

Shell Museum News

Number 56

www.shellmuseum.org

Summer 2005

Renowned Professor Geerat J. Vermeij To Speak at Museum's 10th Anniversary

"Good morning and welcome to the official opening of The Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum."

Those were the words that at one time or another over the preceding nine years some of us on the board thought might never be spoken. But on this sunny, warm November 18, 1995, here was board president Harold Tovell welcoming some 300 guests attending the Grand Opening ceremonies in the parking area's circle.'

-From "An Informal History of The Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum"

-By William F. Hallstead

"blind since the age of three, uses his sense of touch to study the shape and surface features of shells. That work has led him to insights into evolution, ecology, biology and, most recently, economics. In 2004, he was named a faculty research lecturer, the highest honor bestowed by UC-Davis faculty members on their peers and recognizes exceptional contributions to research."

Dr. Vermeij will be accompanied by his wife, Edith Zipser Vermeij, who is his research collaborator. He will give a talk during the afternoon of the open house and then be available to sign Museum store copies of his book, *A Natural History of Shells*. Dr. Vermeij will speak briefly during the evening reception, to be followed by another book signing.

No admission will be charged for the daytime open house, which will run from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Visitors are encouraged to use The Sanibel School parking lot as a trolley shuttle pick-up and drop-off point. Adventures in Paradise Inc. has generously agreed to donate its trolley shuttle service throughout the day and evening. Members and friends will receive an invitation to the evening party.



Dr. Geerat J. Vermeij

Photo: Mary Doval Graziose

Flash forward ten years since the penning of those words by author and former Museum board president Bill Hallstead: On Saturday, Nov. 19, 2005, the Museum will celebrate the start of its second decade with a daytime open house for the public and an invitation-only evening reception for members and friends.

Museum director Dr. José H. Leal is pleased to announce that the guest of honor at the open house and reception will be University of California-Davis distinguished professor of geology Dr. Geerat J. Vermeij. A 1992 MacArthur "Genius" Award recipient, Dr. Vermeij specializes in marine ecology and paleoecology, and the functional morphology of marine mollusks.

UC-Davis News Services explains that Dr. Vermeij,

From the Director

Saturday, August 13, 2005, marked the first anniversary of Hurricane Charley's disastrous landfall on the coast of Southwest Florida. On the anniversary, local and national media emphasized the fast recovery observed in our area, a phenomenal effort supported by governmental agencies and private organizations, but implemented mostly through the willpower and resilience of locals.

Notwithstanding the material restoration, local businesses and non-profit organizations have yet to see reinstated their "pre-Charley" figures. The islands of Sanibel and Captiva have had in 2005 the lowest visitor traffic since 1989. This (it is hoped temporary) decline in numbers of visitors, which affects in particular the revenue at the Museum, may be attributed to a combination of factors.

Most of these stem from last year's

hectic hurricane season: concerns about storms during summer 2005, resorts not operating at full capacity or still closed after Charley, and the mistaken belief by potential visitors that the islands have not yet recuperated. Last year's toll increase and now the start of construction on the Sanibel Causeway probably do not help either.

Local leaders believe that, after the end
(continued on page 2)

WHAT'S INSIDE

Adopt-A-Class

From the Board

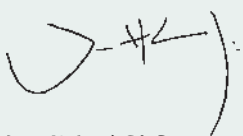
Shell of the Moment

Director...from page 1

of the 2005 hurricane season and full opening and revitalization of some of the larger resorts by early 2006, the islands will return to their spots as major destinations for domestic and international travelers. Until then, I want to invite you to consider making a tax-deductible contribution to help support the Museum and its operation during these difficult times.

The 2005 Annual Conchologists of America Convention, which made landfall at the Sanibel Harbour Resort and Spa (located right before the causeway) on July 19 to 24, arrived as a benign gale of fresh air during an otherwise quiet summer. COA is the largest organization in the world devoted to shell collecting and the informal study of mollusks and their shells. This year's convention was organized by Museum trustee Anne Joffe; Museum staff and volunteers participated with the logistics of the event and hosting an evening open house for convention participants and their families. I led a field trip to beautiful Cayo Costa State Park (great weather!) and was invited by 2005 COA program chair and Museum trustee Harry G. Lee to present a talk on the importance of protoconchs (the early shell) in the biology of mollusks.

