

THE Current

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George Foulsham

New Grant Will Help UCSB's Cheadle Center for Biodiversity and Ecological Restoration Complete Its Vertebrate Collection Catalog

Thanks to an \$80,655 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), UC Santa Barbara's Cheadle Center for Biodiversity and Ecological Restoration (CCBER) will complete the curation, documentation, cataloging, and database processing of its 24,875 herpetological, ornithological, and mammalian specimens.

The two-year Vertebrate Collections Management Project will allow the Cheadle Center to hire a curatorial assistant, create a new museum internship program, and curate its collections of reptiles, birds, and mammals according to national standards. When completed, UCSB faculty, students, environmental consultants, the general public, and the global scientific community will have access to CCBER's collections and associated data. The project also will provide educational opportunities for students interested in biological fieldwork and museum careers.

"The IMLS grant will allow UCSB students and the CCBER to computerize -- and thus, make more accessible -- its vertebrate collection," said Linnea Hall, executive director of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, and adjunct curator of ornithology at CCBER. "These days, accessibility of collection material is extremely

important, as researchers work on critical issues regarding historic versus current and shifting species distributions in response to human-induced impacts on the environment; genetic and taxonomic changes via different evolutionary pathways; and biodiversity questions such as exactly how many species are on this planet. These are important, fundamental issues in organismal biology, and having students trained to curate the vertebrate collections, as well as to computerize all the records, will greatly facilitate the reach of the collections."

The other curator of CCBER's vertebrate collection is Sam Sweet, a professor in UCSB's Department of Ecology, Evolution and Marine Biology.

This funding comes after CCBER received two grants from the National Science Foundation in the past two years. Those grants covered the costs of upgrading and preserving the museum's plant collection. "That momentum made us realize that we can successfully compete for funding at the national level," said Jennifer Thorsch, director of CCBER. "People are starting to acknowledge how important our collections are."

The most exciting benefit of the funds, according to Thorsch, will be the ability to document the entire collection in an accessible, user-friendly database.

"After two years, we should have all of the vertebrate collection cataloged and databased," Laurie Hannah, CCBER's librarian and digital resources coordinator, said. "The ultimate goal is that we should be able to share this through the Internet, and people should be able to search through the entire collection online."

To illustrate the potential value of such a database, Thorsch pointed out that "we (CCBER) have an extensive collection of White-crowned Sparrows from former faculty member Barbara DeWolfe, who studied these birds. Unless someone dug in the literature, way back into the 1930's and 40's, and tied it to her as a member of the faculty at UCSB, they wouldn't know that this extensive collection exists. If they want to do studies across regions, they wouldn't know to contact UCSB, unless the information is accessible and available on a database. And that is key to the survival of museums," Thorsch said.

CCBER houses regionally focused collections of terrestrial plants, algae, and vertebrates, as well as an extensive plant anatomy collection. CCBER also promotes the teaching of diverse undergraduate courses in UCSB's departments of Ecology, Evolution and Marine Biology, Environmental Studies, and Geology. It also supports

faculty, staff, and student research interests by providing field- and lab-based resources. In addition, CCBER provides stewardship of campus lands and, through its ecological restoration program, the center encourages land restoration on and near campus.

Out of 481 applications submitted, IMLS selected 160 institutions to be awarded a Museums for America grant, for a total of \$18,777,552 awarded. IMLS is an independent federal agency supporting museums and libraries of all types and sizes. Museums for America is the institute's largest grant program for museums, supporting projects and ongoing activities that build museums' capacity to serve their communities. Museums for America grants strengthen a museum's ability to serve the public more effectively by supporting high-priority activities that advance the institution's mission and strategic goals.

"Congratulations to the Museums for America grantees," said Susan Hildreth, director of the IMLS. "We are pleased to support museums through investments in high-priority, high-value activities that benefit communities throughout the U.S. These museums, small and large, will help to educate and inspire the public for years to come."

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† Top photo: Heather Fox, assistant curator of CCBER's vertebrate collections, displays one of the many snakes in the museum's herpetological collection.

Credit: George Foulsham, Office of Public Affairs

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