

A Tribute to Phillip Merrill Youngman: 1927–2011

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Phillip Merrill Youngman was a well-known mammalogist, an all-round naturalist, a gifted carpenter, a great storyteller, and a collector of close friends. He spent most of his career at the Canadian Museum of Nature, beginning when it was called the National Museum of Natural Sciences, where he served in various positions, including Curator of Mammals, Exhibits Planner, and finally Assistant Curator of Quaternary Zoology. After a long illness, he passed away on 22 November 2011 at the age of 84.

Phil was born 1 September 1927 in New York City. Although he had early memories of becoming fascinated with animals through visits to the Bronx Zoo, he spent most of his childhood in New England. He told his children about wonderful hunting trips he took with his uncle, who introduced him to wilderness experiences that he would always enjoy. As a teenager (Figure 1), he joined a falconry club and thus became interested in birds.

Phil joined the U.S. Navy in 1945, and his duties included serving as an aviation machinist. In 1948, his love of animal study brought him to Storrs, Connecticut, where he worked at the University of Connecticut Museum and the Connecticut Department of Wildlife Management while taking courses in zoology. During this period, he also worked in the U.S. National Park Service teaching nature study and preparing exhibits. In the summer of 1950, Phil held a job with the American Museum of Natural History, spending much of his time in the Bahamas collecting plankton samples and doing oceanographic studies above and below the water.

His studies were put on hold from September 1952 until September 1954, while he again served in the United States Armed Forces, this time in the Army. He was sent to Korea as a mammalogist to study suspected rodent reservoirs of hemorrhagic fever, and he took the opportunity of being in such a biologically understudied region to make a large collection of mammals, reptiles, and amphibians from that country. Among his earliest papers was a study of the ecology of Korean rodents. (Phil credited this paper with helping to launch his career, as it gained the attention of academics at the University of Kansas who invited him to do a master's degree there.)



FIGURE 1. Phillip Merrill Youngman as a teenager.

Phil earned his B.A. in Zoology at the University of Connecticut in 1955, but not before he had spent another summer of research, this time working with L. R. Penner on schistosome dermatitis (swimmer's itch) in Florida and collecting animals of all kinds for the University of Connecticut Museum.

In 1956, Phil moved on to Lawrence, Kansas, to begin graduate work, assisting in a graduate course in embryology and in other subjects. During the summer, he worked with the Colorado Cooperative Gopher Survey studying the pocket gophers (*Thomomys bottae*) of Colorado, and they became the subject of his master's thesis. Working under E. R. Hall, Phil received his M.A. in Zoology from the University of Kansas in 1957.

After Phil had spent two years as an instructor at the University of Tampa (Florida) teaching a large variety of zoology courses, Frank Banfield, a mammalogist colleague who was then Director of the National Museum of Natural Sciences in Ottawa, invited Phil to apply for the position of Curator of Mammals there. With Phil's vast experience collecting and studying mammals in various parts of the world, he was well qualified for the job. So Phil packed up his things and, with his pregnant wife, headed north. On 8 September 1960, he began his long tenure at the Museum.

His first research projects took him to the Yukon Territory, where he collected 2277 specimens added to the Museum mammal collection and studied thousands more. Besides mammals, Phil collected vascular plants and other animals, all now deposited in the Museum's collections. About half a dozen catalogued Pleistocene specimens in the Museum were collected in the Ogilvie River area, Yukon Territory, by Phil and Terry Morgan (museum taxidermist at the time) in July of 1971 (a couple of these specimens are mentioned in Harington (1980)). The Yukon was always special to Phil, but he also made major contributions to our knowledge of the mammals of the entire northwest, including Alaska, Siberia, and the Northwest Territories, especially as they related to Beringia and patterns of deglaciation in that region. He did not ignore the eastern mammals, however, and some of his papers deal with eastern populations of hares, mice, and shrews, and he also did fieldwork in Newfoundland.

When Phil arrived at the Museum, Gaston Tessier was already there, working for Earl Godfrey, the Curator of Ornithology. Gaston then became Phil's assistant, accompanying him on numerous field trips. The two became lifelong friends and kept in contact even after Gaston left for the Canadian Wildlife Service in 1965 and after Phil retired in 1992. Over the years, Phil spoke often and very warmly about Gaston. On his part, Gaston writes that Phil "became a mentor that I will always remember and be so thankful to have known."