I want to acknowledge the support received by the Museum from COA and its members since the Museum's inception, and hope for another COA convention in a fully recovered Southwest Florida in the near future!



José H. Leal, Ph.D.
Director



Volunteer education docent Ginny Avery sits on the Museum front steps with Lee County public school fourth graders. Mrs. Avery always takes photographs of the "adopted" classes to give to their sponsors.

Adopt-A-Class Campaign Enters 3rd Year

Readers will notice that this issue of *Shell Museum News* contains an inserted form asking people to sponsor a Lee County public elementary school class field trip to the Museum. The 2005-2006 academic year marks the start of the third season of the Adopt-A-Class campaign, and the eighth season of the field trip program.

In the 2004-2005 academic year, 2,073 public school students took part in the field trip program. It is primarily fourth graders who visit, because they study Florida and teachers say the Museum program works best with that grade.

It is no surprise that transportation costs continue to skyrocket, explains group tour and education coordinator Anna Marie Nyquist. As a result, the Museum can no longer underwrite the large number of classes that would like to visit, and

annual Adopt-A-Class donations of \$195 help defray costs.

Volunteer education docent Ginny Avery (pictured above) and her husband, Bruce, sponsor several classes every year. In addition, Mrs. Avery takes photographs of all "adopted" classes and their sponsors (if the sponsors are able to visit with their class), to give as a memento. She mails class photos to out-of-town sponsors.

"I loved receiving an adorable photo of 'my' class," says Sanibel resident and Adopt-A-Class sponsor Virginia Fleming, a former Museum board member. "I was unable to attend with the class and I thought it was so gracious of the Museum to send me a photo of their visit. It's a terrific program."

For further information, please call the museum at 239-395-2233 or 888-679-6450.

From the Board

2005 Annual March Membership Meeting: Board president Jon Thompson thanked secretary Anne Joffe for chairing "Under the Sea"; treasurer Joe Troiano gave the 2004 financial report and said the Museum is in good shape despite the hurricanes, thanks to generous donations to the Emergency Operating Fund; Dr. Leal's presentation included the website, which is designed and maintained by webmaster Tina Yorgey and now numbers more than 700 pages; trustee Jerry Harasewych, of the Division of Mollusks at the Smithsonian Institution, said a global community of members supports the Shell Museum.

April 9, 2005, Board Meeting: The Public Relations Committee is organizing the 10th anniversary celebration on Saturday, Nov. 19; Dr. Leal said the Museum is eighth in line for a matching grant from the state Division of Cultural Affairs Cultural Endowment Program; education and group tour coordinator Anna Marie Nyquist is training education docents in PowerPoint.

Summer 2005 Executive Committee Meetings (President Jon Thompson, vice president Sam Bailey, treasurer Joe Troiano, secretary Anne Joffe, member-at-large Wil Schlosser): The Museum's financial position has been about as expected in the budget, except we have had fewer visitors because island hotels have still not fully recovered from the hurricane. As a result, we have had to draw down the contingency reserve money more than expected; progress is beginning on the Long-Range Strategic Plan that will be important for accreditation and to set future policies; the Museum successfully interacted with the COA Convention in July, which should increase membership and contributions for the future.

World-Record Size Whelk Now on Exhibit

The Museum recently changed its temporary exhibit that is known as the "Shell of the Moment," and is now featuring a world-record size lightning whelk.

The gigantic lightning whelk measures 40.2 cm and is cited in the current edition of *Registry of World Record Size Shells* by Don Pisor. It was collected in 1993 by a scallop boat at a depth of 37 meters off Carrabelle in the Florida Panhandle.

The shell was given to the Museum by Bev and Al Deynzer of Sanibel Island. Its scientific name is *Busycon sinistrum* and it was first described in a scientific journal by Hollister in 1958.

Lightning whelks are common in shallow water throughout the eastern Gulf of Mexico and the southeastern coast of the United States. They are remarkable for having *sinistral* or left-handed shells (when you hold the shell with the top, or *apex*, pointing up, the opening, or *aperture*, is on the left side). The *operculum*, a trapdoor-like structure that seals the shell shut after the whelk retreats inside, is also on display.

