



Sam Noble Museum

# Tracks

Spring 2012 Newsletter Volume 24, No. 1

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Warrior Spirits:  
*Indigenous Arts of New Guinea*

New Bug Species Discovered

Oklahoma Native American  
Youth Language Fair  
*State of the State*

Museum Curators Retire





## TRACKS, SPRING 2012: VOLUME 24 NO. 1

### MUSEUM INFORMATION

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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

*Editor-in-Chief:* Michael A. Mares

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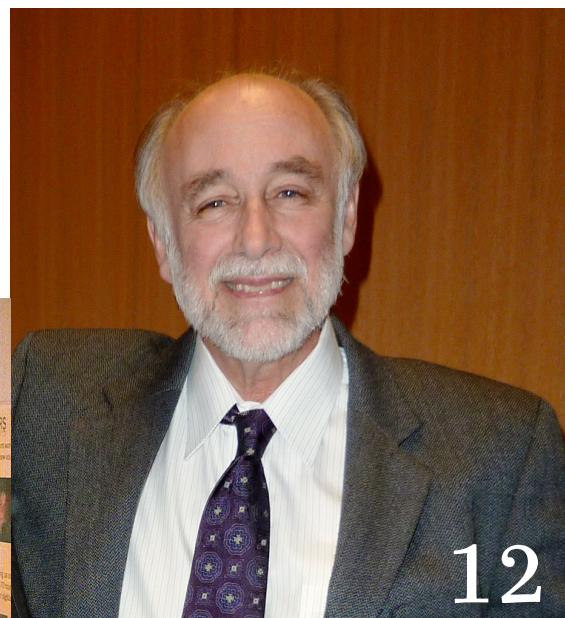
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*Carved object, New Guinea*

PHOTO Hadley Jerman

Thanks to our Corporate Benefactors:



# Dear Friends,



The Sam Noble Museum has a tradition of outstanding exhibits, exciting lectures and workshops, and a variety of special and community events. 2012 will continue this tradition. Warrior Spirits: Indigenous Arts of New Guinea, opening in February, will highlight objects created and used by the indigenous people of present-day Papua New Guinea and West Papua, Indonesia. We again welcome the collaboration with the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art to bring you this exhibit.

This summer, we will host a traveling exhibit, Chinasaurs. Showcasing recently discovered Chinese fossils found nowhere else in the world, this display will make you realize that dinosaurs aren't extinct, but live among us as birds.

This April, we will celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair. Begun in 2003 by Dr. Mary Linn in our Department of Native American Languages, this two-day Fair showcases students and encourages pride in Native languages. This year's theme, "I Am My Language," highlights the relationship between student, language and culture. Special events and guests are planned for the each of the two days, including Miss Indian World 2011-2012, Ms. Marjorie Tahbone. A 2012 calendar featuring the annual winners of the poster art competition has been printed as part of the celebration.

Last year, we had 166,880 visitors, including 79,851 children. Our innovative educational programs continue to be popular and provide unforgettable experiences for all ages. 21,942 students came to the museum on school field trips and the Discovery Room had over 70,000 visitors. ExplorOlogy, one of the finest outreach programs in the nation, reached 8,246 students across the state and provided intensive on-site field classes with scientists and curators for 26 high school and middle school students.

The New Bug Species Discovered article features research by Dr. Katrina Menard, collection manager, recent invertebrates.

Associate Director Peter Tirrell most recently won the Mountain Plains Museum Association's Hugo G. Rodeck Award of Excellence, adding this very special award to so many others over the years.

Finally, 2011 saw the retirement of three of our curators – Dr. Don Wyckoff, Dr. Laurie Vitt and Dr. Janalee Caldwell. Each has had an exceptional career and influence on the museum, collections and students. In this issue you will read about the careers of Drs. Vitt and Caldwell. We wish all of the museum staff who have moved on the best of luck in their retirement or in future careers.

Michael A. Mares, Ph.D.  
Director



# SUMMER EXPLORERS



## NOW REGISTERING!

REGISTRATION BEGINS: MONDAY, JAN. 23

REGISTRATION DEADLINE: MONDAY, MAY 13

### TO ENROLL:

Please call the  
Education Department,  
(405) 325-1008.



