



COPROLITE

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Coprolite is the newsletter of the Geological Curators' Group, compiled and produced by Lu Allington-Jones, Senior Conservator at the Natural History Museum, London. Contributions from everyone are welcomed, and should be sent to the Newsletter Editor (coprolite@geocurator.org) by the appropriate deadline:

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Events

Webinars

The Geological Society of London is hosting 2022: The Year of Sustainability. Check out their website for details. <https://www.geolsoc.org.uk/sustainability22>

SedsOnline is an online webinar series sponsored by the International Association of Sedimentologists. They have a webinar every Wednesday at 4pm BST, as well as regular communal Coffee Breaks <https://sedsonline.com/events/>

Conferences and Events

The 11th European Palaeobotany and Palynology Conference will be held as an in-person meeting in Stockholm, 19th – 22nd June 2022. <https://jirango.com/cms/web/4b67cbd5?lang=eng>

Western Society of Malacologists 55th Annual Meeting – Fossil Molluscan Papers in Memory of Louella R. Saul, is due to take place at Pasadena City College, Pasadena, California, between 23rd and 26th June 2022. <http://westernsocietymalacology.org/>

The 19th European Association of Vertebrate Palaeontology conference will take place in Benevento, Italy, as well as online, between 27th June and 1st July 2022. The registration deadline is 15th June 2022. <https://2022eavp.wixsite.com/eavp2022>

The 22nd International Multidisciplinary Scientific GeoConference: Surveying, Geology and Mining, Ecology and Management conference (SGEM 2022) will take place 2nd – 11th July 2022 at the SPA Albena Complex, near Varna city, Bulgaria. <https://sgem.org/index.php>

The 12th International Conference on Modern and Fossil Dinoflagellates will take place 4th – 8th July 2022. <https://dino12conference.com/>

The annual meeting of the Palaeontological Association has moved, with pre-conference workshops and tours from 18th – 20th July and post-conference field trips on the 23rd and 24th July. <https://www.palass.org/>

The Open University Geological Society is hosting a symposium The Weald and Beyond 5th – 7th August 2022. https://ougs.org/events/?branch_code=lon

The European Geosciences Union's Galileo Conference The Warm Pliocene: Bridging the Geological Data and Modelling Communities is taking place in Leeds between 23rd and 26th August 2022. <https://www.egu-galileo.eu/gc10-pliocene/>

The exhibition Titus: T. rex is King is open at Wollaton Hall until the 31st August 2022. More information can be found here. <https://wollatonhall.org.uk/titus/>

NatSCA, the University of Cambridge Museums, Manchester Museum, and the British Society for the History of Science have launched a project called Environment and Empire Workshop – in the Museum. There are several videos available and a workshop 1st September 2022. <https://collections-research.lib.cam.ac.uk/research-growth-networks/environment/environment-and-empire/workshop>

The Challenger Society Conference 2022, marking the 150th anniversary of the Challenger Expedition, will be held 5th and 9th September. Deadline for registration is 1st July 2022. <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/science-events/the-challenger-society-conference-2022-in-london.html>

The Bridges 2022 conference will be Bridges Between Disciplines: Gender in STEM and Social Sciences. It will be both online and in-person (Gandía – Valencia, Spain) 12th – 16th September 2022. <https://bridges2022.com/>

Registration is open for the Symposium on Palaeontological Preparation and Conservation (SPPC) which will take place at the Natural History Museum in London 21 September 2022 <https://svpca2020.com/symposium-on-palaeontological-preparation-and-conservation/> Presentations from previous years can be viewed here <https://www.geocurator.org/events/102-sppc/previous-years-of-sppc>

Many thanks to Emma Nicholls, GCG Blog Editor, for collating this information.



News Feature

There and back again: a geology collection's curatorial journey

The Sternberg Museum of Natural History has always had a geology collection, but it has historically been undercurated and subsequently underutilised. This collection is the smallest at the museum and includes minerals, rocks, drill cores, tektites, and meteorites from various depositional environments around Kansas and the world. It is housed with, and under the care of, the paleontology division. Because the paleontology collection receives more research attention, it also receives more resources when projects are prioritised. However, a large mineral donation to the museum in late 2017 necessitated a reevaluation of the long-term storage and archiving of the collection. In addition to the care of this donation, other key areas for improvement were identified, such as needing a full inventory of the specimens, creating a digital data archive, curating the specimen backlog, housing unpacked specimens and rehousing poorly stored specimens, implementing a clear organisation system, and implementing best-practice conservation techniques.

