

American Society of Mammalogists

MICHAEL A. MARES, President
Sam Noble Oklahoma MNH
University of Oklahoma
2401 Chautauqua
Normon, OK 73072
(405) 325-9007 FAX: 325-27699
Email: mamares@ou.edu

EDWARD J. HESKE, President-Elect
Illinois Natural History Survey
U1816 South Oak Street
Champaign, IL 61820
(217) 244-2173 FAX: 333-4949
Email: eheske@uiuc.edu

EILEEN A. LACEY, Vice-President
Museum of Vertebrate Zoology
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720-3140
(510) 642-3567 FAX: 643-8238
Email: ealacey@berkeley.edu



DEEANN M. REEDER, Recording Secretary
Department of Biology
Bucknell University
Lewisburg, PA 17837
(570) 577-1208 FAX: 577-3537
Email: dreeder@bucknell.edu

RONALD A. VAN DEN BUSSCHE, Secretary-Treasurer
Department of Zoology
430 Life Sciences West
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK 74078
(405) 744-5663 FAX: 744-1797
Email: ron.van_den_bussche@okstate.edu

RONALD E. BARRY, Journal Editor
Bates College
Department of Biology
Lewiston, ME 04240
(207) 786-6109 FAX: 786-8334
Email: rbarry@bates.edu

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Dr. Luis Izquierdo Vázquez
Rector, Universidad de San Marcos
Lima, Peru

Dear Dr. Vázquez:

I am the president of the American Society of Mammalogists, the world's largest organization dedicated to the study of mammals. I am also the former president of the Natural Science Collections Alliance, the largest organization dedicated to representing collections in the legislative process of the United States. My specialty within the science of mammalogy is South American mammals. Thus I am very familiar with Peru and its rich mammal fauna. Indeed, Peru is the 5th richest country in the world in terms of mammalian biodiversity, with almost 500 species of mammals. My travels in South America have also taken me to the Universidad de San Marcos, where I was able to tour the outstanding mammal collection that has been in operation for 92 years and is the major repository for scientific specimens of mammals of Peru. This collection is truly a national treasure for the university, for Peru, and for international science. Additionally, the collections preserve much more than mammals. The museum contains an enormous variety of Peru's wildlife, from birds, reptiles, and amphibians, to plants and fossils. The specimens that are preserved in the MUSM collection represent a unique resource on nature, one that is not replicated in any other university or collection in the world. The scientists who have trained in the collection and received advanced degrees in mammalian biology at universities in the United States and Europe, are becoming respected leaders in their field, and certainly are leaders in the study of Peru's natural heritage.

As a museum director and administrator, I am aware of the challenges of maintaining or providing new facilities that offer proper care for invaluable scientific collections and for the scientific and educational needs of universities. Thus I understand the urgency for updated infrastructure whenever possible. However, the protection of invaluable scientific collections must also be a priority for institutions. One must consider that collections provide continuity of information about a country's natural heritage across time. I have routinely worked with specimens that were collected in the 1700s, and even the 1600s. Every specimen is an irreplaceable piece of information on the status of a species, its habitat, and its time and place. We have learned an enormous amount about species extinction, climate change, emerging diseases, introduced pests, agricultural threats, evolution, conservation, and other matters from the specimens in our museums and collections. They provide the irreplaceable scientific record of nature across both space and time.

When museum specimens are lost or damaged due to substandard care or poor planning related to how the collections are stored, it is a very sad occurrence. Should a collection with the national and

international importance and stature of the MUSM be damaged or lost, it would be an international tragedy for science. I thus urge you to work closely with your highly respected museum professionals at the MUSM to ensure that the collections are not only protected during any temporary construction operations, but receive new and improved space in any final design.

As administrators, we will be remembered, if we are remembered at all, for the things we did that affected our organization over time. Building new facilities is important. However, few buildings persist for two or three centuries. Collections, however, continue across time, becoming more valuable to their university and nation each year. You now have an opportunity to affect the future of the most important natural science collections in Peru and I hope you will be able to work with collection professionals to ensure that this rich resource is available for the research and teaching needs of future generations.

Respectfully,



Michael A. Mares
President

cc. bmillans@unmsm.edu.pe (Dra. Betty Millán, Directora Museum of San Marcos)
rgropp@aibs.org (Dr. Robert Gropp, Natural Science Collections Alliance, American Institute of Biological Sciences)
bpatterson@fieldmuseum.org (Dr. Bruce Patterson, Curator Field Museum, Past President ASM)
vrpacheco@yahoo.com (Dr. Victor Pacheco, Curator, San Marcos Mammal Collection)
mmonicadiaz@arnet.com.ar (Dr. Mónica Díaz, President SAREM)