



Sam Noble Museum

# TRACKS

Spring 2019 Newsletter Vol. 31, No. 1



Photo by  
Jim des Rivières

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## MUSEUM INFORMATION

Address:  
Sam Noble Museum  
The University of Oklahoma  
2401 Chautauqua Ave.  
Norman, OK 73072-7029

Telephone: (405) 325-4712

Email: [pr.samnoblemuseum@ou.edu](mailto:pr.samnoblemuseum@ou.edu)

Web: [SamNobleMuseum.ou.edu](http://SamNobleMuseum.ou.edu)

## 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: Daniel C. Swan  
Managing Editor: Brittany Belli  
Design: Wilson Tharp

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# FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear members,

In this issue of Tracks, we continue our transition to digital publication and communication at the Sam Noble Museum. We are working to take full advantage of the format, incorporating dynamic elements and layers of information to accommodate the different agendas of our membership. Our goal is to create a highly engaging publication that provides direct access to stories and information. We appreciate your patience as we grow into this format.

In this new year we have much to celebrate at the museum. We recently hosted a members preview of our new exhibition, Winged Tapestries: Moths at Large. Members gathered in the Pleistocene Plaza for a reception and then enjoyed a talk in the Great Hall by Jim des Rivières, the artist/photographer who created the wonderful images on display. We enjoyed des Rivières' discussion of the natural history of moths and his unique approach to wildlife photography. I invite you to exercise your member benefits and visit this beautiful exhibition.

We welcome Dahiana Arcila, Ph.D., to the museum as assistant curator of ichthyology and assistant professor of biology. Dr. Arcila's hire brings our collections and research division to full staffing with 12 faculty and staff curators. Her research is focused on evolutionary fish biology, accessing both molecular and paleontological data to address a broad range of issues in classification and diversification.

Marc Levine, Ph.D., assistant curator of archaeology and assistant professor of anthropology, is a 2019 recipient of a prestigious Humanities Faculty Fellowship from the OU Humanities Forum. The museum and the Humanities Forum co-hosted a panel discussion in February. Levine's research team shared insights into their use of advanced imaging technologies in a reassessment of the history of the archaeological site Monte Alban in Oaxaca, Mexico. For more information, please visit <https://montealban.oucreate.com/>.

Our education department announced the release of a series of enhanced family and student programs. Super Saturday Programs, Adults Only Night at the Museum, Spring Break Camp, expanded birthday parties and Summer Explorer Day Camps highlight our new offerings. As members, you receive priority enrollment and reduced fees for these incredible museum programs. Visit <https://samnoblemuseum.ou.edu/education-2/> for more information and registration.

I thank those members who responded to our annual campaign in December. Your generosity supports our ability to subsidize school field trips, circulate our discovery kits to schools in every county in Oklahoma and host the annual Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair. Members lead our museum in many ways and I hope to see you at the museum as we move through our exciting spring season.

Cheers,

Daniel Swan, Ph.D.

Interim Director





# *Winged Tapestries:*

## **MOTHS AT LARGE**

A TRAVELLING EXHIBITION FEATURING  
THE ART OF JIM DES RIVIÈRES

**VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH EXHIBIT  
ARTIST JIM DES RIVIÈRES**







FROM THE FIELD

# CONSERVATION IS CRUCIAL

*Brown with local Filipinos*

Two graduate students from the herpetology department at the Sam Noble Museum are researching different species of reptiles and the importance of their conservation.

Initially from China, Kai Wang is currently pursuing his doctorate in evolutionary biology at the University of Oklahoma. He first became involved with herpetology research when he was an undergraduate intern studying reptile and amphibian diversity in Tibet. After he completed his internship and master's thesis, he continues to return to Tibet for two to three months each summer to conduct field research.

"The majority of my research focuses on the fundamental question of validity," says Wang. "I do taxonomy and systematics to describe new species, and using that fundamental information, I ask evolutionary questions pertaining to genes."

Wang studies the effect that paleo-geological events have on the evolution of lizards, paying special attention to any gene changes. If the lizards are not changing genes, he examines why. Throughout his research, Wang has discovered between 10 and 15 new species of snakes, frogs and lizards. His discoveries of new species go hand-in-hand with conserving them.

"A lot of things that people see every day may not have a proper scientific name, especially in less developed parts of the world where scientific research may be lagging,"

says Wang. "That's because they haven't been fully discovered yet, and that's actually a serious issue. If you don't put a proper name on a species, you can't protect them, give them a conservation status or protect their habitat."

Wang's research focuses in particular on an endangered lizard called the mountain dragon. Due to a lack of technology and study on the species in general, it was thought that only one single species existed.

"Through research, we found that there are at least 15 different species comprised under one umbrella, and that each species is micro-endemic, meaning they have a really small population," says Wang. "Their habitat overlaps greatly with human development, and zero consideration has been given to habitat conservation."



*Diploderma new species*

Part of Wang's latest research paper considers assessments by international conservation organizations for the species he's discovered. The paper discusses how likely the lizards are to be threatened over the next 10 years and what conservation efforts can be made.

"Conservation plays a large role and I am passionate about it," says Wang.

Joey Brown is also familiar with conservation efforts. He is working towards his master's degree in biology at OU, specifically focusing on ecology and conservation of the critically endangered Philippine crocodile (*Crocodylus mindorensis*). He's been working in the Philippines since 2009, but more recently spent nearly all of 2018 as a Fulbright Research Scholar and National Geographic Explorer studying Philippine crocodiles through GPS and satellite tracking devices, along with field surveys.

"With a declining population and only about 100-200 Philippine crocodiles remaining in the wild, it's not only the most threatened crocodile species (out of 26 total), but it's one of the most endangered animals on our planet," says Brown. "In order to protect and ensure a sustainable population for any species, you must understand how these animals live in the wild and what environmental factors are needed for them to thrive."

