



Friends of the Florissant Fossil Beds eNewsletter

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Michelle Wheatley Named Superintendent Of Florissant Fossil Beds

Michelle Wheatley, a 15-year employee of the National Park Service, has been named superintendent of Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument in Florissant, Colorado. She will begin her assignment there on May 28th.

"Michelle is a talented individual and her aspiration to advance the NPS into the next century is one of her main focal points," said John Wessels, Intermountain Regional Director. "I have no doubt that Michelle will achieve this goal."

Wheatley has served as chief of interpretation, education and visitor services at Colorado National Monument since 2005. She established the park's Division of Interpretation, Education and Visitor Services, which serves more than 450,000 visitors annually.

She also led the planning, design, and installation of new state of the art visitor center exhibits and 36 wayside exhibits along Historic Rim Rock Drive, the park's educational program, and a Junior Ranger Summer Explorer day camp for local area youth. In 2010, Wheatley was Intermountain Region's Freeman Tilden Award winner for her work in reaching thousands of local youth through innovative programs. Wheatley also developed the monument's yearlong centennial events in 2011.

Wheatley has also worked at Yellowstone and Rocky Mountain National Parks in a variety of visitor service positions. In 2011 she served as acting superintendent at Colorado National Monument, and she most recently served as acting superintendent at Grant Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site in Montana.

"It is a great honor to be selected superintendent of Florissant Fossil Beds



National Monument which protects one of the finest fossil assemblages in the world. I look forward to getting to know the park staff, partners, and the local community,” said Wheatley about her new assignment.

Before joining the NPS, Wheatley worked in a variety of leadership positions including director of outdoor and environmental education for the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colorado, environmental technician for the City of Colorado Springs, and safety and environmental officer for Ford Microelectronics.

Wheatley is a graduate of Colorado State University, where she earned a bachelor of science degree in park and recreation administration. In 2008, she received a natural resources and environment graduate certificate from Colorado State University. While in college, she also worked as an intern for the United States Forest Service.

When not working, Michelle and her husband, Hal, enjoy exploring the outdoors together, often with their family dog, Millie.



Springs girl reacts to fossil find: ‘I think I’m going to be pretty famous’

By DEBBIE KELLEY debbie.kelley@gazette.com



A May snowstorm that spoiled a field trip for fourth-graders at Academy International Elementary School serendipitously gave one student her first 15 minutes of fame. It’s now apparent her celebrity status will last a lifetime.

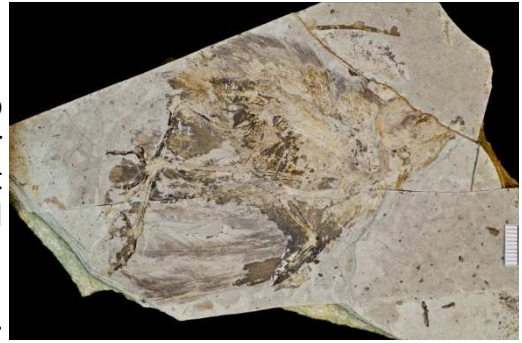
Ten-year-old Gabrielle “Gabby” Linden struck the lottery of the paleontology world in class on May 20. As she gently cracked open one of several layers of a piece of shale with a butter knife and a hammer, she saw something different.

“In my first layer, I found a stick. My other friends were finding a leaf or fish,” she said. “I thought it was a fish. Or poop.” Nope. Gabby’s rock from the Florissant Fossil Quarry turned out to contain a rare fossilized bird from the Eocene epoch, which dates

back 34 million years.

“It was exciting. I think I’m going to be pretty famous,” she said Tuesday during a press conference announcing the finding, held at the Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. Shawn Frizzell validated Gabby’s thoughts. “This is such an important find. This is something that doesn’t happen all that regularly,” said Frizzell, a National Park Ranger who was helping the kids with their science project at school that day.

Students at the District 20 school had been scheduled to visit the Florissant Fossil Quarry in person, but Mother Nature decided otherwise. Instead, the school bought eight cases of shale from the quarry, a privately owned business adjacent to the fossil beds monument.



Gabby said she was surprised that out of all the students, she was the one who found the fossil. But her teacher, Wanda Lepillez, said Gabby's discovery seemed meant to be. "There was an incredible randomness to this. Gabby could have chosen one of five or six hairline fractures and never found anything, but something told her to pick that one," Lepillez said. "She's my science girl – she's totally engrossed in science. The fossil couldn't have fallen into better hands."

But it didn't stay in Gabby's hands for long. Although she had never seen a bird fossil, Frizzell said she immediately recognized impressions of feathers, along with skeletal features of a head, jaw, toes and feet. "Gabby wanted to split it again, but I said, 'Oh my goodness, this is so important to science,'" said Frizzell, who has been stationed at the fossil beds for 14 years.

