

Visaggi publishes fossil data research

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Christy Visaggi

Marine Biology doctoral student Christy Visaggi was published in the July 4, 2008 issue of Science Magazine, as co-author of "Phanerozoic Trends in the Global Diversity of Marine Invertebrates." Visaggi worked with 34 other paleobiologists across the country on the article, which concludes that the diversity of marine invertebrates has increased over time, but not as much as some early scientists believed.

The authors came to this conclusion by crunching data concerning 3.5 million fossil specimens gathered around the globe and entering it into the Paleobiology Database headed by John Alroy of the University of California-Santa Barbara. The database is an international, multi-institutional effort to catalog paleontological data from scientific literature and make it accessible online. More than 200 researchers from 100 different institutions and nearly 20 countries contribute to the project.

Visaggi became involved with the database in 2003, after hearing about it from her advisor at Syracuse University. She entered latitude and longitude information for more than 3,000 fossil collection sites to make comparisons among them more meaningful. She also entered primary data on 73 fossil collections, 30 of which were part of her masters research at Syracuse University on the early Oligocene Byram Formation of Mississippi.

Now, entering her third year of doctoral study at UNCW, she is exploring predator-prey relationships of mollusks in the modern world to help understand aspects of the fossil record. "I'm doing a combination of work to understand latitudinal variation in predation which includes temperature experiments with live snails, looking at microstructural differences in prey bivalve shells, and going to Brazil and Argentina to collect specimens for the fieldwork portion of my project," she said.

Visaggi continues to work with the Paleobiology Database as time and opportunity permits.

Brenda Riegel contributed to this story.