

## PVAS members tour Moore Lab

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Chaparral Naturalist Editor



In March, 16 PVAS members toured the fascinating bird specimen collection at Moore Laboratory of Zoology on the campus of Occidental College.

The lab is well-known as the repository for the world's largest collection of Mexican bird specimens. During Audubon members' visit, lab technician Russell Campbell dazzled them with a wide variety of specimen skins, from the world's smallest hummingbird (a Bee Hummingbird from Cuba) to an imposing Harpy Eagle.

Participants were even allowed to hold a Great Horned Owl and feel its velvety-soft feathers that help it achieve near-silent and stealthy flight.

The lab contains approximately 60,000 whole-bird study skins from the historic collection of Thomas Moore. Most of the specimens are from Mexico, with sizeable holdings from Ecuador, Honduras, Guatemala and Costa Rica.

The specimens were not taxidermized. Rather, lab technicians at the time removed the body cavity, organs, bones and muscle and stuffed the remaining skins with cotton.

Moore, an adventurer and amateur naturalist, amassed his collection in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the help of fellow ornithology enthusiast Chester Converse Lamb. Moore moved his extensive collection from his house to Occidental College in 1951.



PVAS tour participants were thrilled at the opportunity for up-close-and-personal views of dozens of hummingbirds, brilliant tanagers, a quetzal with a resplendent tail, several owl species including the smallest, the Elf Owl, and the bizarre horned screamer sporting a unicorn-like projection from its head.

Revealing a sad chapter in American ecology, Campbell opened one drawer with specimens of three extinct species: the Imperial Woodpecker, Carolina Parakeet and Passenger Pigeon. Campbell and members reflected on the



tragedy of how Passenger Pigeons, once seen in vast numbers, were hunted to extinction.

As they concluded their tour, PVAS members admired the colorful bird and aquatic murals in the stairwell by artist Jane Kim, noted for her massive "The Wall of Birds" mural at The Cornell Lab of Ornithology.