Gabby's family, Academy International Elementary School and D-20 donated the artifact to the fossil beds, where it is being researched. It will be on display for one day only, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, during the grand opening of the new Visitor Center and Paleontology Lab.

Fossil beds paleontologist Herb Meyer said fossil birds are rare at Florissant, which millions of years ago was submerged under water. Volcanic ash helped preserve life in the area in shale formations. "More than 40,000 fossils from Florissant are in museums around the world, but most of them are plants and insects," Meyer said. "Only about 12 are birds."

Meyer sent a photo of the discovery to Bob Chandler of Georgia College, an expert on Florissant birds. In a written statement on his findings, Chandler said he believes the fossil bird is a new genus and species, possibly related to the potoos that today live in tropical Central and South America. "In the fossil record, potoos have been described only from Europe. This will be the first member of this group described from the Western Hemisphere and from North America," he concludes. "This is a significant contribution to our understanding of the origins of potoos. "This important find will be studied by scientists for many years to come," Meyer said.

On Tuesday, the fossil beds named Gabby an honorary junior paleontologist and junior ranger. She also got to again admire her fossil, which for now is being called "The Gabby Bird." The experience has cemented Gabby's desire to continue studying her love – plant cells – and someday work in the field.

New Visitor and Paleontology Research Center Open

Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument celebrated the grand opening of its first new visitor center this past weekend following a quest that began when the Monument was first established in 1969. For decades, the Monument utilized a tiny dilapidated cabin, built in 1924, as a “temporary” visitor center. Following years of unfulfilled architectural designs, the vision for the new facility was finally realized on Friday, June 14, with a ribbon cutting grand opening ceremony. The events also included the formal installation of the park’s new superintendent, Michelle Wheatley. This was followed by a two-day public event including a Paleontology Open House attended by many scientists and paleontology enthusiasts on Saturday, June 15. Everyone was delighted to finally celebrate the grand opening of the new visitor center and paleontology lab.

Legendary botanist and internationally awarded conservationist, Estella Leopold, joined by five other contributing research scientists featured in the new exhibits, participated in the “Meet the Scientists” program as part of the weekend’s public events. Guided tours of the new paleontology research and museum collection storage area were offered to the public by the Monument’s six paleontology interns. Demonstrations of the new energy-efficient visitor center were also given. A Junior Ranger music concert featuring the NPS album “Songs for Junior Rangers” by Park Ranger Jeff Wolin topped off the festivities.

The new building was awarded the Gold rating certification for its environmentally sustainable building design and construction, according to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) program standards. This is the second-highest rating provided by the U.S. Green Building Council. The new facility addresses the NPS Call to Action called “Going



Green” by reducing the park’s carbon footprint through the use of renewable energy sources and Call to Action “Out with the Old” by replacing outdated and inaccessible exhibits and installing state-of-the-art interpretive media that offers interactive experiences accessible to the public.

The new building serves as the park’s primary facility for orienting visitors to opportunities within the park and surrounding area. The facility now houses a research center and the park’s world class fossil collection containing over 10,000 specimens. The center is headed by Dr. Herb Meyer, renowned paleontologist and author. The new complex will provide adequate space for visiting researchers and seasonal interns to work for years to come.

The staff at Florissant extends their gratitude to so many NPS colleagues and community supporters who made the new facility possible, and to the scientists who helped the park develop credible exhibits about the area’s fossil history. Please come for a visit! www.nps.gov/flfo



Your Friends Group Supports Many Park Programs

Below are some of the many programs that the Friends of the Florissant Fossil Beds help support at Florissant Fossil Beds NM with your membership and contributions. We are constantly in need of further funds. If you would like to make an additional contribution to a specific program please contact Eric Bailey at (719) 689-3938 or ebailey41@yahoo.com.

Post to Parks – Award Winning Military Outreach Program

Since 2007, Florissant Fossil Beds has been engaging the military community of the Pikes Peak Region and connecting them with our national parks. Through this award-winning program thousands of active and retired military and military families have been able to visit and enjoy healthy outdoor experiences.



Accomplishments

Issued over 10,000 national park passes to active military, families, and disabled veterans

Provided opportunities for outdoor recreation such as hiking, camping, snowshoeing in parks for active military and families

Hosted recovering service members on federal details through Operation Guardian to help them transition into the workforce

Developed an award-winning military-teen, trail crew mentoring program

Serving as a model program for all National Park sites and has helped spread the program to other areas



Needs

Award winning, military teen trail crew mentoring program (\$8,000 per year)

Weekend Getaway for Families of Fallen Soldiers (\$6,000 per year)

Bus trip for active and/or families to Great Sand Dunes and/or Bent's Old Fort (\$2,000 per trip)

Military teen photojournalism camp (\$8,000)

Supplies for youth programs (pins, badges, game books, hats, backpacks) \$5,000 per year

Create promotional video with professional film team (\$10,000)





100 new Junior Rangers from the Air Force Academy

Youth Programs

Florissant Fossil Beds actively seeks to help the future generations connect to our national parks. Through hands on, engaging programs the park supports youth of all ages in programs that increase their awareness of public lands, science, history, and service.

