

Cave palaeontology in the 21st century: unearthing our underground biodiversity records to help preserve our future

Julien Louys

Vertebrate Palaeocology Research Group, School of Earth Sciences, University of Queensland

Fossils preserved in caves have long been renowned for the spectacular glimpses of the past that they provide to the general public, technical enthusiasts and scientific professionals. Although these deposits are sometimes quite difficult to access, the material that can be recovered from caves is unparalleled. In particular, palaeontologists value cave fossils because of their often great level of preservation, completeness and the abundance of material preserved and available to study. These qualities in particular are essential for palaeoecologists - those scientists with an interest in determining ancient environments and their effects on both living and extinct animals. Such insights are critical to determining how communities and ecosystems have reacted to climate change in the past, and allow us to build realistic models of how future climate change might affect the biodiversity upon which we currently rely. This presentation will showcase some recently explored and excavated caves that have yielded abundant fossil material, and how this information can be interpreted to provide information critical to modern conservation efforts.

http://nswsc.caves.org.au/troalong/video/Cave-palaeontology_Julien_Louys.avi