3-1995

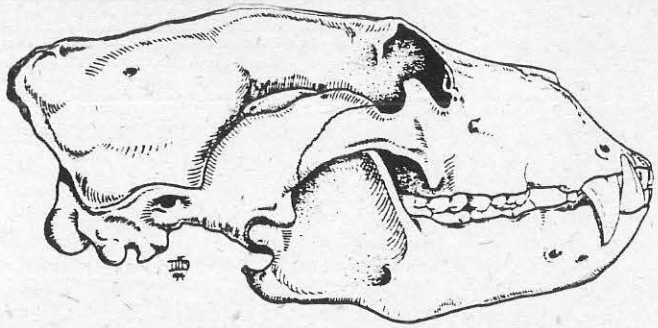
MuseU.M. News, No. 1

University of Montana--Missoula. Zoological Museum

MUSE U.M. NEWS

MARCH 1995 **No. 1**

NEWS AND INFORMATION FROM
THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA ZOOLOGICAL MUSEUM



RECENT ACCESSIONS BY THE MUSEUM

20 specimens of *Synaptomys borealis* (Northern Bog Lemming) from several Montana counties were received from the Montana Natural Heritage Program. Skins, skulls, and complete skeletons were preserved for these specimens.

Phil Wright recovered two specimens of the Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca zaboria*) from Liberty Co. MT. These are the first examples of this subspecies in the Museum.

The skull of a White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) with maxillary canines was collected by Craig Marr. Upper canines in deer are unusual and this is the first specimen in the Museum.

A partial skull of a Bison from Lewis and Clark Co. was donated by Clara Redman.

A documented example of skeletal trauma is present in an Elk skull (*Cervus elaphus*) collected by John Mitchell. Bony differences in entry and exit wounds from a gunshot are evident. The slug, probably a .38 or .357, was recovered.

A permanent collection of herpetiles has begun, in addition to the teaching collection, with the donation of a Bullsnake (*Pituophis melanoleucus sayi*) collected by Tanya Mitchell. This specimen, from Missoula Co., was verified by the Montana Natural Heritage Program.

MUSEUM TOUR PROGRAM

In order to bring the resources of the Zoological Museum to a larger audience and to meet the demand of schools for science based field trips, a museum tour program has been started. This is a joint project between the Museum and the Montana Natural History Center. We have recruited a graduate student, Rachel Wolstenholme, as a coordinator of the program. She will receive graduate credit through Environmental Studies for creating and developing the tour program. Rachel is also coordinating the Wilderness Lecture Series for the Wilderness Institute.

Tour groups will be divided between a classroom, where they will receive a natural history program, and the museum. Selected specimens from the teaching collection will be available for "hands-on" use by participants. Curriculum is now being written for the museum and classroom programs, and training of docents is underway.

TEACHING COLLECTIONS EXPANDED IN 1994

Specimens are continually being added to the teaching collections to provide quality specimens for courses in vertebrate zoology. These are often specimens with little data and thus would be of limited value in a research collection, but are useful for instructional purposes. Since January 1994, 98 specimens have been added to the bird and mammal teaching collections. These are primarily study skins, skulls, and skeletons.

CURATION OF BIRD COLLECTION

Craig Marr, the manager of the Museum Preparation Lab, is currently pursuing an independent study project to curate the bird collection. In addition to the arsenic testing project, Craig is reorganizing the collection according to a standard reference work, lining all the trays with Ethafoam to protect the specimens, and expanding and reorganizing the teaching collection.

ARSENIC CONFIRMED IN BIRD SKINS

Recent tests have confirmed the presence of arsenic in bird skins in the permanent collection. Arsenic was commonly used for many years as a preservative to prevent insect damage to skins. Its use has been recommended as late as 1981 (The Mammals of North America, E.R. Hall) and was used on bird skins at the Smithsonian until the early 1970's. The skins we have tested thus far are from the turn of the century. Arsenic has probably been a factor in allowing many specimens to survive until today, before the advent of modern insect-proof museum cases. Older skins are being removed from the teaching collection and being replaced with arsenic-free newer specimens.

We strongly recommend that anyone handling bird skins in the Museum wear protective gloves. This is also beneficial for the specimens since years of oil and dirt from handling can be a major source of damage!