Female lightning whelks are far bigger than males and, beginning in spring, lay long strings of egg capsules from which crawl-away babies hatch. *Dextral*, or right-handed, whelks are rarely found. Lightning whelk feed on clams, most often quahogs (*Mercenaria campechiensis* and *M. mercenaria*).

As seen on the apical (or top) view of the shell, females start off with a color pattern of light-brown and dark-brown hues and gradually turn paler with growth. In the later growth stages the shell is almost pure white. This whelk probably lived to be more than 20 years of age.



"Shell of the Moment" Exhibit
Photos: José H. Leal

Museum News

At the end of the work day on Friday, June 17, Museum director Dr. José Leal and staff enjoyed hosting the board of directors of the Florida Association of Museums. The group was having a weekend retreat on Sanibel and participants highly praised the Museum, noting that the tour was one of the highlights of their three-day agenda. FAM directors are elected by the membership, which is representative of the spectrum of museum disciplines in Florida.

"Environmental Education: The Perspective from a Natural History Museum" was the title of Dr. Leal's talk at the Latin American Malacological Congress in Panama. The meeting took place from July 4 to 7.

Dr. Leal is looking forward to attending the 2005 FAM Annual Conference and Exposition from Sept. 11 to 14 in Naples. He will present a museum technology session on Sept. 12, titled, "A Web of Shells: The Online Life of The Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum." The session discusses the strengths and achievements of the Museum, with emphasis on its website and online resources.

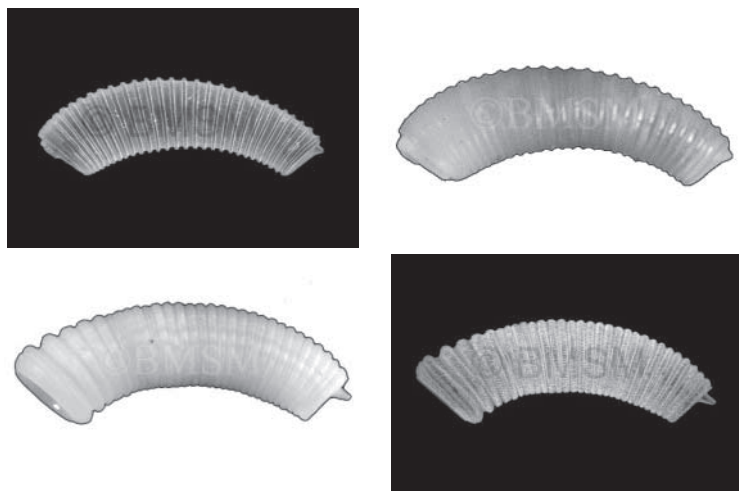
On Oct. 10, Dr. Leal will talk about the Museum's online Southwest Florida Shells identification guide during a presentation at the Museum that is part of "Ding" Darling Days 2005. The weeklong event, which runs this year from Oct. 9 to 15, is a celebration of the natural wonders of Sanibel's J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge. A Museum information table will be at the refuge during "Ding" Darling Day on Oct. 15.

Museum staff are to participate in the Gift from the Sea Festival on Nov. 13 on Captiva Island's Andy Rosse Lane. There will also be an info table about the Museum's Calusa exhibit at a celebration of Florida's Native American cultures. That event, organized by *Islander* newspaper reporter Karen Nelson, will be held on the grounds of the Sanibel Historical Village & Museum on Nov. 26.

"Telltale Shelling: Uncoiling a Snail's Life Through Protoconch Morphology" will be presented by Dr. Leal at the kick-off meeting of the Sanibel-Captiva Shell Club's 2005-2006 season. The meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 25, at the Museum.

The upcoming Shell Club meeting offers people a chance to see Dr. Leal's program if they missed it at the 2005 Conchologists of America Annual Convention. The convention was held July 19 to 24 at the Sanibel Harbour Resort and Spa, near the Sanibel Causeway. Conventioneers enjoyed an open house at the Museum on Thursday evening, July 21, and Faye Mucha's photographs from that event are in this issue of *Shell Museum News*.

