

NEWS

Florida Fossil Hunters



Florida Prehistorical Museum, Inc.
dba/ Florida Fossil Hunters
Volume 36, Number 5

SEP/OCT 2026

From Ye Olde President.....

Welcome everyone to the busy Fall season.

The club's **Fossil Fair** will be here soon and we are looking for

- VOLUNTEERS
- SILENT AUCTION DONATIONS
- Valerie reports the show tables are all rented and FULL.

See page 3 for more info. If you want to sign up or have questions, please see Melissa at September's 26th meeting for information. *All club members' donations and volunteer hours will earn you fossil bucks.* Everything is a go and lets pray the weather is good to us that weekend of the Fossil Fair.

Russ Ahlgrim with Florida Fossil Hunters will be our guest speaker for **September's 26th FFH meeting**. The topic will be ***Digging Dinosaurs in Wyoming***. I ask all FFH members to bring in their dinosaur fossils for show and tell.

Please remember **No Meeting in October** because of the Fossil Fair. I hope to see everyone visiting the FFH Fossil Fair.

At EVERY meeting!

- Support your club with the purchase of vintage fossil fair t-shirts! Variety of sizes available at meetings while they last. \$25/Adults and Kids/\$20.
- "Fossil swap": every member brings in fossils to talk about and swap with other members.
- Paleontology for Kids has been a success and will be held before the general meetings at 2:00pm.

Thank you
Salvatore Sansone
FFH President

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Saturday, September 26th

2pm Paleontology for Kids

3pm Meeting

FFH meeting at OSC

OCTOBER 3 & 4

2026 FFH Fossil Fair

Saturday, November 14th

2pm Paleontology for Kids

3pm Meeting

2026 Schedule

Available pg 8

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www.floridafossilhunters.com

MEETINGS & MORE

Our Upcoming Meetings

At EVERY meeting!

- Support your club with the purchase of vintage fossil fair t-shirts! Variety of sizes available at meetings while they last. \$25/Adults and Kids/\$20.
- "Fossil swap": every member brings in fossils to talk about and swap with other members.
- Paleontology for Kids has been a success and will be held before the general meetings at 2:00pm.

Regular Meetings held at the Orlando Science Center. Unless otherwise noted. Admission and parking is FREE to attending members. At the garage & ticket counter inform them you are there for the meeting.

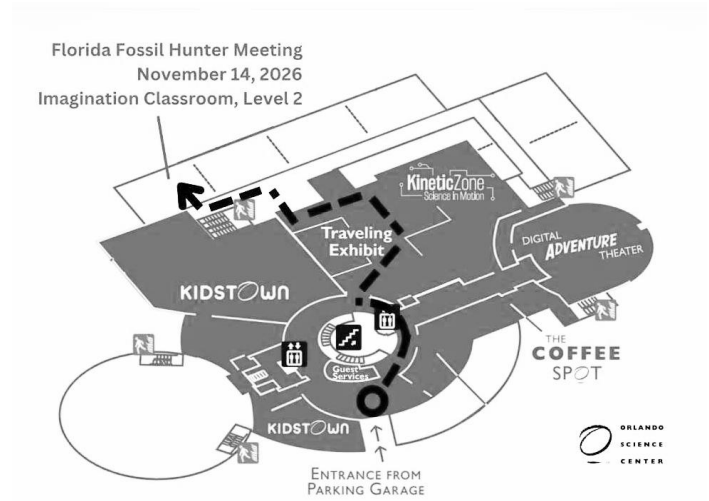
PALEONTOLOGY FOR KIDS

Every OSC Meeting; 2:00-3:00pm

Kids' Fossil Blast is an informal, hands-on experience aimed at kids ages 5 to 14.

FFH OSC Meeting Room

See the map below attend our November Meeting



JOIN FFH!

Family memberships cost \$25

Individual membership will cost \$20

<https://floridafossilhunters.com/membership>,

mail in the form on pg 7 or renew at the meeting.

