

# THE Pteranodon

Highlights from the  
Sternberg Museum of Natural History

No. 31

Winter 2004

## Artists look to nature

Ceramics students in the FHSU Art Department visited the Sternberg Museum earlier this fall.

In mid-November, they returned with the fruits of that visit: an art exhibition that will be displayed through December 15. The exhibition's title: *Biosynthesis*.

"The students are becoming more aware of how they, as artists, are impacted by science," commented Linda Ganstrom, instructor of the ceramics class, as they worked on their pieces earlier this semester. The class serves both graduate and undergraduate students. "They are expanding their understanding of the world.

"We talked about the museum's mission and its position in the community," added Ganstrom. "We also visited Castle Rock, since it's representative of the rocks in which many of the museum's fossils are found.

"A lot of artists use nature for inspiration. Experience in nature feeds you."

For some, that experience in nature is on the grand scale of rock formations. For others, it's a very different scale. Consider the work of graduate art student Stacey Letsch.

"I work in a medical lab," she said, "so I see a lot of microscopic things like fungi and bacteria. I never thought I'd put my art into that, but it's gone that way," she said.



FHSU ceramics student Brendan Arnold works on abstractions of cylinders. Paper nests of social wasps were among the natural objects he studied in preparation for executing the work.

Letsch is currently drawing inspiration from coccolithophores. What's the significance here? It turns out that coccolithophores are the minute, single-celled organisms whose body fossils make

up the matrix of the Smoky Hill Chalk, the rock unit that comprises Castle Rock and from which many of the museum's important fossils were excavated.

As they developed their works of art, the students discussed their connection with the land.

"I've taken my textures from growing up on the farm," said Andy Nolan. "I use furrows and ridges as a visual symbol.

"The texture also symbolizes trees, which are pretty special where I'm from," Nolan explained that his works often involve altars with niches holding stylized natural objects.

Jane Travis found that participation in the class's *Biosynthesis* project helped her expand beyond her favored area of designing functional art pieces. "I've been fascinated by Pangea," she said. "Pangea" is the term applied to the single land mass into which Earth's continents were united about 250 million years ago.

"I've been thinking about Pangea spreading throughout the installation exhibit," she said, pondering the exact form to best

express the idea. "I'm trying to connect the continents of the past with those we find in the present."

(continued on page 2)

# Biosynthesis art installation (cont'd)



Jeanette Zamrzla refines one element of her work for the *Biosynthesis* installation art exhibition to open November 13. “I like to work with containers,” said Zamrzla. “My contribution to the exhibition looks at the body as a container.”

“*Biosynthesis* is an installation exhibit,” explained Ganstrom. Rather than a collection of discrete works of art, each to be perceived individually by the visitor who comes to experience it, *Biosynthesis* is one entity itself. The students’ pieces, all together, function as components of one whole.

Museum visitors may find that this is a familiar concept.

“The dinosaur diorama at the museum is an enchantment installation,” Ganstrom explained. “The tent in the fossil gallery on second floor is an example of a simulation art installation.

“Installation art is an art of space. The visitor is surrounded by the art, rather than individual pieces. One actually enters the work of art.”

Ganstrom continued, “You have an experience with the art that is similar to the experience the artist has with nature.”

As such, the experience can involve more than simple viewing. “I always want to be able to touch ceramics,” explained Kate Barnaby, who is forming totem poles. “So I’m making these to be very much a hand-held size.”

Each individual totem in her work is about five inches tall and recognizable as a North American animal. “I wanted to do something for the family, something understandable to the public,” she added. “I wanted people to be able to come up and touch them.”

*Biosynthesis* will be displayed through December 15 in the Hansen Gallery on the museum’s second floor.

## Choate's Notes




Dr. J. R. Choate  
Director

I have written about the Sternberg Museum’s volunteer program before, but our need for additional volunteers remains a concern. The recent downsizing of the museum’s staff made the museum even more dependent on volunteers than it had been before, and it ratcheted up the museum’s emphasis on volunteer recruitment.

