

# Oakland Owlets' Museum Exploration @ University of Michigan Museum of Natural History

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The Oakland Owlets Families and Friends traveled to Ann Arbor Michigan on November 6<sup>th</sup> for a special tour of the University of Michigan's Museum of Natural History (UMMNH). The UMMNH has a long history that dates to Michigan's statehood. The museum



supports research and maintains collections in four distinct academic disciplines: paleontology, zoology, anthropology, and botany. At the main entrance, it was incredible to see the famous mastodon couple standing side by side. This is the only place to see nearly complete skeletons of male and female mastodons together. UMMNH has the skeletons of many Michigan Mastodons.

In 2019, the UMMNH moved into a new state of the art building which also incorporates the biological science building with the Museum.

Visitors can see inside the bio-sci labs while touring the museum. Owlet families and friends were warmly greeted by our guide Nichole in the lobby. Nichole trains museum docents to lead tours. Nichole is studying to attend graduate school in Texas for an advanced degree in paleontology. Nichole spends her summers at dig sites in Texas. Nichole was the perfect guide for the young birders group.



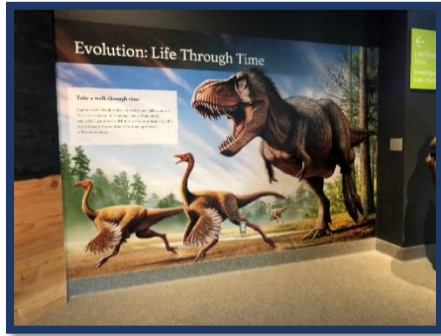
Once everyone arrived, Nichole led the group into the Michigan gallery, just a short walk from the main entrance. This gallery features Michigan



wildlife, natural communities, geology, and some specimens from the fossil record. Nichole shared some Michigan facts and then gave the group some time to explore individually.

Owlets assessed their Michigan bird IQ in a mini quiz and aced all the questions.





The next stop on the tour was the second floor and the **Evolution: Life Through Time** exhibit. Nichole explained how scientists look at the geological past through periods of time known as epochs or era. She also shared that many of the plants and animals in this exhibit are extinct. Scientists recognize that earth has experienced periods of mass extinction in the past.

Evidence of animals that once lived during these epochs is found in the fossil record. Paleontologists can identify species even from partial skeletons or just teeth. Young birders looked at a skull of a Tyrannosaurus rex as Nichole explained the varied sizes of the teeth. Their teeth continually grow, and new smaller teeth erupt to replace older ones. Nichole also said that much is unknown about the species of the past. For instance, the fossil record does not address skin color and texture.



At the Dinosaur exhibit, Nichole shattered some dinosaur myths. The apex predator in this exhibit is a *Majungasaurus*, a carnivore native to Madagascar. Nichole noted that the positioning of this dinosaur and how it holds its tail. Fossil records of footprints indicate that dinosaurs did not drag their tails. The latest research prompted the museum to store a similar dinosaur previously on display for decades because the position of the dinosaur was incorrect. We also learned that birds are believed to be ancestors of dinosaurs.



There were many awe-inspiring moments on the tour. Nichole took time to make sure that young birders were aware of the characteristics of different animal groups. Young birders were interested in a variety of concepts. Skeletons and models of pre-historic creatures prepared by scientists based on the most up to date knowledge can really spark curiosity and emphasizes that we are all still learning.



At the end of the gallery, the group stepped into an open light filled atrium with a life size



model of a *Quetzalcoatlus*. This species belongs to a group of ancient flying reptiles known collectively as pterosaurs.

*Quetzalcoatlus* was the largest flying creature to ever live. Nichole remarked that pterosaurs were not dinosaurs. The group thanked Nichole and realized that there is a lot more to see at the museum.

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