

## Zoology alumni



### Dear alumni,

Welcome to the first newsletter of 2016, the year which marks the 150th Anniversary of the Department of Zoology. We are putting on a series of events, culminating in the 150th Anniversary Weekend, which runs from Friday 23 September to Sunday 25 September 2016. Please put these dates in your diary; we hope to be able to welcome as many as possible of you to the Department over this weekend.

The first event in the 150th Anniversary Year is a guest lecture by Professor Jim Secord of the Department of History and Philosophy of Science, entitled "Raising the Whale: defining zoology at Cambridge". This will be held at 4 pm on Thursday 28 April 2016 in the Main Lecture Theatre of the Department. All are welcome. Further details about the lecture are given in the newsletter. Exciting events and activities that we are planning for the 150th Anniversary Weekend include:

- Sir David Attenborough and Dame Frances Ashcroft in conversation
- An illustrated talk on the making of natural history programmes by Mike Gunton, a television producer and senior executive at the BBC Natural History Unit
- A family-oriented event focused on insects by Tim Cockerill, zoologist, circus performer, broadcaster and photographer
- Lectures on developmental biology by Professor Michael Akam and on behavioural ecology by Professor Rebecca Kilner
- "Eureka!", a series of short films featuring members of the Department talking about their moments of discovery
- Garden designer Tom Stuart-Smith and Professor Beverley Glover, the Director of the Botanic Gardens, Cambridge, in conversation
- A series of short talks and short films about current research taking place within the Department
- Tours of the Museum Stores and Open Laboratories within the main Department
- "Just a Marmot": a panel of alumni try to talk without deviation etc for one minute on zoological topics
- A series of animal specimens to identify, in a quiz open to all alumni and their guests
- There will also be a drinks reception and afternoon tea, with plenty of opportunity for alumni to talk to each other and to present and past members of the Department.

There will be a display of photographs from your student days, including field courses, practical classes, and other outings: so please do **send these to us** if you possibly can. We are looking forward to seeing large numbers of you over the course of the weekend in September.

Best wishes

William Foster  
Director of Alumni Relations,  
Teaching Staff: 1976-present





## Our boots aren't made for walking... on vertical walls

David Labonte, Walter Federle and colleagues have established that the ability to stick to walls requires an increasingly large proportion of an animal's surface as body size increases from mites to geckos. A further increase in body size would require unrealistically large pads; extrapolating the observed scaling reveals that humans would need to devote 80% of the frontal area as an adhesive surface or wear size 145 shoes. Thus, anatomical constraints may have prevented the evolution of adhesion-based climbers larger than geckos.

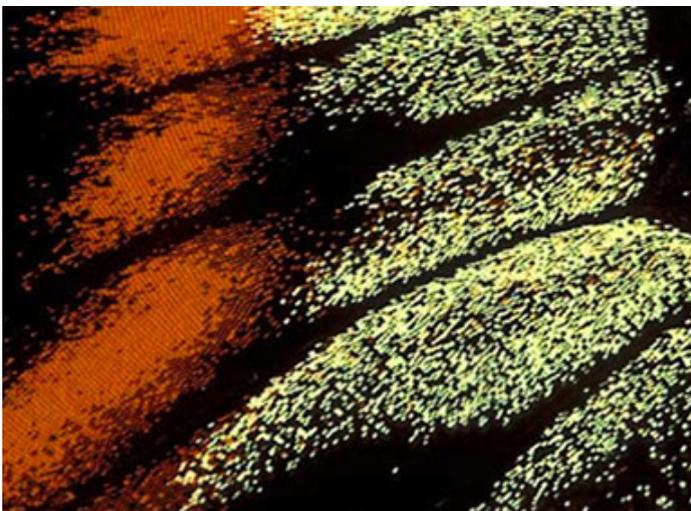
[Read more](#)



## Howling at the moon: decoding the language of wolves

A study led by Arik Kershenbaum, a Herschel Smith Fellow in the Department, has carried out the largest ever investigation of howling in canids (wolves, jackals and dogs) and has documented their diverse and distinctive howl repertoires. These findings could be useful both in helping the efforts to conserve these remarkable animals and may also shed light on the earliest evolution of our own use of language.

[Read more](#)



## Opening up the genetic paint box of butterflies' wings

Researchers in the Chris Jiggins group have shown how independent genetic switches can jump between the genomes of different *Heliconius* butterfly species through evolutionary time, creating novel wing patterns from an array of independent elements.

[Read more](#)

## Pollinator power for the people

Delegates from almost 100 national government and scientists



from across the world, including Lynn Dicks from the Department have met in Kuala Lumpur to discuss a new report on the threats to animal pollinators and strategies for harnessing their power. The report, produced over a two year period by an international panel of scientists, including Lynn, is the very first global assessment ever issued by the International Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Function (IPBES).

“People’s livelihoods and culture are intimately linked with pollinators around the world. All the major world religions have sacred passages that mention bees”, comments Lynn.

[Read more](#)

## Paul Brakefield: President of The Linnean Society

We are proud to report that Paul Brakefield, the Director of the University Museum of Zoology, is the current President of The Linnean Society of London, the oldest active biological society in the world. The society embraces the entire sweep of natural history and its activities for the current year can be accessed from the link below.

[Read more](#)



## Jenny Clack is awarded the Lapworth Medal of The Palaeontological Association

Congratulations to Jenny Clack, who has been awarded the Lapworth Medal, the most prestigious award of the Palaeontological Association. It is a life-time achievement award, for “a palaeontologist who has made a significant contribution to the science by means of a substantial body of research”.

