

# T Sam Noble Museum Tracks

Fall 2014 Newsletter Vol. 26, No. 3

## *Special* Conservation *Edition*

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Bom Bom's Legacy

Saving the Snot Otter

Firing Back Against Extinction!

End of the Monarch Reign?

Out of the Ashes:  
The Story of the  
Sam Noble Museum



## TRACKS, FALL 2014: VOLUME 26, NO. 3

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### OUR MISSION

The Sam Noble Museum at the University of Oklahoma inspires minds to understand the world through collection-based research, interpretation and education.

### OUR VISION

As one of the finest museums, we are at the heart of our community, collectively working to inspire understanding, appreciation and stewardship of the earth and its peoples.

### TRACKS

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# From the Director



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As we approach the end of 2014, we find ourselves in challenging times. Terrorists popping up all over the world, growing wars, kidnapping and a deadly virus that even appeared just down the road in Dallas. Terrorism, wars and viruses threaten life, but two of the greatest challenges facing humanity are global climate change and loss of biodiversity.

These two growing existential threats (along with an exploding human population) are related. Species were disappearing even before scientists realized that the global climate was changing. Now scientists are attempting to understand how climate change will affect the rates of species disappearance and the distribution of species.

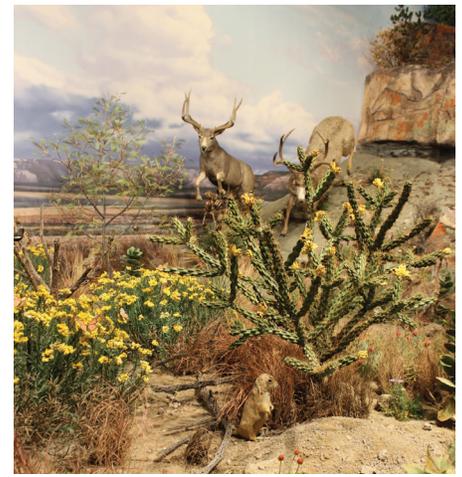
There is evidence that habitat destruction is influencing the emergence of deadly diseases, such as the Ebola virus. As ever more people destroy isolated habitats and move into previously uninhabited areas, viruses and other pathogens can move into the human population. The world is a complex place, and scientists are hard pressed to understand exactly how these massive factors will affect life as we know it, though affect it they will.

As museum scientists, we are in a race against time to discover new species before they are lost forever. Working in Argentina a decade ago, a team from the Sam Noble Museum discovered a new genus and species of rodent that lives in isolated salt flats in the far northwest. It is rare to discover new genera of mammals.

This unusual rodent (about the size of a gopher) is a specialist on salt plants — plants that have a salt content four times that of seawater. Yet these remarkable rodents are able to feed on these specialized plants, and only these plants. The rodent has been isolated in that lost valley for millions of years.

When we discovered it, I was hoping that it would occur throughout the valley over hundreds of square miles and perhaps exist in a population of many thousands of animals. Alas, when I traced the limits of the species, I found that it is only found over an area of perhaps 4 square miles and only a few hundred animals exist. As I once wrote, we are now discovering the living dead: animals that exist on the knife-edge of extinction. This observation is becoming increasingly common among those who explore for new species.

The Sam Noble Museum's scientists are committed to conducting research on disappearing species no matter where they occur. Over the last decade, curators have worked in South Africa, Namibia, India, Brazil, Ecuador, Argentina, Mexico, the Caribbean, Poland, Indonesia, the Philippines, Canada and across the United States —



*Above: Collection-based research (left), educational programs and events (center) and exhibitions (right) represent ways in which the museum educates on conservation.*

especially in Oklahoma — to push back the curtain of ignorance about species identities, distributions, origins and conservation status. Oklahoma is hardly immune from the global threats, as is made clear by our changing habitats, extensive droughts and loss of fresh water.

Our current exhibit on conservation, *RARE*, consists of photographs by Joel Sartore, native Oklahoman and National Geographic photographer. The beautiful photographs show species that are becoming ever more rare on their way to extinction. We included additional species in the exhibit to heighten the impact on the visitor. The famous lowland gorilla from the Oklahoma City Zoo, Bom Bom, is displayed in an eerily accurate mount that preserves the beauty and dignity of the living gorilla. Bom Bom's species, too, is increasingly rare and has entered the road to extinction. We added Bom Bom because he illustrates the global nature of extinction.

There is a grizzly bear from Alaska in the exhibit that was collected almost 100 years ago by two Oklahomans who were collecting exhibit specimens for the then president of OU. Why a grizzly? Grizzly bears used to occur in Oklahoma! In fact, one of the last Oklahoma grizzlies killed a man on the Red River more than 150 years ago. The bald eagle in the exhibit was collected before The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act enacted in 1940. All salvaged materials from bald and golden eagles since 1940 are not allowed to be held by any museums and must be deposited to the National Eagle Repository.

The Sam Noble Museum and the people of Oklahoma have weathered many crises since the museum's founding in 1899, including droughts, severe storms, world wars, the Dust Bowl, the Great Depression and unjust wars. As we continue on into the 21st century, we can overcome the challenges if we become informed about the issues, if we learn about the science that both describes these problems and offers solutions to them. We have likely been through worse, and we will get past this as well.

