter. The cabinet has been ordered and we have been working with a student worker to select the best of the many possible specimens. Each specimen will be labeled and will have information about that particular animal. We have been able to incorporate a few of the specimens such as the glass sponges into existing displays. Much of the collection is in temporary cabinets and will be moved as we get display cabinets. But even the temporary displays draw attention from the many visitors who walk by — especially for the color of the shells and the many different seastars and sea urchins.

Inventory work continues — it really never ends — on the storage collection. The storage specimens are not a glamorous part of the collection but we are finding some very interesting items. The donation of the Cooper Collection coincided with the work on the “black boxes” containing the Jurica collection of marine invertebrates. Cooper's generous donation of books helped us immensely with identification challenges. The two collections seem to complement each other well and will help us to develop a nice reef display.

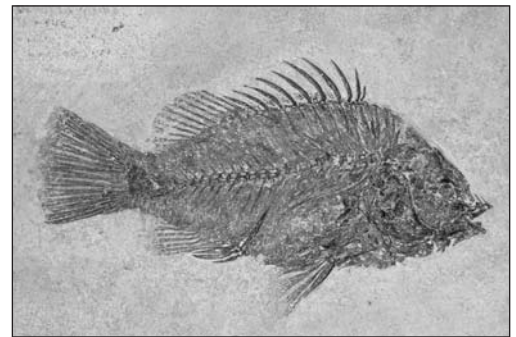
Students are currently working on the boxes containing fossils from the Green River area in Wyoming. This is a rich fossil field for both fish and insects. Many of the very best fossils are displayed in the museum. The fish fossils show great detail in the skeleton and teeth, and you can almost feel the skin scales. A few of these fossils are from a collector who cut them out of the rock almost as if they are framed. As we learn more about this collection, we will share it with you. It may be hard to imagine how we don't know everything we have but there are several hundred “black boxes” each filled with 10 to 12 Riker mount boxes with different fossils. Each box is being inventoried by a student worker, and that inventory will then be put into our museum inventory database. We still hope to find the funds to upgrade our computer and add digital pictures to the inventory information.

At some point, we hope to be able to put more of this collection information on our Web page so that it will be more accessible to researchers.

Fr. Theodore Suchy, O.S.B.
Curator

Collection Spotlight: Green River fish fossils

Almost unnoticed on the sides of some of the cabinets are a collection of fossils from the Green River Formation in Wyoming. Many of these were collected by Frs. Hilary and Edmund on their summer trips out west. We currently have almost half of the 25 different fish species found in the area. Our finest specimen is pictured below. All of these specimens deserve a close look to see the incredible details that make these fossils so unique.



Perca Obtusa
Eocene Epoch
Green River Shale



*Frs. Hilary and Edmund Jurica on a
collecting trip to Puget Sound*

Jurica Tallgrass Prairie Update

The Jurica Tallgrass Prairie (JTP) will be back by late summer — slightly bigger than the first Tallgrass Prairie and definitely better. Late last summer, two 3-foot red brick walkways, two large benches and a 10-foot diameter Council Ring were professionally installed. The closest Council Ring I know of is in Jens Jensen Park in Ravinia — it is on Chicago area maps. The cost for all this work was approximately \$9,000. All of this was made possible by the very generous donations for the first JTP from faculty, staff and especially the alumni. Thanks again. I believe that there is still enough money left to buy the 2,000-plus plants that I will need. These will be put in over the course of the summer — 100 here, 200 there as plants become available at the two natural/native plant nurseries from which I buy.

If you want to view the beautiful brickwork or the progress of the prairie later on in the summer, the new and improved JTP is on the north side of

Lake St. Benedict on the grassy field to the west of Kindlon Hall. The new JTP is 69-by-43 feet, dimensions that are significant mathematically, believe it or not (Why does a 3x5 index card look so pleasing to the eye?). Further explanations, descriptions, progress reports and answers to questions will be given in the next newsletter. Besides all the generous donors, especially the alumni, I would like to thank Fr. Ted Suchy and Mary Mickus for generously offering me space in this newsletter. This helps keep costs down. Next time you are in the Jurica Museum, look for the new JTP display (it still needs signage and some nice pictures on the cabinet sides) with the new JTP in all four seasons of the year. More about these things in the next newsletter.

Larry Kamin
Director, JTP

Student Worker News

Tom James is a second year student who joined us in the fall. He has a great interest in insects so he has been identifying and inventorying the different insect collections we have.

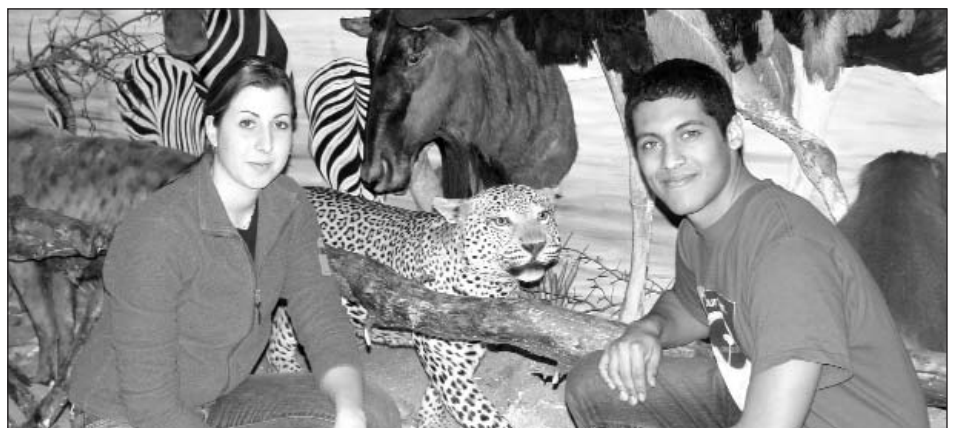
Alex Rose is a second year student worker and she has excellent eyes for identifying small things. She has been doing a great job with the Cooper gastropod collection items that need more complete identification.

