

Avian Taxidermy and Museum Curation Internship

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Mentor: Dr. Kimberly Sullivan



Summary

The avian teaching collection had been in storage for two years during the reconstruction of Utah State University's Biology and Natural Resource Building. I spent the past academic year working with Dr. Kimberly Sullivan restoring the collection and gaining skills in avian taxidermy and museum curation. During this internship, I learned how to remove arsenic, repair specimens, prepare new specimens, identify species, and catalog a scientific and/or teaching avian collection. I gained skills and insights that will prepare me for my career in ornithology.

Objective

My objective for this internship was to gain skills in curatorial techniques. The Utah State University's Avian Teaching Collection was in storage for two years as the Biology and Natural Resource building was being renovated. After the collection was moved to its permanent home, the collection needed to be cleaned, repaired, and cataloged.

Skills I Acquired

I learned how to maintain a scientific and/or teaching avian collection. I gained skills in identification, cataloging, preparation, maintenance, and repair of a collection. This was a good introduction to the Utah State University's Biology Department and allowed me to investigate a career in ornithology.

Maintenance

Until the mid-1970s, avian specimens were often painted with liquid arsenic on the inside of the skin to protect the skin from insect damage. Over time, arsenic makes its way through the skin and appears on the feathers of the specimens. The arsenic can then contaminate other specimens and surfaces. Vacuuming specimens removes the arsenic and is recommended every five years. This is done by placing a specimen inside a fume hood and using a hand-held HEPA filter vacuum.

Repair

All specimens were inspected, restored, and repaired. This is done by cleaning the feet and glass eyes of the specimens, repairing any broken specimens by sewing or gluing the broken areas, and then combing the feathers in place with a toothbrush.

Specimen Preparation

To make a new study skin specimen for the collection. All information about the bird was recorded. The internal organs, and muscles were removed, and the empty cavity filled with cotton. The specimen was sewn up on the ventral side and wrapped to dry. Once dry, the specimen is added to the collection.

Catalog

Dr. Kimberly Sullivan and I created a spreadsheet of all specimens in the collection. The spreadsheet contained the species name, mount or study skin details, storage location, date vacuumed and repaired, as well as the quantity and sex of each species.



Image 1. Photo of Victoria Radley holding a Ferruginous Hawk.



Image 2. Photo of Victoria Radley holding an Atlantic Puffin.

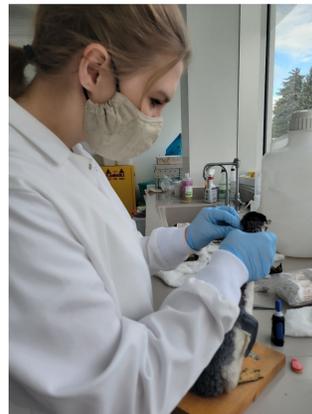


Image 3. Photo of Victoria Radley repairing the head of a Little Blue Penguin.



Image 4. Photo of Victoria Radley repairing a specimen.



Image 5. Photo of a Dark-eye Junco study skin, prepared by Victoria Radley.



Image 6. Photo of three Cedar Waxwings (left) and a MacGillivray's Warbler (right) study skins, prepared by Victoria Radley.



Image 7. Photo of Victoria Radley identifying specimens.



Image 8. Photo of Victoria Radley cataloging the collection.



Image 9. Photo of Victoria Radley removing arsenic from a Great Horned Owl.



Image 10. Photo of Victoria Radley holding a Chilean Flamingo.

		Feb-22						
1	Avian Collection							
2	Species	Mount/Study Skin	Cabinet/Case	Vacuum/Repa	No. Specimens	No. Females	No. Males	No. Juveniles
20	unk pheasant	mount		3 fall 2021	1	1		
21	Ruffed Grouse	mount		3 fall 2021	1		1	
22	Sage Grouse	mount		4 fall 2021	1	1		
23	Blue Grouse	mount		4 fall 2021	4	4		
24	Chukur	mount		4 fall 2021	1		1	
25	Grey Partridge	mount		4 fall 2021	3		3	
26	Ruffed Grouse	mounts		4 fall 2021	3	2	1	
27	Mountain Quail	mount		4 fall 2021	1	1		
28	California Quail	mount		4 fall 2021	1	1		
29	Northern Bobwhite	mount		4 fall 2021	1	1		
30	Sora	mount		4 fall 2021	2	1	1	1
31	Common Poorwill	mount		4 fall 2021	4			
32	American Flamingo	study skin		4 fall 2021	1			
33	Greater Roadrunner	mount		4 fall 2021	1			
34	American Coot	mount		4 fall 2021	2	1		1

Table 1. Sample of Utah State University's Avian Teaching Collection Catalog.

Acknowledgements

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