

Ross and D'Urban – Where did museums begin?

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1 - Collared peccary

Tayassu tajacu

Southern America

Peccaries are related to pigs. Like pigs they root in the earth with their snouts for food.

2 - Musk duck

Biziura lobata

Australia

Adult male musk ducks have a black, leathery lobe under their beaks during the breeding season.

3 - Great black-headed gull

Larus ichthyaetus

Europe

F.W.L. Ross Collection

4 - Amazonian umbrella bird

Cephalopterus ornatus

Peru, South America

This tree-dwelling bird has an ornate tuft of feathers just above its beak, giving rise to its name.

5 - Wompoo pigeon

Ptilinopus magnificus

Australia

6 - Wood duck

Aix sponsa

Northern America

When this specimen was added to Ross's collection, the species was in decline due to the loss of nesting habitat, usually in hollow trees, and marshland drainage.

F.W.L. Ross Collection

7 - Button trochus

Tectus niloticus

Indo-Pacific Oceans

Under the shell's dull outer covering is a layer of nacre, or mother-of-pearl, which is used for making decorative buttons.

8 - Lotorium triton

Cymatium lotorium

Indo-Pacific Oceans

The thick, heavy shell of this marine snail helps stabilise it when buffeted by waves.

9 - West Indian worm-shell

Vermicularia spirata

Caribbean Sea and West Atlantic

F.W.L. Ross Collection

10 - Tiger skull

Panthera tigris

Mysore, Karnataka, India

The entry for this specimen records, “‘Royal Tiger’ killed in Mysore in February 1836, received 7 balls, 4 years old”. The ‘Royal’ title suggests it was associated with the Wodeyar dynasty of Mysore.

11 - False killer-whale

Pseudorca crassidens

Origin unknown

It’s likely that this skull came from a stranded animal. False killer whales are so named because of their similarity to killer whales in shape and behaviour.

F.W.L. Ross Collection

12 - Zebra nerite

Puperita pupa

Caribbean Sea

These shells probably come from a rocky shore where they inhabit splash-pools and graze on algae.

13 - Spiny chiton or red limpet

Acanthopleura echinata

Coast of Chile, South America

Chitons have a distinctive flexible shell that enables them to attach firmly to different rock surfaces.

14 - Eel slit-worm shells

Tenagodus anguinus

Indo-Pacific Oceans

F.W.L. Ross Collection

15 - Long-spined trunk fish

Lactoria cornutus

Indo-Pacific Oceans

This small marine fish is a type of boxfish, which if stressed exudes a deadly poison, ostracitoxin.

16 - Seba's bronzeback snake

Dendrelaphis tristis

India

17 - Suckerfish

Remora remora

Caribbean Sea

These fish have a suction cup-like structure on their heads which they attach to larger fish and mammals. They extract oxygen from the water flow over their gills.

F.W.L. Ross Collection

18 - Duplicate tower shell

Turitella duplicata

Indian Ocean

The genus of this marine snail, *Turitella*, comes from the Latin word for tower and reflects the shape of the shell.

19 - Atlantic distorsio shell

Distorsio clathrata

Found in Brazil, the Caribbean and the east coast of America

This marine snail is in the genus *Distorsio*, meaning 'distorted', due to the shell's uneven coiling. It is a common species found in depths shallower than 130m. Fishermen often net these unintentionally whilst fishing for shrimps.

F.W.L. Ross Collection

20 - Blue-breasted quail

Coturnix chinensis lineata

Australia

Also known as the Asian blue quail or the king quail, these are popular to keep in captivity due to their attractive blue plumage.

21 - Yellow-wattled lapwing

Vanellus malabaricus

India

These are common across India and are often found on dry, open and stony grasslands.

F.W.L. Ross Collection

22 - Compass (Lo P'an)

Before 1850

China

The feng shui compass is still used today. It originated in the belief that the world is governed by the forces of Heaven and Earth. Through correct alignment, positive energy, *chi*, is channelled into buildings to promote harmony and good health.