PIECE ON THE PEACE

Want the most current height? Visit floridafossilhunters.com and click on the easy Peace River Gauge button in the sidebar or under the Resources tab for the latest water level data or visit the USGS website directly.
PEACE RIVER AT US 17 AT ZOLFO SPRINGS, FL

Peace River at US 17 at Zolfo Springs, FL - USGS-02295637

[Subscribe to WaterAlert](#)

- using custom time span -
July 1, 2026 - September 17, 2026
Gage height, feet

7.37 ft - Sep 17, 2026 08:30:00 PM EDT
5.16 ft - Aug 05, 2026 10:13:00 AM EDT



Fossil Fair, How I Can Help?

To put on such an event, we need lots of volunteers to help!

There are so many ways to take part in this fun-filled, fossil-packed weekend. First of all, volunteer some time to help out in one of the areas during the Fair.

- Be one of the smiling, helpful people at the admissions table where people arrive.
- Help get set up Friday and/or tear down on Sunday, the Kids' identify their fossil finds in the activities area, folks bidding on treasures at the Silent Auction.
- Volunteer at the Membership table, answer questions and helping folks get started in their own quest to find fossils.
- And more...

Each position offers plenty of opportunities to share your excitement of fossiling and the joy of learning more about the world. Please give a few hours.... or more if you can.

You will be rewarded, not only in Fossil Bucks, but also with the fun of sharing your interests with other folks. The shifts: Saturday: 8:30am to 12:45pm and 12:30pm to 5pm | Sunday: 9:30am to 12:45pm and 12:30pm to 4pm

SIGN UP: to volunteer at the September meeting or call Melissa Dunaway at 407-461-8507. Public information, civic center, and dealer questions please contact Sal at 321-278-9294.

Admissions Table: Greeting visitors with a smile, taking the money, giving them a free door prize ticket, etc. Kid's Activities: help the kids shift through shark tooth and Yankee town echinoid fossil matrix and help them identify what they find with ID sheets.

Silent Auction: Logging donations, selecting items for each auction round, taking money, soliciting donations from the vendors, announcing the beginning and end of the auctions, etc.

Membership Table: Handing out club info, helping join the club, explaining about the field trips and other activities, selling t-shirts, etc.

Fossil Display Area: Telling visitors about the fossils on display and answering questions or suggesting other sources for the answers.

Setting up on Friday and packing up after closing on Sunday, putting the signs out on the streets early Saturday morning,

To donate items to the Kids' Corner or the Silent Auction, just bring them to the Fair with you.

Bring Food!

One of the really extraordinary things about our Fossil Fair is that we feed our volunteers and vendors. We firmly believe full tummies make for happy people. So we ask that everyone bring a casserole, or salad, or dessert, or bag of munchies to share. The club foots the bill for the lunch meat and fixings for sandwiches as well as the paper plates and utensils. Finally, bring some food to share with the other volunteers and the vendors. We've managed to feed the workers at our past Fossil Fairs which really makes it feel like a big family reunion... a really strange but funny and intellectually stimulating one.

Donations for the Kids' Corner and Silent Auction

Small bones, echinoids and sharks needed for kid's activities. Please bring to the meetings or Fossil Fair. Those donated fossils bring smiles of joy to the kids who get to find them in our activities.

Silent Auction

For the Silent Auction, you can donate display cases/shelves, modern bones, figurines, prehistoric animal toys, etc. as well as fossils or minerals.



An illustration of a tyrannosaur preying on an ancient diving bird. Credit: Andrey Atuchin

A 66-Million-Year-Old Feather, Preserved in Dinosaur Poop, May Explain Why Birds Survived the Asteroid

September 11, 2026 | Summarized from article from Field Museum

Paleontologists have uncovered a remarkable clue in an unlikely place: a fossilized feather preserved inside 66-million-year-old dinosaur dung. The discovery, detailed in a new study in *Current Biology*, may help solve one of paleontology's longest-standing mysteries - why birds were the only dinosaur lineage to survive the mass extinction that ended the Cretaceous Period.

