

Meet the Mammals  
Podcast Transcript  
February 20, 2009

Burke HOST: Welcome to the Burke Museum Podcast. I'm your host Karin Hoffman.

Intro Jingle

*JIM: Well, I think it's exciting for people to understand biodiversity which means lots of different kinds, lots of different sizes and lots of different shapes, lots of different evolutionary histories and mammals are all descended from a common ancestor 210 million years ago but especially over the last 60 million years they've evolved into an incredible variety. The whales and the seals and sea lions and walruses and manatees are examples of mammals that returned to the sea over the last 50 million years from ancestors that lived on the earth. Bats are flying mammals who've descended from mammals that walked around simply on earth and by showing off, really, all of these 29 remarkable different orders of mammals we show people what an incredible variety there is of things that all belong to the class mammalia.*

HOST: That was Dr. Jim Kenagy, recently retired curator of mammals at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture talking about Meet the Mammals which took place on November 22, 2008. This annual event allows Burke mammalogists to showcase the Burkes' mammal collection and more importantly share with visitors the adaptations that produced the rich diversity of mammals on Earth. The Burke Mammal collection has over 54,000 mammal specimens comprised of 950 of the of the world's 5400 mammal species. That translates to almost a fifth of the total diversity in species terms of the worlds mammals.

Meet the Mammals provides visitors the opportunity to touch authentic mammal skins and skulls and interact with Burke mammalogists. Jeff Bradley, collection manager of the mammalogy collection at the Burke Museum shares his thoughts on what it means to share the collection at Meet the Mammals.

*JEFF: I really like Meet the Mammals because it is the one time of year when I really get to focus on the educational aspect of the specimens and of the collection. Talking with kids about mammals is fun and getting out a diversity of mammals that help tell the public a story instead of just tell researchers, or help researchers answer their questions – that's a really fun part of my job and meet the mammals is the time of year when I really get to focus on that. We take about 200 of our specimens from back here, we select ones that tell good stories, we put them together in tables or stations that tell a story about mammals or about evolution in way that's easy for the public to understand and easy for people to get into and get excited about.*

HOST: As Jeff just mentioned, teaching kids about mammals is an integral element of Meet the Mammals. By inviting children to touch real animals and ask questions, Burke mammalogists are able to help kids make connections between their personal experiences and the natural world. Let's listen in to see how Dou Yang, a biology graduate student and Burke mammalogist was able to make a connection between a young girl's Halloween costume and the mammals on display.

CLIP: audio recorded at Meet the Mammals

*Girl: A white bunny in pink slippers.*

*Dou: Why were you a white bunny?*

*Girl: because that was the costume my friend had.*

*Dou: So if you were to live in a snowy environment with a lot of snow around do you think you would rather be a white bunny or a brown bunny?*

*Girl: White.*

*Dou: Why do you want to be a white bunny?*

*Girl: because then no animal could eat me.*

*Dou: Exactly. So do you think white bunnies like this bunny right here, not you, but white bunnies stay white all year round?*

*Girl: Umm, no. They shed.*

*Dou: Why do they shed?*

*Girl: Because they don't want animals to eat them and they have to match the ground so that ...[background sound is too loud to hear the rest of the conversation]*

HOST: As collection manager, Jeff is responsible for the day-to-day care and protection of the specimens so he takes great care to select skins and skulls that can withstand being handled all day. Those specimens that are particularly valuable or fragile are not put on display.

*JEFF: A big challenge of mine, really for MTM, is just the logistics of moving the 200 specimens from their home in the mammal collection up front. In part because we can't set up very far ahead of time. The skeletons can't go up front until the night before the event. The skins have to spend every night in a protective case so the skins can't go out until the morning of the event and then when the event's all over everything has got to be wheeled back upstairs into the mammal collection and into their cases before I can go home that night. From my point of view movement of this many specimens is the biggest challenge. But it's a fun challenge – you know I get to work with a lot of really good people. I get to get in the collections and see a lot of things I don't get to see the rest of the year and so it's a type of challenge I like.*

HOST: While this was the third year the collection has been exhibited for Meet the Mammals, the collection has a long and distinguished history and has provided valuable research in areas such as biodiversity, ecology, evolution, biogeography and conservation.

*JIM: Well the Burke Museum is the official Natural History Museum of the state of Washington. This is a legislative mandate and the museum was organized as such even before it became associated with the University of Washington, so there is a legacy of museum collection and preservation that goes way back over 100 years and it's an ongoing matter that relates to the research and documenting the biodiversity in the state of Washington. We can refine and collect in more meaningful ways with greater precision over different regions in the state of Washington using geographic information systems, collecting new specimens now that can be analyzed for their DNA content, which is part of the research that graduate students and other research scholars are engaged in to understand the diversification and evolution of population of mammals even around the state of Washington.*

HOST: Meet the Mammals is an annual family event. Check out [www.burkemuseum.org](http://www.burkemuseum.org) for more information about Meet the Mammals and other upcoming events.

HOST: This podcast has been brought to you by the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle, WA. To find more podcasts or to visit our blog, go online to [www.burkemuseum.org](http://www.burkemuseum.org). That's [www.B-U-R-K-E-museum.o-r-g](http://www.B-U-R-K-E-museum.o-r-g).

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Closing Jingle