

NATURAL INQUIRER

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ALUMNI NEWS

Daryl Mergen (MS 1991), a former graduate student of **Dr. Joseph Thomasson**, is putting his academic background to work earning money in field biology. After working several years as a wetlands biologist and technician for a Boulder, CO based environmental firm, Daryl has formed his own company, Mergen Ecological Delineations, in Colorado Springs, CO. He conducts studies for private companies and governmental agencies in the areas of resource monitoring and surveying, wetlands delineations, GPS mapping, soil surveys, and botanical photography. Daryl's strong botanical and zoological background (e.g., courses in botany, zoology, plant taxonomy, dendrology, agrostology, ecological and range techniques, microbiology, vertebrate biology, field zoology, invertebrate biology, ecology, biometry, etc.) as well as his preparation in various courses in chemistry, geology, mathematics and physics undoubtedly contributed to his ability to successfully establish his company and to conduct his business. Daryl indicated recently to Dr. Thomasson that he has been able to stay quite busy doing his ecological delineation work. However, he has at times had to turn down lucrative contracts to do plant surveys because he could not find a person who was skilled at both using a GPS and identifying plants (e.g., one contract in Minnesota last year at \$400/day for three weeks). Daryl's example can serve as one more option that our graduating students might want to consider as they prepare for a career in biology. His web site can be accessed at <http://environment.home.att.net/index.html>.

FACULTY HAPPENINGS

Fort Hays State University's inter-disciplinary team has received a \$200,000 National Science Foundation grant. The team includes Dr. Paul Adams, associate professor of physics; Dr. Ervin Eltze, professor of mathematics and computer science; Dr. John Heinrichs, assistant professor of geosciences; **Dr. Karen Hickman**, assistant professor of biological sciences; Dr. Jim Hohman, professor of chemistry; and Dr. Germaine Taggart,

assistant professor of teacher education. Out of 1,041 proposals that were presented, the National Science Foundation chose FHSU's proposal of "Integrating Exemplary Physics Science Teacher Enhancement Materials with Mathematics for Preservice Middle School Teachers." The grant will now lead to a new class for FHSU students. The purpose of the project is to develop mathematics and science courses aimed at future and current middle school science teachers.

Dr. Paul Adams, associate professor of physics, and **Dr. Karen Hickman**, assistant professor of biological sciences, received a \$63,326 grant for a second year of funding for Project IRIS. Project IRIS is a two-week workshop, June 3-14, 2002, Monday-Friday from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. The project targets middle and high school teachers and will help them enhance their knowledge and skills in areas such as teaching through inquiry and integrating physical science and biology. The science content of the workshop will focus on the topic of astrobiology - how astronomy, plants and animals interrelate. Participating teachers receive a stipend and technology equipment for their schools. Housing is available for those living outside the immediate Hays area.

GRADUATE STUDENTS

On December 11, 2001, FHSU hosted the Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition meeting. Ranchers, organizations (Audubon Society), and various governmental agencies (KDWP, USFWS, NRCS) attended the meeting. The mission of this organization is to improve Kansas grazing land resources through cooperative management, economics, ecology, production, education, and technical assistance programs. Dr. Hickman's graduate student, **Jan Steier**, gave an oral presentation at the meeting about her summer 2001 research in Comanche County, KS, *Effects of a non-native grass on avian and arthropod communities*. Dr. Farley's graduate student, **Matt Bain**, also presented his research *Prairie-chickens in the mixed-grass prairie*.

PUBLICATIONS

Graduate student **Matt Bain** (B.S. 2000; Ness City) and **Dr. Greg Farley** recently submitted a manuscript for publication on "Display by Apparent Hybrid Prairie-Chickens in a Zone of Geographic Overlap", resulting from research in the 2001 breeding season in Ellis, Gove, Lane, Ness, Rooks, Russell, and Trego counties. The research paper will appear in a future edition of **The Condor**, an International Journal of Avian Biology. Matt has been assisted in the field by **Trevor van Eaton** (Stockton), a junior biology major, and various graduate students. Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks has provided funding. The focus in the 2002 breeding season will be on observing the display behaviors of the putative hybrid males, as well as documenting possible mating success of these same individuals.

Hilary Gillock (BS 1994 Kansas State University; MS 2001 North Carolina State University) has been hired as Assistant Editor for *The Prairie Naturalist*, which is a regional journal that deals with manuscripts about the natural history of the Great Plains and grasslands of North America. *The Prairie Naturalist* is a publication of the North Dakota Natural Science Society. The journal is presently published at Emporia State University, but will soon be published at FHSU. **Dr. Elmer J. Finck** serves as the editor for the journal and **Mark Eberle** serves as its Webmaster. See

<http://www.fhsu.edu/biology/pn/prairienat.htm>. The *Prairie Naturalist* Office is now located in Albertson Hall.

ODDS AND ENDS

"Jurassic Park: Life and Death of Dinosaurs" opened to the public at the Sternberg Museum of Natural History on February 2nd and will run through May 5th. This is a very large exhibition that contains a dozen skeletons of dinosaurs never previously exhibited in the United States plus a dozen "Jurassic Park" movie props, an extinction theater hosted by actor Jeff Goldblum, and numerous educational kiosks and games. The exhibition was assembled by "Dino" Don Lessem (dinosaur consultant for the "Jurassic Park" movies) in cooperation with Universal Studios and Amblin Entertainment. For those of you who visited "A T.rex Named Sue" at the Sternberg Museum last year, this is a much bigger and even more complex exhibition that you should not miss.

The curatorial staff of herpetology at Sternberg Museum is currently working on herpetological surveys in the panhandle of Florida. Adjunct Curator of Herpetology, **Joseph T. Collins** and wife Suzanne have been contracted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct an in-depth survey of the herpetofauna of St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge in Franklin County, Florida. This is the third year of the on-going project. In addition to the island, Collins has also been contracted to do surveys of some refuges administered by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection in Gulf and Franklin Counties. For a week in January, Adjunct Curator **Travis Taggart** (BS 1995) and graduate student **Curtis Schmidt** assisted Collins with the surveys. The group was rather successful, recording 22 species of amphibians and reptiles, including american alligators (*Alligator mississippiensis*), eastern diamondback rattlesnakes (*Crotalus adamanteus*), pigmy rattlesnakes (*Sistrurus miliarius*), little grass frogs (*Pseudacris ocularis*), eastern glass lizards (*Ophisaurus ventralis*), and three species of tree frogs (*Hyla sp.*). Curtis will return to Florida for a week in March to continue the survey of the mainland refuges.

The department participated in the annual Science Olympiad regional competition for middle school students on February 12 and high school students on February 14. Teams compete in various science and technology events for a chance to advance to the state competition. The departments of Biological Sciences, Chemistry, Geosciences, Math & Computer Science, Physics, and Technology Studies host the olympiad each February. Within biology, the topics for 2002 were general life science processes, microbiology (specifically, diseases), cellular biology, ornithology, and water quality. Assisting with the olympiad this year were biology faculty **Drs. Greg Farley, Eric Gillock, and Duane Hinton** and the following students: **Peg Althoff, Matt Bain, Amanda Barnett, Sara Kay Carrell, Jeff Conley, Justin Hoffman, Eric Johnson, Margaret Kritsch, Jason Luginbill, Jim Schmidt, Dave Spalsbury, and Jamie Timson.**