The story begins in 2016, when David DeMar Jr., a research scientist with the Hell Creek Project, was fossil hunting in northeastern Montana. He noticed an unusual reddish-brown nodule and, on closer inspection, spotted a tiny fossil feather - a first for the well-studied Hell Creek Formation despite over 150 years of exploration there. Suspecting the rock was actually a coprolite (fossilized feces), researchers used micro-CT scanning at USC's medical campus to look inside without damaging it.

The scans revealed an extraordinarily well-preserved feather along with fish scales and small leg bones from a hesperornithiform - an extinct group of flightless, loon-like diving birds.

Because the feathers and bones appeared together, the team concluded they likely belonged to the same bird, which had apparently been eaten by a large theropod, possibly a *T. rex* or *Nanotyrannus*, shortly before the asteroid impact. The find gives researchers a rare direct snapshot of a predator-prey relationship from the very end of the Age of Dinosaurs.

But the bigger significance lies in what the feather reveals about bird evolution. Hesperornithiforms were closely related to Neornithes, the lineage that gave rise to every bird alive today, yet hesperornithiforms went extinct along with nearly all other dinosaurs. Since both groups lived in and

around water, their fate challenges the idea that living near water alone helped early birds survive the post-impact devastation.

Instead, lead author Jingmai O'Connor, associate curator of fossil reptiles at Chicago's Field Museum, suspects feather structure and molting patterns may have played a decisive role. The newly discovered feathers show a mix of modern, waterproof characteristics alongside smaller, fuzzier, more primitive body feathers - the kind associated with earlier dinosaurs and another extinct bird group called enantiornithines. Because body feathers are key to insulation, birds with less efficient plumage may have struggled to survive the "impact winter" that followed the asteroid strike, when dust and debris blocked sunlight and drove global temperatures down. Neornithes, by contrast, may have had superior insulating feathers that helped them endure the prolonged cold.

Researchers note this is the first time feathers have ever been identified from a hesperornithiform, adding valuable new data to a fossil record where bird feathers are exceedingly rare. Greg Wilson

Mantilla of the University of Washington's Burke Museum called the discovery a rare, detailed window into both feather evolution and ancient food webs.

Perhaps just as exciting is the method itself. No one had previously thought to search fossilized feces for feathers, and the team suggests coprolites sitting in museum collections worldwide could hold similarly overlooked specimens. CT scanning these long-ignored samples may open a new avenue for studying prehistoric diets, feather evolution, and predator-prey dynamics.

As O'Connor put it, the project felt less like typical paleontology and more like detective work - piecing together an ancient story from a handful of tiny clues hidden in a lucky, accidentally split-open rock.

Read the full article at:

Source: Field Museum. "66-million-year-old feather in dinosaur poop may reveal why birds survived the asteroid."

ScienceDaily, September 11, 2026.

www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2026/09/260911003849.htm

The American "Cheetah" Wasn't a Cheetah at All

September 8, 2026 | Summarized from article from University of California - Santa Cruz

New genetic research is overturning decades of assumptions about one of Ice Age North America's most iconic predators. A study led by scientists at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and published September 4 in *Current Biology*, reveals that *Miracinonyx trumani* - long known as the "American cheetah" - was not actually related to cheetahs at all. Instead, it was a close cousin of the modern puma that independently evolved a lean, speedy build, and it turns out to have been far more ecologically versatile than its nickname suggests.



Illustration of a Miracinonyx trumani chasing after a Saiga antelope. Credit: Velizar Simeonovski

Using nuclear paleogenomes and stable isotope analysis, researchers confirmed that *M. trumani* split from the puma lineage roughly 2.6 million years ago. Its cheetah-like proportions - slim body, long front legs, a build suited for high-speed pursuit - arose through convergent evolution, where unrelated species develop similar traits under similar environmental pressures, rather than through any direct kinship with true cheetahs.

The study also dramatically expands where scientists believed these cats lived, pushing their known range about 20 degrees of latitude farther north than previously documented. While populations in places like Wyoming and Florida behaved as generalist predators in temperate grasslands, cats living in the Arctic Yukon occupied a strikingly different ecological niche. There, isotope evidence suggests they functioned as tertiary consumers that relied heavily on anadromous fish such as salmon - a far cry from the chase-and-catch hunting style typically associated with cheetah-like cats.

