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A Periodic Newsletter of the Department of Herpetology

February 2002 San Diego Natural History Museum

Herpetology Collection Awarded \$162,838 NSF Grant

The Department of Herpetology received initial confirmation that its NSF grant proposal, Improved Housing and Organization of the Herpetological Collection at the San Diego Natural History Museum, has been recommended for full funding. NSF program director Lawrence M. Page gave the good news earlier this month to Dr. Bradford Hollingsworth from Herpetology and Dr. Paisley Cato from Collections Care and Conservation. The grant will start May 1, 2002.

Herpetology Collection

The amphibian and reptile collection represents one of the Museum's highest priorities to correct for housing and storage deficiencies. With 67,514 amphibian and reptile specimens, collected primarily from the southwestern United States and northwestern México, the collection is a critical resource for biological information in the region. Over the past four years, the San Diego Natural History Museum has been building new facilities as part of a ten-year strategic plan and an ongoing \$40 million capital campaign. The construction project and building renovation has increased the available space from 60,000 sq. ft. to 150,000 sq. ft., allowing for the expansion of research, collections, exhibits and education.

Need for Improved Housing

The collection has a rich history of growth and scientific use. However, outmoded housing, overcrowded conditions, and outdated taxonomic organization have challenged the collection's accessibility and long-term preservation. To correct for this, the Museum has installed compactor shelving units in a new state-of-the-art room to house the fluid-preserved specimens, but is still in need of cabinets to house the skeletal material. Because the previous facility lacked room for expansion, over one-third of the 8,100 jars are full to capacity, though the optimum is no more than half full to minimize specimen damage. Specimen jar labels and their corresponding taxonomic names in the computer database are also outdated, making retrieval of material burdensome and exceptionally time consuming. The goals of the NSF project are to rehouse the collection, so specimens will be better preserved for future generations and more accessible to researchers, students and the many others interested in the reptiles and amphibians of the region. By purchasing 10 skeletal storage cabinets, 3,000 jars and lids, and hiring a full-time collection management assistant for two years (and summer undergraduate interns), the renovation of the physical housing, overcrowded conditions, and outdated organization can be achieved.

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Construction Delays and the Fire Marshal

The new facility for the Department of Herpetology has experienced persistent construction delays and redesigns for the past year. In the meantime, the collection has been moved from its temporary location at the old Naval Training Center to a new temporary storage site at the Museum's new National City warehouse. For a short period in August 2001, the collection was temporarily housed at the Museum. It is currently stored in 1,100 cardboard boxes, each individually numbered and inventoried. Despite the inconveniences, the Department is still processing loans and making specimens available for research.

Fire Marshal

Compounding the construction delays, the overall design of the wet collections storage facility is being reevaluated by the Fire Marshal. Last minute changes include replacing the shelving, airducts, doors, and alarm system. Design reevaluation was unexpected because the plans were previously approved during the initial phases of the Museum construction project. Current estimates are hopeful, with occupancy permits expected by April 2002. The Department of Herpetology research laboratory is completed and the major renovations are finished. The final Fire Marshal directives have been submitted to the architects and it appears only a few additional changes are still needed.

Research Center on the Third Floor

Original plans to have a research laboratory for Herpetology on the third floor have been changed. Because of financial considerations, the Scripps Wing will not be outfitted with a mezzanine floor, decreasing the available space for Birds & Mammals and Herpetology. The Scripps Wing will be primarily devoted to the bird, mammal, and herpetology skeletal collection. The new plans leave the herpetology curator's office on the third floor, while the research laboratory will be combined with the collections preparation room near the wet collections room in the basement of the building.

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Collections Use Statistics Increase Over Last Two Years

Collection use over the last two years has increased to levels not seen since the 1980's and the early 1990's. Research use is one of the primary indicators of the overall health of any natural history collection. Specimens from the collection are regularly loaned offsite. Figures 1 and 2 show numbers of loans and loaned specimens since 1959. Over the last ten years, an average of 7.2 loans and 370 specimens were processed annually. Information from the department's computerized database is typically sent electronically within two days of the request. In 2000 and 2001, we transmitted the results of 69 database inquiries, totaling over 63,268 records. The Department is awaiting news on another NSF grant proposal which would provide a link to a national database called HerpNet.

