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***BIZARRE BEASTS PAST AND PRESENT* EXHIBIT PROVES FACT IS STRANGER THAN FICTION**

See the Academy's own rare, bizarre fossils at opening weekend Jan. 29-30

PHILADELPHIA—A new interactive exhibit opening Saturday, Jan. 29, at the Academy of Natural Sciences takes visitors back in time to experience some of the strangest animals that have ever lived.

Bizarre Beasts Past and Present, on view through April 24, features lifelike models of prehistoric animals that evolved crazy-looking features that allowed them to adapt to their unique environments. These animals may seem unbelievable, but each one swam, crawled, flew or walked the earth. And some, like the hammer-head shark, are still around today.

The realistic-looking, life-sized models of freaky fish, radical reptiles and bizarre birds—in all their gory details—are the work of Gary Staab, an illustrator and sculptor whose creations have been seen in museums, movies and on television. Staab, of Missouri, worked closely with scientists and with real fossils to create a realistic portrait of amazing creatures that lived millions of years ago.

“These creatures are so realistic looking,” said Jennifer Sontchi, the Academy’s manager of exhibit projects. “The big flightless bird looks like it’s about to gallop away, and the shark looks like it could gobble you up.”

Special activities for the whole family during the exhibit’s opening weekend include craft-making, games and a display of rarely seen fossils from the Academy’s own world-renowned collection.

Visitors will learn how the 7-foot-tall birdlike *Dinotryma* evolved to fit the ecological niche left when dinosaurs went extinct. The 13-foot-long *Helicoprion*, a shark that lived 250 million years ago, sports a row of circular teeth resembling a buzz saw. A shovel-tooth elephant that lived 7 million years ago totes a 5-foot-long skull with two outsize scoop-like teeth in its lower jaw.

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Touchable casts, squishy intestines to finger, interactive games, and videos help bring to life a long-ago cast of creatures that some people may be glad are no longer in existence.

Bizarre Beasts Past and Present was created by Staab Studios, Inc., and is free with museum admission. A Spanish translation of the exhibit label text is available.

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The Academy of Natural Sciences, founded in 1812, is the oldest natural science research institution and museum in the Americas and a world leader in biodiversity and environmental research. The mission of the Academy is the encouragement and cultivation of the sciences.

HOURS: Monday–Friday, 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Saturday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. ADMISSION: \$12 adults; \$10 children 3-12, seniors, college students, military personnel; free for members and children under 3. \$2 fee for Butterflies!