Let's work to understand our environment and listen to the warning bells of science that will affect our lives, whether we choose to believe them or not. Science is not a belief system; it is a system based on experiments, data and facts. Learn to ignore ideologues who revel in ignorance. We are Oklahomans, and the land we belong to is grand.

  
Michael A. Mares, Ph.D.  
Director

# RARE: Portraits of America's Endangered Species

BY BRANDY MCDONNELL, THE OKLAHOMAN

Well-known endangered species like bald eagles and sea turtles are showcased alongside more unfamiliar species, including the Delhi Sands flower-loving fly and the Higgins eye mussel, in *RARE: Portraits of America's Endangered Species*, an exhibition based on Joel Sartore's book by the same title, which, like the exhibition, organizes the featured species by number of living populations remaining.

In addition to highlighting those species most in danger, National Geographic's *RARE* also celebrates endangered species making a comeback, including the red wolf and

the American alligator, which have both rebounded from the verge of extinction.

The project's message was made particularly poignant when one of the featured animals, the Columbian Basin pygmy rabbit, went extinct while the book was being produced. The exhibition also examines the history, purpose and effectiveness of the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The traveling exhibition based on the 2010 book is on display at the Sam Noble Museum through Jan. 19, 2015.

"In this show, you're looking at animals that are among the rarest in the world, a couple that have gone extinct and other animals that have been saved because of people caring. We can save species; it's just a matter of putting our minds to it," Sartore said to me after a recent talk at the Oklahoma City Zoo.

## Fighting extinction

The longtime Nebraska resident's interest in animal photography goes back to boyhood, when his mother got him a Time-Life picture book featuring birds. He was especially taken by the sad story of the passenger pigeon, which once numbered in the billions but was killed off within a matter of decades.

Martha, the last passenger pigeon, died Sept. 1, 1914, and in light of that solemn centennial, the once-petentful bird will be among the creatures featured in the "Rare" exhibit.

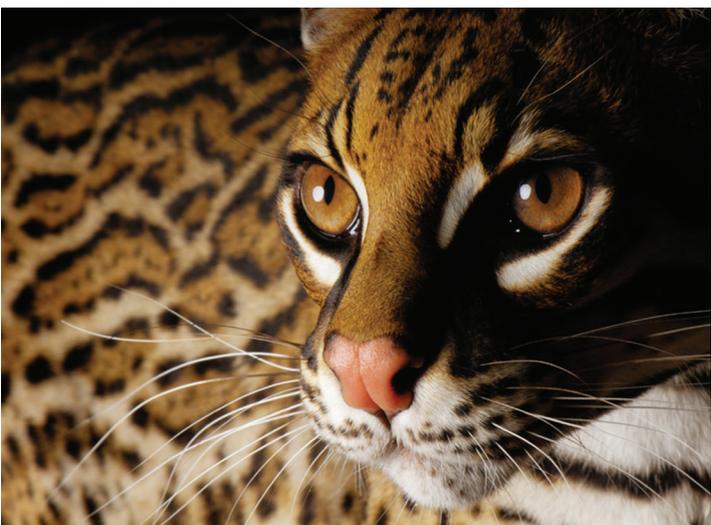
"The Sam Noble Museum is an institution dedicated to preserving and fostering biodiversity," Laura Wilcox,



Right: Joel Sartore,  
National Geographic  
photographer,  
speaker, author and  
conservationist.



Above: Red Wolf, *Canis rufus*, photographed at the Great Plains Zoo, Sioux Falls, South Dakota c. Joel Sartore, "RARE: Portraits of America's Endangered Species."



Above: Ocelot, *Leopardus pardalis*, photographed at the San Diego Zoo, San Diego, California c. Joel Sartore, "RARE: Portraits of America's Endangered Species."



Above: Nashville Crayfish, *Orconectes shoupi*, photographed at the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, Nashville, Tennessee c. Joel Sartore, "RARE: Portraits of America's Endangered Species."

the museum's publications and promotions specialist, said in an email. "The museum hopes to inspire understanding, appreciation and stewardship of the Earth. That's what RARE is all about."

The exhibit will include specimens from the museum's collections as well as Sartore's portraits. "It's the tip of the iceberg, but maybe we get people thinking a little bit more about the fact that they can turn things around," Sartore said. "I've met several people that have saved species on their own. They've done it by themselves. That's remarkable, isn't it? One person."

### Continuing mission

His "Rare" book features a bald eagle at Sutton Avian Research Center in Bartlesville, a lesser prairie chicken from Laverne and a polar bear at the Tulsa Zoo. He said the book spun off of a story on America's endangered species he did for National Geographic, where he has been a contributor for about 25 years.

"It was really the first story I did for the magazine where I used this black-and-white portrait technique heavily," he said. "We try to show the world what biodiversity looks like, (with) everything on black and white backgrounds. ... It's a great equalizer, isn't it? A mouse is every bit as important as a polar bear."

For the past nine years, Sartore, 52, has taken that technique around the world to build on the Photo Ark, the largest collection of studio-quality animal portraits in the world. Sartore's goal is to capture images of all 10,000 to 12,000 captive animal species on the planet.

Learning from the passenger pigeon's story, he photographs both rare and common creatures since he can't predict what might one day become extinct.

