

Pickle Creek as it exits the sandstone gorge is a testament to the slowness of its movements and the unusually consistent cold temperatures experienced during the past several weeks. Only a short distance downstream, however, these lazy waters reach the bottommost layers of the erodible sandstones and encounter the hard rhyolite below. These half-a-billion year old layers of igneous rock are much more resistant to the wearing action of water, which rushes noisily through narrowly-carved chutes before fanning out in broad sheets over smooth, steep slopes below.

Sadly, there would not be time to visit the shut-ins. The short February day conspired with our snow-slowed pace to leave us with a too-low-sun by the time we reached the fork in the trail that led to the shut-ins, a mile in one direction, and our car, a mile in the other. Although we (both) had thought to carry flashlights (just in case), the last thing I really wanted to do was find myself stumbling over snow-covered trails through the dark with my 10-yr old daughter. Even had we survived the nighttime winter woods, I might not have survived the inevitable maternal reaction to such an escapade.



Arriving back at White Oaks Trailhead with a few minutes to spare.



## Do You Have “An Inordinate Fondness”?

By *Ted C. MacRae*

When asked by an English cleric what his studies of nature’s diversity had taught him about the

Creator, 20<sup>th</sup> Century British geneticist and noted evolutionary biologist J.B.S. Haldane reportedly quipped, “*He has an inordinate fondness for beetles.*” While there is some uncertainty whether Haldane ever actually spoke these words, no one can argue with their truth.



In fact, nearly half of all insects and one quarter of all described living species are beetles—350,000 and counting. They occur in virtually every habitat imaginable and exhibit innumerable, often brightly colored—

even iridescent—and architecturally elaborate forms. Their impacts on humans are also many, not only as pests and beneficial organisms, but also as cultural symbols and objects of passionate scientific and philatelic interest.

Given their unparalleled diversity and significance, I always found it puzzling that there were no nature blog carnivals<sup>1</sup> devoted to beetles. Nearly all other main divisions of natural history study do - [birds](#), [trees](#), [marine life](#), [plants](#), and recently [herps](#). Even [moths](#), another great insect order, have their own carnival, but the only available outlet for posts dealing with earth’s dominant taxon is within the broadly circumscribed [Circus of the Spineless](#).



All that has changed with my introduction of nature blogging’s newest carnival, [An Inordinate Fondness](#)<sup>2</sup>—the monthly blog carnival devoted to beetles. The name honors J.B.S. Haldane’s perhaps apocryphal

riposte (made even more famous by the

<sup>1</sup> A “blog carnival” is a periodic, themed collection of permalinks to other blog posts – a sort of anthology where the works of multiple authors are compiled and presented to readers in a coordinated fashion.

<sup>2</sup> <http://aninordinatefondness.wordpress.com>

breathhtakingly beautiful [An Inordinate Fondness for Beetles](#), written and illustrated by my friends and colleagues, Drs. Arthur V. Evans and Charles L. Bellamy). The [inaugural issue](#), posted in mid-February, includes 18 submissions by 17 contributors who have written about beetles from a diversity of perspectives ranging from ecology to photography to objects of art. Despite these different perspectives, all display an element of passion—a common feature among those who study beetles. Nobody displays this passion better than the late Frank T. Hovore, a widely known and respected student of longhorned beetles. The issue includes a video of Frank collecting one of the world's largest beetles, *Titanus giganteus*, in the Amazon forests of Ecuador. I hope you'll visit and savor the excitement that Frank displays upon encountering this enormous beetle, and then visit the sites of the contributors to enjoy the passion that they've shared in their individual posts.



## St. Louis Zoo Lecture Series

By [Jim Jordan](#)<sup>1</sup>

The St. Louis Zoo presents two lecture series: *Conservation Conversations* and *Science Seminar Series*. Both series are co-sponsored by the Academy of Science–St. Louis. Programs are **FREE** and open to the general public, no reservations required. Programs are held in the Living World, with free parking available in the North parking lot. Call (314) 646-4544 for more information.

<sup>1</sup> Curator of Education, Saint Louis Zoo.

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## CONSERVATION CONVERSATIONS

Adult lectures that focus on worldwide conservation issues and efforts supported by the Saint Louis Zoo.

**Tuesday, April 13, 7:30–9 p.m.**

### ASI: Animal Scene Investigators

Dr. Laurel A. Neme, environmental journalist and author.

Go behind the scenes and explore the first and only Forensic Lab dedicated to wildlife with Laurel Neme. In her newly published book *ANIMAL INVESTIGATORS: How the World's First Wildlife Forensics Lab Is Solving Crimes and Saving Endangered Species*. Neme reveals how forensic scientists and the agents at the first and only animal forensics laboratory in Oregon are working to investigate wildlife crimes, protect endangered species, and stem illegal wildlife trafficking.

Killing wild animals is big business. While much wildlife trade is legal, a huge black market exists. Illegal wildlife smuggling can be worth as much as \$20 billion annually and ranks just behind drugs and human trafficking as the third largest illegal trade world-wide. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon is known as a “CSI of wildlife.” The lab investigates a wide range of cases and handles over thirty thousand cases. From polar bear rugs, tarantula paperweights, and crocodile-face ashtrays, to dried seal penises, bear paws and various potions and pills allegedly made to counteract impotence, to countless feathers, hides, bones, preserved animals, animal parts and full carcasses awaiting examination, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory feverishly works to solve crimes and forging a new field of science in the process.

Neme’s program provides new perspectives on animal forensic science while taking a fresh look at the trade of animal products and describing how it fits into the broader context of wildlife conservation. Combining mystery and science, this will be an absorbing and fast-paced account that takes readers into the cutthroat and complicated web of wildlife crimes and uncovers the hardworking animal investigators who are fighting to solve them and help stop the destruction of wildlife for profit.