

# Deseret News

## 'Basement' bugs delight visitors

### *U. museum exhibit features insects, plants and artifacts*

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Bugs crawled around at the Utah Museum of Natural History — and people were delighted.

An exhibit with live insects and bugs made its debut today at the 15th annual "What's in the Basement" event on the campus of the University of Utah.

"Bugs Alive!" features various live and dead insects waiting to be inspected. The dead insects are pinned to boards behind glass, while the exhibit's living critters reside in smaller versions of their original habitats — with one exception.

A red push button activates a light to expose a hiding resident to the curious. Startled by the faux sun, a tarantula charges toward the big face looking at it — only to be stopped by the Plexiglas.

Meanwhile, an antisocial Jerusalem cricket hides in the sand.

"He's like a teenage boy," said Christine Bills, insect collections manager. "He comes up, eats his food, makes a mess and goes back down."

As she showed off the collection, Bills explained each bug and insect in an excited, breathless and loving fashion. She's admittedly passionate about bugs, and she's hoping the new exhibit will "encourage people to be aware of what's in Utah" when it comes to bugs.

Children are the biggest fans of bugs, Bills said. Because of a bug's size, children are drawn to them.

"We want to validate that innate sense of curiosity," she said.

One volunteer let a praying mantis crawl up her arm. Bugophobes and bug-lovers alike stared in fascination, unable to look away. One visitor even wanted to hold a tarantula.

"We can't let people touch the tarantulas because their hairs are toxic," Bills said.

In the herbarium, Ann Kelsey showed her collection of 130,000 plants from all over the world.

"These are my kids," the herbarium collections manager said.

One of Kelsey's "kids" is a Beckwith violet, preserved in the collection since 1885, when the U. was called the University of Deseret. Because of development, it doesn't grow in the Salt Lake Valley anymore, she said.

Other former residents of the Salt Lake Valley were housed in the paleontology department. Dinosaur bones, saber-toothed tiger bones, musk ox and others that were native to the area were on display.

In the anthropology department, collections of ancient and modern American Indian artifacts were on display. All collections were presided over by staff and volunteers who are passionate about their areas and eager to show their collections to the public.

"This is truly a heroic effort on the part of the collections team," said Patti Carpenter, museum spokeswoman.

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