



PUGET SOUND MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

2025 Fall Newsletter

Where Dead Things Come Alive...

The '24-'25 school year was a busy one! Involvement in our student docent program was strong as ever, we hosted and attended all kinds of fun events, and our collections reached more than 13,000 students, researchers, and members of the public. Find out what we've been up to!

Our unofficial mascot...



HIGHLIGHTS

- We hosted 2 Night at the Museum events, with our Halloween event drawing a record breaking crowd of over 500 attendees
- Our Nature in the Classroom educator position returned after a long hiatus due to COVID-19
- The second annual Natural History Trivia Night was a success, drawing over 50 attendees
- The Puget Sound Museum crew attended the annual Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections meeting in Lawrence, Kansas

A Message From our Director

Here we go, another exciting year! As you can tell from this newsletter, last year was busy here at the museum! I continue to be so grateful to work with such amazing staff, and to welcome in new and returning student docents and volunteers. The museum personnel and collections serve as exceptional resources for on- and off-campus community members and partners interested in all facets of natural history.



Kena Fox-Dobbs
Museum Director & Professor of
Environmental Studies and Sciences

Greetings from our Museum Historian

Hello from Wyatt Hall, where - amid visits to the PSM Library - I teach and write about the history of natural history museums. Feel free to ask me about the history of the Puget Sound Museum or museums in general (kristinjohnson@pugetsound.edu)! I'll be teaching STHS 325 Natural History Museums and Society during the 2026-2027 Academic Year.



Kristin Johnson
Museum Historian & Professor of Science,
Technology, Health, and Society

Hello from our Education & Outreach Director

Hello everyone! My name is Ellie Olpin and I'm the Education & Outreach Director at the Puget Sound Museum. You may have seen me around the museum this year, but if not, it's time I formally introduce myself! Prior to my time in this position, I was a student docent at the museum where I worked on a wide range of collections projects from cataloguing and sorting our insect collection to numbering bones and repairing skeletons. I'm super passionate about all things natural history and it's been an honor to work so closely with the collections, visitors, and docents. I'm looking forward to another fantastic year of museum happenings!



Ellie Olpin
Museum Education & Outreach Director

The PSM at SPNHC!



Left to right: Margaux Ranson, Ellie Olpin, Kena Fox-Dobbs

This year, the Puget Sound Museum's Education & Outreach Coordinator position returned after a long hiatus due to COVID-19, allowing coordinator Margaux Ranson to teach our Nature in the Classroom kits to elementary students across the South Sound. To share some of the awesome outreach work made possible by Nature in the Classroom, Margaux attended the annual Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC) meeting in Lawrence, Kansas alongside Education & Outreach Director Ellie Olpin and Museum Director Kena Fox-Dobbs. Margaux and Ellie presented a talk on the Nature in the Classroom program, showcasing our unique specimen-based curricula and how we bring natural history and biodiversity to elementary classrooms!

In addition to the opportunity to present on some of the important outreach work that happens at the Puget Sound Museum, the week presented many opportunities for learning, networking, and fun! Conference goers attended informative talks and poster sessions, explored the University of Kansas Natural History Museum's galleries and their behind the scenes collections, participated in a trivia night, and experienced a variety of field trips. The PSM crew got to kayak the Kansas River as part of one of these trips!



SPNHC allowed us to connect with other museum professionals, learn about how natural history collections can contribute to science and education, and think about how to better care for our collections and make them more accessible to the public. We're looking forward to next year's meeting!

Borrow our kits or invite a museum educator!

We're excited to announce that our Nature in the Classroom Kits will both be available to borrow and teachers can invite a museum educator to their classrooms! Learn more [here](#) or email pugetsoundmuseum@pugetsound.edu to reserve a kit.



Left: Our Wild Things kit
Below: Our Urban Bird Diversity kit





Above: A Night at the Museum attendee does a leaf rubbing at our Plants Across the World table!

Night at the Museum

This past year, we hosted two successful Night at the Museum events! The theme of our ever-popular Halloween Night at the Museum was **Haunted Forest**. Our docents featured a plethora of spooky specimens to our costumed cohort of visitors. On display were bats, owls, wolves, bugs, and many other creepy creatures. Docents chose to display our dermestid beetle colony to showcase how our specimens become skeletons. UPS Chemistry Club showcased some mad science experiments and visitors participated in trick-or-treat bingo. Attendees also had the opportunity to try their hand at fun activities like specimen ring toss and crafts in our kids' activity room. Our Halloween event continues to break records each year, with this year's event bringing over 500 attendees!