"I think this is a pretty important thing: the future of life on Earth. I think it's pretty important," he said. "it's folly to think that we can doom half of everything to extinction and not have it hurt humanity in a major way."

RARE: Portraits of America's Endangered Species is sponsored by Love's Travel Stops and Country Stores and by a grant from the Norman Arts Council. Brandy McDonnell, also known by her initials BAM, writes stories and reviews on movies, music, the arts and other aspects of entertainment for the Oklahoman and is NewsOK's top blogger.

# Bom Bom's Legacy

BY LAURA WILCOX, PUBLIC RELATIONS

On June 25, 2012, the Oklahoma City Zoo announced the tragic death of Bom Bom the gorilla — a local icon, beloved friend of many and father of three. His passing came as a devastating blow to zoo-lovers and was covered by nearly every major news outlet in the state — The Oklahoma Gazette, KFOR, KWTU and the Oklahoman, among others.

“Bom Bom was such a magnificent animal; his loss will be felt by our entire zoo family,” said Dwight Scott, zoo executive director, shortly after Bom Bom’s death.

Now, nearly two years later, his legacy lives on. The Oklahoma City Zoo donated Bom Bom’s body to the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, and the museum decided to preserve Bom Bom and tell his story, which speaks to the heart of wildlife conservation.

Bom Bom was born at the Audubon Zoo in New Orleans 38 years ago. In 2002, he joined the Oklahoma City Zoo as part of a national breeding program intended to boost the dwindling numbers of western lowland gorillas.

According to Robin Newby, supervisor of apes at the Oklahoma City Zoo, Bom Bom was a great silverback. He understood his role in relation to the group and fostered peaceful relationships among his troop.

In January 2010, Bom Bom was diagnosed with heart disease—a common threat for captive male gorillas. Two years later, after significant weight loss, he suffered a deadly ruptured aneurism in his heart. Although it was the end of his life, it would not be the end of his story.

