

Malcolm Carnegie McKenna

A message from Senior Vice President & Provost of Science Michael Novacek

It is with much sadness that I inform you that Malcolm McKenna, Frick Curator of Paleontology Emeritus, passed away yesterday [March 3rd, 2008]. Malcolm arrived at the American Museum of Natural History to replace the eminent George Gaylord Simpson in 1960 and served as both a Museum Curator and a professor of Geology at Columbia University for 41 years. His numerous publications, field expeditions, and new discoveries, and his close association with many colleagues and especially the many graduate students he trained all mark a tremendous scientific career and a full and exciting life. He was an indefatigable explorer, carrying out expeditions to many regions near and far, including the Rocky Mountains, Mongolia's Gobi Desert and the Arctic. His devotion to training successive generations of scientists launched an extraordinary number of professional careers. His interests bridged very different areas of inquiry--from geology and plate tectonics to evolution and systematics. Malcolm was particularly devoted to the study of fossil mammals and his leadership in that area of research found a sort of culmination in the 1997 publication on the classification of mammals coauthored with Museum researcher Susan Bell. It is important to note, however, that Malcolm continued to contribute significantly to his science until the very end. His accomplishments--too numerous and varied to relate in more detail here--will be summarized in other reflections. At this moment we remember a man who was a true force in his science, in his institution, his diverse community of colleagues and friends, and his energetic, talented, and highly collaborative family. His lifelong passion for his work was an inspiration to us all and he will be greatly missed.