During the open house, longtime Museum supporters Harlan E. Wittkopf and S. Peter Dance presented Dr. Leal with a hard-to-find book for the Museum library. *The Sea Shells of Sagami Bay* (continued on page 6)



The online guide on SW Florida shells (www.shellmuseum.org/sanibel_shells.html) now includes scanning electron micrographs (SEM) of some micromollusks taken by J. Leal at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. See how they compare with standard photos of *Caecum bipartitum* (top pictures, SEM on the left) and *Caecum floridanum* (bottom pictures, SEM on the right).

Photos: José H. Leal



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a valuable addition to the library's reference section. Dr. Leal also reminds COA members that they are always welcome to visit the Museum library and peruse its holdings of photo albums from past conventions.

Dr. Ángel Valdés, associate curator of malacology at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County in California, is the recipient of the 2005 R. Tucker Abbott Visiting Curatorship. Dr. Valdés' research focuses on phylogenetic systematics and biogeography of opisthobranch mollusks. Members of this diverse group of marine gastropods are without shells or have reduced shells. The date of Dr. Valdés' visit is not yet scheduled. During his visit, he will give an evening presentation open to the public, titled "The Secret Lives of Naked Mollusks."

Collection Department volunteer Marguerite Pilcher has added to her duties and is now in charge of handling orders, packing, and shipping the Museum's school shell kits to educators around the world. Longtime volunteer Vera Goldstein, who

worked with the school shell kits for many years, has relocated to San Francisco.

A recent visitor to the Collection Department included Dr. Michael Hollmann, chairman of the Department of Biochemistry I - Receptor Biochemistry at Ruhr University in Bochum, Germany. Dr. Hollmann was vacationing on Sanibel with his family and attended the COA convention bourse. He also generously spent part of his vacation upstairs in the Museum, helping curate the Naticidae family.

A flurry of media interest has surfaced on Sanibel Island a year after its devastating summer 2004 hurricane season. Print, Internet, TV, and radio reporters and photographers from throughout the country and the world have recently mentioned the Museum, including the Scripps Howard News Service and the *Frankfurter Rundschau*.

The Museum is also receiving increased international exposure from Marcus Coltro and José Coltro, who are well-known Brazilian shell dealers.

The brothers visited the Museum twice while attending the COA convention and took digital photographs of exhibits, the Collection Department, and the library. Cyber visitors can view the Coltro's virtual tour of the Museum at <http://www.femorale.com.br/articles/bmmuseum/index.asp>.

For the period July 2005 to June 2006, the Museum has again received a General Support Grant from the Florida Department of State Division of Cultural Affairs. The funds are used for general operating expenses.

The Museum has lost dedicated supporter **Martin Grasgreen**, who set up the Museum's early computer systems.

The Museum wishes to thank the following donors who recently contributed \$1,000 or more in designated and undesignated funds: Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Avery, The Broward Shell Club, Mrs. Garwin McNeilus, and the Naples Shell Club.



Fun on the Fourth!

Collection Department volunteer Rodger Bunnell was a great sport to turn his Jeep into a Shellmobile during Sanibel's July 4th parade. Some staff and junior docents joined him, along with ten unusual balloons. The colorful conchs and scallops were specially ordered by Helen and Rick Adams of Sanibel, who own Balloons Over Fort Myers.

Photo: Hal Pilcher

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Editor: Libby Grimm
Layout: Tina L. Yorgey

Shell Museum Open House for COA 2005



The 2005 Conchologists of America Annual Convention was held July 19 to 24 at the Sanibel Harbour Resort and Spa, near the Sanibel Causeway. Conventioneers enjoyed an open house at the Museum on Thursday evening, July 21, as Faye Mucha's photographs show!

First Row: Josy Wiener and S. Peter Dance; Gene Everson, Marilyn Northrop and Carl Ehrlich; Faye Mucha and Jack Lightbourn

Second Row: Susan Friedman and Jordan Star; Sam Bailey, Anne Joffe and Harlan Wittkopf

Third Row: Maria, Jonathan and Michael Galka; Debbie and Glenn Freeman; José H. Leal and Paul Callomon

Photos: Faye Mucha

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