To address inadequate and non-archival storage conditions, paleontology/geology curatorial staff applied for and received a small (<\$25,000) Institution of Museum and Library Services grant. Most of the funding was used to purchase archival storage, including shelving, cabinets, and specimen trays, while a smaller portion of the grant supported an undergraduate student to assist with curation. Our goal was to prevent specimen and specimen data degradation. Special storage considerations were made for the oversize specimens and the meteorites. For the oversize specimens, heavy-duty shelving provided a

sturdy, accessible storage space. For the meteorites, storage materials such as rechargeable silica desiccant and 4 mil polyethylene zipper lock bags were used to restrict the oxidation process of the metals found within the meteorites.

Prior to 2017, the geology collection was used sporadically for educational camps and outreach programs, but was not featured heavily in exhibits, online content, or regular programming. The improved storage and organization, and newly cataloged specimens, increased the potential of specimens to be incorporated into research, education, and outreach activities. Additionally, several minerals, rocks, and meteorites have been photographed for use in various social media posts and added to the database for public viewing. One such multimedia use includes a YouTube video about the newly rehoused meteorite collection that has garnered over 17,000 views to date. Thanks to the readily available collection data and photographs, staff were also inspired to improve the geology department's webpage by transforming it into an educational resource. This was the first time the museum had an opportunity like this to add educational content to the website.

One key to success for this project was having specialized staff with collective knowledge to complete the project within the given -en time frame. The collection manager's curatorial knowledge and geology background synergized with the undergraduate curatorial assistant's knowledge and enthusiasm to produce a highly productive team. Because of uncertainties with an uncurated collection, an undergraduate with a geology background was hired. Not all projects require a fully specialized staff and timelines may



Stunning Celestine specimen from the 2017 mineral donation that catalyzed collection improvements.

need to be adjusted to account for skill training. Many projects are easily completed with one specialised staff member (often the collections manager) and staff hired to learn a skill (e.g., students, interns, curatorial assistants). For example, projects focused on digitization lend themselves to a skill-based staff structure. Another key to success is written guides with step-by-step instructions to train new staff who may not have a specific skill set needed for the project. Well-developed workflows can reduce training time and need for specific skill sets upon hiring. Understanding staff prerequisites for a project is essential when considering the scale, duration, and goals of the project.



Before: Image of a geology collection drawer prior to the revamp, illustrating the cramped storage condition of the collection. During: FHSU undergraduate staff member on the grant diligently writing labels for newly cataloged geology specimens. After: Image of a geology collection drawer after the revamp illustrating the spacious and improved storage condition inside the new cabinets.

It also pays to do some research on specific collection care needs ahead of time. When constructing the budget, conducting adequate research on conservation best practices for the specimens in the collection enables better estimates of how much money is needed for a project. For this revamp, it was necessary to understand the costs of the extra supplies needed for the meteorite specialised housings. The rarity of these specimens dictated that appropriate and effective materials are selected, which often meant investing in higher quality (and higher cost) products. An understanding of these needs when submitting the project budget meant that collection staff is not surprised during project implementation.

Even with a \$25,000 budget, curating the Sternberg Museum geology collection was considered a small project. However, it is important to note that small projects and grants can hold meaningful value for museums of any size. Small projects or grants can help set a foundation for a larger project by establishing workflows and developing time and expense budgets that can be scaled. They can also be used to address smaller scale needs uncovered during a larger project. On the other hand, this project specifically was completed on a smaller budget because it utilised resources from larger, previous grants to the paleontology department. For example, digitization was not part of the initial geology grant, but because paleontology collections were being digitized, existing protocols, software, and hardware could be used to support the geology collection.



The Sternberg Museum hosted a “Rocktober” event pairing live rock music with specimens from the rock (and mineral) collection.

by **Christina Byrd**, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, and **Laura Wilson**, Sternberg Museum of Natural History, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS



Coprolite of the Quarter

Answer to last quarter's mystery coprolite:

Stratigraphy:
Chalk

Location:
S. E. England

Likely culprit:
Macropoma mantelli

Scale:
in centimetres.

Collection:
The Natural History
Museum (London UK)
NHMUK PVP5629



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Last quarter's winner:

Congratulations to Phil Hadland, Hastings Museum and Art Gallery.

Guess the Coprolite

Please send guesses to coprolite@geocurator.org
The answer and winner will be announced in the next quarterly newsletter. If there are several correct answers, one winner will be selected at random.



<https://www.geocurator.org/coprolite>