

## Awards and Citations

# Response by Matt Friedman for the presentation of the 2022 Schuchert Award of the Paleontological Society

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I would like to begin by thanking my nominators and the Society for this honor, and the disciplinary community for supporting me so generously over the years. Our job as paleontologists is to confront the complexities and nuances of life's story. We mull over biases, accidents of history, and the interplay between extrinsic and intrinsic factors. Since learning of this recognition, I have reflected on personal parallels. Put plainly, I am a beneficiary of unevenly distributed opportunities and resources. What this award recognizes is mostly the product of an advantaged starting position amplified by the good fortune of encouraging family, friends, mentors, and collaborators.

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I grew up in northeast Ohio. My childhood home is near outcrops of the Cleveland Shale, famous for exceptional preservation of Devonian marine fossils. Visits to the Cleveland Museum of Natural History or the local nature center inevitably meant one thing: *Dunkleosteus*. Like any elementary schooler, I thought dinosaurs were great. But *Dunkleosteus*—now that was something else. It seemed so robotic, mechanical, and altogether alien. I was, in a word, hooked.

That early interest lay dormant until my teens, when I realized that paleontology could be a career. As an undergraduate at the University of Rochester, I found support in a trio of faculty: Bill Chaisson, John Tarduno, and John Huelsenbeck. They provided key insights about paleontology, collaboration, and that thing called graduate school. A summer REU at the Smithsonian, working alongside Jim Tyler and Dave Johnson, gave me a taste of collections-based research. I knew then that I was on the right path.

I was fortunate to be admitted to graduate school at the University of Chicago, but my journey was indirect. Following advice to do something different first, I spent a year in Jenny Clack's group at Cambridge. Jenny, who passed away at the beginning of the pandemic, provided me with specimens and the independence to formulate my own research. I have never learned more, both about fossils and how to be a scientist, than I did during that intensely rewarding year.

When I arrived in Chicago to start my PhD, it was obvious why I was told in no uncertain terms that it was *the* place to do paleontology. Too many faculty, postdocs, students, and friends impacted me during that dizzying period to name here. I do, however, want to single out my supervisor Mike Coates. We arrived at Chicago only a few years apart and the lab was just the two of us for a time. But Mike's mentoring was immersive. It permeated lunch conversations, walks across campus, and pretty much everything else.

In 2009, I spent an evening with Zerina Johanson and Greg Edgecombe at their flat in London. After dinner, conversation lingered on the recent interview I was certain I had tanked. But later that year I started my first faculty job as a fresh-faced and mostly clueless kid. Senior colleagues at Oxford—notably Martin Brasier, Hugh Jenkyns, Tom Kemp, Malgosia Nowak-Kemp, and Conall Mac Niocaill—were instrumental in helping me adapt to the unfamiliar tasks landing hard and fast on my plate.

I loved my second stint in the UK, but an opportunity arose that would bring me back to my roots, in terms of family,

geography, and the places that started the whole affair: museums. Coming to Michigan was like putting on an old glove—I gave my first research seminar here over a decade ago, invited by the late Jerry Smith. The community of paleontologists and evolutionary biologists at Michigan is a source of constant inspiration and intellectual stimulation. I would especially like to recognize Carol Abraczinskas, Tom Baumiller, Catherine Badgley, Jen Bauer, Dan Fisher, Hernán López-Fernández, Philip Gingerich, Adam Rountrey, Bill Sanders, Selena Smith, Jeff Wilson Mantilla, and Miriam Zelditch. My role in the Museum of Paleontology, first as curator and now as director, allows me to contribute to an institution like the ones so instrumental in sparking my interests all those years ago.

During my faculty career, I have been enormously fortunate to work alongside remarkable graduate students and research

fellows: Jake Berv, Roger Close, Donald Davesne, Kara Feilich, Valentin Fischer, Rich Harrington, Matt Kolmann, Graeme Lloyd, Carlos Peredo, James Andrews, Gemma Benevento, Alessio Capobianco, John Clarke, Lindsey DeHaan, Daniel Delbarre, Claire Dobson, Sanaa El-Sayed, César Espinoza-Campuzano, Rodrigo Tinoco Figueroa, Sam Giles, Mimi Harrison, Rafa Rivero-Vega, Hadeel Saad, and Laura Soul. What a privilege to have you as colleagues.

In closing, I would like to thank my family. My parents Sharon and Greg provided—as I now realize with inquisitive children of my own—limitless patience and support. My partner Elizabeth has been a companion over the decade and a half since we met as graduate students in Chicago. Our chosen paths are quite different, but we provide each other with important balance. Thank you for taking this journey with me.