A major part of his research also includes working with local Filipinos through community-based conservation efforts. Due to habitat destruction from farming and the expansion of human settlements, very little natural habitat remains for the Philippine crocodile. Brown collaborates with a Filipino non-governmental organization, The Mabuwaya Foundation, that is leading



*Pseudocalotes*



*Children holding a baby Philippine crocodile*

the way to promote crocodile conservation through community outreach, education and research focused on the recovery of the wild population.

The Mabuwaya Foundation also offers incentives to the rural communities of the northern Philippine villages: villages that help protect the crocodiles and surrounding wetlands receive cash rewards, much-needed school supplies, wells for easier water access and land management information.

"They have enlightened many people to treat their villages as crocodile sanctuaries," says Brown. "A lot of farmers now know the species is legally protected, but they also appreciate and respect conservation efforts to save this unique, flagship species living right in their backyard."

Brown and the Mabuwaya Foundation also understand the next generation will need to continue their work in order to save the species from extinction.

"Working with the local kids is essential; they're going to become the farmers taking over this land someday," says Brown. "Empowering these local communities and getting the kids excited and passionate about crocodiles is one of the most rewarding parts of our work, and it gives us hope and inspiration for the future."



# RE-VISITING TRADITIONS

by Christina Naruszewicz

The museum recently initiated the re-installation of the ethnology section of the Hall of the People of Oklahoma gallery. The gallery traces the history of Native peoples in the state of Oklahoma from 30,000 years ago to the present. As the hall transitions into the 19th and 20th centuries, the Sam Noble Museum uses ethnographic objects including clothing, toys and other things to demonstrate change, innovation and continuity in Native American material culture through time. Recent additions to the hall aim to expand this discussion into the 21st century by exploring the intersection of popular

Many of the works display influences from family and tribal histories. The piece by Tom Farris (Otoe-Missouria, Cherokee) is inspired by traditional Otoe-Missouria war clubs. His war club, “Pedal to the Metal,” incorporates pieces of Pontiac automobile parts, including a hood ornament. The Pontiac car company took its name from a war chief of the Odawa tribe. Farris describes his decision to include the hood ornament with a stylized portrait of Pontiac, saying, “by adding his image to a ball-headed war club, I am reclaiming his humanity, Indigenous identity and history...”



*Painted skateboard deck by Micah “Werewolf Micah” Wesley (Kiowa, Muscogee-Creek)*

American culture and traditional Native American art forms. The updated hall now includes contemporary works in diverse media and techniques including painting, photography, beadwork, jewelry and ceramics. Many of these artworks function as important statements of self-representation and address a broad set of topics and themes at the center of contemporary Native American life including cultural appropriation, pervasive stereotypes and contemporary youth culture.

Karin Walkingstick’s (Cherokee) work, “Games People Play,” explores the importance of conversation through game play in dispelling stereotypes about Native Americans. The art piece is a painted ceramic board game with hand-crafted game pieces. The game’s Monopoly™-inspired pathways are illustrated with stereotypical representations of Native Americans drawn from popular movies and television programs. Anita Fields, “It’s a Bucket with a Lid on It,” is a white ceramic pail emblazoned with the Osage word, “ha non tze” (how



*Quanah Parker Bracelet, Beaded Leather Marcus Amerman, Choctaw*

much is it?) in bold, sky blue lettering. Field’s discussion of the piece refers to the time her grandmother and aunt had an uncomfortable encounter in a retail store in Tulsa, Okla. The piece speaks to pervasive misconceptions about Native American capacities and abilities to navigate modern life in the dominant society. These stereotypes are an assault on the integrity and intelligence of Native people.

The hall also introduces the role of skateboarding in contemporary Native American youth culture, represented by a painted skateboard deck by Micah “Werewolf Micah” Wesley (Kiowa, Muscogee-Creek) and a pair of painted Vann’s™ by Garrett Etsitty (Navajo). Skateboarding has solidified its place in Native American culture, particularly with Native youth living on reservations and in urban areas. Many reservation communities have multiple skateboarding parks and host competitions. In many ways the sport has created a new avenue to explore traditional practices, with native youth

and young adults creating new fashion trends, art, music and films inspired by the sport.

Among the colorful beadwork and jewelry pieces in the new display are representations of some familiar pop culture icons including Hello Kitty™, Sponge Bob Square Pants™ and The Simpsons™, rendered in the traditional techniques of beading and stone-on-stone inlay. Some more famous faces can be found in the beaded cuff bracelets by Choctaw artist Marcus Amerman. The ethnology department has recently acquired three of Amerman’s beaded bracelets. In two of the bracelets, the faces of Oklahoma’s Jim Thorpe and Quanah Parker look back at the viewer, expertly crafted in glass seed beads. These beaded works draw from a tradition of beaded craftsmanship that began with the European import of glass “see” beads in the mid 19th century. Today, these same techniques are used to create the inspired dance sets, bracelets and necklaces currently on display.

A focal point in the re-installed gallery is a series of four, large-format photographs by Tom Fields (Muskogee/ Cherokee). These images capture moments in the sacred, secular, political, patriotic lives of contemporary Native peoples and their communities. The next phase of the gallery reinstallation will incorporate works from the 1960s and 70s executed in traditional genres by Native American artists from Oklahoma.

Native American culture does not exist in a vacuum and its traditions are not static. Everyday, Native American people interact with the modern world as members of the larger American society. They watch television, attend sporting events and follow fashion trends. With the new additions to the Hall of the People of Oklahoma gallery, the ethnology department hopes that families and guests will discuss the impact of history and tradition on Native American art.



*Beadwork display including pop culture icon Hello Kitty™*



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