



# MUSEUM OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY

## Celebrating Connections

OUR ANNUAL REPORT | 2019-20

### From the Director

Dear Friends of the Museum,

The Museum of Natural and Cultural History is a place for making connections. As a community of students, professionals, and volunteers, the museum builds new connections every day—reaching across academic disciplines, cultural and age differences, and geographic divides—to help grow our collective understanding of the past and move our society toward an inclusive and sustainable future.



As a museum supporter, you play a key role in these connections, helping to make possible the research, educational programming, and collections stewardship that serve our mission each year. In the last decade, our supporters made more than 6,000

individual gifts to the museum—every one of which helped us grow into the nationally accredited, award-winning museum we are today. I am delighted to report that at the end of June 2020, those combined gifts surpassed the \$13 million goal we set in 2010 as part of the University of Oregon’s campuswide fundraising campaign.

When I became executive director in 2005, the museum’s endowments stood at roughly \$450,000. As we set out to expand the museum’s exhibits, facilities, and programs, so too did we commit to growing its endowments over the years ahead. Thanks to you, today our endowments stand at nearly \$7.25 million, providing a strong financial foundation for the future. Registered estate gifts will push that figure past \$11 million, ensuring that the MNCH will continue to rank among the top university-based research museums in the nation.

As you’ll read in this report, the museum’s impact expanded significantly in 2019-20. Museum scientists furthered their proud traditions of teaching at the UO, conducting groundbreaking research, and publishing in the world’s top journals. Our collections continued to grow and our staff and volunteers continued to digitize them, making thousands of rare fossils, artifacts, and other objects available to audiences around the globe. Despite closing to the public for several months during the COVID-19 pandemic, over the course of the year we welcomed thousands of visitors and served thousands of students—from Kindergarteners to UO doctoral candidates. Our digital presence reached many more, with more than 85,000 unique website visits, nearly 20,000 views of our online collections galleries, and a social media following that grew by 25 percent. Meanwhile, the museum’s coverage by popular news outlets more than doubled, and our volunteers logged an incredible 6,773 hours in the museum’s exhibit halls, laboratories, and collections vaults.

I am proud of the fact that we accomplished all this and more in the midst of a devastating global pandemic and a 19 percent budget cut from the university. This kind of success is possible thanks to an incredible staff and Museum Advisory Council, a passionate volunteer force, and your unflagging support.

On behalf of all of us at the museum, thank you for your generosity and your investment in the museum’s mission. I invite you to join in this celebration of our 2019-20 successes, and I look forward to staying connected with you for many years to come.

Sincerely,  
Jon M. Erlandson  
Executive Director

# A Museum for Ducks



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**Our programs served more than 5,200 University of Oregon students in 2019-20.**

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**Students are at the heart of what we do.** Every day at the museum, UO students take their learning beyond the classroom—gaining unparalleled academic, social, and career benefits in the process.

During the 2019-20 fiscal year, we served **5,213 University of Oregon students** through onsite and outreach programs and hundreds more in the two [field schools](#) and **17 campus-based courses** taught by museum archaeologists, anthropologists, and Earth scientists.



From ancient Thai pottery to Native American basketry to sea mammal fossils, [students used objects from our collections](#) to delve deeper into pressing questions about people, cultures, and ecosystems.

Nearly **600 UO students** joined our free student membership program, participating in dozens of science- and culture-themed social events organized by the [MNCH Student Club](#). Meanwhile, **47 student employees** worked more than **5,800 hours** at the museum, gaining valuable career experience in laboratory methods,

collections stewardship, leadership, public relations, visitor services, and much more.



*Image by K. Kovarik*

# A Museum for Everyone



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**We welcomed nearly 34,000 visitors and served more than 5,000 K-12 students.**

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**The museum creates connections.** Each year, our education programs reach thousands of Oregon adults and children, inviting them connect to learning, to one another, and to the University of Oregon.

In 2019-20, we offered **20 family programs, 18 public talks, and 23 community events** over the course of the year and welcomed **thousands of K-12 students** to dig into science and culture during class field trips to the museum.

Our [award-winning](#) educational outreach program partnered with **28 K-12 schools** and **102 public libraries** to bring inquiry-based learning adventures to children and families in every corner of the state, with a special focus on those historically underserved by museums.

