



Phone: (612) 625-6889 | <https://www.bellmuseum.umn.edu/>

April 27, 2025

Senator John Marty
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
Minnesota Senate, 3235 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Senator Eric Pratt
Ranking Minority Member, Senate Finance Committee
Minnesota Senate, 2217 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Marty, Senator Pratt, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

We respectfully request that you reconsider the elimination of the special appropriation for the Bell Museum in the Higher Education Omnibus Appropriations Bill (SF2483). We understand the challenges of this session and appreciate the difficult choices you and colleagues face in moving forward a state budget that best serves all Minnesotans.

Established by state law in 1872, the Bell Museum is Minnesota's state natural history museum and the official repository for biological collections including birds, mammals, fishes, reptiles, amphibians, mollusks, plants, fungi, and lichens (over 1.2 million specimens).

Our collections form the basis of knowledge of Minnesota's biodiversity, serve as an important resource for scholarly and applied research, and enhance formal and informal science education across the state. The Bell's collections serve state agencies including the Departments of Natural Resources, Transportation, Public Safety, Agriculture, Health, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. Local businesses in the natural resource sector, from environmental impact assessment to landscape architecture, rely on these resources.

The state's annual investment in the Bell Museum (\$140,000 per year) supports curation and accessibility of the Bell's biological collections – namely through the support of key personnel including collections managers and curatorial assistants. The Bell Museum has responsibly stewarded this annual investment for over five decades in service to the state.

The loss of dedicated state funding will negatively impact the Bell Museum's capacity to deliver its statutory obligation as the state's natural history museum. We anticipate reduced staffing that will negatively impact collections operations, delaying service to state agencies and reducing public access to this important and extensive statewide biodiversity resource.

Continued state support for the Bell's collections is even more important now given massive cuts at the federal level targeting museums and collections. The recent gutting of the Institute for Museum and Library

Services eliminated an important opportunity for the Bell to secure critical funds to modernize and expand collections infrastructure

The Bell Museum biological collections are a vital state resource for natural resource management, research, and science education. Continued state investment is necessary to ensure the collections remain accessible and to support growth in a time of environmental change and challenges, including wildlife disease, invasive species, biodiversity loss, ecosystem health, and air and water quality.

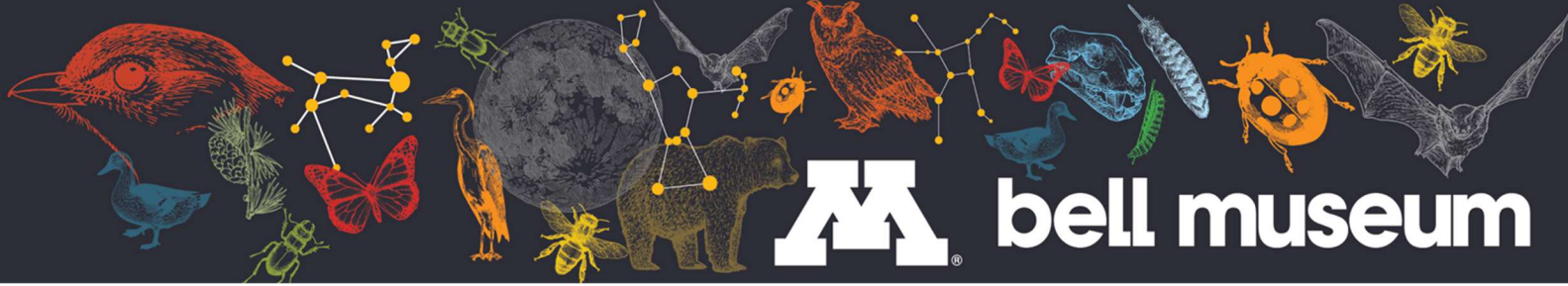
Thank you for your leadership and thoughtful consideration of the Bell Museum's request to make biological collections a resource that continues to benefit all Minnesotans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Menninger', with a stylized, flowing script.

Holly L. Menninger, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Bell Museum

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612-625-6889



Bell Museum natural history collections are a Minnesota resource

Since our founding by the state legislature in 1872, the Bell Museum has collected, interpreted, and made widely accessible Minnesota's plant and animal life. We put 1.2 million specimens to work through service to state agencies, local businesses, educational institutions, and non-profits.

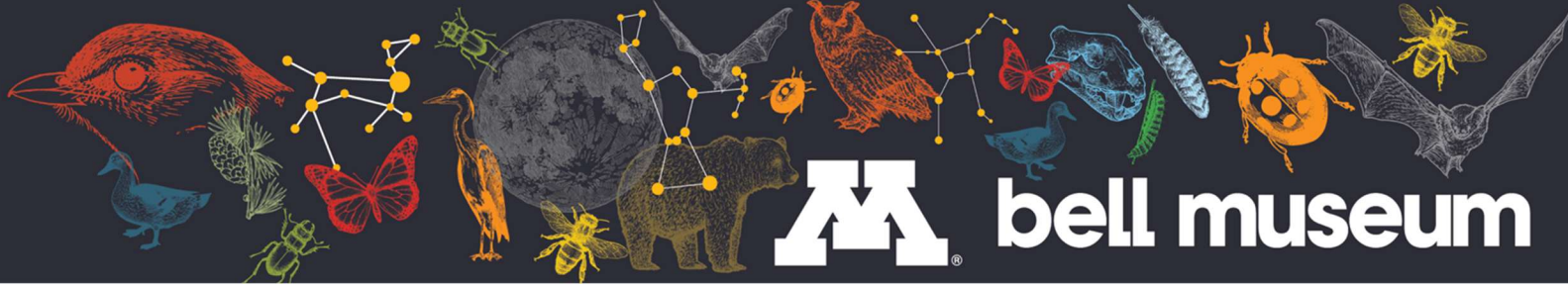
Bell collections serve a vital role in the identification of fishes collected by the MN DNR and MPCA during biodiversity surveys. In 2023-24, the Bell identified over 37,000 fishes from 300 MPCA samples and over 1600 from the MN DNR.



[Bell Museum graduate student Alex Crum](#) used plant specimens from the Bell's Herbarium to help her identify medicinal species used by the local Hmong community. Her research enabled Hmong farmers to safely sell their herbs to local hospitals to make traditional soups for patients. (Photo: Lindsey Miller)

When wolves monitored by the MN DNR die, they are given to the Bell Museum, where they provide critical scientific data about wolf population change in the state; the Bell recently added 200 wolf specimens to the Mammal Collection.





The specimens in the Bell Museum mollusk collection are some of the most diverse in the Midwest and provide the materials needed for state agency workers and environmental consultants to take the Mollusk Identification Exam through the MN DNR.

Based on specimens in the Bell's Herbarium, botanists from the MN DNR recently rediscovered the presence of Geyer's smooth blue aster in Minnesota, long thought extinct in the state. Three specimens, previously misidentified, were collected in Cass, Itasca, and Kittson counties.



The value of the Bell's scientific collection extends beyond the physical specimen. Through DNA sequencing, heavy metal analysis, and 3D-imaging, researchers can understand changes in the environment such as wildlife disease, invasive species, and heavy metal contamination.

The Bell Museum scientific collection is a vital state resource for natural resource management, research, and science education. Continued state investment is necessary to ensure the collections remain accessible and to support scientific growth in a time of environmental change.