Sam Noble Museum  
THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

## Museum Welcomes New Registrar



The museum is happy to welcome Lindsay Palaima as the new registrar. Palaima attended Lake Forest College, majoring in sociology and anthropology. She received a master of arts in museum studies, with a focus on collections management, from San Francisco State University. As registrar at the museum, she will oversee the documentation, safety and security of objects within the museum's care and assist with the development and implementation of collection policies and procedures. Her role also will support the research division with maintenance of collections documentation, deeds of gifts, accessions, appraisals, permits and loans.

# Warrior Spirits: Indigenous Arts of New Guinea

BY JEN TREGARTHEN, PUBLIC RELATIONS

A new exhibit at the Sam Noble Museum will explore the diverse cultures of Papua New Guinea. **Warrior Spirits: Indigenous Arts of New Guinea** opens Feb. 4 and runs through May 13.

Warrior Spirits: Indigenous Arts of New Guinea features nearly 100 objects from the permanent collections of the Sam Noble Museum and the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. The objects were created and used by the indigenous peoples of present-day Papua New Guinea and West Papua, Indonesia.

Daggers carved from the bones of cassowary birds – a large flightless bird native to New Guinea and prized for its aggressive territorial nature – are displayed along with carved shields, war-clubs, spears and bows and arrows.

The exhibit showcases a variety of cultural objects, including masks, drums and ceremonial garments, many of which were collected in the 1970s during surveys assessing petroleum and mineral resources. U.S. soldiers also contributed items collected while Allied Forces manned listening stations in New Guinea during World War II.

The island of New Guinea is one of the most diverse places in the world, with more than 850 distinct languages spoken and hundreds of cultural groups. The people of Papua New Guinea are mostly descendants

of Melanesians, closely related to the islanders of Fiji, New Caledonia and Vanuatu.

Warrior Spirits: Indigenous Arts of New Guinea reflects the diversity of the region, highlighting such ceremonial traditions as the dramatic fire dances practiced in the Highlands of West Papua and the ritualized veneration of ancestors among the Sepik River groups of New Guinea. Augmented with maps, graphics, and audio and video elements, this exhibit allows visitors a glimpse into the fascinating world of New Guinea.

*At right: Carved wooden ancestor figure.  
Below: Ceremonial fire dance with dance mask.  
Photo courtesy of Taylor Bainings.*



*Splash Board and  
Canoe Prow ornament,  
Trobrian Island.*







“Warrior Spirits  
reflects the  
diversity of the  
island regions.”

# Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair: I Am My Language

BY JEN TREGARTHEN, PUBLIC RELATIONS

The Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair will take place April 2 and 3, marking 10 years of commitment to the support, education and promotion of Oklahoma Native languages. Students and teachers from across Oklahoma gather at the Sam Noble Museum to celebrate language diversity in Oklahoma and the United States.

The fair draws hundreds of students, families, volunteers, and university and tribal communities. The students who participate in the fair come from over 70 language classes, including public schools, home schools, community classes and tribal language programs. The number of attendees and contest submissions increases each year.

Hosted this year by Native Networks co-chair Ryan Red Corn, the fair honors these students and their teachers by giving them an opportunity to publicly present their languages. The 10th Native American Youth Language Fair promises to bring many new and exciting elements, including a guest appearance from 2011-2012 Miss Indian World, Marjorie Tahbone.

Poetry read by poet Tohono O'odham and linguist Ofelia Zepeda will kick off the fair's poetry contest, new this year.

"Poetry encourages students to communicate even when they have very little language," says Mary Linn,

curator of Native languages. "It allows for depth and feeling to be incorporated into the students recitals, without the need for fluency."

Each participant also will receive a 2012 Native Languages Calendar, commemorating the 10th anniversary of the fair and featuring artwork by previous fair winners. The calendar incorporates the name of the months, days of the week and moon chart in a variety of native languages.

How to Kits, inspired by Northwest Territories Literacy and created by the museum, will be distributed to every student and teacher. The goal of the kits is to encourage language use among the family and community and teach second language speakers ways to incorporate native languages in everyday life through activities and games.

The importance of the fair and, for that matter, the continued use of the languages is to ensure that tribal cultures are instilled in Oklahoma's youth.





Oklahoma's native languages are severely endangered. Of Oklahoma's 39 Native languages, 21 languages have no fluent first-language speakers. Many languages only have elderly first-language speakers, and with the exception of Kickapoo, none have a population of children acquiring the language naturally in the home or who are fully bilingual in all or most situations.

However, while Oklahoma is losing first-language speakers, we are gaining a small but growing number of young adult second-language learners who are active in language revitalization with the museum's public programs and in cultural and private spheres.

The Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair emphasizes the value of written and oral literacy, and helps to produce the next generation of writers, storytellers and artists in Native communities. As the fair grows each year, so does the knowledge of the importance of language diversity and its contribution to Oklahoma's rich cultural heritage.

Registration for the 2012 Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair opened in January. Any student from grades pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade who is learning a Native American language at any skill level is invited to participate. For more information, contact Mary Linn, (405) 325-7588 or visit [www.snomnh.ou.edu](http://www.snomnh.ou.edu).



*At Left: 2011 poster winner. Artist Cree Drowning Bear*

*Above: Riverside Indian School Apache Club.*

*Top: Glenpool High School*

*Bottom: Cherokee Nation Immersion School*

*View of Acordatus*

# New Species Discovered

BY JEN TREGARTHEN, PUBLIC RELATIONS

**T**he Sam Noble Museum's collection manager for Recent Invertebrates, Dr. Katrina Menard, has become an expert taxonomist on Australian and Indo-Pacific Miridae, or plant bugs.

"Miridae are called plant bugs because the majority of species are found only on one-to-two specific plants," says Menard. "They use the plants for both food and to complete different parts of their life cycle."

Menard, a specialist on a Miridae group called the Leucophoropterini, or Leuco, spent years investigating the relationships between the over 800 potential species recently discovered in Australia and the Indo-Pacific through an ongoing research project called the Plant Bug Planetary Biodiversity Inventory. Before

Menard, little effort had been made in more than 30 years to research the species.

Many species have an attractive deep red or burgundy coloration on their wings and often with a white-stripe across the middle. Others, though, have modifications to mimic ants such as a constriction of the sides of the wings and body to mimic an ant petiole and bunches of hairs on the wings to mimic spines found on the ant body.

"I realized that what defined Leucophoropterini was not a clear answer," Menard said.

Most of the ant-mimicking taxa are found in the tropical regions of Australia and Papua New Guinea, which roughly corresponds to areas with some of the highest ant diversity as well. Many species are also thought to be at least partially predacious, feeding on other soft-bodied insects.

Recently, Menard revealed the existence of 20 new insect species indigenous to Australia and the Indo-Pacific region.

Menard's dissertation focused on the commonalities of the existing members of the Leuco and where the newly discovered species from Australia fit in the known diversity. Her dissertation included descriptions of the Leucophoropterini species new to science.



*Comparison between  
Araf and Ant.*





*View of Aneboisi.*

It was this last aspect of her dissertation that was recently published with Ph.D. co-adviser and fellow expert Randall Schuh in the Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History. Included in the work were Menard's 20 new species described from both Australia and the Indo-Pacific, including the unusual species *Waterhouseana delicata* from Papua New Guinea, which has an unusual flat head that mimics the shape of an ant head, with dense hairs on the underside, thought to aid in sensing prey while feeding, and the *Ausejanus tiramisu*, which was named after the famous Italian cake due to the unique banding pattern on the wings appearing like the layers of ladyfingers.

In addition to the recently collected Australian species of the PBI project, several new species of Leucophoropterini from Papua New Guinea also were identified in collections from the Bishop Museum and Belgian Natural History Museums. Most scientists still rely on the historical material stored in natural history collections for their research.

Most of the species of Leucophoropterini described from the Indo-Pacific are based on specimens collected more than 50 years ago, by individuals who were able to consistently travel there. Recent strides to survey the island by the Belgian Museum of Natural History have provided some material for the recently described species in Menard and Schuh's work. However, as many of the habitats in the Indo-Pacific become degraded by human activity, collections such as the ones held at the Belgian Museum of Natural History are becoming increasingly valuable.

Menard hopes to continue studying the Leucophoropterini, and is looking to describe even more species in the group in the future. She especially is interested in doing more work with species from Papua New Guinea. Because ant-mimicking body forms appear to have evolved multiple times in unrelated groups, Menard will continue to collaborate with Schuh in looking at the Miridae as a whole.

"Is it the plants they feed on? Or is it something else in the environment that would make ant-mimicry a beneficial system for them?" asks Menard. "Current science still doesn't know, and that is what makes it interesting."



*Menard conducting fieldwork for the project.*

# Museum Curators Retire After 21 years

BY JEN TREGARTHEN, PUBLIC RELATIONS

The Sam Noble Museum said “Adios” and “Boa Sorte” to Curator of Reptiles Laurie Vitt and Curator of Amphibians Janalee Caldwell in December. Both began working when the museum was housed in the old Stovall building and were among the original employees who made the transition to the new state-of-the-art facility. The herpetology team has added a dynamic to the museum that will be dearly missed.

