



Illustration by Dan Pegoda

# DuckTales

## A Webfoot with a forked tail

BY AARON RAGAN-FORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON will soon enroll a new Webfoot, but he won't be a Duck at all. In fact, he's a reptile.

When a fossil-hunting hobbyist discovered the ancient remains of a crocodile-like creature in eastern Oregon this spring, Professor Emeritus William Orr was called in to help identify the species—which has a head like a croc but a forked, vertical tail like a fish.

Orr, director of the UO's Thomas Condon Collection of fossils, surmises the beast held its stubby legs flat against its six- to eight-foot body for streamlined swimming, "like the landing gear on an airplane." The critter is thought to be a member of the suborder *Thalattosuchia*, but the exact species is unknown to science.

The reptile is theorized to have roamed Asian seas during the Jurassic era, 150 to 180 million years ago. So what was it

doing trapped in a hunk of sandstone in Oregon ranch country all these eons? Blame plate tectonics, a sort of one-way moving sidewalk across the ocean floor, for scooting the fossil east.

"Most of the things that make the trip—the immigrants, if you will—are not in good shape when they get here," says Orr. This recent find, he says, is significant because the skeleton is more intact than usual.

After a two-year round of study in Iowa, the "croc" will go on permanent display in Hillsboro at the Rice Northwest Museum of Rocks and Minerals, on semi-permanent loan from the Condon Collection. Community members who want to visit the Condon Collection, housed on campus in Pacific Hall, can call 541/346-4577 to set up an appointment.

### Can You Hear Me Now?

If you've ever been on a museum tour and thought to yourself, "I could do that," now's your chance.

Thanks to a grant from the Korea Foundation, the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art on the UO campus has prepared a series of audio podcasts of guided museum tours, available for free download from the Internet or on loner iPods at the welcome desk. The podcasts give art aficionados tailor-made

experiences of their own interests and at their own pace. What's more, the museum wants to hear from community members who'd like their own voices recorded as tour guides.

This new initiative is the work of Lisa Aiba-Smith, the Schnitzer's director of education. She plans to update the play list about every three months. Current offerings include architectural tours of the building's design, as well as gallery tours that highlight portions of the museum's famed Korean, Chinese and Japanese collections.

The tours are narrated by museum staff, art-history graduate students, community members and even a handful of precocious 10-year-olds. "We always want to be able to provide a mix of kids, university students and adults," says Aiba-Smith. "It really is crossing a lot of age barriers."

To download podcasts, visit <http://jsma.uoregon.edu/education/itours>. To volunteer as an audio guide, call 541/346-0966.

### Relief Research

When Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast in 2005, Jim Elliott knew what he had to do. Elliott, who was then an associate professor of sociology at Tulane University in New

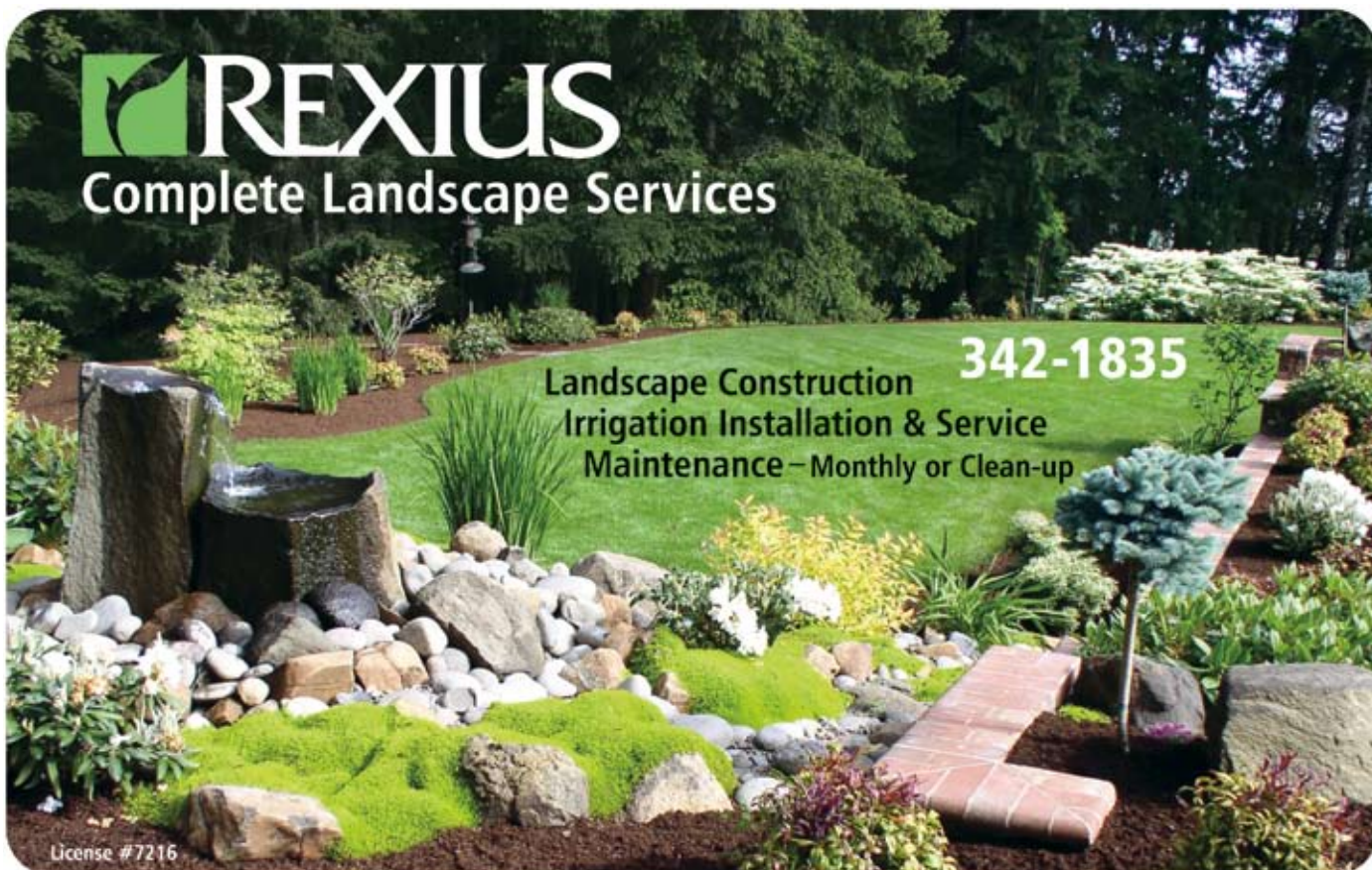
Orleans, volunteered at the hospital where his wife worked as a physical therapist, securing supplies and moving patients. What he didn't expect was a new professional focus.

"Katrina influenced my intellectual trajectory and what I was going to do with it," says Elliott. "I just felt compelled to explore some of the social questions. That got me started thinking, 'Okay, I want to study the sociology of disasters.'"

After his experiences in storm-ravaged Louisiana, Elliott made the cross-country move to Eugene and UO. Here, his research and teaching have centered on applying the lessons of Katrina to life in Oregon. He teaches a class entitled "The Sociology of Disasters," which examines how urban development and inequality contribute to what Elliott calls a "cumulative disadvantage" in responding to disasters more common to the Northwest, such as floods, mudslides and wildfires.

Elliott is heartened by the efforts of UO students who volunteer and conduct research in New Orleans, a city facing ongoing challenges in rebuilding. "We want to learn about the social processes that create vulnerability," he says, "to avoid another Katrina." ■

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