23 - Portrait of Francis William

Locke Ross (1793–1860)

Oil on canvas

James Leakey (1775–1865)

About 1840-50

Born in Exeter, James Leakey exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1821 and 1846.

F.W.L. Ross Collection

24 - Southern guillemot eggs

Uria aalge albionis

Breeds on north Atlantic and north Pacific coasts

The southern guillemot breeds on British coasts. Between May and June, females lay a single egg onto a cliff ledge without making a nest. The slightly conical shape of the eggs reduces the likelihood of rolling off the edge.

25 - Stilt steps (tapuva'e)

Early 1800s

Marquesas Islands, Polynesia

Donated in 1869, these decorated steps were once used in races and contests held during celebrations and funerals. Many were made for sale to Europeans.

F.W.L. Ross Collection

26 - Bracelet

Before 1860

West Africa

This bracelet is made of inter-woven strands of shell that form a wide band. Each shell has been individually ground and drilled.

27 - Ceremonial bowl

Early 1800s

Columbia River Plateau, North America

This rare Salish bowl is carved from mountain sheep horn. Its walls are particularly thin, showing the maker's skill. The bowl may have been used for the first fruits celebrations which give thanks for the first produce of spring.

F.W.L. Ross Collection

28 - Scarab beetles

Family: Scarabaeidae

Mostly from the Tropics

We are fortunate that any of Ross's insect specimens have remained from his Topsham museum of the mid-19th century. These scarabs have robust exoskeletons which helped them survive the attentions of the museum beetle larvae that destroyed many smaller specimens.

F.W.L. Ross collection

29 - Fossilised ichthyosaurus skull

Lower Jurassic, 199-145 million years ago

Lyme Regis, Dorset

This skull of an ancient swimming reptile came out of sea cliffs in Dorset. Ross also acquired fossilised fish and sea lilies from the same site.

30 - Guitar-fish jaws

Rhina ancylostoma

Indian Ocean

Guitar-fish are a species of ray. They have about 50 undulating rows of diamond-shaped teeth in their jaws which can crush crustaceans and other prey.

F.W.L. Ross collection

31 - Moths

South Africa

This group of macro-moths was collected by William D'Urban in 'British Kaffraria', now KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, in 1860-61. He was in his mid-20s at the time. They were later examined by Francis Walker, an entomologist, or insect specialist, at the British Museum. Many of the specimens have been named as new species and there's even a new genus. Walker was known for the enormous number of new taxa, or biological categories, he established. They frequently proved to be unnecessary.

W.S.M. D'Urban Collection

32 - Beetles

Order Coleoptera

Collected in South Africa

This mixed group of beetles was given to RAMM by D'Urban in 1926 from his personal collection. Some are marked as being taken in 1860 and 1861. They all probably date from the same period. After ten years' living in Canada, where he moved at the age of 12, D'Urban returned for a time to South Africa. Along with his South African moths, also on display here, these are the oldest surviving insects in his collection.

W.S.M. D'Urban Collection

33 - Three-whorled rams-horn

Planorbella trivolvis

Detroit, U.S.A.

These snails were collected from the Detroit River, Michigan, in 1869. In life, the flat-spiral shell is carried upside down, as shown here, and appears to have a right-handed, or dextral, spiral. Actually it is left-handed, or sinistral.

34 - Marsh snail

Stagnicola palustris

Montreal, Canada

D'Urban collected these snail shells in 1857 from shallow pools at La Prairie in Montreal. When he returned to Devon, he found this species near his home, Newport House just outside Topsham.

W.S.M. D'Urban Collection

35 - Great pond snail

Lymnaea stagnalis jugularis

St Lawrence river, Canada 1859

D'Urban probably collected these freshwater snails along the St Lawrence River, Montreal. These water snails may be hosts to the larvae of trematode worms which can parasitise farm animals.