After 21 years of exceptional service, Vitt is retiring from the museum to focus on his research on the biology of reptiles in Latin America. He and Caldwell have published a very popular herpetology textbook used in many courses in the United States and other countries, and they will continue to work on future editions of the book.

Vitt and Caldwell worked in the Brazilian Amazon and Cerrado regions for many years. Their research in Brazil produced many published studies and brilliant photographs of some of the country's most colorful wildlife.

In the 1980's, Vitt was elected to the Brazilian Academy of Sciences, his most esteemed recognition. In 2003, his excellent work in herpetology resulted in his selection as a George Lynn Cross Research Professor,

the highest research award given by the University of Oklahoma. In 2007, Vitt received the Distinguished Alumnus Award at Western Washington University.

Throughout his career, Vitt has published hundreds of scientific papers and many well-received reference books, including *Lizards: Windows to the Evolution of Diversity*, co-authored with Eric Pianka, which received two book awards. His top five publications have been cited over 2,000 times.

One of Vitt's most fascinating discoveries was a South American live-bearing lizard, the skink, also known as *Mabuya heathi*. The skink is unique among reptiles in that females ovulate tiny ova when they themselves are juvenile in size and only a couple of months old. Delayed embryonic growth allows these females to grow large enough to accommodate developing embryos when they increase in size.

Caldwell plans to continue her research on the ecology and systematics of amphibians during retirement. Both she and Vitt plan to become involved in local environmental and diversity issues.

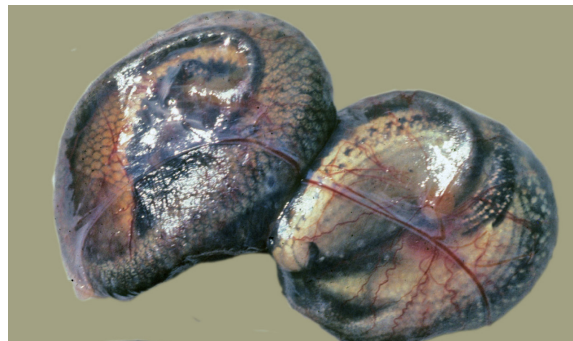
During her 21 years at the museum, Caldwell's research in the Brazilian Amazon resulted in the



Vitt, 2011.



The skink, *Mabuya heathi*.



Full term embryos of *Mabuya heathi*, just after parturition.





*Vitt and Caldwell, 2011.*

discovery of many new frog species and documented interesting aspects of the ecology and behavior of amphibians.

“My discovery of a species of poison frog that has pair bonding, which is common in birds but almost unknown in frogs, was one of the most exciting things to figure out,” says Caldwell.

In 2004, she was presented the University of Oklahoma Regents’ Award for Superior Accomplishment in Research and Creative Activity, and in 2010, she was named Distinguished Alumna of Miami High School, in Miami, Okla.

“All of her life’s work has contributed to a better understanding of the biology of frogs,” says museum Director, Michael Mares. “Her work has led to the discovery of frogs that are new to science and has teased apart the intricacies of the co-evolution of frogs, plants and insects in the Amazon Rain forest.”

Additionally, her work has helped fight the disappearance of frogs on a global scale.

When asked about their fondest memories, both Vitt and Caldwell looked back on the move to the newly established Sam Noble Museum as one of the most exciting times.

“We spent many years anticipating the new building



*Hyloxalus chlorocraspedus, a new species of Amazonian poison frog described by Janalee Caldwell. The frog is transporting its tadpoles on its back.*



*Vitt and Caldwell, 1993.*

and the move,” says Caldwell. “It was very exciting to finally make the move. The activities of Opening Day were memorable, including the evening dinner, which had a surreal atmosphere.”

Both curators served on numerous committees during the construction phase of the museum, notably committees to present preliminary designs for exhibits and to plan how the collection spaces would look and function.

Herpetology Collection Manager Jessa Watters recalls the significant work Caldwell and Vitt did to establish best practices in collection care. The herpetology collection was one of the first to improve quality of specimen labeling by replacing handwritten labels with thermal printed labels. This method has now been adopted by many museums.

“Together, they have been one of the most remarkable couples to study reptiles and amphibians,” says Mares, “and they’ve been outstanding curators.”

