Front of the Werner Wildlife Museum

EVENTS CALENDAR
FEB.-APR. 2016

FEBRUARY 8
Guidelines and entry forms available for “Artisans Unbound: Feathers, Fur, and Fibers”

FEBRUARY 11
Animal House: “Porcupines: A Sticky Situation”*

FEBRUARY 18
Raptor Rap: “Gone to Ground: The Burrowing Owl”*

FEBRUARY 25
Adult Study Program: “Porcupines: A Sticky Situation”*

MARCH 10
Animal House: “Water Babies: Otter, Beaver, and Mink”*

MARCH 17

MARCH 24
Adult Study Program: “Red Tails, Sharp Shins, and Rough Legs: Hawks in Wyoming”*

APRIL 4
“Artisans Unbound: Feathers, Fur, and Fibers.” Deadline for entries at 4:30 p.m.

APRIL 12
Opening reception for “Artisans Unbound: Feathers, Fur, and Fibers.” 4-6 p.m. Ribbon cutting for the new children’s area will take place at 4:15 p.m.

APRIL 14

APRIL 21
Raptor Rap: “Hunting with Birds: Human-Raptor Alliances”*

APRIL 28
Adult Study Program: “The American Bison: Half a Ton of Fence Busting Temper”*

* All Raptor Rap and Animal House programs take place at 4 p.m. Adult study programs are held in the Africa-Arctic Room at noon and again at 7 p.m.

Director’s Report:
Hello and welcome to the Werner Wildlife Museum’s premier issue of The Howl! There have been some big changes at the Werner for the past few years. We have refreshed the old exhibits, developed a few new exhibits and put an emphasis on programming. None of this would have been possible without India, Eileen and their work-study Viola. Along with their volunteers, they have taken pride in their work and have made the Werner a fun and educational place to be. They have increased their visitor numbers, developed new programs, including “Animal House” and “Raptor Rap,” and have taken care of all of the marketing and outreach. India has also taken over planning events, and is working to take the Werner’s outreach program into the local schools. I cannot thank them enough for what they do and how they are helping to transform the Werner into a fantastic museum.

Patti Wood Finkle
Director of Museums at Casper College

Werner Wildlife Museum Mission:
The mission of the Werner Wildlife Museum at Casper College is to promote learning and appreciation of the Earth’s natural history through preservation of collections, exhibits and outreach as consistent with the mission and goals of Casper College.

caspercollege.edu/werner-wildlife-museum
While most birds migrate south from Wyoming for the winter, Wyoming is south for many birds migrating from regions further north. Among the birds that regularly winter in Wyoming is the magnificent rough-legged hawk, known in scientific parlance as *Buteo lagopus* (literally hare-foot buzzard). The rough-legged hawk gets its common name from the thick layer of feathers that covers its legs and feet. The golden eagle and the ferruginous hawk share this adaptation for life in cold climates.

Of the three known subspecies, only one, *Buteo lagopus sancti-johannis*, inhabits North America. The others are found in northern Europe and Asia, with Alaska being a zone of hybridization between subspecies. The rough-legged hawk prefers open country, spending summers in the Arctic tundra north of the boreal forest and winters in the open country of southern Canada and throughout the USA. Though rough-legged hawks have been sited in all but half a dozen U.S. states, most are found west of the Mississippi River.

Lemmings and voles comprise the rough-legged hawk’s main diet while it summers in the Arctic. South of the Arctic Circle, diet depends largely on what winter prey is available. Rough-legged hawks prefer to hunt during daylight hours though they occasionally are seen hunting at dawn or dusk. Rough-legged hawks attack prey from the air and are not above stealing prey from other predators. Carrion becomes important when live prey is scarce.

According to the National Audubon Society of the Rocky Mountain Region, the rough-legged hawk is one of the larger *Buteos*. Beak to tail, length averages from 18.5 to 20.5 inches. Wingspan ranges up to 4.5 feet wide. As with most birds of prey, the female is larger than the male and can weigh up to 3.5 pounds. The rough-legged hawk’s head and beak are small in relation to its body, which helps distinguish this hawk from other species of large hawk, such as the red-tailed hawk (*Buteos jamaicensis*).

Rocky outcroppings with good views of surrounding areas are preferred for nesting though when these are unavailable, rough-legged hawks have been known to nest in tall trees or even on human-made structures. Whatever the situation, the highest possible nesting site is chosen. Rough-legged hawks mature at 2 to 3 years old and form monogamous relationships, which generally last at least one breeding season. A couple returns to the same nest each year unless the nest has been destroyed or occupied by another nesting pair. Egg production and successful raising of young are closely tied to availability of prey. Couples may not breed at all in years when prey is scarce.