While Phil was appointed to the Exhibits Section as an Exhibits Planner (October 1971–August 1978), he worked on a number of travelling and long-term exhibits, directing the activities of designers, thematic researchers, taxidermists, writers, artists, sculptors, and model makers. He produced a film for the Museum entitled *I'm a Mammal and So Are You*, and he visited major galleries across the country to assemble an important exhibition on what Canadian artists were saying about nature at that time. A trip to the Comoros Archipelago, off the east coast of Africa, from 20 March to May 1973 yielded local fishing gear (hand-line with hook for catching coelacanth plus a volcanic rock used for weighing the line) for an exhibit of the Museum's model of the "living fossil" coelacanths and the purchase of a variety of specimens, including mammals, reptiles, and molluscs. On his return, Phil

created a small coelacanth exhibit that travelled across Canada for a number of years, as well as a paper sculpture of a coelacanth with R. J. Sliwa.

From August 1978 until June 1982, Phil took special educational leave to pursue doctoral studies at the University of Helsinki, where he worked with Professor Björn Kurtén. He received his Ph.D. in Zoology in April 1983, with a thesis on the European Mink, *Mustela lutreola*. He also did phenetic (morphological) studies of European and American mink dealing with inter-specific relationships, hybridization, geographic variation, and distribution.

Upon his return from Finland, Phil again served in the mammal unit beginning in September 1983 and then transferred to the Paleobiology Division as Assistant Curator of Quaternary Zoology, working with C. Richard Harington. Harington recalls, "I asked him to pursue the study of ice age cave faunas in Canada, which I thought would be very important to the study of Quaternary Zoology here." To gain experience with cave studies, Phil spent part of a summer working with the U.S. cave expert, Jim I. Mead, then in Flagstaff, Arizona. Phil began his Canadian research at Bluefish Caves, northern Yukon, under the supervision of J. Cinq-Mars of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Harington comments that these were "perhaps the most important Canadian caves yielding ice age mammal bones (including evidence of early humans dating to about 25 000 BP!)" At Bluefish Cave III (Figure 2), Phil found and excavated a rare specimen of the Saiga Antelope (*Saiga tatarica*), which was radiocarbon dated as 13 390 BP. A Beringian polecat (*Mustela eversmanni*) identified by Phil from the same site yielded a date of 33 500 BP, the oldest date recorded from bones from the Bluefish Caves (Harington 2012, page 173). He also collected a "mummified" shrew (*Sorex hoyi*) specimen from Bear Cave Mountain, Yukon, in 1986.

Closer to home, Phil continued his work on cave mammals with colleagues at the Université du Québec at Montreal. He provided stratigraphic information on Quaternary vertebrates from Laffèche Cave, a Late Pleistocene–Early Holocene site about 27 km north of Gatineau, Quebec. Among his discoveries were several species adapted to the Arctic, such as the Snowy Owl, Arctic Hare, and Ungava Collared Lemming, as well as an Arctic Fox dentary (jaw) that was illustrated in Milner and Ryan (2006: figure 18-C). This work is summarized in Harington (2012). Phil's papers published while with the Paleobiology Division are referenced and summarized in Harington (2003, pages 325–326). One particularly valuable paper of this period dealt with the Pleistocene small carnivores of eastern Beringia. Phil's complete bibliography follows this tribute.

Phil was elected a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1964. He was a long-time member of the American Society of Mammalogists, and he served as an Associate Editor of *The*