[Read more](#)



## Nancy Lane is awarded a Doctorate of Science by Heriot–Watt University

Congratulations to Dr Nancy Lane on her award of a Doctorate of Science by Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, in recognition of her exceptional leading contribution to the advancement of women in the communities of science, engineering and technology, and distinction in the field of cell biology.

[Read more](#)



## International Serpentarius: 40 years on

*International Serpentarius* was a subversive alternative newsletter, produced by graduate students in 1975-1976, and modelled on the official departmental newsletter *Serpentarius* (which continues to this day). It was produced during a difficult period for the Department, between the death of Professor Torkel Weis-Fogh and the appointment of Gabriel Horn as the next Head of Department. It featured several thinly disguised characters, including Rory Panda, the acting Head of Department, and his secretary Lucy Gay-Batters. Huw Edwards, one of the writers of *International Serpentarius* has written a short account of its illustrious history, 40 years on...



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## Francis Maitland Balfour: the first and only Professor of Animal Morphology at Cambridge

Francis Balfour (1851 – 1882), after whom the Departmental Library is named, was a pioneer of animal embryology and one of the most prodigiously gifted scientists ever to be associated with the Department. He became a Fellow of the Royal Society at the age of 27 and, after being headhunted by other universities, was elected to a specially created chair of Animal Morphology at Cambridge in 1882. He died tragically young in the same year in a climbing accident on Mont Blanc, before he had begun his teaching role as a Professor. His uncle and his brother were both British Prime Ministers, and he is the grandson of Bamber Gascoyne the Younger.



Read more about him in the article by Adrian Friday, the third in his series about distinguished alumni of the Department.

[Read more](#)



### See inside the David Attenborough Building

The new-look David Attenborough



### Zoology Department welcomes Andrew Gillis as a new Fellow

The Department is delighted to



### 'Whale Up For It!': Comedy Night at the Museum

On the evening of Darwin's 207th

Building opens its doors to the public for the first time for an art exhibition that celebrates the pioneering partnership between conservationists and the University of Cambridge. Visitors can view the refurbished building (formerly the Arup Building) for the first time when exhibition *Conflicted Seeds + Spirit* opens to the public on 9 March.

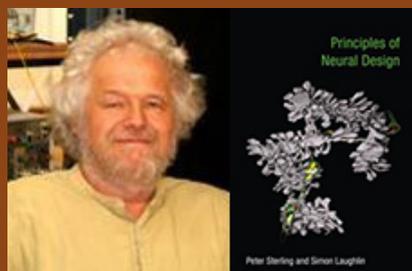
[Read more](#)

welcome Dr Andrew Gillis as a new Royal Society University Research Fellow. Andrew works on the molecular and cellular basis of vertebrate skeletal development, and the evolution of jawed vertebrate skeletal systems. His current research focuses on primitive and/or unique skeletal features of chondrichthyan fishes – sharks, skates, rays and holocephalans – but he is happy to consider any model system that may be used to address fundamental questions about vertebrate skeletal development, growth and repair.

[Read more](#)

birthday, 12 February, 260 guests attended a comedy fundraising gala in aid of the Museum redevelopment. This was the first public event in the David Attenborough Building. Ably hosted by Radio 4's Robin Ince, they were treated to an evening of laughter and science courtesy of Simon Singh, Matt Parker, Steve Mould and Sara Pascoe. A busy outdoor bar was supplied in partnership with Cambridge Wine Merchants.

The Museum team were delighted to raise £5,000 on the night, with all proceeds going towards the conservation and redisplay of the Museum's iconic finback whale skeleton.



### Simon Laughlin's book wins a prose award

*Principles of Neural Design*, which Simon co-authored with Peter Sterling, has won a Prose Award for Excellence in Biological and Life Sciences. The Association of American Publishers annually give out a series of awards to the best books of the year in different categories. MIT Press won the Award for Excellence in Biological and Life Sciences with *Principles of Neural Design*, which also received an excellent review in 'Current Biology'. Some of Simon Laughlin's work also features in the next edition of the University's Research Horizons under the appropriate heading, *Think Small*.

[Read more](#)



### Equalities and Wellbeing annual lecture 2016

On the 26 January 2016, Professor Michelle Ryan (centre) delivered the Department of Zoology's second Annual Equalities and Wellbeing lecture. She explored the tendency for women, and members of other minority groups, to be more likely to opt-out of some career paths due to a perceived innate lack of ambition and commitment.

She disputed this theory with data from different populations and suggested that this feeling in women is driven, in large part, by the lack of desirable and attainable role models in leadership positions. She spoke eloquently on the importance of a "fitting in" process for women in science and outlined ways to encourage all members of a department to feel like they have fitting role models.



### New Zoology Department Facebook page

A good way to stay in touch with our latest events, research and publications is by having a look at the brand [new Zoology Facebook page](#).

It has been set up this month by Hannah Rowland, a lecturer in the Department, and she is encouraging students, staff and alumni to post what they are up to. Please [email Hannah](#) if you have any news or ideas.



Department of Zoology  
University of Cambridge  
Downing Street  
Cambridge CB2 3EJ

**Tel** +44 (0)1223 336600

**Email** [Rachel French, Alumni Coordinator](#)

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**Website** [www.zoo.cam.ac.uk](http://www.zoo.cam.ac.uk)

