

# New app customizes animal natural history on the go

October 20 2014, by Greta Guest

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A University of Michigan startup has launched the first of many mobile apps with customized data on animals for parks, zoos, museums and

other natural areas.

The Animal Diversity Web spun off from the university this year after nearly 20 years as a learning tool started by recently retired U-M biologist Phil Myers, professor emeritus of ecology and [evolutionary biology](#). He created the searchable database and multimedia encyclopedia of animal natural history on the fledgling World Wide Web in 1995.

From modest beginnings, ADW has steadily grown to become one of the world's largest and most widely used natural history websites. During busy times, more than 4 million pages of content are provided to more than a half million users worldwide each month.

Undergraduates from across North America built the text for the species accounts that form the backbone of the site. Over the years, more than 2,500 students at nearly 100 colleges and universities have contributed.

"We haven't just made the Animal Diversity Web into an app—you can go online from your mobile device and view the website," said Tanya Dewey, the business director for the commercial venture. "We have more than 4,000 species in the database and we can customize data on those species in any imaginable way."

She said the apps, or ADW Pocket Guides, could be created with just a list of species. That generates a guide to the wildlife of a specific area such as a park or zoo. Information on the natural area and [animals](#) that live there can be illustrated with images and maps.

Pocket Guide "Trails" can be designed to support education and outreach goals, such as interpretive trails, habitat explorations, ecological interactions or virtual tours.

"This is a great example of technology transfer," said Ken Nisbet, U-M associate vice president for research–technology transfer. "There now is a business model that makes the ADW database available to regional customers while creating a revenue stream to ensure its sustainability."

Dewey met Myers, her graduate adviser, while earning her doctorate in 2006 at U-M's Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. She worked on the ADW project as a postdoctoral student and program associate.

They are joined in the venture by Roger Espinosa and Tricia Jones, who co-founded the ADW with Myers in 1995 and George Hammond, content manager and education consultant.

Consumers who purchase the first app, priced at \$3.99 for a bundle of 10 Great Lakes parks, museums and zoos, will have access to park information, trails, images and state-of-the-art information on [animals](#).

**More information:** ADW Pocket Guide: [itunes.apple.com/us/app/adw-po ... ide/id916179421?mt=8](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/adw-pocket-guide/id916179421?mt=8)

Provided by University of Michigan

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