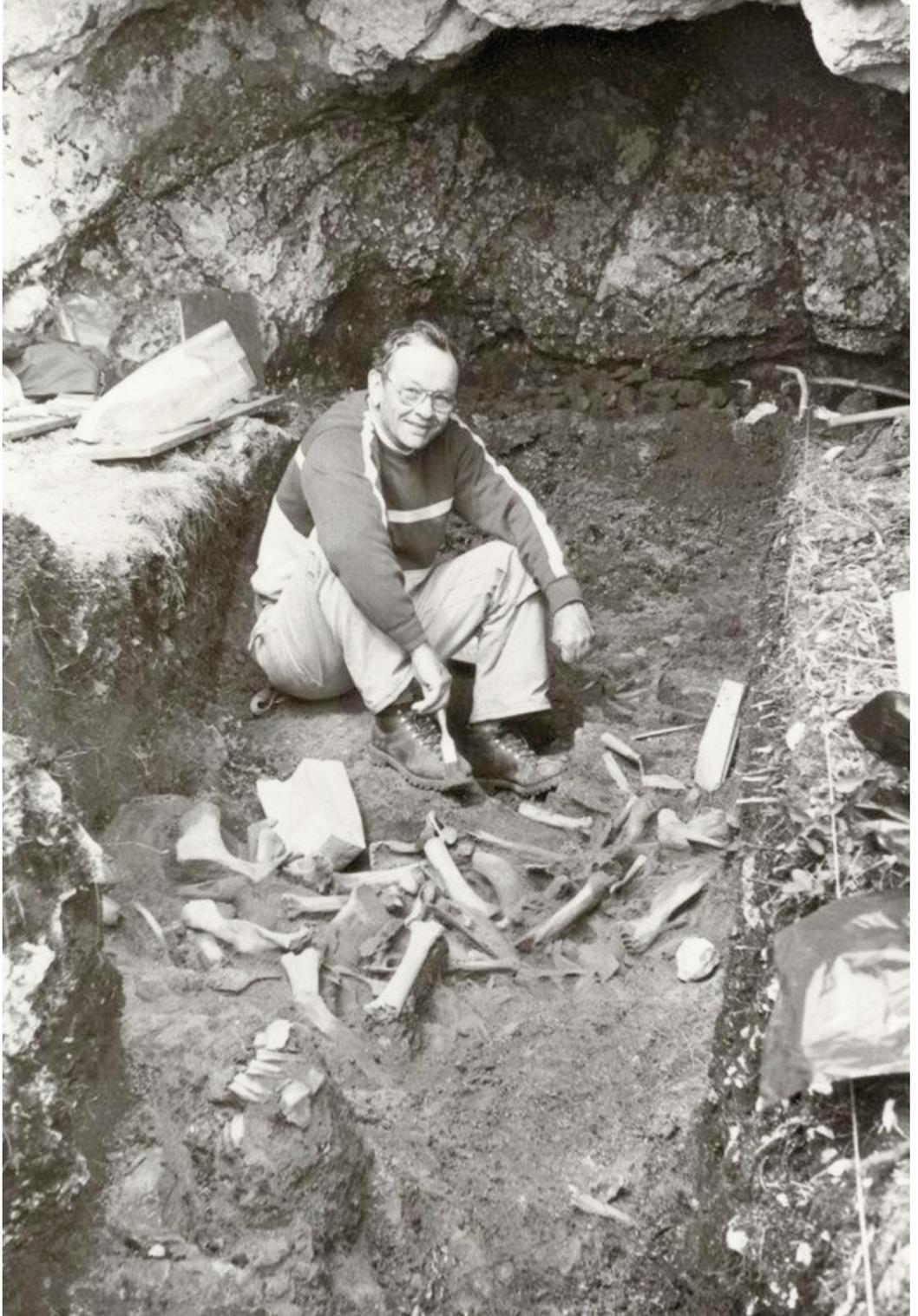


FIGURE 2. Phillip Merrill Youngman at Bluefish Cave III in 1986.

Canadian Field-Naturalist from 1961 until 1970. He was also proud that his Finnish entomological colleague, Pekka Vilkamaa, named a new species of fly in his honour, *Corynoptera phili* (Hippon et al. 2010).

Phil was at the Museum for 32 years, retiring in 1992, thus avoiding an unsettled time of major reorganization at the Museum. Two of his papers (Youngman 1993, 1994) appeared after his retirement, but he did not finish additional work in mammalogy after that. Although he may have worked on fossils of wild dogs such as *Cuon* for a while and the Holocene fauna of Lafliche Cave from which he had collected numerous specimens, he devoted his time to home schooling his youngest daughter, Katherine, and doing cabinetry and other home-based projects that he had put off for so long. He was a talented carpenter and had spent years assembling and building a log home near North Gower, south of Ottawa. Phil also enjoyed working on his family's genealogy, sailing, bicycling, and cross-country skiing, as well as fine art.

Phil loved children and was a devoted father to the four children from his marriage with Ana Maria Lammer, who had come to the United States from Argentina. The oldest is Edward, followed by Stephen, David, and Elizabeth, who still lives in Ottawa. They provided Phil with eight grandchildren. Several years after his divorce from Ana, Phil married Liisa Rissanen, whom he met in Helsinki. She is an artist now living in Maberly, Ontario. They had two children, Anina and Katherine, both based in Ottawa, and Phil was equally devoted to them.

Although a youthful and fit man, Phil became ill not long after retiring, first with a melanoma, and then leukemia and other ailments, including a returning melanoma, which required surgery. He remained fairly mobile, chatty, and friendly to the end, however, always enjoying visits with his friends, talking about his adventures, and hearing about theirs. Phil was a remarkable person who will be fondly remembered by his large family and his many friends and colleagues.

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