36 - Bladder snail

Physa species

Montreal, Canada

These snails were collected from freshwater pools on common land in a suburb of Montreal. Bladder snails prefer standing water to rivers with currents. They differ from the lymneid water snails in having a left-handed spiral.

W.S.M. D'Urban Collection

37 - Bufflehead duck

Bucephala albeola

Montreal, Canada

This male duck was bought by William D'Urban when he was a teenager at Montreal market in 1851. Buffleheads are small sea ducks. Their name is derived from 'buffalo-head' due to the male's puffy head feathers.

38 - Tufted duck

Aythya fuligula

Exeter

This tufted duck was collected on the river Exe near Topsham. Though this is a migratory species, it can be found in the U.K. throughout the year.

W.S.M. D'Urban Collection

39 - Withdrawn rivulet-dwelling snail

Amnicola decisus

River Ottawa, Canada

These freshwater snails were collected from the river Ottawa which flows between the provinces of Quebec and Ontario. D'Urban showed a particular interest in freshwater snails whilst he was in Canada and sought them in a variety of wetland habitats. He was interested in the way that snails had evolved to occupy the many different niches offered within the freshwater environment.

W.S.M. D'Urban Collection

40 - Harpoon point

Before 1902

Chumash, San Miguel Island, California, U.S.A.

The coastal Chumash people used this point made from Monterey chert to catch fish. They first settled on the Californian coast over 13,000 years ago and established many settlements before European contact.

W.S.M. D'Urban Collection

41 - Grinding stone

Before 1902

Chumash, Bartlett canyon, Santa Barbara, California, U.S.A.

This was used to grind acorns, which were a major part of the diet of the Chumash people. Near this find is a site called Arrowhead Springs which has pictographs, a form of communication carved and painted onto rocks.

42 - Knife (Musele)

1800s

Kota, Gabon

This is not a weapon, but a mark of authority and status. Chiefs and ritual specialists of the Mungala secret society owned such knives which also marked chiefs' tombs.

W.S.M. D'Urban Collection

43 - Inuktut map

Before 1902

Inuit, possibly eastern Arctic

This unusual map is carved from caribou antler. It can be 'read' by feeling its shaped edges when it is too dark to see. It is a tactile version of the coastline which helped the Inuit to steer their kayak home after a day's hunting.

W.S.M. D'Urban Collection

44 - Lady finger mussel

Elliptio dilatata

St Lawrence River, Montreal, Canada

This large freshwater mussel reproduces with a larval stage that is parasitic upon fish. The diversity of freshwater mussels in North American rivers is enormous. However, many populations are under threat from pollution, both by its direct effect upon the adult mussels and through a reduction in the number of fish as temporary hosts.

W.S.M. D'Urban Collection

45 - Lyell's little-disc snail

Discula lyelliana

Deserta Grande Island, south-east of Madeira

The Madeiran islands allow us to study the evolution of animals and plants that have been isolated for a very long time. The founder snails that somehow arrived naturally upon these islands in the Atlantic, subsequently evolved into hundreds of new species and sub-species. This species from a barren island near Madeira have recently been declared extinct.

W.S.M. D'Urban Collection

46 - Flat periwinkle

Littorina obtusata palliata

Gulf of St Lawrence, Canada.

The Gulf of St Lawrence is one of the largest estuaries in the world. It is located at the mouth of the St Lawrence River which is the outlet of North America's Great Lakes and runs through Montreal. These small sea snails would have been collected on the gulf's rocky shores.

W.S.M. D'Urban Collection

47 - Black rat

Rattus rattus

Glen Loch, California, U.S.A.

D'Urban caught this rat in his bar whilst living in Glen Loch near Santa Barbara in 1885. Black rats originated in Asia but have since been introduced across the globe, largely on board ships. The black rat has also been known by several other names including ship rat, roof rat, house rat, Alexandrine rat and old English rat.

W.S.M. D'Urban Collection