Volunteers serve the museum in various capacities. They assist the exhibit staff, help curate the research collections, perform clerical duties in the museum office, serve as gallery attendants, work in the Sternberg Store, help with educational programs, and man the admissions desk. Few, if any, museums could function without volunteers—it’s just that simple.

Our most critical needs at the present time are for persons to work at the admissions desk, in the store, and in the galleries. We prefer volunteers who can work several hours per week on a regular basis. And, like substitute teachers who are called to come in when needed, the museum needs a few volunteers whom we can call on a moment’s notice.

The museum’s Reservations Manager and Volunteer Program Coordinator (Mark Kellerman) and his student assistant (Amanda Herl) would like to hear from persons who are interested in working at the museum on a volunteer basis. If you, a family member, or a friend are interested, please contact the Sternberg’s Volunteer Program Office at 628-5684.



**THE Pteranodon**  
Highlights from the  
Sternberg Museum of Natural History

Publisher: Dr. Jerry R. Choate  
Editor-in-Chief: Cami Liggett  
Story Contributors: Jerry Choate, Cami Liggett  
Photography: Julie Bliese, Cami Liggett, Greg Liggett  
Printing: FHSU Printing Services

Sternberg Museum of Natural History is a department of Fort Hays State University. *The Pteranodon* is published for associates of the Sternberg Museum. Please address all correspondence to the Sternberg Museum of Natural History, FHSU, 3000 Sternberg Drive, Hays, Kansas 67601-2006 or call (785) 628-4286. On the Web at [www.SternbergMuseum.com](http://www.SternbergMuseum.com).

# SHOP AT THE MUSEUM STORE!

## Customer Appreciation Sale



All shoppers: 10% off regular prices  
(Members & Volunteers: total 20% off)

Nov. 26 - 28

## Hays Frost Fest Sale



Show your Frost Fest brochure  
to receive 10% off regular prices

Dec. 3 - 5

## Members' & Volunteers' Sale



Museum members & volunteers only:  
Additional 10% discount - total of 20% off

Dec. 10 - 12

## MUSEUM EVENTS

[www.SternbergMuseum.com](http://www.SternbergMuseum.com)



### Continuing

*Journey to South Africa: An Exhibit Experience*; ongoing

*Museum Memories: A Centennial Exhibition*; ongoing

*Biosynthesis FHSU ceramics students' exhibition*; continues through Dec. 15

*Structures of Life*; continues through Jan. 16

### November

24 Museum closes for Thanksgiving at 5:00 PM

25 Closed for Thanksgiving; re-open at 9:00 AM Friday, Nov. 26

26-28 Customer Appreciation Store Sale; All shoppers receive 10% off regular prices (Members and Volunteers receive 20% off regular prices)



### December

3-5 Hays FrostFest Store Sale; show your FrostFest brochure to receive 10% off regular prices

10-12 Members' & Volunteers' Store Sale; museum members and volunteers receive an additional 10% discount for a total of 20%

15 *Biosynthesis* exhibition final day

24 Museum closes for Christmas Eve at 5:00 PM

25 Closed for Christmas; re-open at 1:00 PM on Sunday, Dec. 26

31 Museum closes for New Year's Eve at 5:00 PM

### January

1 Closed for New Year's Day; re-open at 1:00 PM Sunday, Jan. 2

16 *Structures of Life* exhibition final day

22 *Diversity Endangered* exhibition opens; continues through April 24

# Scientific Meetings

“Scientific meetings bring us together in a way that nothing else does,” commented Jerry Choate, Sternberg Museum Director. “We just completed the annual meeting of the Central Plains Association of Mammalogists.”

That meeting, hosted by the Sternberg Museum and FHSU’s Department of Biological Sciences, began the evening of Friday, October 15, with a reception for participants at the Sternberg Museum.

