

ANNUAL REPORT: US-CA: La Brea Tar Pits 2018 FIELD SCHOOL

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The 2018 La Brea Tar Pits field course not only was an intensive, one-of-a-kind training program in paleontological theory and methods, vertebrate morphology, museology, and science communication, but it furthered active research focused on the past ecological communities captured at our site. Field school students measured, documented and excavated more than 200 large fossil specimens including bones of giant sloths, dire wolves, and saber-toothed cats. In the Fossil Lab, students prepared these specimens and sorted and identified microfossils comprising everything from juniper seeds to rabbit jaws. All of this material will be incorporated into analyses of the food webs of past ecosystems in Southern California, and how the properties of those food webs relate to the stability of those communities and the resilience of their component species to global changes and extinction.

Students mainly excavated in and prepared material from Project 23 Deposit 9, a newly-opened deposit that is one of six being analyzed under this multi-year, interdisciplinary, NSF-funded project. Preliminary results of this project have already been reported at national and international conferences including the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, the American Association of Mammalogists, the Ecological Society of America, the International Commission for Museums and Collections of Natural History, the Western Association of Vertebrate Paleontologists, and the International Biogeography Society, with abstracts accepted for the upcoming American Geophysical Union and International Quaternary Association meetings, and several publications are in prep.

Aspects of this project have also been communicated informally, through publications including *Popular Science*, *Good Magazine*, and *The Naturalist*, as well as on our project blog (<https://labreawebs.wordpress.com/>)