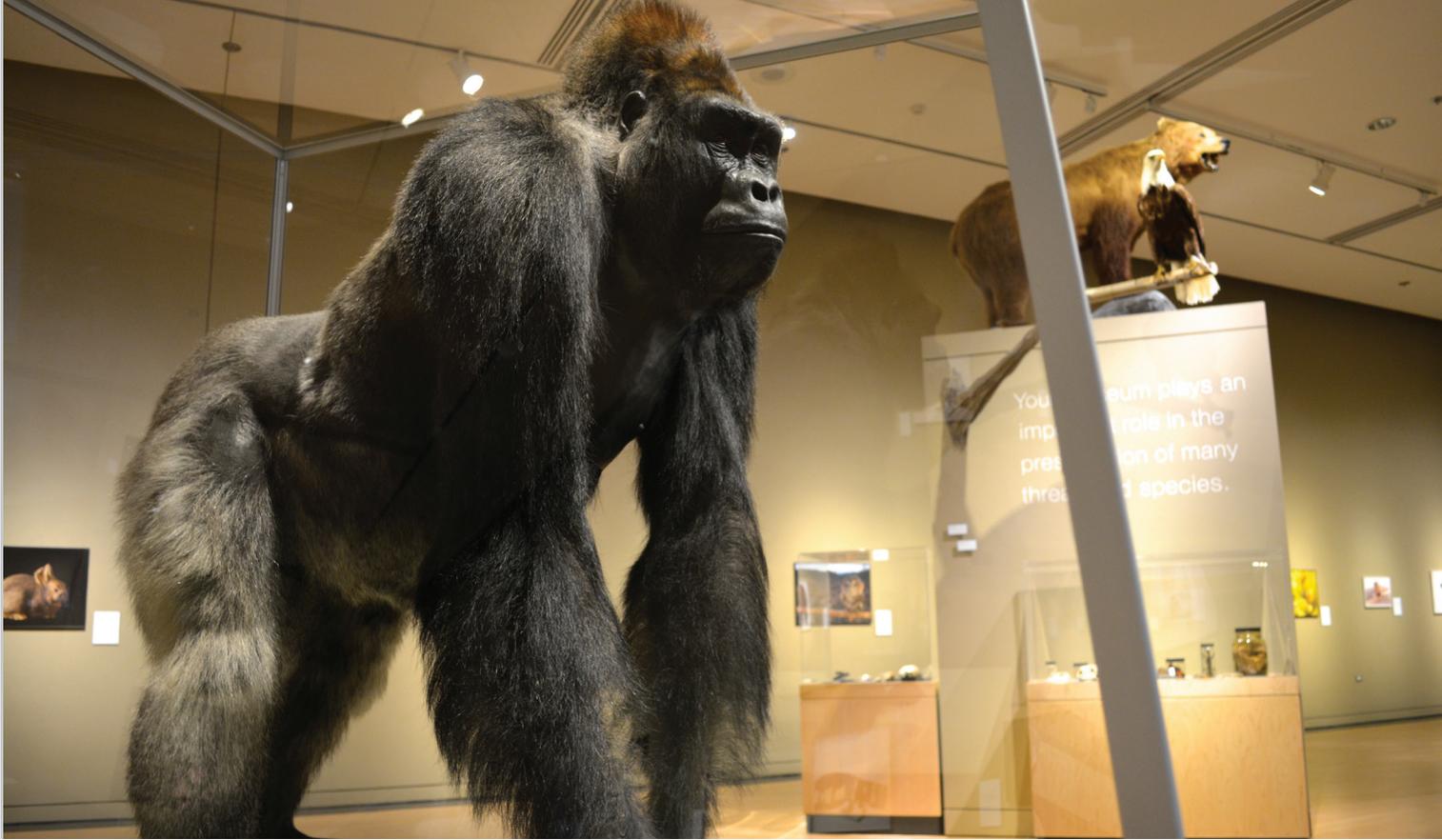


*Above: Bom Bom at the OKC Zoo courtesy of Gillian Lang*

The Sam Noble Museum requested the help of artisan taxidermist Paul Rhymer, who lives near Washington D.C., and has worked for the Smithsonian Institution. Because the specimen was preserved so well by the museum, Rhymer was able to sculpt a stunningly realistic live mount for the museum.

“To ensure this mount was identifiable as Bom Bom, I made molds of his face so we could try to capture the facial features that make him different from other gorillas,” Rhymer said. “From that mold I was able to sculpt a form that was a portrait.”

Bom Bom’s body became an educational vehicle in more ways than one, as his skeleton also left insights for scientists about the way western lowland gorillas age. According to Brandi Coyner, Sam Noble Museum mammalogy curatorial associate, zoo animals live longer than their wild counterparts, which allows scientists to observe effects of aging that seldom occur naturally.



Above: Bom Bom currently exhibited in RARE.

In fact, the Smithsonian has already studied the bones of Bom Bom’s hands and feet and returned these pieces to the museum’s mammalogy collection.

“We could tell by the way he walked he was getting older. The museum helped us understand why and did a great job with him,” Newby said.

Bom Bom also left the zoo staff one final surprise—a son. He had been selectively chosen to mate with one of the zoo’s female gorillas, Kelele. After nearly a decade with no success, Kelele conceived just one month before Bom Bom’s passing. Leom—named after his parents—was born on Valentine’s Day of 2013.

Candice Rennels, manager of marketing and public relations for the Oklahoma City Zoo, said the zoo supports conservation initiatives by working with various organizations and causes such as the Diane Fosse Foundation and the Great Ape Heart Project.

“I think it’s awesome that Bom Bom is going to be a frontrunner of conservation,” Rennels said. “He’s going to be educating for years and years to come, and he has an important story to share.” Rennels also stated that Bom Bom and Leom serve as

“ambassadors for wild relatives” in regard to wildlife conservation as a whole, and the Sam Noble Museum incorporated this belief into Bom Bom’s future.

Bom Bom currently is displayed within *RARE: Portraits of America’s Endangered Species*, a photographic exhibit designed to raise awareness about endangered wildlife in America. Signage displayed beside Bom Bom helps to inform visitors of his purpose, legacy and relevance in preserving biodiversity.

“Bom Bom is an extremely rare gorilla who will continue to influence people’s views on conservation as a part of the Sam Noble Museum’s collections and exhibits,” said museum director Michael Mares. “I decided to prepare him as a mount so that he would carry a message of the fragility of life on Earth in the face of the enormous environmental changes that gorillas, and people, face.”

The Sam Noble Museum invites all Oklahomans to discover a remarkable cause while rediscovering an old, familiar friend. With full support from museum and zoo faculty and staff, the Sam Noble Museum could not be more excited about combining the museum’s legacy of conservation with the life of this locally famous icon.



# Saving the Snot Otter

BY LAURA WILCOX, PUBLIC RELATIONS

If you've never heard of a hellbender, you're certainly not alone. Often called "snot otters" or "old lasagna sides," the hellbender is a large salamander that can grow up to 2.5 feet long. Rivers throughout Missouri, Arkansas and much of the southeastern United States once supported this peculiar species. In fact, nearly 8,000 wild hellbenders once waded in American waterways—but today, fewer than 600 hellbenders exist due to severe habitat modification.

"Most aquatic salamanders have gills, but these don't," herpetology collection manager Jessa Watters explained. "They have flaps running down the side of their bodies to take in more oxygen directly through their skin. If there is silting or pollution in the water, the hellbenders have more of their body to clog than other aquatic species."

Due to this unique anatomy, hellbenders require fast-flowing, unpolluted rivers. The silting that Watters described can be a consequence of damming, which can stir up loose particles in the river and reduce water flow. Silting and other pollutants have caused a rapid decline in the hellbender population in recent years. In fact, current populations are only 30 percent of what they were in 1990.

"We are now seeing species once reported to be healthy but with small recognized ranges becoming exceedingly threatened and rarely encountered in the wild," said

Cameron Siler, herpetology curator. "Recognizing these population trends early and acting immediately to identify critical habitat for protection is necessary for the survival of rare species on our planet."

According to Watters, the most important thing is stabilizing the hellbender population by preventing further decline and fostering conservation research and initiatives. As a near-threatened species identified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the hellbender is protected at a federal level. However, populations will continue to decline unless governmental action also protects undammed rivers. In the meantime, zoos are stepping in to help save the hellbender.