When COVID-19 forced the temporary closure of our public spaces, we moved quickly to translate many of our onsite programs into [virtual experiences](#) and “take-and-make” activity kits. In the process, we greatly expanded the reach of these programs to audiences all across Oregon.

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**Our exhibits sparked important dialogue about bias, justice, and inclusion.**

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**We inspire connections across diverse stories.** In 2019-20, we unveiled **two landmark exhibitions** designed to amplify and celebrate historically marginalized stories from Oregon and the American West. [Blake Little: Photographs from the Gay Rodeo](#) and [Racing to Change: Oregon's Civil Rights Years—The Eugene Story](#) have since inspired crucial conversations among students, faculty, and community members about LGBTQIA visibility, civil rights activism, and how we can all take part in building a just and inclusive future.

In spring 2020, [Oregon Heritage](#) recognized [Racing to Change](#) with an Oregon Heritage Excellence Award, honoring the museum and our exhibit co-developer, [Oregon Black Pioneers](#), for our community-centered exhibit development process. Watch the 6-minute [award video](#) to learn more.

# Rooted in Research



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**Museum scientists published  
45 peer-reviewed studies and generated \$1.2  
million in research contracts.**

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**We're digging deeper.** In the field and in the lab, museum staff and students continued to uncover important insights into our past, present, and future—and to share those insights through publication in both scientific and popular media.

The year's published research included a surprising, student-led journey into [Oregon's paleontological past](#), new [deep-time perspectives on climate change](#), the first reliable model of [human settlement in the ancient Caribbean](#), and an unprecedented [synthesis of worldwide archaeological data](#) that offers a clearer picture of humankind's global ecological footprint.



Through its contracts with multiple state and federal agencies, our [archaeological research program](#) continued to play a central role in protecting Oregon's cultural resources and [helped critical public works projects keep moving](#) as the COVID-19 pandemic made its way to our state.

# World-Class Collections



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**We house more than 460,000 catalogued objects from Oregon and around the world.**

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## **Museum collections preserve our collective heritage and support generations of scholarship.**

As Oregon's official repository for publicly owned collections, the museum is home to hundreds of thousands of artifacts, fossils, rocks, and biological specimens—together comprising Oregon's premier research collections and attracting scholars from [around the globe](#) to the University of Oregon.

The museum is continually digitizing these collections, making them available to scholars and the wider public through our online [collections galleries](#) and [searchable databases](#).

At the end of 2019-20, the [Condon Fossil Collection](#) included more than **63,000 catalogued fossil specimens** representing well over 9,000 species. In addition to thousands of ethnographic objects from the world over, our [Anthropological Collections](#) house more than **365,000 archaeological specimens**, including an extraordinary collection of Native American basketry spanning 14,000 years. The museum also curates a collection of roughly **15,000 modern zoological specimens** representing nearly 4,000 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and invertebrates.



# Our Strategic Plan



**Resilience is our road to the future.** As part of our 2016 accreditation by the [American Alliance of Museums](#), we created a robust, five-year institutional strategic plan (2015-2020) called [Building on Our Momentum](#). As the plan's timeline neared its close last spring, we excitedly began work on a new five-year plan. But then COVID-19 arrived in Oregon and made necessary the postponement of our planning process. As the pandemic continues, we face unexpected challenges as well as new opportunities and directions for growth. Realizing the importance of a shared vision at this critical time, we decided to forge ahead with a three-year extension of our 2015-2020 plan.

The extension, titled [Celebrating Excellence and Resilience](#), is the product of input from museum members, volunteers, staff, the [Museum Advisory Council](#), and other stakeholders. It articulates the museum's core activities, identifies our vision, and lays out our strategic directions for the next three years. We're delighted to share it with you, and we look forward to your continued support as we realize its aims.

## **Learn how you can support our work.**

Visit [mnch.uoregon.edu/giving-and-volunteering](https://mnch.uoregon.edu/giving-and-volunteering)  
or contact Erin Hart at 541-346-2467 or [erinhart@uoregon.edu](mailto:erinhart@uoregon.edu).

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### **Museum of Natural and Cultural History**

University of Oregon  
1680 East 15th Avenue  
Eugene, OR 97403  
(541) 346-3024

*The Museum of Natural and Cultural History enhances knowledge of Earth's environments and cultures, inspiring stewardship of our collective past, present, and future.*

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