In the Spring, we introduced a collaboration between the museum and the University of Puget Sound Education Department. For our **World of Change** Night at the Museum event, students from the EDUC 297 class: *Teaching about Climate Justice* were paired with student docents, and they collaborated to bring an interactive component to each table. These components included leaf rubbings to show leaf anatomy, trivia with prizes, microscopy, and a display to show the length of the leatherback sea turtle (2.7 meters!). One of the EDUC 297 students, Andi Gonzales, curated a selection of books for our quiet reading room, providing a space for kids who prefer a less stimulating environment. We are excited to collaborate with students from the EDUC 297 in the future to bring more of these awesome and creative activities to Night at the Museum!

Natural History Trivia Night!

In the Spring, the museum hosted our second annual Natural History Trivia Night! Our docents worked hard to write questions on a variety of topics including WA State Symbols, Fictional Fauna, and Record Holders. We even had sound ID and photo ID rounds to test our participants' naturalist skills. Our winning team was **Cat-tastrophe**, a group composed of members from last year's winning team! They maintained the title of Natural History Trivia Champions and took home the first place prize of tickets to the Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium.

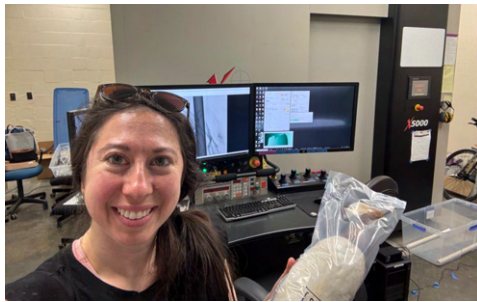


Research in the Museum

Waterfowl are recognizable for their webbed feet, and this adaptation helps them easily navigate their aquatic environments! However, little is known about different types of webbed feet, how they evolved, and how these differing morphologies affect swimming ability. Researcher Dr. Glenna Clifton from the University of Portland is aiming to quantify duck foot shape across different species using CT scans, search for evolutionary patterns, and connect foot shape to swimming performance by measuring hydrodynamic forces generated by models of duck feet.



Above: Students Nathaly Galindo and Lili Gudgel articulating waterfowl bones at the museum



Above: Dr. Glenna Clifton with a duck specimen

Earlier this year, Glenna visited the Puget Sound Museum. She bagged some of our duck specimens and transported them back to the lab for CT scanning, and her undergraduate research assistants worked to articulate waterfowl foot bones. Glenna's research is yet another great example of how museum collections help scientists answer unknown evolutionary and ecological questions!

Another Research Highlight!

Studying animal bones can tell us a lot about the environments those animals have lived in. Trabecular bone is a sponge-like structure found in mammal bones. Due to its spongy nature, it changes throughout the animal's life depending on the forces it experiences over time.

Hartrich Zack, a PhD candidate of Integrative Biology at the University of Chicago is using museum specimens to study trabecular bone in raccoon forelimbs using CT scans. This year, they CT-scanned specimens from the Puget Sound Museum and will use these scans along with scans of specimens from other museums to determine the effect of location and urbanization on raccoon trabecular bone! You can find Hartrich's previous work [here](#) and their contact information [here](#).



New Nature is Queer Exhibit

This Spring, museum docents Mary Borgerding and Cas Unruh curated a new exhibit for our display cases on sex and gender in nature. They aimed to highlight the wide variety of ways in which sex and gender are expressed in the animal kingdom.

You can see Cas and Mary's exhibit outside of the main museum space in Thompson Hall. Look for the rainbows!



What have our docents been up to?



This year, our docent program hosted 46 students volunteering in the museum, three work-study students, and one *Next Move* intern from the Science and Math Institute (SAMI). In addition to preparing for our Night at the Museum events, giving tours, and representing the museum at several outreach events, our docents spent over 500 volunteer hours in the museum!