In November of 2011, the Saint Louis Zoo celebrated the world's first captive breeding of hellbenders. The decade-long effort yielded 63 hellbenders. Since then, the Saint Louis Zoo has successfully bred an additional three populations, introducing over 214 new hellbenders to the world. The Saint Louis Zoo's breeding success is an example of effective and applied research, not unlike the practical knowledge developed at natural history museums.

"The more we know about every endangered species, the more we understand what conservation methods work best," Watters said. "The more examples of endangered species that we have, the more we can better protect them in the future."

*Top Right:  
Hellbender.  
Photo courtesy of  
Brian Gratwicke  
<http://goo.gl/bcfh>*

# Firing Back Against Extinction!

BY LAURA WILCOX, PUBLIC RELATIONS



Above: Black-capped Vireo, *Vireo atricapilla* photographed at Fort Hood, Texas c. Joel Sartore, "RARE: Portraits of America's Endangered Species."

The term "endangered" often carries the grimmest connotations, a hopeless diagnosis of inevitable extinction. Fortunately, that is not always the case. With the help of applied research and conservation strategies, many species have rallied to survive. One such example is the black-capped vireo, an endangered songbird that once whistled near Norman, Oklahoma.

In the 1980s, this species suffered a major population decline due to habitat modification. Black-capped vireos rely on dry scrubland habitats, which are maintained by periodic wildfires that clear out vegetation. When these fires are suppressed, scrublands grow into extensive wooded areas and are no longer suitable to the black-capped vireo. Other threats include agricultural development and a pesky parasitic enemy—the brown-headed cowbird.

The female brown-headed cowbird is notorious for abandoning her eggs in the nest of other birds, who then must foster her young. This comes at the expense of the host's own chicks since cowbirds hatch much earlier. At their peak, roughly 80 percent of black-capped vireo nests in Oklahoma and central Texas contained these parasitic eggs, radically limiting their reproductive success.

Sam Noble Museum-affiliated research associate Joe Grzybowski developed a black-capped vireo recovery plan for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Implemented in 1991, the recovery plan included strategies for prescribed burns by land managers, plus new cowbird-trapping techniques. Since then, the black-capped vireo population has successfully grown from around 60 pairs to 4,200 pairs in the Wichita Mountains.

Despite his inspirational success, Grzybowski's work is not done. He currently serves as a co-principal investigator with colleagues from Texas A&M University on a grant from the Joint Fire Science Program of the Bureau of Land Management. Through this grant, scientists hope to develop models of habitat changes created by fires to maximize the effectiveness of fire management strategies. If these strategies are fruitful, it will mean greater reproductive success for the black-capped vireo and other similarly endangered bird species.



Above: A black-capped vireo nest with vireo eggs (white) and a cowbird egg (brown)

# End of the Monarch Reign?

BY LAURA WILCOX, PUBLIC RELATIONS

**E**ndangered species—mighty rhinos, bands of gorillas, roaming elephants, bales of wild sea turtles. Often when we consider conservation, we picture exotic fauna located thousands of miles away. But what about those threatened species living in our own backyards?

The monarch butterfly is a native species in Oklahoma and surrounding states. According to the World Wildlife Fund, it also is a near threatened species—but private collecting, museums and science field trips are not to blame. The biggest influence on the decline of monarchs is the loss of milkweed, a plant that monarch caterpillars consume as they grow. This is due to significant land development. Without milkweed, monarchs cannot complete their life cycle as they morph from a caterpillar into a butterfly.

Every winter, monarch butterflies migrate hundreds of miles. This migration, known as overwintering, is one of nature's most intriguing phenomena. Monarchs use a magnetic understanding of Earth's poles in steering south to escape the cold northern winter. Millions of monarchs migrate from the northern U.S. plains and Canada to a few locations in either Mexico or California, and these butterflies return to the same sites each year. It takes several generations to complete a single migration, and in 1997, it was estimated that 1,200,000 butterflies landed at each individual migration site!

"They have a very strong geographic preference, and it's not exactly known why," explained Andy Boring, recent invertebrates collection manager. "During the overwintering period, you may have hundreds on one tree and none on a tree 20 feet away."

In 1997, those million-plus monarchs settled at multiple locations covering nearly a mile each. Now a mere

200,000 monarchs are overwintering on less than 1/100 of a square mile per site. That's barely larger than six neighborhood homes. Over the past two decades, the monarch population has experienced a 90 percent drop, from roughly 1 billion individuals to just 33 million.

Scientists like Boring track and monitor the populations of monarchs and other invertebrates, studying characteristics, habitats and breeding patterns. In turn, they use this information to develop local and global conservation strategies. Occasionally, they offer counsel on land management decisions that could impact threatened species.

"I think this sort of action-driven research should become more common," Boring said. "I think that it's a local service that most people overlook."

There is something you can do, too. By planting milkweed and other nectar-producing plants in your home garden, you can help foster a successful monarch migration. Milkweed typically blooms in Oklahoma during the month of May, when butterflies migrate through the Sooner state. Milkweed seeds are inexpensive and can be purchased online or seasonally at your local gardening store.

"If enough people planted milkweed in their gardens, it could make a substantial difference," Boring said. "The key is to help this species complete their life cycle."

To help foster a monarch-friendly habitat, you also can refrain from using herbicides that may damage milkweed and other plants. You also may help track populations as a citizen scientist or support existing conservation efforts. Take care to remember the wildlife in need!