It continued Saturday with a full day of technical presentations.

What does that really mean? What is the significance of scientific meetings? Is it important for the Sternberg Museum to participate in hosting scientific meetings, and for scientists from the Sternberg Museum to attend and present at meetings elsewhere?

“In a word, yes,” said Choate emphatically. “Without professional meetings, scientists would miss out on the opportunity for intense interaction with numerous colleagues, which turns out to be an essential element in the creative aspects of doing science.”

This is true, said Choate, not only in his own scientific discipline of mammalogy, but throughout the scientific world. Researchers can and do publish their results and findings in technical journals.

But that process can be very drawn out, and still does not result in the same kind of shared interaction.

Adjunct Curator of Vertebrate Paleontology Greg Liggett confirmed that this is true in his own discipline. “Basically,” he said, “research happens faster than the publication process, and by



Individuals visiting the collection of mammals share a moment of levity before getting down to the work at hand.

going to meetings you can hear the most cutting-edge research and learn from your colleagues things that will apply to your own research.”

Interaction among researchers is essential for other reasons also. “We do a lot of recruiting graduate students at these meetings,” said Choate.

“Without professional meetings we would have fewer graduate students. Graduate students would have fewer job opportunities and would progress more slowly through their profession.

“Individual scientists would not be as well-known within their professions, either,” Choate added.

“Basically, publishing research conveys the science, but not the scientist. The mental stimulation is essential.”

Professional meetings have a great deal of significance to Choate. “Three things have been most important to me,” he said. “the first is sharing my science with other persons within the discipline.

“The second is helping promote the careers of my graduate students.

“The third is participating in a very active way in the administrative functions of my professional organizations, as an editor, trustee, and so on.”

Chris Bennett, Associate Curator of Paleontology, recently returned from the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology’s annual meeting, held in Denver this year. He agreed that publishing research articles is no substitute for meeting yearly.

“You often get other workers’ preliminary results,” he pointed out. “You get things before they’re done, which allows you to adjust the direction of your own research activities.

“Conversely,” continued Bennett, “you yourself present what research you’ve done. It’s important for a lot of reasons, one being that it gets out the name of your institution and adds to its prestige.”

And when the museum and biology department host a meeting in their own facilities, the aspect of promotion is only intensified, commented Mark Eberle, Manager of the Collection of Ichthyology and Freshwater Mussels.

“Having it here at FHSU allows us to directly show off our facilities.

“It gets the word out, brings in potential graduate students and others. It makes a difference,” he said.

Among the specialties of Eberle, an aquatic biologist, is studying the microscopic aquatic algae called diatoms. Like Choate, he considers attention to students to be an important characteristic for a scientific meeting.

Eberle cites the annual meetings of diatom specialists as a great example of student involvement. “Because it’s a



Scientific meetings vary in size and topic, but they share one general format: lecture, accompanied by slides or digital presentations, as in this presentation at the 63<sup>rd</sup> annual meeting of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology held in Minneapolis in 2003.



Vertebrate paleontologists associated with Fort Hays State University and the Sternberg Museum are briefly reunited at the 63<sup>rd</sup> annual meeting of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology in Minneapolis last year. From left to right are Richard Zakrzewski, Chief Curator; Kenshu Shimada, Research Associate, who resides in Chicago and is a professor at DePaul University; Bruce Schumacher, Adjunct Curator, a Forest Service paleontologist living in LaJunta, Colorado; and Mike Nelson, past chairman of the FHSU Department of Geosciences, who resides in Wisconsin, where he is the Dean of the College of Science and Allied Health at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

smaller meeting, it can be more student oriented,” he said. “Students even participate as moderators.”

Some scientific meetings are discipline-specific, such as the North American Diatom Symposium. Part of their value is bringing together researchers who share an interest in highly technical aspects of a defined discipline.