Adult *M. trumani* weighed around 150 pounds, stood about 3 feet tall, and measured roughly 8 feet long. Lead author Molly Cassatt-Johnstone, a Ph.D. candidate in UC Santa Cruz's Paleogenomics Lab, noted that the cats carried loss-of-function mutations in circadian rhythm genes, potentially an adaptation to the extreme seasonal light cycles of the far north — evidence of just how flexible the species was across its range.

This adaptability complicates a long-standing idea in evolutionary ecology: the "ghosts of predators past" hypothesis, which credited the American pronghorn's exceptional speed to an evolutionary arms race with a fast, cheetah-like hunter. With *M. trumani* now understood as a more puma-like generalist rather than a specialized sprinting predator, that explanation may need reconsidering.

The genomic work also turned up an unexpected sensory clue: *M. trumani*, along with every other felid lineage examined in the study, lacked a functional gene for detecting sour tastes - the first documented instance of this particular genetic loss

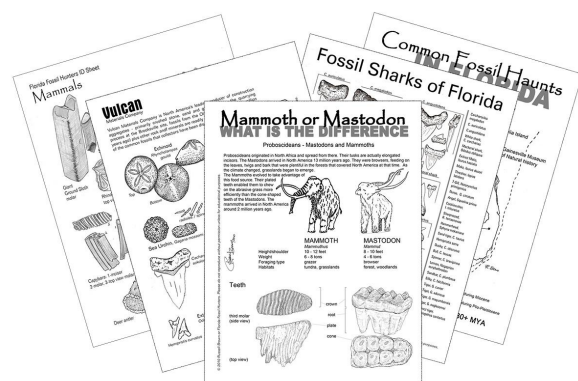
in cats. Since cats are already known to lack the ability to taste sweetness, researchers suggest such sensory losses may be tied to highly specialized diets, like the Arctic population's apparent reliance on fish.

As for why the species eventually died out, the genetic record shows low diversity in both Wyoming and Yukon populations, but notably without the signs of severe inbreeding or sudden population crashes seen in some other extinct species. Senior author Beth Shapiro, a UC Santa Cruz professor of ecology and evolutionary biology, explained that the decline appears to have been gradual, stretching across much of the Pleistocene, rather than a sudden collapse - a slow fade that may have left the species unable to adapt when the climate ultimately shifted.

Taken together, the findings are a reminder that appearances can be deceiving in the fossil record, and that an animal's name and outward form don't always reflect its true evolutionary story or way of life.

Read the full article at:

Source: University of California - Santa Cruz. "The American 'cheetah' wasn't a cheetah at all." ScienceDaily, Sept 8, 2026. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2026/09/260907201558.htm



Check out the fossil resources available at
FloridaFossilHunters.com

FLORIDA FOSSIL HUNTERS

is a fun and educational group whose goal is to further our understanding of the prehistory of Florida. We encourage family participation and welcome explorers of all ages.

Membership options are listed to the right.

Meetings are usually held on the third Saturday of the month but may vary with club activities. Check the website for the date and location of the next meeting or call one of the officers.

Officers:

President	Salvatore Sansone	(321) 278-9294
Vice President	Steve Sharpe	(352) 552-2296
Secretary	Melissa Dunaway	(407) 461-8507
Treasurer	David Dunaway	(407) 786-8844

Chairs:

Field Trips	OPEN	
Fossil Fair	Valerie First	(407) 699-9274
Fossil Auctions	Dave Dunaway	(407) 786-8844
Fossil Bucks	Dave Dunaway	(407) 786-8844
Fossil Lotto	Ed Metrin	(407) 321-7462
Membership	Ken Sellers	
Newsletter	Elise Cronin-Hurley, info@elisech.com	
Photography	John Heinsen	(407) 291-7672
Facebook	Salvatore Sansone	
	Ken Sellers	
Webmaster	Elise Cronin-Hurley, info@elisech.com	

Board of Directors:

