

## FRESH FISHES FILL TIDE POOL AND TANK

A sunny Tuesday morning at low tide finds the Royal BC Museum (RBCM) curator of vertebrate zoology Gavin Hanke knee-deep in the waters off Clover Point. It's 10 a.m. Shouldn't this guy be at his desk?

Nah. Hanke's still on the RBCM clock – but today he's on a collection outing. He and his colleague, Moretta Frederick, collections manager for invertebrates, fish, reptiles and amphibians, are joined by a biologist from the provincial government and a few other researchers. Surrounded by buckets, coolers and nets, they're on the hunt for a few new fishes and food items to add to the museum's live collection in the natural history gallery: some seaweed for the urchins to munch on; a few new sculpins and gunnels to dart around inside the tide pool; a couple flatfish that show nicely when viewed from above; and a Rockhead for the aquarium in Ocean Station. "I caught him by hand," says Hanke. "Rockheads are really slow, and they crawl along the bottom, almost like a fish-meets-a-toad." With its skinny body and bulbous, sponge-like head, the heavily armoured Rockhead will share the tank with a Buffalo Sculpin, a Saddleback Gunnel, a Rock Greenling, a Padded Sculpin, a Northern Clingfish and a Snake Prickleback, to name just a few.

While none of the new aquarium-dwellers are rare – Hanke says they won't take a rare fish from its habitat – the Rockhead and others offer a visually rich representation of the life within BC's coastal waters.

Later this summer, Hanke will rustle up his posse again and head back out to Willows to do some beach seining, gathering up an even wider variety of species, such as Sticklebacks and Surf Perch. "We take a 50-foot net, walk out into the water and drag it to shore," he says. The researchers disturb as little habitat as possible – and what they don't keep, they return to the water. Even so, it never fails to draw a crowd, and Hanke routinely deals with questions from curious onlookers.

For an inquisitive scientist, trawling the waters off BC's coastline is a rewarding way to spend a morning. "We're all like this at the museum," says Hanke. "We're always trying to bring new stuff in, whether it's something weird or new or exciting."



Vertebrate zoology curator Gavin Hanke (centre photo) gets a kick out of collecting new fishes for the live collections in the Ocean Station aquarium (top) and the Living Land, Living Sea tide pool (middle). The anemone pictured below is just one of the tide pool creatures that now has new roommates.

## NEW FLOORCLOTH BRIGHTENS KITCHEN IN HISTORIC HELMCKEN HOUSE

Next time you find yourself passing by Helmcken House, take a peek inside the kitchen doorway. Yep, that's a brand spanking new oilcloth you see there on the floor. "The previous canvas floorcloth was getting really worn," says exhibition arts technician Kate Kerr. Colleague Megan Anderson suggested a new floor covering and so, with guidance from the Royal BC Museum (RBCM) Human History and Conservation departments, exhibition arts staff researched, planned and sourced everything necessary to create a new oilcloth. The canvas was ordered, unspooled and taken to a Victoria awning manufacturer to be sewn into a five-metre square – enough to cover the kitchen floor. Then staff and volunteers laid out the canvas and smeared it with several layers of a non-acidic calcium-carbonate base coat. "We had our History staff approve some historically accurate designs," says Kerr, who then proceeded to leaf through several books for ideas.

With its blue wisteria flowers, green leaves and curlicues on a 'home and hearth' yellow background, the new floor covering is an authentic replica of what you might have found in an 1890s-era kitchen. "Oilcloth was used then because it was easy to clean up sooty things," explains Kerr, who adds that the pattern would have been a very fashionable choice for the time.

"When we were putting it in, there was someone peering in the window," says Kerr. "They said, 'Wow, look at that floorcloth!' That made me feel so good, like it was worth all the effort."



Exhibition arts technician Kate Kerr helps create a new floorcloth for historic Helmcken House.



## Updates

- What do you get when you cross a xylophone with a dragon? Why, a *saron*, of course. Part of a *gamelan*, a set of Indonesian musical instruments collected by Sir Stamford Raffles between 1811 and 1815, the *saron* joined its sister instruments to accompany court processions and shadow puppet performances. Come see it for yourself at *Treasures: The World's Cultures from the British Museum* (until Sept. 30, 2009).



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- The latest publication from the Royal BC Museum, *Pacific Coast Ship China*, is an easy-to-use guide, packed with photos illustrating more than 280 china patterns once used on the liners that plied the Pacific coast of North America. *Pacific Coast Ship China* is now available through your favourite bookstore for \$75.



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