---

*Since 1999, every biology meeting that has been on campus has involved a partnership with the Sternberg Museum.*

---

Other meetings function to facilitate cross-disciplinary work, such as the annual meeting of the Southwestern Association of Naturalists (SWAN).

FHSU has twice hosted SWAN meetings, in 1976 and more recently in

2001. “About 300 people attended the 2001 SWAN meeting we hosted,” said Choate.

The group would have included not only mammalogists such as Choate but botanists, ecologists, ornithologists, range management specialists, entomologists, herpetologists, and ichthyologists, among a variety of others.

Scientific meetings range from statewide to international in scope. But, as Eberle pointed out, “Not all diatomists had the means to make it to the September meeting of the International Society for Diatom Research; it was in Poland.

“The International Society meets biennially, and on the off years we have the North American Diatom Symposium. It’s usually held at a research station somewhere in the United States.”

The newest addition to the Sternberg Museum’s list of scientific meetings is the Kansas Herpetological Society meeting, which will be hosted in early November 2006 by Associate Curator of Herpetology Curtis Schmidt.

**YOUNG  
NATURALIST  
AWARDS**

The American Museum of Natural History is pleased to announce the 8th annual Young naturalist Awards contest. Students in grades 7 through 12, throughout the United States and Canada, are invited to plan an expedition that will provide data, observations and conclusions on a topic in the area of biology, Earth science, or astronomy. Entrants can share their data and experiences in an essay that describes the expedition and their findings. Essays are judged by a panel of museum scientists, educators, and environmentalists.

The top 12 students to demonstrate insight, originality, and accuracy in observation and research, as well as creativity in writing and documentation through drawing and photography, will win an expense-paid trip to New York City (with a parent or guardian). There they will take a behind-the-scenes tour of the museum, meet and speak with scientists, and attend a special awards ceremony.

In addition, winners will receive cash awards ranging from \$500 to \$2,500 and will have their essays published. Teachers of the winning essayists will receive a collection of books and resources for their classrooms. All entrants will receive a certificate of participation.

To learn more about the program, please visit the museum’s web site at [www.amnh.org/youngnaturalistawards](http://www.amnh.org/youngnaturalistawards). There you can view contest guidelines and download an entry form. The contest deadline is January 7, 2005.

# Changing Exhibitions: Current & Upcoming

## ***Journey to South Africa: An Exhibit Experience;*** ongoing

Video, artifacts, and photographs recap the Sternberg Museum's exciting 2003 eco-tour to South Africa.

## ***Museum Memories: A Centennial Exhibition;*** ongoing

Artifacts and specimens formerly displayed in the Sternberg Memorial Museum on the FHSU campus are again presented to the public.

## ***Biosynthesis;*** through Dec. 15

This site-specific art installation inspired by the museum's collections is created by students and faculty from the FHSU Art Department.

## ***Structures of Life;*** through Jan. 16

A revolution in scientific instrumentation allows us to "see," comprehend, and modify the molecular structures of life.

## ***Diversity Endangered;*** January 22 - April 24

We examine the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to the worldwide loss of biological diversity.

## ***John Cody's Moths;*** Feb. 19 - Aug. 21

Exquisite watercolors by "The Audubon of Moths" and interactive exhibits capture the beauty and biology of Cody's life-long passion.

## ***Oceans of Kansas: The Art of Dan Varner;*** April 29 - June 19

Dan Varner exhibits paintings of prehistoric Kansas life that he created for a new book by Sternberg Museum Curator Mike Everhart.

## ***Who Speaks for the Land?*** June 25 - Aug. 28

Fine art photographs by Robert Lindholm are paired with 1854 quotations attributed to American Indian leader Chief Seattle that presaged today's ecological awareness.

## ***Floral Diagrams of Charles Eastman;*** Sept. 3 - Nov. 13

Art and science merge in floral diagrams—graphic representations of flower anatomy.



Nancy Aspegren peeks out from behind her camera during a rare instance of being a photo's subject rather than the photographer.