*Above: Milkweed flower*

*Right: Monarch butterfly*

“The key is to help this species  
complete their life cycle.”

-Andy Boring, Sam Noble Museum



# Out of the Ashes: The Story of the Sam Noble Museum

BY LAURA WILCOX, PUBLIC RELATIONS



*Above: A university building destroyed by the 1918 fire*

**B**elieve it or not, the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History hasn't always been the pinnacle of preservation and exhibition that it is today. Long before dinovators and the famous bronze mammoth, the museum was little more than the odds and ends of various university collections. The history of the museum is a tale filled with disaster, frustration and never-ending setbacks, but it also is a tale of persistence and passion. It is, quite simply, a tale worth telling.

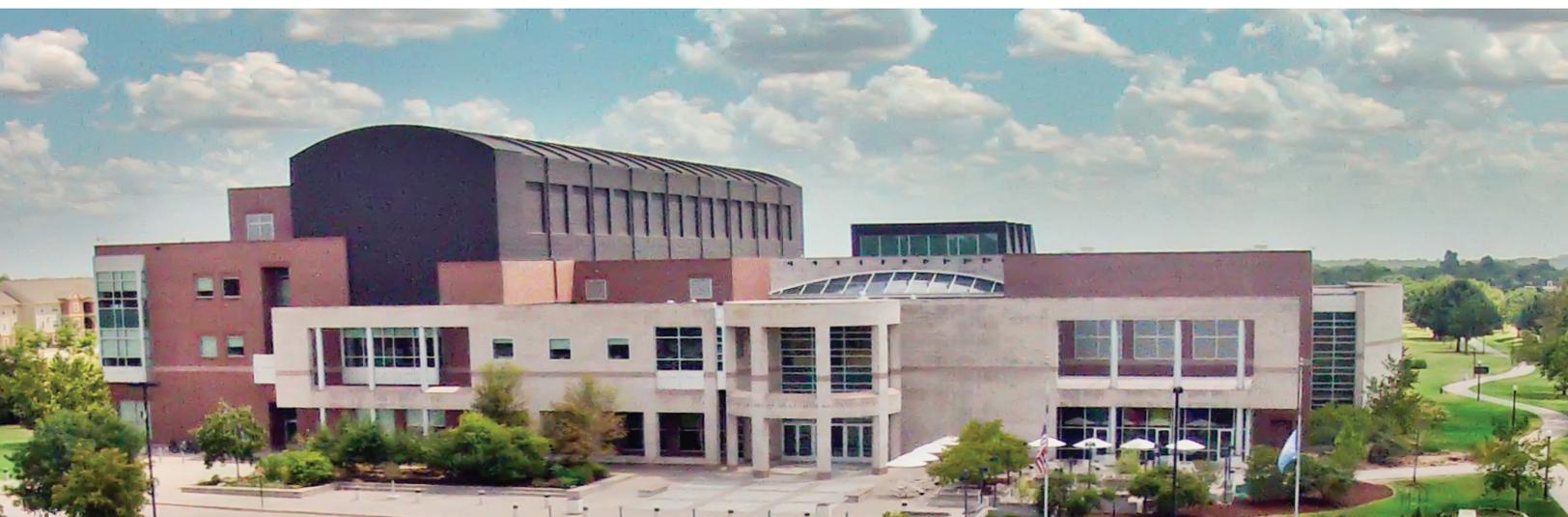
When the University of Oklahoma first began accumulating artifacts and specimens in 1899, the artifacts were housed in a single building that served all administrative and teaching functions. At this point, the museum was nothing more than a loose collection of specimens numbering about 10,000. Tragically, the

administrative building burned down more than once during OU's early history, and nearly all collections were lost in the first fire in 1903.

What little remained of the university's specimens and artifacts then moved between buildings, essentially being stored wherever room could be made. Janet Braun, staff curator at the Sam Noble Museum, said that the collections were moved into Old Science Hall, DeBarr Hall and an unnamed workshop, which was also destroyed by a fire in 1918.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the remainder of the collection passed through a slew of buildings, being stored where possible in attics, basements and under the football stadium. In these conditions and with scarce funds, the artifacts and specimens could not receive the preservation care they needed, nor

*Below: Sam Noble Museum, photo courtesy of Welch Creative*





*Above: J. Willis Stovall, first curator and director of the University of Oklahoma Museum*



*Above: A WPA project in western Oklahoma during the 1930s*

were they available for public viewing. They remained scattered across campus for at least seven decades.

During the Great Depression, a Works Progress Administration effort yielded a large collection of dinosaur fossils. In 1939, J. Willis Stovall, scientific leader of the WPA excavation team, recognized and articulated the university's need for a permanent housing structure for the specimens. In 1943, Stovall became the first curator and director of the University of Oklahoma Museum, part of which was moved into three abandoned Reserve Officers' Training Course buildings.

Despite the exhibit space offered in the ROTC buildings, Stovall still fought for the construction of a new building. In 1953, Stovall passed away, and the museum was renamed the Stovall Museum of Science and History. However, the collection would remain in the same dilapidated buildings for the next half century.