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Figure 1. Number of Loans

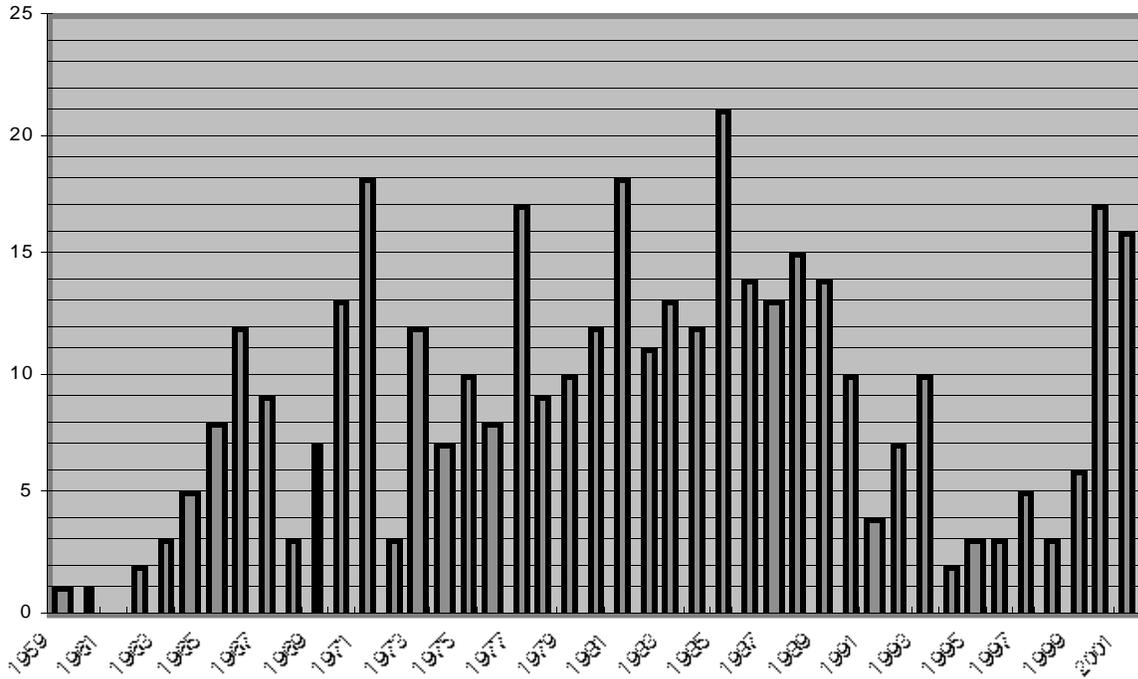
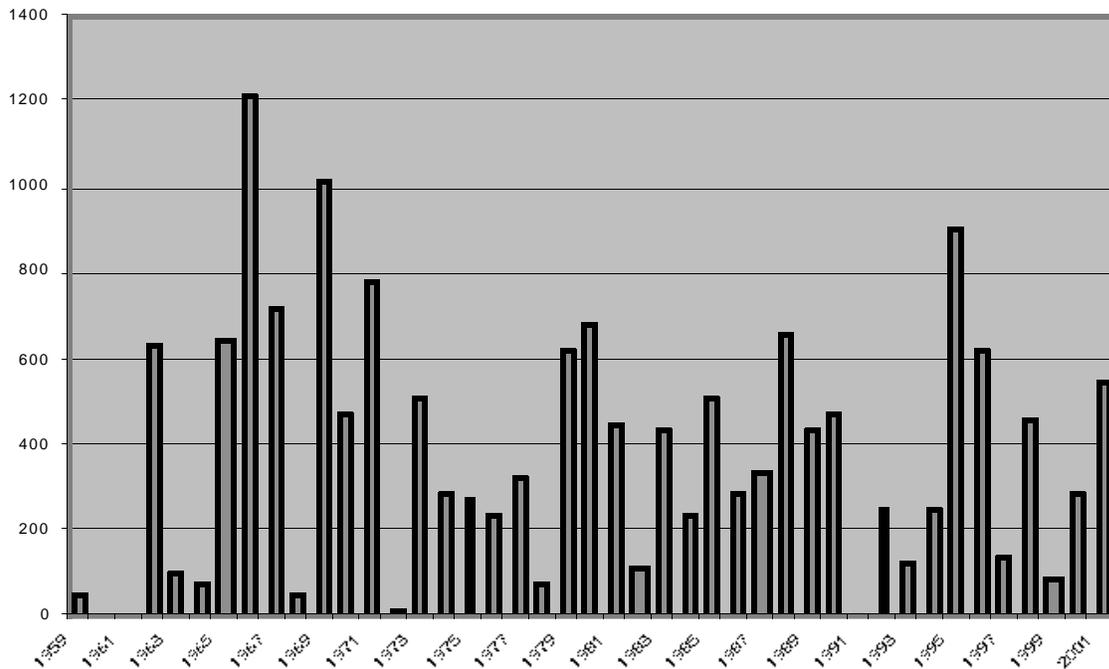


Figure 2. Number of Specimens



Standard English Names For North American Amphibians & Reptiles

Common names have been standardized for amphibian and reptiles from North America north of México. A joint committee sanctioned by the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles, the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists, and The Herpetologists' League was appointed to further develop the standard English names. Their 2000 publication is available through the SSAR website at <http://www.ukans.edu/~ssar/SSAR.html>. The common names for San Diego County amphibians and reptiles can be found at the Museum's websites at <http://www.sdnhm.org>.

*Scientific and Standard English Names of the Amphibians and Reptiles of North America North of Mexico,
with Comments Regarding Confidence in our Understanding*