As academics they were accomplished, as curators they were highly respected, and as members of the community, they will be missed. Congratulations and best of luck in your future endeavors!



*Caldwell, 2011.*

# Museum Celebrates Associate Director's Award

BY JEN TREGARTHEN, PUBLIC RELATION



*MPMA President, Jay Smith, left, presenting award to Peter Tirrell.*

**P**eter Tirrell, associate director of the Sam Noble Museum at the University of Oklahoma, has been named the 2011 recipient of the Mountain-Plains Museums Association's Hugo G. Rodeck Award of Excellence for significant service to the museum field within the region.

Named for one of the founders of the association, the Rodeck Award is given infrequently and only in recognition of long and very distinguished service. Recipients are noted for their contributions to the field of state, provincial and local history, art, anthropology or natural history, and are recognized nationally as leaders in the profession.

"I was a maverick," says Tirrell of joining the MPMA. "They allowed me to test out my ideas. It is the association's friendly, nurturing environment that helped shape my life, and I am honored to receive such a distinguished award."

Tirrell served a pivotal and formative role in the strategic planning, design and development of the \$45 million project for the new 195,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility that today houses the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History. He has long been a member of the Oklahoma Museums Association and served as vice president and president of the association in addition to serving on the program committee and local arrangement committee for the annual conference.

Tirrell has served as board member for the American Association of Museums and president for the Association of College and University Museums and Galleries. In addition to his duties at the museum, Tirrell serves as adjunct professor, Museum Studies Program Online, for the OU College of Liberal Studies. In 2008, he was awarded the Kenneth E. Cook Faculty Award for his excellence in teaching.

In the words of a colleague, "What he has learned he has shared and what he has shared has benefitted us all."

In addition to Tirrell's recognition, the museum received first place in the MPMA Publication Design Competition for the "Sam Noble Educator's Guide 2010-2011" in the category of brochures and rack cards for institutional budgets of \$250,000 and above.

An Award of Merit was awarded to the Sam Noble Museum in the Publication Design Competition for "Logo/Stationery Promotional Packet" in the category of invitations, development or promotional package for institutional budgets of \$250,000 and above.

MPMA President Jay Smith announced the awards during the association's annual meeting in Helena, Mont., Oct. 17-21.





# Volunteer of the Year

Michael Laing has been recognized as the 2012 recipient of the Tom Siegenthaler Volunteer of the Year Award. Mike has served the museum for almost 12 years and is both a docent in the Hall of Ancient Life and a volunteer for Vertebrate Paleontology. In all, he has donated more than 3,100 hours to the .

The recipient of this award represents our volunteer core as a whole in the community and exemplifies what it means to be a Sam Noble Museum volunteer. Nominations from staff and volunteers are submitted to the Volunteer of the Year Committee, which is composed of previous Volunteer of the Year Award-winners.

The museum is proud to have volunteers like Mike, and we congratulate him on receiving this award and for his unwavering support of the museum.

## Science in Action

Join friends, family and visitors from 1 to 5 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 26, for Science in Action and Object I.D. Day at the Sam Noble Museum. Curators and staff from the Sam Noble Museum, as well as experts from a variety of other organizations, will come together to investigate mystery objects of all kinds from the private collections of people from across the state. Everything from bones and rocks to Native American objects and languages are brought in to the museum on this day for the experts to ponder over, identify and explain.

Museum staff will be available to make identifications and answer questions. Each department will have a number of objects on view from their collection to serve as “show and tell” for visitors. To learn more about Science in Action and Object I.D. Day, call (405) 325-4712, or visit the museum’s website at [www.snomnh.ou.edu](http://www.snomnh.ou.edu).

## Spring Break Escape

The Sam Noble Museum offers opportunities for exploration and fun on a budget at “Spring Break Escape,” Monday, March 19 through Friday, March 23. Each day, the museum will offer a host of presentations, programs and activities, all free with paid museum admission.

Activities will include outdoor nature walks, crafts and demonstrations; informal chat sessions with museum staff featuring objects from collections or live animals; as well as song, dance, story times, face painting and more.

Most programs are geared for families with children ages 4 and up. Though all programs are free with museum admission, space is limited in some. Passes for these programs may be picked up at the museum information desk the day of the event. All programs will be filled on a first-come basis.



# Sam Noble Museum

The University of Oklahoma  
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## Coming soon!

*Chinasaurus*  
On exhibit June 1 through  
Sept. 16, 2012.