In 1983, Michael Mares became curator of the museum and pushed plans for a museum building, moving its priority rank from number 116 to number 35 on the university's building list. Mares also worked with legislators to change the museum name to the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History. By specifying that the museum specialized in natural history, Mares distinguished the institution as Oklahoma's official natural history museum.

"By removing the Oklahoma history aspect from the title, we would avoid conflict with the state museum in Oklahoma City and the State Historical Society, which dealt primarily with Oklahoma's history since territorial

days," Mares said. "As a museum, we needed to highlight our collections, not those that supplemented another museum in the capital city."

The future of the museum looked promising for once, thanks to a \$5 million bond from the city of Norman and \$15 million from a statewide higher education bond. However, a new building would cost roughly \$42.5 million. Just as Oklahoma supported the museum through the passing of crucial bonds, the people of the state, led by alumni of the university, rallied together to make this visionary project a reality.

"The funds were raised privately, with everything from school children across Oklahoma, to donors large and small," Mares said. "There were several \$1 million donations, and the largest donation was from the various foundations of the Noble family, which ultimately totaled \$10 million. The only thing the Noble family asked was for the museum to be named in honor of Sam Noble, who had passed away while we were building the museum."

The Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History opened on May 1, 2000, and welcomed a record-breaking 62,269 visitors in the first month. Although it took over a century, the fragmented collection that had once been reduced to ash has become one of the state and country's leading natural history museums. The road was long and difficult, but the museum is finally home sweet home.

# The Art of Philanthropy

BY LAURA WILCOX, PUBLIC RELATIONS

From Olympic-level racers to indie musicians, canine rescue trainers to romance novelists, the Sam Noble Museum staff possesses an eclectic array of talent. Impressive as this may be, the way these individuals use their gifts to better local, state and even global communities is perhaps most remarkable of all.

One such example is Coral McCallister. McCallister began working as a custodian at the museum in March of 2014 after moving back to Oklahoma from Arkansas. A lifelong artist, McCallister's eyes are always privy to inspiration—especially amid century-old treasures housed in the museum's collections.

Before long McCallister spotted Bom Bom, a live-mounted Western lowland gorilla acquired from the Oklahoma City Zoo. Although not yet on display, Bom

Bom's natural beauty captivated McCallister and stirred her artistic senses.

"I saw Bom Bom many times in various enclosures at the zoo, and like most of us, I was in awe of him and the wildness he represented to me," McCallister recalled.

McCallister began visiting the mammalogy collection after her shifts to sketch Bom Bom. Meanwhile, mammalogy curatorial associate Brandi Coyner was gathering donations for one of the Oklahoma City Zoo's annual philanthropic events. As soon as she saw McCallister's work, she recognized a perfect fit.

"Teresa Randall is a friend of mine and asked if the museum could donate a family membership to one of their philanthropic events," Coyner said. "When I saw Coral's sketch, I called her back immediately and told her I had something even better."

McCallister's 19-inch-by-24-inch pastel creation took nearly 15 hours to complete. Despite the extensive investment to this piece, McCallister had no reservations about donating her work to Zoobilation, a ZooFriends annual gala and fundraiser for the Joan Kirkpatrick Animal Hospital. For her, art is a currency of the most valuable variety.

"Art has gotten me through some of the hardest times of my life, and it makes life worthwhile," she said. "My brother once told me 'if I didn't have art, I'd be searching for that feeling at the bottom of a bottle.' If a person can do art, for money or not, they've just got to do it."



*Below: Conceptualized Joan Kirkpatrick Animal Hospital, OKC Zoo*

McCallister worked diligently to ensure that her portrait truly captured the essence of Bom Bom, down to the last detail. The piece is entirely black-and-white, with the exception of one of Bom Bom's signature traits—a reddish tuft of hair on the top of his head.

"I couldn't decide if I wanted to do the red on top of his head, or if I wanted the piece to be monochromatic," McCallister explained. "But when I did it, I just knew it had to be there."

Perhaps no one appreciates these minute details more than the sketch's current owner, OKC Zoo head veterinarian Jennifer D'Agostino. McCallister's masterpiece spurred on a bidding war at the Zoobilation silent auction, but D'Agostino was determined to win the sketch. In fact, D'Agostino says she attended the event looking to purchase McCallister's portrait.

"There were several other people bidding on it but none that knew Bom Bom," D'Agostino said. "Once, at the end of a medical procedure, he crashed and almost died. I did CPR on him, and he didn't wake up for about 13 hours. I stayed with him trying to keep him alive. Because of that, I really had a strong connection with him."

D'Agostino's colleagues even helped to keep an eye on the bidding to ensure her success. She plans to hang the picture inside her new office at the hospital, as a reminder of Bom Bom's role as a conservation ambassador for others of this critically endangered species in the wild.