According to records kept by the U.S. Forest Service, the rough-legged hawk is one of North America’s most abundant raptors and its population is thought to be stable. The number of rough-legged hawks in any given area depends largely upon availability of prey, with populations shifting regularly from place to place. Winter numbers are particularly concentrated in areas of abundant prey species.

Avid bird watchers regularly report rough-legged hawk sightings in the prairie surrounding Casper. Rough-legged hawks may be seen hovering in the wind above the prairie or perched on the highest location available. In the treeless plains of Wyoming, this includes power poles and windmills. Bundle up against the cold and wind, clean the lens of your binoculars, and spend an afternoon looking for yourself.

*Wyoming’s Snowbird: The Rough-legged Hawk*

*Top and bottom right: Rough-legged hawks (Buteo lagopus) on display in the bird gallery of Werner Wildlife Museum.*
Binomial Nomenclature or How to tell a Spadefish from a Jackass.

In 2011, the Census of Marine Life estimated that 8.7 million animal and plant species inhabit planet Earth. To make sense of this vast biodiversity, scientists classify living things via a universally understood Latin system that was developed in the eighteenth century by Swedish scientist Carl Linnaeus. Known as binomial nomenclature, the system applies a unique two part Latin name to every known earthly organism. The first part of the name describes the genus to which an individual belongs; the second part of the name describes the species.

But why bother with such fancy dead language names? Wouldn’t it be simpler to call a spadefish a spadefish instead of Chaetodipterus faber? No, because common names can be uncommonly confusing.

Throughout their range, spadefish are known as angelfish (USA); butterfly fish, leather coat, ocean cobbler (Jamaica); Luna (Columbia); three-banded sheephead (Cuba); and jackass (Guyana). All of these common names and many more refer to the same fish. Some of these monikers are common names for other species as well: In Wyoming, the spadefish is probably not the first animal that comes to mind when someone refers to a jackass.

Using Linnaeus’s system of naming, Chaetodipterus notes that this creature belongs to the Spadefish genus, which includes several types of spadefish; the word faber indicates that this is the spadefish that lives in shallow waters off the coast of the southeastern United States. Binomial nomenclature clearly distinguishes it from Chaetodipterus zonatus, found in the eastern Pacific Ocean, or Chaetodipterus lippei, which is endemic to the waters off Angola and Senegal. Chaetodipterus faber is certainly never confused with Equus asinas, aka the jackass, donkey, moke, or burro, depending on where you live.

Each creature belongs to a higher classification or taxon (plural: taxa) as well. Domains are the broadest taxa and include archaea, bacteria, and eukarya. Within these domains are kingdoms; within the kingdoms are phyla (singular: phylum). Each phylum contains (in descending order) class, order, family, genus, and species.

Thus using binomial nomenclature, the Atlantic spadefish belongs to Domain Eukarya, Kingdom Animalia, Phylum Chordata, Class Osteichthyes, Order Perciformes, Family Ephippidae, Genus Chaetodipterus, Species faber.

Not a single one of the other 7.7 million animal species on earth can claim the same name. Simple.

Volunteer of the Year Award

Jeff Peterson is the winner of the 2015 Fred Eiserman Volunteer of the Year Award. Pictured here with his wife and daughter, Jeff has been a stalwart supporter of the Werner Wildlife Museum for several years. In addition to manning the front desk and answering visitor questions, he has been instrumental in helping new museum workers adjust to life among the critters.
CALL FOR ENTRIES:

All artisans who work with natural materials including fiber, leather, wood, stone, and metal are encouraged to enter.

DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES:
MONDAY, APRIL 4, 2016 AT 4:30 P.M.

The show is open to all Wyoming residents

To request entry forms and guidelines please call 307-235-2108, email indiahayford@caspercollege.edu, or come by the museum.

Size constraints may apply due to space limitations.

ARTISANS UNBOUND:
FEATHERS, FUR, AND FIBER

APRIL 12-JULY 11, 2016

Volunteer Voices
This month’s contributor is teen volunteer Leila Fox

New in Casper or just looking for something fun to do? Head on over to the Werner Wild Life Museum. It’s a great place for kids, adults and families to go! When my family and I moved to Casper, we didn’t know where to go. Someone recommended the museum to us and we were sure glad we went.

The museum features lots of fun programs and activities for kids and families to do. One of the most entertaining programs is called “Raptor Rap” where a museum worker entertains us with stories about raptor birds every third Thursday of the month. She shows us what the birds look like, what they do, how they hunt, and she tells folk stories as well as stories from her own experiences with the birds.