Left: Eva Langental, Magnus Mansfield, and Philip Fisher tabling at Puget Sound Estuarium's Turn of the Tides event
Right: Gemma Bertain prepping a rodent specimen

There were many projects for docents to work on in the museum. Walter Stackler, Raka Custer, and Philip Fisher began digitizing historical field notebooks from prolific naturalist Stanley Jewett. In our herbarium, docents Josie Cort, Reggie Westgate, and Gus Medley digitized plant specimens to add to our online repository. Docents Alex Gully and Brita Restad continued to digitize our egg collection data, and Sam Gerrish worked hard to catalogue and sort our insect teaching collection. Specimen prep continued to be our most popular docent task, with 12 docents preparing specimens this year. Work-study student Lou Lobdell worked on articulating a swan skeleton for display.

Art was a focus for docents like Paige Laurie and Mikhail George who decided to use their volunteering time to draw specimens and hone their artistic skills. Docents Cas Unruh and Mary Borgerding worked all Spring Semester to research and put together a new exhibit titled *Nature is Queer*. Read more about their exhibit on page 5! Max Walz was our *Next Move* intern from SAMI. Max helped out with a variety of museum tasks and used his 3D printing skills to make models of bat and rodent skulls for our Nature in the Classroom kits.



Left: Docents pinned insects at one of our meetings!
Right: Cas Unruh with their pinned insects

For our end-of-year field trip, docents visited the Burke Museum at the University of Washington for behind-the-scenes tours of different collections. They observed museum professionals at work and experienced more examples of the uses and benefits of museum collections!



Above: Graduating docents Philip Fisher, Gemma Bertain, Alice Lee, Sam Gerrish, Mary Borgerding, and Nieve Whitehouse

Interested in being a museum docent?
Email us at
pugetsoundmuseum@pugetsound.edu



Stats wrap-up

DOCENTS:

Alex Gully, Alexander Lafler-Austern, Alice Lee, Amelia Bondi, Anna Brown, Ashley Garman, August Grey, Benjamin Johnson, Bennett Fitzgerald, Brita Restad, Cas Unruh, Cecilia Turetzky, Clay Rowe, Easton Umansky, Eva Langenthal, Ezra Thill, Gemma Bertain, Gus Medley, Josie Cort, Julie Hernandez, Kaia Doan, Kendall Baldwin, Lianna Saucedo, Magnus Mansfield, Mary Borgerding, Megan Riehle, Mikhail George, Natalie Brachvogel, Josie Cort, Paige Laurie, Philip Fisher, Quinn Fafard, Quinn Sullivan, Raka Custer, Reggie Westgate, Ruby Moon, Sam Gerrish, Sara Guillen-Alvarado, Sophia Haynes, Thomas Paschke, Tunya Carissimo, Vincent Wills, Walter Stackler, Wren Havelly

WORK-STUDY: Lou Lobdell, Anna Pabst, Sage Kenny

SAMI NEXT MOVE INTERN: Max Walz

RESEARCHERS: Chris Law, Andrea Bernal Rivera, Cameron Piper, Carter Unions, Jake Kuschel, **Glenna Clifton** (read more about her research on page 5), **Hartrich Zack** (read more about their research on page 5), Pieshu Li, Edú Guerra, Claudia Gerecke

VISITORS: Around **1,300** people came through the doors of the museum during the '24-'25 academic school year and over **13,000** people interacted with museum specimens in some way!

Join us for Drawing Nights!

Interested in art? Join us the first Thursday of each month for a fun evening of sketching and painting inspired by museum specimens! This event is BYO art supplies and intended for ages 15 and above. Registration required.

To attend Drawing Nights, please email us at pugetsoundmuseum@pugetsound.edu and ask to be added to our SciArt mailing list.





THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING THE PUGET SOUND MUSEUM!

The Puget Sound Museum of Natural History is one of the Pacific Northwest's significant natural history collections, with over 100,000 bird, mammal, reptile, amphibian, plant, insect, and geological specimens. Located on the University of Puget Sound campus, the Puget Sound Museum focuses on research & education as well as engaging university students with museum collections. To find out more about the museum or to make a donation to support our continued work, visit our [website](#).

If you'd like to visit the museum, have questions about our events or our Nature in the Classroom kits, or wish to volunteer at the museum, please email us at pugetsoundmuseum@pugetsound.edu. Don't forget to follow us on social media!

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 [@PSMatUPS](#)



Puget Sound Museum of Natural History

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