

## Investing in science and nature: Major philanthropic gift to Nature Foundation will advance insect and biodiversity research.

**Ottawa, May 19, 2021** – A major philanthropic gift to the Nature Foundation by two renowned entomologists will fund a program for visiting scientists at the Canadian Museum of Nature, Canada's national museum of natural history and natural sciences.

The endowment by Drs. Jarmila and Stewart Peck, now retired but with long-standing ties to Carleton University, will support in-person study of the museum's world-class collections of beetles and fossil insects by researchers and students from around the world. These studies, in turn, inform projects and international collaborations related to natural history, biodiversity and environmental change.



"The Pecks' gift is timely. The pandemic has put a fine point on the importance of nature to our own health and the well-being of the planet, yet only a tiny fraction of philanthropy supports nature initiatives," says Rob Crosbie, Chair of the Nature Foundation Board. "The Pecks demonstrate the type of commitment needed to support evidence-based science that fosters solutions for a sustainable future."

For more than five decades, the Pecks have travelled the world together, studying and collecting insects, teaching students, and sharing their passion about science, biodiversity and evolution.

"Over our careers, we benefitted from grants and other financial support, not to mention collaborations with mentors," says Dr. Stewart Peck. "Now that we have the means, we want to return the favour and help others with similar opportunities."



During their years of fieldwork, the intrepid scientists amassed an astounding representation of insect diversity, including beetles. Close to half a million specimens of these environmental sentinels have been donated to the Canadian Museum of Nature.

Even in a digital age, studying real specimens in scientific collections remains fundamental to discoveries relevant to global environmental issues such as climate change, invasive species, and habitat loss. “Specimens in collections are the reality and truth of the diversity in nature,” explains Stewart.

Museums have the capacity and curatorial expertise to make these resources available for scientific study. As such, the Pecks' gift will cover travel, lodging and related expenses for visits by global scientists to the museum's national research and collections facility in Gatineau, Quebec.

“We are profoundly grateful for their support,” says Meg Beckel, Canadian Museum of Nature President and CEO. “The commitment by Jarmila and Stewart ensures that our collections remain relevant to studies of the planet’s past, present and future. We all benefit from the resulting scientific collaborations that add to knowledge about biodiversity.”

Insects are considered the most successful living things on the planet, with origins dating back more than 300 million years. Beetles are the most diverse group of insects, being found on every continent. They break down organic matter, especially in forests, and they recycle nutrients for other living things. Specific types of beetles can be used as indicators of the relative health of a region's biodiversity. Their presence is critical to the maintenance of many habitats and ecosystems.

The Pecks have been part of the scientific community that has contributed to this knowledge with the evidence acquired through their collecting expeditions and fieldwork. The couple met in the late 1960s, while Jarmila was a visiting scientist at Harvard University. They moved to Ottawa in the 1970s when Stewart became a professor at Carleton University and Jarmila worked as an adjunct research professor.

As an entomologist and biogeographer, Stewart Peck taught biology at Carleton for four decades. Canadian Geographic named him one of Canada's top 100 explorers, and he has mentored numerous students that went onto careers in science, including the museum's entomologist and beetle expert Dr. Bob Anderson.

Jarmila Peck was elected to the Royal Society of Canada in 1992. She donated her life's collection of thousands of fossil insects to the museum in 2018. As a professor in the former Czechoslovakia, her passion for geology and paleontology led her to focus on the origins of flight in insects. She documented this evolution through comprehensive collections of fossils, some of which show the earliest evidence for the development of wing structure in insects.

And while international museums such as the Smithsonian, the Field Museum or the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology could have been the repository for her life's work, Jarmila chose the Canadian Museum of Nature: "I am Canadian, I am proud of that and I don't want it to be somewhere else," she notes.

The Pecks continue to publish about their scientific findings, for which their collections are critical. But in the twilight of their careers, they want to ensure others can benefit from their life's efforts, and their support for the museum is a natural step.



"Studying nature requires a lifelong commitment. We want to support young researchers as they build their professional careers," explains Jarmila.

Applications for the *Stewart and Jarmila Peck Visiting Scientist Fund in Entomology* will be available in July at [nature.ca](http://nature.ca).

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### **About Jarmila and Stewart Peck**

Through their 51 years of marriage and entomological exploration, the Pecks have complemented each other professionally and personally, sharing a passion for travel, adventure, and discovery of insect diversity which has been a huge part of their lives together.

The Pecks are internationally renowned experts on the systematics and taxonomy of beetles (Stewart) and insect wing evolution and fossils (Jarmila). Both have had global impact on the world of entomology. Stewart is considered by some as the living person who has collected the most insects through his extensive fieldwork.

Stewart's life's work has contributed immensely to the understanding of beetles, particularly small fungus beetles (Leiodidae), cave arthropods (especially Coleoptera), and island biogeography, including the Coleoptera of the Galapagos, and Coleoptera of the West Indies. Jarmila is one of the leading paleoentomologists of her time. Her work has focussed on the origin and evolution of insect wings and legs, which includes preparation of a monumental atlas of wing morphology and homology across all insect orders.

### **About the Nature Foundation**

Launched in 2020, the Nature Foundation is an independent charitable entity supporting the important work of the Canadian Museum of Nature. The Foundation's mission is to inspire investments in nature for discovery, research and education to foster solutions for our future. Supporters investing in the Foundation provide vital funding to advance fact-based science that empowers globally relevant field work and research, training of Canada's next generation of natural history experts, as well as knowledge sharing, collaboration, and educational initiatives. Learn more at [foundation.nature.ca](http://foundation.nature.ca).

### **About the Canadian Museum of Nature**

Saving the world through evidence, knowledge and inspiration! The Canadian Museum of Nature provides evidence-based insights, inspiring experiences and meaningful engagement with nature's past, present and future. It achieves this through scientific research, curation of a 14.6 million specimen reference collection, education programs, travelling exhibitions, and a dynamic web site, [nature.ca](http://nature.ca).

### **For more information:**

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