Joyce Bittle	(407) 341-6366
Melissa Dunaway	(407) 461-8507
Valerie First	(407) 699-9274
Ed Metrin	(407) 321-7462
Russ Ahlgrim	(407) 461-9207
Alex Bittle	(407) 202-5414
Micheal Sharpe	(352) 435-5308

*Florida Prehistorical Museum, Inc.
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Membership Application

MAIL in this form or Register ONLINE at
www.floridafossilhunters.com/membership

Name:			
Associate Members			
Address:			
Phone:			
Email:			
☐	New	☐	Renewal
Please list any interests, experience, talents or just plain enthusiasm, which you would like to offer to the club:			

Family membership: \$25

Individual membership: \$20

Please make your checks payable to:

Florida Fossil Hunters
Post Office Box 540404
Orlando, Florida 32854-0404

Associate members are people in the same household, included at no extra charge, 2 adult votes per household with Family Membership. Per our insurance policy, family membership covers married couples and children. All other individuals must have separate individual membership to be covered by our club insurance.

Membership year runs from January to December.

Newsletter Policy

Articles must be submitted two weeks before publication date. to be considered for an issue. Emailed to: info@floridafossilhunters.com. Articles can be sent either as text in the email, in a google doc, or in Microsoft Word files (.docx). Please note in subject of email 'FFH News: [article or info]



UNEARTHING FLORIDA'S ANCIENT PAST

For Salvatore "Sal" Sansone, President of the Florida Fossil Hunters, a lifelong passion began with a single discovery when he was just a child.

“

"I found my first fossil at the age of six," he recalls. "I've been hooked ever since." That early moment in Sal's life sparked a curiosity that would grow into much more than a hobby. As his passion grew, so did his collection and his reputation.

Sal first became involved with Florida Fossil Hunters through a friend, but it was his own enthusiasm for collecting and exploring that pushed him to take a larger role. Today, as President, he helps guide others who share that same excitement for discovery. "My love for fossil hunting and collecting inspired me to be a leader," he says.

Ask him about his most memorable find, and he doesn't hesitate: a trilobite – the very same fossil he found as a boy. That small, ancient marine creature became

the foundation of Sal's Mobile Museum, a collection that has grown to over 10,000 artifacts. The Mobile Museum brings fossils directly to communities and events like Fossil Fest at Orlando Science Center.

Fossil hunting in Florida isn't just about rare finds. The process is as much a part of the experience as the discovery. Sal spends his time exploring rivers and streams with shovels and sifters to uncover treasures hidden beneath layers of sediment. Shark teeth, horse teeth, dugong bones, alligator scutes and even remnants of glyptodons are all part of the landscape beneath Florida's waters. On land, places like Yankeetown and shell pits offer opportunities to surface-collect echinoids, crabs and fossilized shells.

Through his work with Orlando Science Center, Sal brings these discoveries to life for guests of all ages. His goal is simple but moving: to help people imagine a very different Florida. "I hope that people get a sense of the cool animals that lived in Florida in the past, and what Florida looked like, then," he says.

It's a reminder that the state we know

today by its theme parks, coastlines and bustling cities was once home to prehistoric giants and ancient ecosystems. Fossils serve as a bridge between those worlds, offering tangible evidence of how dramatically our environment has changed over time.

For those inspired to try fossil hunting themselves, Sal's advice is refreshingly accessible. "It's easy to get started," he says. "Join our club. Go on a field trip. Meet like-minded people who can show you the ropes."

That sense of community is at the heart of Florida Fossil Hunters, and it's at the core of Sal's work as a Community Partner at OSC. Whether he's out exploring with other fossil hunters or sharing his collection with curious visitors, he's passing along a sense of curiosity, connection, and discovery.

Next time you visit during a special weekend event or Community Partner Showcase Day, say hello to Sal and explore his extensive collection of fossils. You never know what you might uncover on your own journey into the past!

