

Classified information

Summarize yourself in the form of a title of a paper in Nature.

Quaternary mammal from Argentina sheds light on dinosaur evolution.

Who has been the most important mentor in your career?

José Bonaparte, a well-known Argentine vertebrate palaeontologist and my PhD adviser. From him I learned how to work hard, to persevere, and to believe that no obstacle is insurmountable.

Whose graduate student would you most like to have been (historical impossibility notwithstanding)?

Leonardo da Vinci, who not only had a voracious appetite for knowledge, but integrated science and art like nobody else.

What book has been most influential in your scientific career?

E. O. Wiley's *Phylogenetics: The Theory and Practice of Phylogenetic Systematics* (J. Wiley & Sons, 1981), a book that made me realize the importance of framing my research (and my way of interpreting the history of life) within cladistic methodology.

What was the worst/most memorable comment you ever received from a referee?

A reviewer of one of my books said that he wanted to throw it away after reading the first few pages.

You have the audience in your hands, but some smart-alec asks you the killer question you have no idea how to answer. What's your response?

Something straight: "Sorry, you've got me — I have no clue."

What book currently resides on your bedside table?

The Riddle of the Compass by Amir Aczel, and Michael White's *Leonardo: the First Scientist*.

What music heads the playlist in your car or laboratory?

All sorts of things, from Handel to Joan Manuel Serrat to Cat Stevens. It depends on the mood of the day.

What do you most dislike about having research published?

Finding mistakes that I could have corrected.

Assuming the dead can be raised and/or time travel exists, who from the world outside science would you most like to have dinner with?

The Renaissance painter Hieronymus Bosch, the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, and Marco

Polo. In many ways, all of them thought differently from their contemporaries.

Where and when would you most like to have lived or worked?

In North America or Europe around the turn of the twentieth century, when much more uncharted territory and funds were available for palaeontological exploration and discovery.

You are on a plane behind two students obviously going to the same conference, who start to talk about your work. What do you do?

I would remain quiet and listen. It might give me another opportunity to learn how to improve my work and how to communicate it better.

The Internet is the bane of scientists' lives because...

...e-mail takes up a large amount of time and still leaves you with the sour feeling of not being able to handle all your correspondence. I fear that the Internet has made available a large amount of misinformation, through lists, amateur pages and publications that are not peer-reviewed.

What do you do to relax?

I like to look at paintings. What I like most is to find a quiet bench at an art museum where I can relax in the company of beautiful canvases. I also like to take care of my garden and to hang out at the beach at sunset. Doing fieldwork also relaxes me, although it brings other kinds of stress.

What would you have become, if not a scientist?

In retrospect — I did not entertain this when I went to university — an art historian. It is the historical aspect that interests me most, whether the object is man-made or of natural design.

What's the one thing about science that you wish the public understood better?

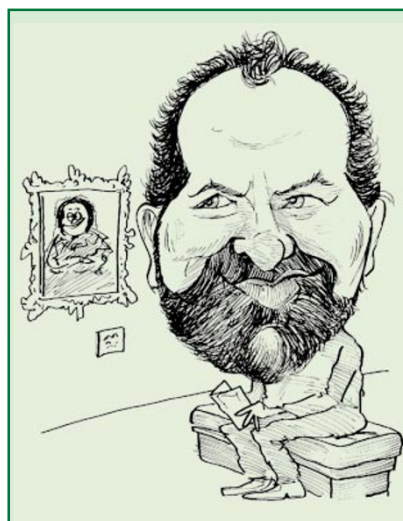
The importance of systematics. How our understanding of the evolutionary history of organisms should underpin all other investigations about them.

What's your motto?

It would be something along the lines of Henri Matisse's "What I had to do, I did the best I could."

The job of captain on the Starship Enterprise in Star Trek has become vacant. Nominate any real person, living or dead, for the post.

Roy Chapman Andrews, who led the central Asiatic expeditions to the Gobi Desert in the



Luis Chiappe

Luis Chiappe is a curator and chair of the department of vertebrate palaeontology at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.

When he is not doing research on dinosaur evolution, he enjoys art, gardening, the outdoors, fishing and living by the sea.

1920s. Someone who had not just a great spirit of adventure and discovery, but who also who knew how to make that excitement contagious.

Do you have a burning ambition to do or learn something of no practical or immediate value? If so, what?

I would like to sail to a remote island, a trip that would take days of navigation to reach my destination, and would give me a lot of time to reflect on my work.

Harry Potter or Lord of the Rings?

I haven't read Harry Potter (nor have I seen the movies) but I have always treasured J. R. R. Tolkien's work — *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit* and *The Silmarillion* are among my favourite books. As someone used to describing objects (fossil specimens), I have always admired Tolkien's outstanding ability to describe the most fascinating landscapes.

What's just around the corner?

Affordable three-dimensional scanners that can scan objects of all sizes. Many museums are already digitizing their collections but in a two-dimensional, photographic format. As three-dimensional scanners become affordable and museums begin to digitize their specimens in three-dimensional files that can be downloaded and replicated by prototyping systems, the nature of how research is conducted in specimen-based institutions will change drastically. ■