

News and Comment

Annual Meeting of the Alliance of Natural History Museums of Canada, October 2010

Leaders of Canada's major natural history museums attended the annual meeting of the Alliance of Natural History Museums of Canada (ANHMC) in October 2010. The network was created in 2003 to enhance collaborative work in the areas of research, collections development, and education about the natural environment.

The ANHMC's 16 members from west to north to east are: the Royal British Columbia Museum, Vancouver Aquarium, Royal Alberta Museum, Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology, Yukon Beringia Interpretive Centre, Prince of Wales Northern Heritage, Royal Saskatchewan Museum, Manitoba Museum, Royal Ontario Museum, Canadian Museum of Nature, Toronto Zoo, Montreal's Nature Museums (Biodôme, Insectarium, Botanical Gardens and Planetarium), Redpath Museum (Montreal), New Brunswick Museum, Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History, and The Rooms Provincial Museum, Newfoundland and Labrador.

These institutions are responsible for preserving the record of Canada's natural history through time. Together, member museums safeguard more than 19 million catalogued specimens of plants, animals, minerals and fossils collected over 150 years. The purpose of the national collections strategy is to ensure that this crucial record is complete and is preserved in perpetuity.

Dr. Wayne Maddison, an evolutionary biologist at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and director of Canada's newest natural history museum, is the distinguished recipient of the 2010 Bruce Naylor Award. This national award was presented on 26 October in the Speaker's Reception Room in the Centre Block of Parliament Hill by the ANHM Canada. It recognizes exceptional contributions to the museum-based study of natural history in Canada. The Bruce Naylor Award is named for the former director of the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology. Deceased in 2007, Dr. Naylor had also served as president of the ANHMC.

Dr. Maddison heads the new Beaty Biodiversity Museum in Vancouver, British Columbia, where he recently presided over the museum's public opening on 16 October 2010. This administrative post is the latest step in his multi-faceted career as a professor, teacher and world expert on jumping spiders, a group with more than 5000 species known to science. Maddison has published over 20 scientific papers on the taxonomy, systematics and evolution of jumping spiders, which are known for their acute vision. In 2008, he dis-

covered dozens of new species during field work in Papua New Guinea.

"He's not only an inspirational teacher and natural historian, but also someone who has contributed to the way that we talk about evolutionary biology," explains Dr. Sarah Otto, a colleague and Professor of Zoology at the University of British Columbia.

Maddison has shared his passion for understanding evolution and biodiversity in numerous ways. He has developed some fundamental computer programs and tools used by biologists for phylogenetics, the study of evolutionary relatedness among living things. He is also one of the founders of the encyclopedic Tree of Life project (<http://tolweb.org/tree>). With more than 10 000 Web pages, this award-winning project provides information about biodiversity, the characteristics of different groups of organisms, and their evolutionary history.

His path as a naturalist and scientist began in his youth. "I remember paying a lot of attention to bugs, salamanders and other critters as a child, with my brother," he remarks. "When I was 13, I found an especially entrancing jumping spider. I kept it alive for months, and started learning about others. I haven't stopped since."

Undergraduate studies at the University of Toronto were followed by a doctorate at Harvard University. From there Maddison eventually landed at the University of Arizona, where he established his credentials as an evolutionary biologist who studied jumping spiders as a way to approach scientific questions about systematics and the interrelationships of living things.

In 2003, Maddison relocated to Vancouver as a professor at the University of British Columbia and was awarded a Canada Research Chair in the Departments of Zoology and Botany. At UBC, he spearheaded the development of the Beaty Biodiversity Museum, which houses 2 million specimens, including one of only two blue whale skeletons on display in Canada.

"I've been associated with museums since high school, and I've often felt the joy of stumbling on important specimens in their collections. I always felt that I was sifting through treasures of the natural world," he notes in reflecting on his new position at the Beaty Museum. "When UBC decided to consolidate our collections and open a public natural history museum, I stepped forward to help with this important effort to study biodiversity, to archive it, and to tell the public of its wonders."