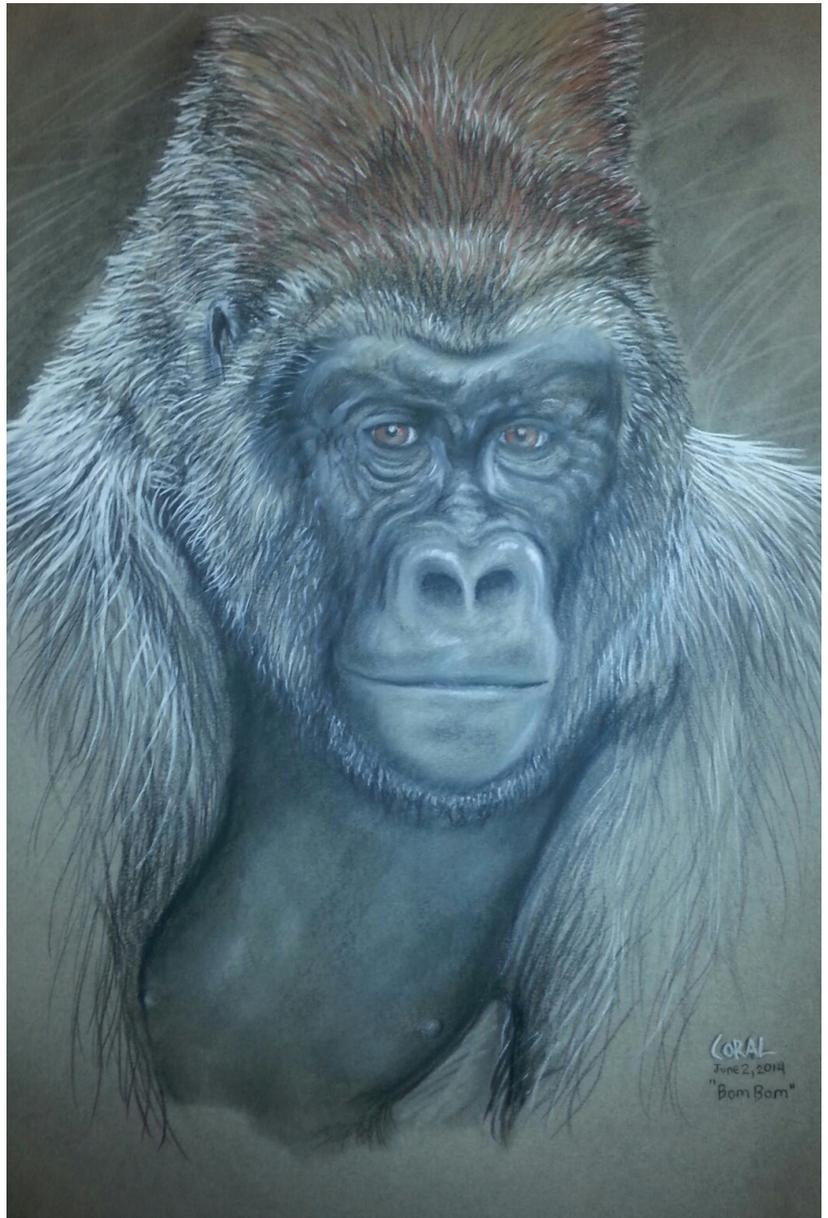
"We're here to get people to see and care about these animals," D'Agostino said. "Conservation is a global effort, but everything we do has an impact on conservation. We can all make a difference, even in Oklahoma."

McCallister's contribution to the 2014 Zoobilation was not her first philanthropic creation, as she previously lent her talents to the Nature Conservancy. McCallister also is a multi-time sculpting champion at

the Norman Chocolate Festival, an annual fundraiser for the Norman Firehouse Art Center.

Like many philanthropists, McCallister's humility is above reproach. For her, art is not about notoriety, monetary gain or even public admiration. Art is a connection—both human and animalistic. In this way, McCallister hopes to continue using her art to engage with others and foster harmony among all species.

"I like feeling tied into everyone else," McCallister said. "Giving back creates a kind of oneness with nature, and it's really a beautiful thing."



*Above: Drawing of Bom Bom by Coral McCallister*

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A taxidermy display featuring a bald eagle perched on a branch and a brown bear standing behind it, both looking upwards. The eagle has a white head and neck, and the bear is a rich brown color. They are positioned on a light-colored wooden structure.

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# Conservation's Unwieldy Path:

*Big Animals in an Increasingly Peopled World*

**Reception and Presentation**

**4:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 6**

The Sam Noble Museum invites the public to enjoy a complimentary reception and presentation from Joel Berger, John J. Craighead Chair and professor of wildlife conservation at the University of Montana.

A Wildlife Conservation Society senior conservation scientist, Berger conducts research across five continents while also working in his own backyard to train local scientists and students. From the impacts of energy development on Yellowstone's pronghorn to wild yak surveys on the Tibetan Plateau, Berger's research spans human-wildlife interactions, long-distance migrations and climate change. He has written four books on wild horses, rhinos, bison and fear in prey species, and co-edited a volume on large carnivores and biodiversity.

His experiences as a wildlife biologist, including research in the Jackson Hole area for more than a decade, led Berger to believe that more effort needs to go into building public involvement in sustaining wildlife and healthy ecosystems.

"I am interested in living in environments where the local community has deemed healthy ecosystems, minimizing impacts, and sustaining wildlife as high priorities," Berger said.

For more information, visit [SamNobleMuseum.org](http://SamNobleMuseum.org).



*Above: Joel Berger during his research on the Tibetan Plateau  
Photo c. Berger Lab — University of Montana*



*Top left: Muskox. Photo c. Berger Lab — University of Montana  
Bottom left: Ibex. Photo c. Berger Lab — University of Montana*



# Sam Noble Museum

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