

MUSE U.M. NEWS

SUMMER 2001

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NEWS AND INFORMATION FROM THE PHILIP L. WRIGHT
ZOOLOGICAL MUSEUM - THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

RECENT ACCESSIONS BY THE MUSEUM

Nick DeCesare, a Wildlife Biology graduate student, found a burnt skull of a male **Bighorn Sheep** (*Ovis canadensis*) near Nimrod Hot Springs, Granite Co., MT. It appears that the skull was already in place when the forest fires of 2000 swept through the area. The skull was blackened and the outer layer of the keratin horn sheaths were melted.

A **Violet-green Swallow** (*Tachycineta thalassina*) was found injured in front of the Natural Sciences Building on the U.M. Campus. It died shortly afterwards and was brought to the museum.

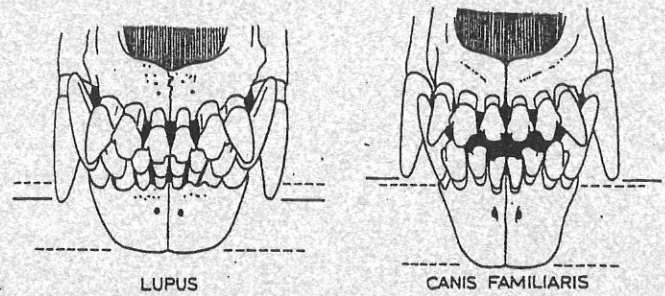
Paul Hendricks, of the Montana Natural Heritage Program, brought in a **Merriam Shrew** (*Sorex merriami*) for the museum's permanent collection. It was collected in Rosebud Co., MT.

A **Northern Saw-whet Owl** (*Aegolius acadicus*) was found dead on top of the snow last January in an alley near the U.M. Campus. It was recovered by B. Graham Hall, and will be added to the avian skeletal collection.

DERMESTID COLONY KILLED BY MITES

The Museum's live dermestid beetle colony, which has been in continual existence for at least the last 10 years, was wiped out by a severe mite infestation this summer. The mites were first noticed in June when the adult beetles were seen walking around with their elytra raised, and their bodies covered with mites. The mites quickly spread, and were seen covering the inside and outside of the dermestid box. We suspect that the mites were attracted to the colony because of recent damp conditions within the container.

The mites appear to be a host-specific species and were not affected by commercial mite sprays or other insecticides. We finally used talc as a control for the mites on the sides of the box and on the floor. Talc acts to desiccate the mites. However, the dermestid colony could not be saved. We froze all the contents of the box to kill any remaining mites, then thoroughly cleaned the container and the lab.



Jay Villemarette, of Skulls Unlimited International of Oklahoma, has generously offered to provide the museum with a new starter colony of beetles. Though the smell on the second floor has improved greatly since the colony has been gone, we hope to have them again chomping away on skulls and skeletons very soon.

ASM VISITS ZOOLOGICAL MUSEUM

The 81st annual meeting of the American Society of Mammalogists (ASM) was held at the University of Montana in June. Mammalogists from all over North America and the world descended on U.M. The museum hosted 24 visitors who used the mammal collection to conduct research or to view the collection. Researchers included such names as Hugh Genoways, Jerry Choate, and Robert Dowler. Visitors ranged all the way from the Smithsonian to British Columbia.

The collections were also visited by the Systematics Committee of the ASM. The committee evaluates mammal collections to see if they meet the minimum standards to be eligible for accreditation. Our mammal collection was first accredited in 1985, and at the time was one of only 49 accredited mammal collections in North America. The first draft of the committee's report was positive, so we expect to receive word of reaccreditation soon.

NEW EXHIBIT IN H.S. BUILDING

If you haven't already seen it, check out the new exhibit in the 2nd floor hallway case in the Health Sciences Building. "That's Gotta Hurt - Skeletal Trauma and Disease in Wild Mammals" was constructed to provide an interesting exhibit, rather than an empty case, for the mammalogist's meeting over the summer. But hurry, the exhibit will only be up until classes start!

TOUR PROGRAM CONTINUES FOR FALL

The Museum's collaboration with the Montana Natural History Center (MNHC) in providing tours and educational programs in the museum continues for the upcoming school year. However, this year the program will operate a little differently. Now schools and other groups can directly call the Natural History Center at Fort Missoula to arrange the tour. After an extensive training program, including many sessions conducted last spring in the museum, the MNHC docents are full of knowledge and enthusiasm. They are ready to share this with your group! Call the Center at 327-0405 to schedule a tour.