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# Georgia Southern University Professor Published in Nature

MARCH 19, 2009



**GEORGIA  
SOUTHERN  
UNIVERSITY**

A paper published in this week's edition of the scientific journal *Nature* by a Georgia Southern University faculty member helps lay the foundation for explaining how whales evolved from land animals around 55 million years ago.

Research by Jonathan H. Geisler Ph.D., associate professor of Geology and Curator of Paleontology at Georgia Southern University, and his co-author Jessica Theodor Ph.D. (University of Calgary) suggests that the closest living animal to whales and dolphins is the hippopotamus.

The fossil record of hippos is relatively short, so they have pinpointed the fossil *Indohyus*, from Pakistan, as close to the ancient split between hippos and whales. Although previous work by Geisler and others had recognized close relationships among *Indohyus*, hippos, and whales, the current study resolves their exact evolutionary positions. Knowing this, Geisler and Theodor have been able to develop a hypothesis on how the ancestors of whales went from living on land to having descendants that lived underwater.

"The ancestor of whales went through a hippo-like stage where they were amphibious, walked on river bottoms instead of swam, and ventured onto land to forage for plants," said Geisler. "Then they went through an *Indohyus*-like stage where they spent nearly all of their time in the water, possibly feeding on aquatic vegetation. Later, their teeth evolved for fish eating and the earliest whales lost their ability to move on land." Geisler says this scenario can be tested and further refined by studies that incorporate data from living and extinct species.

## Georgia Southern University Botanical Garden Announces Opening of Rural Life Museum

MARCH 19, 2009



Visitors will get a glimpse of what living and working in rural Georgia was like during the early 20th century when the Rural Life Museum opens at the Georgia Southern Botanical Garden at 11 a.m. on Saturday, March 28.

The Rural Life Museum is housed in a restored mule barn and includes photographs and stories along with farm and household tools commonly used in rural Georgia during the 1920s and 1930s. Many of the

pieces belonged to Dan and Catharine Bland, who worked the farm that once stood on the site that is now the Botanical Garden. Items on display include baskets, harnesses, a wringer washing machine and even whirligigs constructed by Mr. Bland.

“The Rural Life Museum provides a look into the hard work, determination and ingenuity required to survive and be successful in the challenging conditions of the rural south,” said Georgia Southern Botanical Garden Director Carolyn Altman. “The Rural Life Museum represents the collective history and spirit of this area’s people and their relationship to the land.”

The late Dr. Frank Saunders, who was a history professor at the University, and many in the community, contributed the stories and many of the unique objects included in the exhibit. Planters Telephone Foundation also provided funds for the project.

Visitors will also have hands-on experiences at the museum that include weighing cotton. They will also see a “catface” tree that bears the marks of the turpentine industry in the area as well as view tools used to manufacture turpentine.

The opening of the Rural Life Museum coincides with the Whirligig Spring Festival and Plant Sale on March 28, which will be held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Botanical Garden.

Georgia Southern University, a Carnegie Doctoral/Research University, offers 116 degree programs serving nearly 18,000 students. Through eight colleges, the University offers bachelors, masters and doctoral degree programs built on more than a century of academic achievement. The University, one of Georgia’s largest, is a top choice of Georgia’s HOPE scholars and is recognized for its student-centered approach to education. Visit: [www.georgiasouthern.edu](http://www.georgiasouthern.edu).