



## Society of Vertebrate Paleontology

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FEIN: 06-0906643

To:

Dr. Sean M Decatur  
President  
American Museum of Natural History  
200 Central Park West  
New York, New York 10024-5102

Dr. Melanie Hopkins  
Division Chair  
Paleontology Division  
American Museum of Natural History  
200 Central Park West  
New York, New York 10024-5102

Dr. Roger Benson  
Macaulay Curator  
Paleontology Division  
American Museum of Natural History  
200 Central Park West  
New York, New York 10024-5102

Dear Dr. Decatur, Dr. Hopkins, and Dr. Benson:

**The Society of Vertebrate Paleontology (SVP) strongly opposes the American Museum of Natural History's (AMNH) plans for the privately owned Stegosaurus specimen known as "Apex."**

The SVP is an organization of more than 2,000 scientists, preparators, educators, artists, and collections specialists who are dedicated to the advancement and ethical stewardship of paleontology. We urge the AMNH to take a different course with Apex: one that ensures that this impressive vertebrate fossil will remain in the public trust, where it can be properly studied, preserved, and appreciated for generations to come.

Scientific reproducibility is a core principle of SVP's Code of Ethics. In paleontology, reproducibility requires that scientists other than those conducting the original research have access to the same fossil specimen(s). To ensure this access, fossils must be held in (or destined for) collections in institutions committed to their permanent care and accessibility.

Many members of the AMNH's own curatorial and collections staff are SVP members who have pledged to uphold these ethical standards. Yet "Apex" remains privately owned, and the AMNH has made it clear that the specimen is on temporary loan. The specimen's owner, Kenneth Griffin, has indicated plans to make it available for research, but there is no binding agreement ensuring its long-term preservation in a publicly accessible repository. Without such a binding agreement, access to the specimen is ultimately contingent on the decisions of one individual.

More troubling, the AMNH has announced plans to conduct scientific research on Apex during the loan period. This will include 3D-imaging and histological sampling by a postdoctoral researcher funded by Griffin. This violates SVP's ethical guidelines, which require that research be conducted only on fossils held in

collections with a permanent commitment to curation and accessibility. It also sets a dangerous precedent by legitimizing private ownership of vertebrate fossils and may incentivize future sales of similar fossils by increasing their perceived market value. This has occurred previously: after the *Tyrannosaurus rex* specimen "Baby Bob" was publicly displayed and studied at the University of Kansas, its scientific and public value were exploited to drive up its sale price.

We commend the AMNH's curators for their intent to share 3D data from Apex, but digital scans and casts can never replace the scientific value of the original fossil. Surface models capture only a fraction of the information contained in a genuine fossil and leave out critical internal and contextual data that illuminate growth patterns, disease, diet, and environmental interactions. Accessioning a small fragment of Apex into AMNH collections might be useful for limited biogeochemical, genetic, or other analyses, but if the remainder of the specimen remains in private hands, it creates the additional problem of having vital scientific data from one specimen spread among institutions, which runs counter to best practices.

Museums today face increasing pressure in a fossil market distorted by private sales, collections, and escalating prices. This undermines their mission to preserve Earth's history and limits access for researchers and the public alike. We are grateful to individuals who seek to support science and conservation, but true conservation requires that a fossil be permanently placed in an institution committed to long-term curation and accessibility rather than studied and displayed while its future remains uncertain.

The AMNH is one of the world's leading natural history museums. As such, it has both the influence and responsibility to model ethical stewardship. We call on the museum to lead by example and refuse to study or exhibit Apex unless it is formally committed to a permanent publicly accessible collection. That is the only way that we ensure that incredible specimens like Apex remain accessible, discoverable, and preserved for the public good.

Respectfully,



Stuart Sumida, PhD  
*SVP President*



Kristina Curry Rogers, PhD  
*SVP Vice President*



Margaret Lewis, PhD  
*SVP Past President*