

EXPLORING LIFE ON EARTH

Over time, museums have developed new and creative ways to share what people have learned about the natural history of our planet. This guide will look at five types of exhibits and experiences our Museum uses to explore the variety of life on earth.

Cabinets of Curiosity - At the top of the Grand Staircase, you will find a unique display of all sorts of life. Before museums began designing dioramas and adding descriptions, they stored their artifacts and specimens in cases that they called “cabinets of curiosity.” Among the animals represented you’ll find only their names. What is the name of the animal in this exhibit with the largest skeleton?

Diorama – Milwaukee Then and Now - Turn around and walk to the right of the staircase until you come to the middle diorama, *1,000 Years Ago and Today*. The use of the diorama helps us to understand how the presence of settlers has caused a change to the landscape and wildlife. Advancements into the modern age have further decreased the natural biodiversity (the total number of different species) of plants and animals of the area. Observe the number of animal species on each side and compare. What types of animals are on both sides of the diorama?

Living Exhibits: The Museum’s Butterfly Vivarium and Bugs Alive! - The *Butterfly Vivarium* immerses you in the tropical habitat of dozens of species of insects and plants, engaging all five of your senses. Next to the *Vivarium* is the *Bugs Alive!* exhibit. Here you can learn about the most successful group of all animals – the arthropods – through both a combination of live animals and models. Find the case showing the six major groups of arthropods. What group do spiders belong to?

Bigger Than Life Models: Mantis and Prey - In the butterfly exhibit, look for the three-foot praying mantis that has just caught a creamy yellow butterfly. A natural process in life is the predator-prey relationship seen here. The use of oversized models enables us to explore biodiversity up close. Both these animals are insects and share in common their six legs, two sets of wings, and three body parts (head, thorax, abdomen). Can you point out all these parts on the two animals?

Instructional Exhibits - Tree of Life - Exit toward the nearly two-story-high display of the *Tree of Life*. Museum scientists and exhibits staff have included a large amount of information, models, mounts, and hands-on activities to support a visitor’s desire to understand both how species are related and the history of life on Earth. Look for the wall text “Reading the Tree.” What does a branch on the tree represent?

Graphics - Biodiversity Timeline - Enter the laboratory opposite the *Tree of Life* and find the *Biodiversity Timeline* in the center of the room. Based on years of research, this graphic exhibit sheds light on how a study of biodiversity has revealed that in Earth’s history there have been a number of mass extinctions, meaning that at least half of all species of life on Earth at the time became extinct. How many mass extinction events have happened in Earth’s history?

what will you find?

The ecosystem with the greatest biodiversity of life on Earth is the rainforest. The Museum’s research and exhibit teams developed the biology hall to resemble a Costa Rica rainforest. Explore!