The Werner Wild Life Museum offers a wide range of different animals and birds on display as well as an outdoor activity area where you can sit and watch the birds and maybe get lucky and see a deer. My family and I greatly recommend the museum to everyone who is looking for something entertaining to do. The Werner Wildlife Museum is located by the YMCA of Casper. Hope to see you there!
The Wyoming Jackalope

The Wyoming jackalope is a cross between an extinct pigmy deer and a fierce meat-eating species of jackrabbit. Though generally quite small, jackalope are capable of speeds up to 90 miles per hour when in pursuit of prey and will fight aggressors to the death using their razor sharp antlers. In a gentler mood, jackalope are excellent mimics and can be pleasant though shy companions; cowboys have reported hearing jackalope singing along when ranch hands gather around campfires for a musical evening after a hard day in the saddle.

Many people don’t believe jackalope are real creatures because they’ve never seen an antlered jackrabbit in the wild. This is due to a behavioral dimorphism between bucks and does. The does are diurnal. Being visually undifferentiated from female jackrabbits, jackalope does generally go unnoticed by the public though they are common along the highways. The bucks are not only nocturnal but also extremely suspicious in nature, assiduously avoiding contact with humans and going to ground immediately upon sighting a person. Few people are quick enough to spot a buck jackalope, much less get a photo. And woe unto those who attempt to corner a buck! They are liable to find themselves on the wrong end of sharp tines and teeth. No one ever reports a jackalope attack for fear of being thought a credulous fool.

Though jackalope are native to Wyoming and rarely seen outside the state’s borders, rabbits and hares with horns have been reported throughout the world for centuries. Earlier sightings were recorded in 1650 in “Historiae Naturalis de Quadrupetibus Libri” (The History Book of Natural Quadrangles) and again in 1575 by Joris Hoefnagel in “Animalia Quadrupedia et Reptilia” (Terra). However, not too many years after the publication of Hoefnagel’s book, the idea of horned rabbits and hares fell out of scientific favor and reports of the same were greeted by legitimate scientists with derision and scorn.

Are you thoroughly confused now? Where does legend end and science begin when it comes to the jackalope and its horned relatives?

Real examples of horned rabbits and hares do exist thanks to a pathogen discovered in 1933 by American virologist Richard Shope. Working with a set of keratinized growths found on a cottontail rabbit’s head, Shope isolated a virus that is related to human papillomavirus (HPV), itself a virus which causes cancerous tumors in the human cervix. Shope’s discovery was the first model of a cancer-causing virus in mammals. Papillomaviruses regularly occur in mammals, birds, and reptiles. In rabbits, Shope’s papilloma virus causes facial growths that can manifest horns. If a growth occurs near a creature’s mouth, the ability to eat can be compromised and eventually results in starvation.

The legend of Wyoming’s Western Jackalope originated about 1933 in Douglas, Wyoming, in the taxidermy shop belonging to Douglas Herrick. He noticed a jackrabbit and antelope lying next to one another on the floor of the shop and thought a hybrid of the two heads would make for a good joke. It turned out to be such a good joke that many people he showed it to wanted their own mounted jackalope. Over the years, Douglas and his brother, Ralph, produced thousands of examples of this curious creature. Though an antelope provided the original inspiration, taxidermists eventually substituted deer antlers for antelope horns.

Today Douglas, Wyoming, proclaims itself “Jackalope Capitol of the World,” hosting a Jackalope Day each June. In an attempt to control the population of these ferocious creatures, the Douglas Chamber of Commerce issues hundreds of hunting licenses each year. Licensing requirements are stringent with hunters required to have an IQ than falls between 50 and 72. The season is brief, taking place on June 31 between midnight and 2 a.m.

While serving in the state legislature between 2001 and 2008, Converse County Representative David Edwards drafted a bill to have the jackalope declared Wyoming’s Official Mythical Animal. Less imaginative heads prevailed and despite four subsequent attempts to get a bill passed, the jackalope continues to languish without proper recognition. However, all is not lost: as a tribute to Edwards, who died in 2013, Representative Dan Zwonitzer, R-Cheyenne, has vowed to keep reintroducing the jackalope bill until it passes. He has made two attempts; perhaps the third will be a charm.
After many months in the planning stages, work has begun on the long anticipated children’s area at the Werner. Located downstairs in the diorama room, the area will include a puppet theater, reading and puzzle area, a hollow stump for short hibernations, an eagle aerie for gazing down at the world, a fishing tank, and an interactive diorama with plenty of child-sized moose, bear, antelope, and other animals to play with. There will also be wall murals where children can measure themselves against the wingspans of birds ranging from a bee hummingbird (1.3 inches) to a golden eagle (8 feet) and paw prints of wolves, voles and moose.

The grand opening is scheduled to take place in conjunction with the opening of “Artisans Unbound: Feather, Fur, and Fiber” on Tuesday, April 12, 2016. An open house will be held between 4 and 6 that evening with the ribbon cutting at the children’s area to take place at 4:15.

Folks with an artist’s eye or steady hands are welcome to give us a call at the Werner to see how they might become involved.