## Who is it?

# Behind the camera

The face of volunteer Nancy Aspegren may not be as familiar as the faces of other museum volunteers.

That's because it seems her face is always behind a camera.

Aspegren is well-known around the Sternberg Museum not only for taking lots of pictures but for sharing them very generously. "I give away ninety percent of my pictures," she said, smiling. She obviously enjoys doing so.

Aspegren's photos help document many of the museum's events. She especially likes sequence topics. And Aspegren also uses her camera in her professional life.

"You know, a lot of kids don't get pictures of themselves anymore," said Aspegren, citing the effects of factors ranging from digital cameras to low family income. Aspegren, a resident of Russell, Kansas, has been a special education teacher for 34 years at Bickerdyke Elementary School in Russell.

She said that taking photos of the children she teaches, and then giving them

copies of the photos, shows the children that they are important as individuals and provides them with a special memento they might not otherwise have.

Aspegren's classroom skills carry over into her gallery attending at the museum. "I'm a disciplinarian—I'm an affectionate one—but I do expect them to behave," she said of her approach.

Aspegren says that her life's passions, in order, are family, children everywhere, animals, and photography.

Aspegren's many interests do keep her busy. She was the Russell County 4-H dog project leader for over 30 years, and she also trains dogs to assist people with disabilities. She has been a Special Olympics team coach for over 30 years.

With pride in her voice, Aspegren also noted that her daughter, Heather, will be graduating with three degrees from Kansas University next month.

"Think I should take my camera?" she laughed. I laughed with her. No power in the world could keep her from it.

# VOLUNTEER VENUES



## DECEMBER

**10-12 Members' and Volunteers' Sale;** *museum members and volunteers* receive an additional 10% discount for a total of 20%

**11 Museum Volunteers' Holiday Potluck Brunch** (in place of Answers 101 meeting); *Sternberg Volunteers and spouses*; 10:00 AM to 11:30 AM, museum classroom; please bring a dish appropriate for a light brunch; no RSVP required

## JANUARY

**8 Answers 101 for Volunteers;** *Sternberg Volunteers*; 10:00 AM to 11:30 AM, museum classroom; program: Dr. Joseph Thomasson, Curator of Paleobotany and Professor of Botany, will discuss his work conducting botanical surveys during the summer months in Minnesota, Colorado, and Wyoming and how this work ties in with the Sternberg Museum and its research collections.

**11 Docent Continuing Education;** *Active Docents*; 10:00 AM to 11:30 AM, museum classroom

# MUSEUM MEMBERSHIPS



# MAKE GREAT GIFTS!

## STERNBERG MUSEUM ASSOCIATES

Enclosed is my check payable to *Sternberg Museum of Natural History* -OR- please charge to my:

VISA       MASTERCARD       DISCOVER

Acct. # \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_



### Membership Categories

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student \$20       | <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor \$100-\$249         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior \$20        | <input type="checkbox"/> Curator's Club \$250-\$499  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Couple \$35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Director's Club \$500-\$999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$30    | <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime Member \$1000      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family \$55        |  |

Please send information about including the museum in my estate plans.

Name

Address

City/State/ZIP

Home Phone

Daytime Phone

Mail to: Sternberg Museum of Natural History, 3000 Sternberg Drive, Hays, KS 67601-2006  
Charge by phone (toll-free call): (877) 332-1165

No. 31



FORT HAYS STATE  
UNIVERSITY

STERNBERG MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY  
600 PARK STREET  
HAYS, KS 67601-4099



NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
HAYS, KS  
PERMIT NO. 4

I cannot hope in this short space to have given more than a passing glance at the life of a fossil hunter. It has been one of joy to me; I should not like to have missed making the discoveries I have made, and I would willingly undergo the same hardships to accomplish the same results.

—Charles H. Sternberg  
*The Life of a Fossil Hunter*

