

## This alumnus is hooked on fish

He hurries in out of the morning rain, hangs up his raincoat and walks down the empty hallway. His footsteps echo in the tiled stillness as he heads toward the laboratory. Another day at the museum.

Walking through the collection room, he stops and looks around at the shelves of preserved specimens that line the walls. Eyes stare out of the neatly arranged jars. It's time to begin work.

Vertebrate zoology is his speciality. Identifying fish is his job.

Jeff Howe, '85, works as a museum technician in the Smithsonian Institute's Division of Fishes, National Museum of Natural History, Washington, D.C. He earned his master's degree in marine biology at UNCW.

"I work with one of the largest preserved collections of fishes in the world," Howe said. "As a museum technician, my duties are varied, but my primary duty is cataloging."

Cataloging is the numbering of each specimen and entering the information onto the Smithsonian data base. Information about who collected each fish, when and where it was collected, and the water depth at which it was found is part of the data base. "Some of the specimens are 150 years old," Howe revealed. "If they're maintained well, they'll be around for a long time."

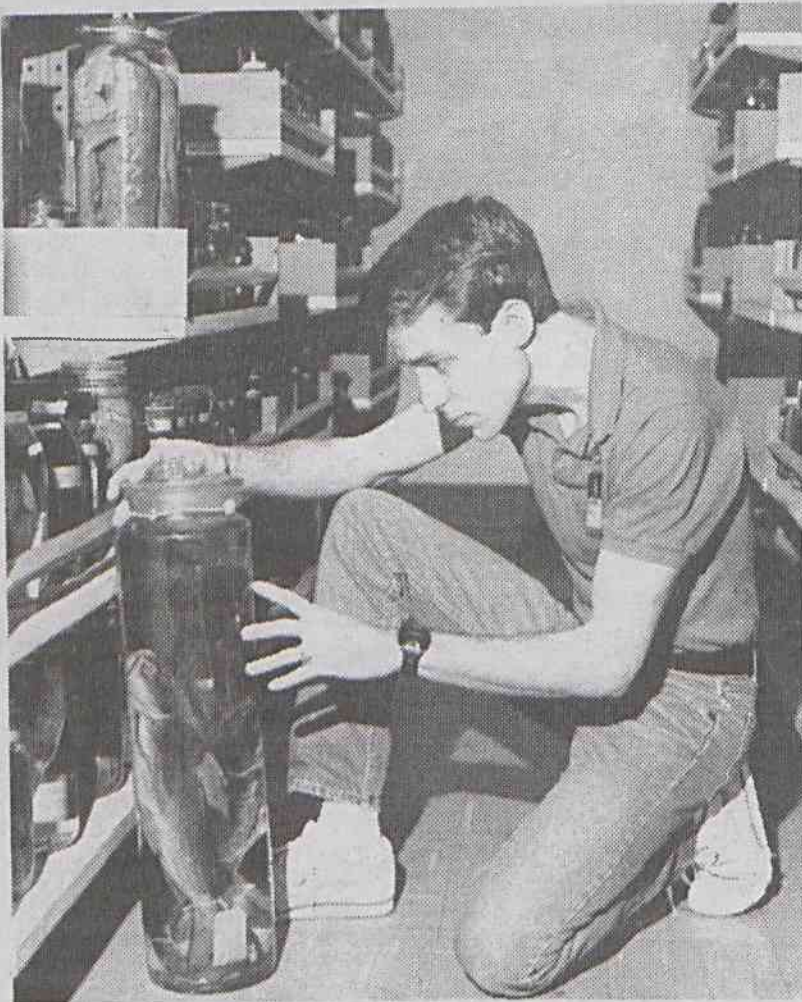
Howe and nine other technicians work with the specimens that need to be cataloged. Their training includes systematics, comparing one fish to another, and taxonomy, classification of a particular specimen. "Working here is a great opportunity," said Howe. "The number of groups and families of fishes is astronomical. This collection contains literally everything you'd want to study about fishes."

The most challenging aspect of Howe's work, in terms of identifying fishes, is "keying out", that is, going through a series of steps to precisely identify a fish. "You're basically starting with an unknown and ultimately working down to a genus and species," he said.

Howe advised anyone interested in becoming a museum technician to have a strong background in systematics. "This is essential in working with collections," he said. Course work in classification and evolution should also be completed. Experience in working with computers is helpful too.

As the day draws to an end, Howe logs off of the computer - the image on the monitor begins to fade. He smiles at the thought of returning tomorrow to continue his work with one of the largest collections of fishes in the world.

*Allison Relos*



Jeff Howe examines one of the specimens in the Division of Fishes collection, Smithsonian Institution.

*Alumni Spotlight*

## Frankly Speaking



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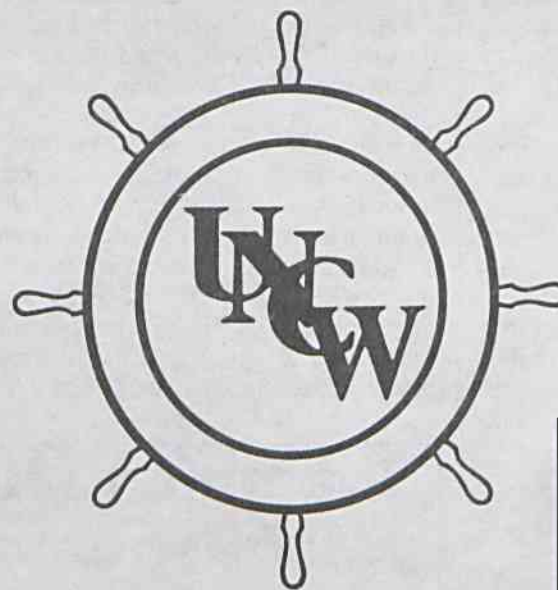
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Frank Bowen

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