

## Awards and Citations

# Presentation of the 2021 Harrell L. Strimple Award of the Paleontological Society to Daniel Phelps

Colin D. Sumrall\*

Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996, USA <[csumrall@utk.edu](mailto:csumrall@utk.edu)>

Dan first came to my attention in 1998 when I was curator at Cincinnati Museum Center. He contacted me to inquire about leading a Kentucky Paleontological Society (KPS) field trip to visit the paleontological collections. He also brought with him a collection of undescribed Mississippian edrioasteroids from near Fort Knox, Kentucky that included two new species, one of which I named in honor of the society. Dan took me to the locality and showed me the occurrence and context, asking nothing in return except to invite me to speak at one of their monthly meetings—which I was happy to do. Their mission statement makes it clear that the KPS is all about the science. According to their website, the KPS is intended to be a network for the exchange of data between professionals and serious amateurs in the field. Since that initial introduction, Dan has funneled many important fossils my way, including other edrioasteroids, a new rhombiferan, and many other researchers and students have similar stories. For Dan, the data that fossils provide is far more important than ownership, and his donations have greatly added to the holdings of many important public fossil collections.

For nearly forty years Daniel (Dan) Phelps has been a citizen scientist and advocate for evolution and the fossil record in and around Lexington, Kentucky. He is founder and president of the Kentucky Paleontological Society as well as the cofounder of Kentuckians for Science Education. The KPS brings paleontology to interested citizens through monthly meetings, hosting tables at fairs and other public events, and fossil/geological field trips in Kentucky and surrounding states. He has been generous, sharing his personal invertebrate fossil collection at these public events and donating collections to institutions for curation. The KPS would not be the success it is without Dan's continued leadership. Dan also has discovered many interesting and important fossils and fossil localities and has been extremely generous with his material by assuring it gets into the hands of scientific community and is properly curated. Dan has been a stalwart supporter of science and a vocal and eloquent critic of the resurgence of creation science in central Kentucky. I can think of few that have done so much to better society and our scientific community than Dan Phelps!

Dan received a Master's degree from the University of Kentucky in geology and has worked as a geologist for the Energy and Environment Cabinet in his home state of Kentucky for

many years. He became a champion in the fight against creation science in central Kentucky in the early 1980s when the Lexington Board of Education was contemplating introducing young-Earth creationism into the high school science curriculum. Eugene Scott—then a Professor at the University of Kentucky—recruited Dan to help in the fight. Dan was extremely active, writing letters to the editor, attending meetings of the Board of Education, testifying about how geology understands the age of the Earth, and being an advocate for good science. Dan has been the constant thorn in the side of Answers in Genesis (AIG) since it came to central Kentucky in the mid 1990s. He successfully led the campaign to keep AIG from opening its museum near Big Bone Lick, which holds an historically important place as the beginning of paleontology in North America. When the AIG museum ultimately was opened at an alternate location, Dan created a detailed guide to the exhibits for the National Center for Science Education website. The survey is thorough and provides the real science behind the exhibits.

When the Ark Encounter, was proposed Dan was again fighting in the front lines. He argued that this controversial “adventure park” had discriminatory employment practices, and blatantly disregarded well-established geology, paleontology, biology, archaeology, and history, but ultimately lost the battle in federal court. His work against AIG led its founder to quip, “We need to pray that God's eternal truth will shine on Dan Phelps' heart.” Most recently Dan appeared as one of the experts in the feature film documentary *We believe in Dinosaurs*. This film follows the building of the Ark Encounter and its impact on the residents of northern Kentucky. The film was highly praised, receiving 90% on Rotten Tomatoes.

Dan has contributed greatly to society through many years of service with his burning passion for scientific literacy. Furthermore, his contributions to the paleontology of Kentucky through discovery, collection and donations of important fossils, his leadership of an active and enthusiastic amateur paleontological society, his outstanding community service in fighting against creationism, and his advocacy for quality science being taught in public schools, Daniel Phelps richly deserves the 2021 Harrell Strimple Award.

October 11, 2011

---

\*Corresponding author.