

CINNABAR FOUNDATION

Montana Natural History Center

From celebrating its 25th anniversary, to welcoming a new executive director, and expanding and developing existing programs, the [Montana Natural History Center](http://www.MontanaNaturalist.org) continues to see growth and support in all aspects of the organization.



The Montana Natural History Center (MNHC) aims to “promote and cultivate the appreciation, understanding, and stewardship of nature through education,” throughout Montana.

To accomplish this, the MNHC approaches natural history education through public media, a tri-annual publication, experiential educational opportunities, summer camps, classroom activities, and even interactive video conferencing. Programs span across all ages with its *miniNaturalist* program accommodating children as young as two-years old.

At its inception, in 1991, MNHC was solely volunteer-run. Now, the Center has 13 full-time staff members as well as 8 camp counselors during the summer months. As MNHC grows and expands, so too are several of its programs.

AT MNHC

In 2014, MNHC underwent a complete re-model, which allowed for an explosion of programmatic growth and illuminated the importance of having on-site indoor and outdoor exhibits and spaces that complemented the extraordinary quality of their field programs.

The Center now includes both large and small classrooms, a *Kids' Discovery Room*, and the *Ralph Lee Allen Environmental Education Library*. These spaces provide plenty of room for programming and education about the natural world.

The classroom space is complemented by a nature art gallery and a wide variety of exhibits that are divided by time period and habitat. Exhibits include wetlands, prairie, and alpine ecosystems; Cretaceous and Pleistocene time periods; pollinators; bones; and even Glacial Lake Missoula. To outfit its exhibits, MNHC collaborates and shares collections with the Zoological and Paleontological departments at the University of Montana.



In addition to the exhibits and education space, there is a green-screen room, which is a state-of-the-art production studio that allows the Center to produce fun and interactive educational videos that are shared with visiting-naturalist partner classrooms as well as the community. Here, naturalists can guide “virtual” natural history hikes by simply standing in front of the screen while locations are projected on it. For example, if you want to be standing among mountain goats in Glacier National Park, you can stand in front of the green screen with that view projected in the background!

A few steps outside is the MNHC’s *Nature Adventure Garden* that has interactive stations where children of all ages can experience what it is like to be an archeologist or explore the Monarch butterfly garden.

IN THE FIELD



MNHC has not only a phenomenal education center at its main campus, but it also coordinates several programs that set the organization apart.

One of the Center’s foremost programs is the *Montana Master Naturalist Program*, designed for adults who are interested in broadening their understanding about the natural world. MNHC runs two Master Naturalist certification courses: a 12-week course in the spring, and a one-week intensive course in the summer. The Center partners with the University of Montana, which enables UM students to earn course credit through the completion of one of the Montana Master Naturalist courses.

Throughout the year, MNHC also offers 4-6 full-day field classes, as well as occasional two-day field weekends, such as this year’s *Dino Dig* at the Two Medicine Dinosaur Center in Bynum.

To reach people near and far, MNHC utilizes a multi-prong approach, including all major social media platforms. The Center also publishes *Montana Naturalist*, a three-issues a year magazine that focuses on natural history topics and is distributed to members, school groups, and the community. Non-members who would like to receive the magazine can pick one up free at the Center or have it delivered to your mailbox for \$10/year. Additionally, the Center broadcasts “*Field Notes*” a twice-a-week program on Montana Public Radio (MTPR). “*Field Notes*” are 5 minute essays on various natural history topics that are written and submitted by citizen naturalists.

The keystone program of MNHC is its *Visiting Naturalist in the Schools* program for 4th and 5th grades. Running seven months out of the year, MNHC staff naturalists visit 68 classrooms monthly, within a 60-mile radius of Missoula, to introduce students to the art of natural history. With a focus on experiencing what it’s like to be a naturalist scientist, artist, and writer, the program reaches up to 1,600 students a year. The classroom sessions culminate with two experiential-learning field experiences that provide



students opportunities to use their newly learned skills as they explore and investigate their local, natural areas.

MNHC INTO THE FUTURE

This fall, MNHC is hiring a full time teaching naturalist and expanding their *Visiting Naturalist in the Schools* program by implementing an *ID Nature* program to reach students across the state of Montana. This new initiative will further utilize the Center's green screen technology and Polycom video conferencing equipment.

The Cinnabar Foundation awarded its first grant to MNHC in 1992, and has supported the organization 22 of the past 25 years with grants totaling \$162,500. With the help of its 2016 Cinnabar Foundation grant, MNHC looks forward to further expanding its programming over the next year, continuing to enhance its exhibit spaces, and implementing a third-party evaluation of its *Visiting Naturalist in the Schools* program.

Recently, MNHC joined the Association for Science and Technology, which allows Center members to access 300+ science centers around the USA. Members also receive year-round access to the Center; educational tours for all ages at the MHNC, Native Plant Garden or the UM Zoological Museum; a subscription to *Montana Naturalist* magazine; and discounts on various MNHC programs.



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