Andrea Sims and Katrina Faso, both new student workers, do a lot of inventory work with the infamous black boxes. Andrea also works during a quiet time and she gets to polish the plexiglass fronts of the displays. All of the student workers have learned to lead a group of Cub Scouts and Girl Scouts as needed. The students are responsible for the museum in the afternoons

when Fr. Ted and Mary are busy in their offices.

Teresa Grano (fourth year student worker) and Gus Gomez (second year in the museum) have been fine-tuning some of the display cabinets. They work together on Friday afternoons, usually a quiet time. They have become quite expert at taking the fronts off the cabinets and cleaning the specimens or arranging them in better order.

The Museum has been very fortunate with the many talented students who have worked with us over the years. Teresa is one example. She has done just about every job a student worker can do from inventory cards to exhibit displays. We asked Teresa to share some thoughts about her job these past four years. Please see her reflection on page 3.



Theresa Grano and Gus Gomez by the Africa diorama

Student Worker Reflection

Teresa Grano

For the past three-and-a-half years, I have had the privilege of being a student worker at the Jurica Nature Museum. My time there has been both exciting and unforgettable, from all the tours to helping with the displays and an overall appreciation of not only the substance but the effort needed to upkeep such a facility.



When I started at the museum, it was located in the Scholl Science Center. It was a dimly lit room with dead animals everywhere. That was a little unsettling; the dead animals just sitting there watching me, or so I thought. The student workers were not only welcoming but helpful. They assured me that the animals would not move let alone come back to life. Ms. Mickus and Fr. Theodore were very patient with me as I learned the ropes of the museum. But sure enough I got the hang of it. I soon forgot about the idea of the animals haunting me and became interested in them. Now the animals are a comfort to me, they have become a staple for me here at Benedictine. Now I actually call them my “buddies.”

The move to the Birck Hall of Science was quite exciting. I remember walking over to the new museum with Fr. Theodore. The room looked huge and I was so excited to see the finished product. Two years later, I realize there will never be a finished product; we are always enhancing displays and adding pieces to the collection. Which is why a museum is wonderful — you can come in so many times and every time notice something new.

Overall my time spent at the museum has been no less than wonderful. I have learned a lot about animals and their environments. I completely believe that it has helped me become a more rounded person and I would not change one minute I spent there for anything. Again, I say the museum has become a staple in my life for the past couple of years and it saddens me that I will soon have to leave it behind. But I know that whenever I want to come back, I can. I know exactly where it is, the smells and the hours. It is going to be hard to leave such a pleasant place behind.

Educator's Corner

Winter is the time of year that brings Cub Scouts and Brownies to the museum in large numbers. This year was no exception. One Cub Scout group was led by Andrea Terashevich, an alumna from the late 80s. She was surprised to see the changes in the museum, having remembered the original site in Scholl before the exhibits were changed. Many of you may remember the original museum with the dark cabinets and many bears. She was delighted to see the new museum and plans to bring her Brownies next! It's always fun to have an alumnus come in and share memories of the museum, Benedictine and the classes they remember. We hope you will stop in if you are in the neighborhood. Our student workers particularly like to hear stories of Fr. Ted!

The Museum is ready to launch three new discovery boxes that are a result of workshops for teachers that were funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and the Illinois Clean Energy Foundation. There were three workshops and participating teachers contributed their ideas for materials and activities to put in the boxes. The focus of the workshops was renewable energy resources, particularly solar energy. There is a Wind Energy Box and Solar Power Boxes for both primary and middle schools. The teachers in each of the workshops investigated a different problem about renewable energy. They learned science content and were exposed to problem-based learning.

All of the participants of each of the three workshops were invited back for a follow-up session in early February. They shared their classroom experiences and gave us advice for continuing support for renewable energy. The teachers wrote a reflection as part of each day of their workshop. We asked them to write reflections for this joint meeting and there were some powerful things shared:

“I now include a lot more inquiry. When students ask questions, I do more guiding than giving the answers.”

“The materials I ordered plus the knowledge I had gained from this class helped me create activities for my students. I feel much more comfortable teaching some topics now. The light activities went far beyond what I have done in the past.”

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“The children really enjoy the (renewable energy) unit — probably because I enjoy it so much!”

“We incorporated our partnership in this workshop into a team teaching classroom. We do more hands-on activities. We allow the students to pursue their thoughts to the end.”

The teachers asked for more follow-up sessions and we will be looking for funds to do this. They were happy to share their work and it will eventually be put on a Web page for other teachers to use.



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JURICA
NATURE MUSEUM



CHICAGO WILDERNESS™

A Regional Nature Reserve