2026 FOSSIL FAIR

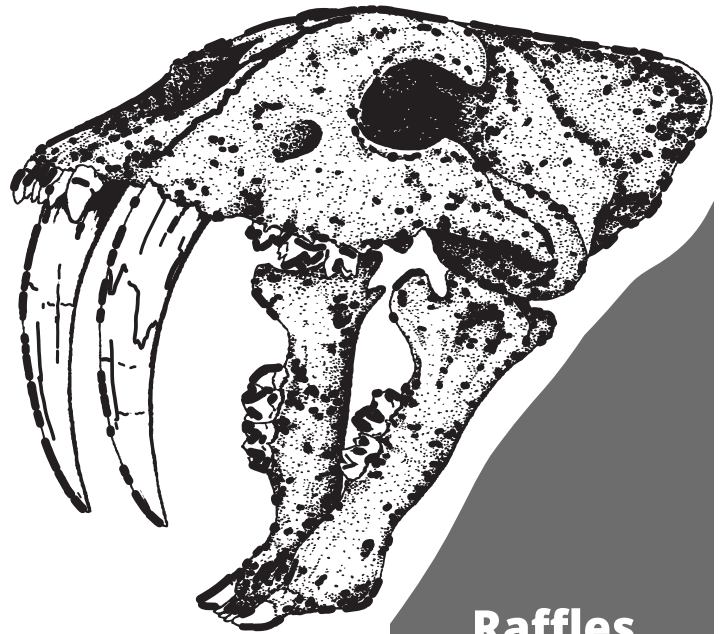
Thirty-Fifth Annual Fossils, Rocks, Gems & Minerals

Saturday, October 3, 2026

9:00am - 5:00pm

Sunday, October 4, 2026

10:00 - 4:00pm



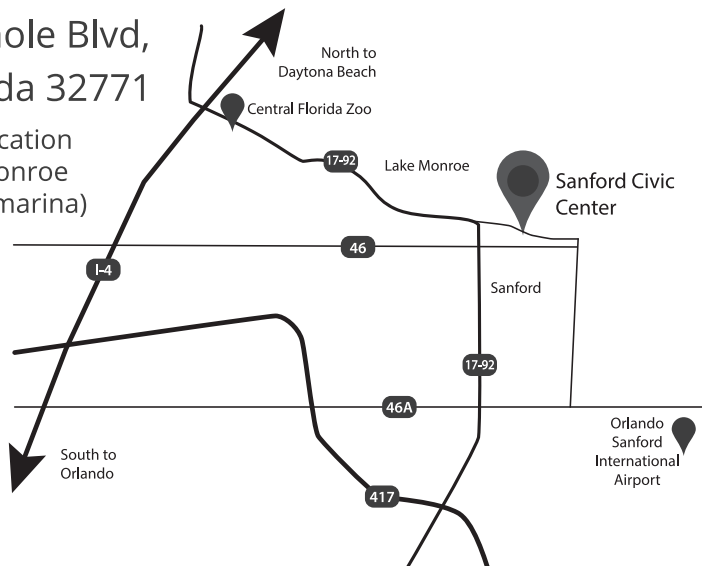
\$6.00 Adults | \$2.00 Children

**LEARN to dig in Florida and
see what can be discovered!**

Sanford Civic Center

401 E. Seminole Blvd,
Sanford Florida 32771

A picturesque location
right off Lake Monroe
(across from the marina)



For more information

contact us at one of the following info@floridafossilhunters.com,
(cell) 407-721-0481 or 407-699-9274, or visit

www.floridafossilhunters.com

We accept cash, local check, credit card & PayPal at the door.

Raffles

Vendors

**Silent
Auctions**

**Children's
Activities**

**Educational
Displays**

**Airconditioned!
INDOORS!**

Florida Fossil Hunters

Florida Fossil Hunters Meetings & Events

MARK YOUR 2026 CALENDAR

Meetings 3pm at OSC | Paleontology for Kids at 2pm and alternative time and location noted when applicable.

September 26, 2026, Meeting

2026 Fossil Fair
October 3-4th

No October Meeting

November 14, 2026, Meeting

December date tba,
FFH Annual Christmas Party
and Fossil Bucks Auction

SEE INSIDE

for more information on events



Join Our Facebook group:
www.facebook.com/groups/floridafossilhunters

Visit us online at www.floridafossilhunter.com

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Florida Fossil Hunters

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Florida Fossil Hunters News