Accomplishments

Nearly 4,000 youth participate in the park's Junior Ranger program each year and earn their Junior Ranger Badge or Patch

Over 3,000 students from pre-school to post graduate participate in field trips to Florissant Fossil Beds on a yearly basis

The park has hosted scout groups, church groups, and a variety of school groups in educational and service learning programs

Each year, the park hires a local area teacher to become a Ranger for the summer which helps the park connect with new students



Teacher Ranger Teachers

Needs

- Teacher Ranger Teacher (\$3,500 per year)
- Junior Ranger Badges, Patches, Books (\$3,000 per year)
- Educational Interns to help with programming (\$5,000 per year)



Volunteers in the Parks



Each year over 60 community members choose to give back to the National Park Service by volunteering at Florissant Fossil Beds. Over 6,000 hours are donated each year which is the equivalent of three full time positions. The volunteers help the park in many different ways and are invaluable.

Accomplishments

Last year volunteers donated over 6,000 hours

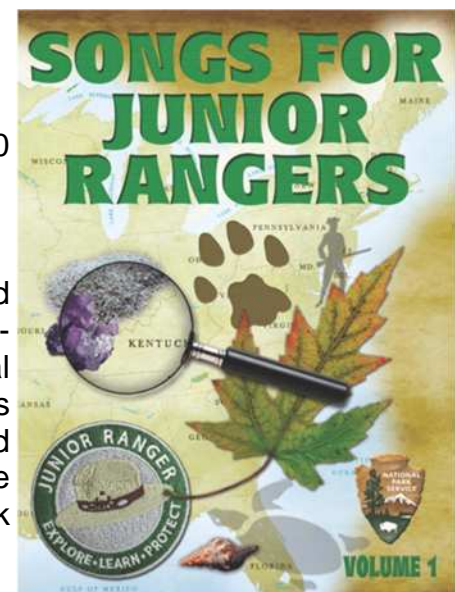
- Volunteers completed a massive fire mitigation project
- Fossil theft and other park violations were caught by vigilant staff volunteers
- Numerous youth participated in the volunteer program

Needs

- Funds for volunteer awards (\$900 per year)
- Training for volunteers (\$2,000 per year)
- Upgrade uniforms to insure safety and comfort (\$1,000 per year)

Junior Ranger Album

Park Ranger Jeff Wolin at Florissant Fossil Beds is an award winning musician. In 2012, he helped the National Park Service create a one-of-a-kind children's album about National Parks called "Songs for Junior Rangers." The album has won numerous awards such as a Parents' Choice Gold Award and the Freeman Tilden Award. Proceeds from the album fund the Junior Ranger Program of the National Park Service.



Accomplishments

Florissant Fossil Beds led the entire National Park Service in producing an unprecedented musical product for the National Park Service

Recipient of numerous awards and positive critical acclaim

The album is generating interest in our national parks, joy for families, and funding for youth programs



Needs

Create music videos for schools and online (\$20,000)

Volume 2 is currently in production and funding is being sought. Each song (there will be twenty) costs \$1,500 to produce

Ranger Jeff Wolin performs throughout the Pikes Peak Region. Update sound system for performances (\$2,500.)



Interpretive Programs for the Public

Florissant Fossil Beds provides a variety of engaging, interpretive programs for the general public. Ranger talks, guided walks, and science demonstration programs are just a few of the services offered to the public.

Accomplishments

The Monument contacts over 70,000 people a year at interpretive programs



A variety of programs are offered including science demonstration programs, guided walks, tours of the historic Hornbek Homestead, and ranger talks

Needs

Training for staff (\$2,000 per year)

Supplies for demonstrations and elk programs (\$500 per year)

Intern to conduct programs (\$5000 per year)

Purchase new props to educate the public about sustainable technology (\$3,500)

Software to design brochures and flyers (\$1,500)

Paleontology Research

Florissant Fossil Beds is an active scientific research area. The park has a full time paleontologist and conducts and/or coordinates research throughout the year. It is a world-



class fossil site that attracts scientists from across the globe.

Accomplishments

Completed two books about the fossils of Florissant and the formation of the park

Hosted numerous scientists from across the country conducting research on ancient climate and climate change

Hosted 5 college interns

Researched and helped design exhibits for the new visitor center

Continues to monitor and protect fossil resources



Needs

Paleontology intern (\$5,000)

Equipment for laboratory (\$2,000)

Support sister paleontology site in Peru by helping build museum (\$10,000)

Students in Sexi, Peru, where the park is helping to protect and educate the public about a sister paleontology site.

