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SCIENCE MUSEUM OF MINNESOTA WELCOMES NEW CURATOR OF PALEONTOLOGY

Dr. Alex Hastings comes to Minnesota from the Virginia Museum of Natural History, brings a passion for public outreach and science communication

Saint Paul, Minn. – The Science Museum of Minnesota announced today that it will welcome a new curator of paleontology this fall. Dr. Alex Hastings will assume the position of Fitzpatrick Chair of Paleontology in early October.

Currently the assistant curator of paleontology at the Virginia Museum of Natural History, Hastings has worked on a wide variety of fossil projects, ranging from dinosaurs to insects. His research interests and interpretation achievements, in addition to his unique ability to translate complex science topics for non-science audiences, make him the perfect fit for the position.

“I am so pleased to introduce Dr. Alex Hastings as the Science Museum’s new paleontology curator,” says Dr. Laurie Fink, vice president of Science at the Science Museum of Minnesota. “Our collection of prehistoric specimens, which is rich in crocodyliform reptiles, is a great match with his research interests, and I’m excited by the possibilities that promises. But most of all, I’m looking forward to seeing how Alex translates his research and the treasure trove of information within our collection for the people our museum serves. He has a natural rapport with people. When he presented his research at the museum last spring, his energy and passion for his work really stood out to us, and I’m eager to see him work with visitors to share his knowledge in new and innovative ways.”

Hastings did his Ph.D. work at the University of Florida, focusing his research on fossil crocodiles from South America. During his graduate career, he named five new species of fossil crocodile and helped discover the world’s largest snake, the extinct *Titanoboa* from about 60 million years ago. Following his Ph.D., he taught at Georgia Southern University and completed a two-year postdoctoral fellowship at Martin Luther University in Halle, Germany, where he helped develop and co-wrote the bilingual companion book for the *Gaining Ground* exhibition, which was about the horse-hunting crocodiles and giant birds of prehistoric Germany. Hastings also contributed to the Smithsonian’s *Titanoboa: Monster Snake* traveling exhibition.

Hastings did his undergraduate work at Penn State University, where he studied Geological Sciences. He is a member of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology and the Geological Society of America.

“I am very excited to be coming to the Science Museum of Minnesota,” says Hastings. “The museum’s collection has an incredible array of ancient animals, ranging from giant dinosaurs to tiny crocodiles. There are so many different directions the research can go, and I can’t wait to hit the ground running.”

Hastings is passionate about the importance of science knowledge getting out of the labs and in front of the community. “The opportunities to collaborate with other research groups, as well as the museum’s Exhibits and STEM Education and Equity departments, is another major selling point,” he says. “My view of science is that community outreach is a necessary component of what we do, and the Science Museum has many different avenues to interact with the public and share its amazing resources. Paleontology has been my life’s passion and I can’t wait to share that love of ancient life with the people the Science Museum serves.”

Hastings will fill the role previously occupied by Bruce Erickson, who retired in 2017 after a remarkable 58 year tenure at the Science Museum.

The Science Museum will host welcome events for Dr. Hastings during his first few weeks on the job, and he will appear at the museum’s Fossil Day festivities on Saturday, October 13. Details about a public meet and greet will be posted on the Science Museum’s website as the date approaches.

The Science Museum of Minnesota is one of the state’s most popular museums, with a reach that extends well beyond its riverfront location in downtown Saint Paul. It serves hundreds of thousands of people each year with its engaging exhibits, breathtaking giant screen films, and engaging special events. Science Museum education programs touch students in all of Minnesota’s 87 counties each year, and its research programs span the globe. For more information, visit www.smm.org.

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Note: A photo of Dr. Alex Hastings is available for download at smm.org/media.