1.2. Locating specimens and genetic materials (USE)

dhobern #1 March 27, 2020, 9:52am

> This is topic 1.2. in the *Uses* section of the ***Advancing the Catalogue of the World's Natural History Collections*** consultation. Use this topic to discuss the questions listed below.

Background
Taxonomic studies and other research projects normally depend on researchers (or their contacts) knowing which institutions hold relevant specimens or other materials. This is complicated by the history of expeditions and collecting activities. Specimens have been scattered across all continents. Only a small proportion of these specimens have been databased in forms that can be accessed through GBIF or other portals. A catalogue providing at least summary information on taxonomic and geographic scope for each collection could assist researchers in locating relevant materials.

Other materials

The following contributed materials are particularly relevant to this topic:

- **Presentation: Index Herbariorum - Perspectives of a Long-Standing Collection Catalog**
- **Presentation: CETAF and DiSSCo Collections Registry**
- **Document: GBIF Services and Support for the Collections Catalogue**
- **Presentation: ALA Collectory**

Questions

- Would summary information on every collection's materials be a useful tool?
- Who would use this information?
- What is the minimum level of information (and what is ideal) to support these users?

Presentation: Index Herbariorum - Perspectives of a Long-Standing Collection Catalog

Presentation: ALA Collectory

Integrated summary from 17 to 30 April 2020

Adelantando el Catálogo de Colecciones de Historia Natural del Mundo

建立《全球自然历史馆藏名录》

Presentation: CETAF and DiSSCo Collections Registry

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pzermoglio #4 April 22, 2020, 2:08am

Could minimum level of information that a given collection may be able to provide vary according to local/regional laws? If so, it would be important to identify beforehand if any regions/countries would present any constraint or requirement on the information they can share and how they can share it, as part of understanding if the initiative could provide, at least in the majority of the cases, a usable product; and develop a contingency strategy for getting those more restricted on board as well without diminishing their value.

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PaoloViscardi #5 April 22, 2020, 8:20am

*** Would summary information on every collection's materials be a useful tool?**
Yes. In the UK the Natural Sciences Collections Association crowdsourced similar data for collections in the UK and Ireland (Natural History Near You) in 2014,

which has seen more use than we originally envisaged. Knowing what kind of material is held where is a fundamental level of information that facilitates access. A more in-depth body of research condcted in the 1980s (FENSCORE) is also still being used, even though it is out of date and not comprehensive.

*** Who would use this information?**
In our experience the information use is constrained by sign-posting. Curators in collections that contributed information are aware of the resource and use it for their own research and they will often direct researchers that they engage with to the data as a way of tracking down more information on collection holding institutions.

*** What is the minimum level of information (and what is ideal) to support these users?**
This is the difficult question. Different users have a range of different information required. The absolute minimum level of data is the fact that an institution exists, where it is located, that holds a certain type of collection and how to access more information about that collection - this at least allows resources to be found.

However, most researchers want more in-depth information about particular collectors, taxonomic groups etc. which is a considerably more difficult level of data to collect without significant investment.

2 Likes

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abentley #6 April 22, 2020, 9:45pm

This could definitely be one cog in the network needed for automated data attribution and integration where publications, Genbank sequences and other products could be linked to collections, and by extension to the individual records in that collection.

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abentley #7 April 22, 2020, 9:46pm

Agree that minimum information will vary by discipline, region and individual collection. Only a core set of basic fields should be required while others should be optional to allow for collections to publish as much or as little as they want or need without compromising the utility of the system.

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elyw #8 April 24, 2020, 5:41am

I think the question here is not who would *use* the information but who would write, compile and keep up-to-date the information? And what incentive would they have to do it?

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waddink #9 April 24, 2020, 1:48pm

For institute collections the institute will probably be the primary maintainer of the information, or delegate that to a trusted party. The institute needs it, for instance to give access to the collection through loans, visits or digitisation on demand by using the European Loans and Visits system. Also, the institute is responsible for the collection so needs the information to be correct and has direct access to the collection, therefore is best suited to provide the information. However others may also have incentives to provide such information, for instance a working group that is working on COVID-19 and wants to mark all the collections that have Bats specimen. For the institutes I think the main problem at the moment is that they need to provide such information in 10 different systems in 10 different formats, for which they do not have the resources to do this. The TDWG CD standard, unique collection identifiers and synchronisation between the different systems (like has been done recently by GBIF for Index Herbariorum and GRSciColl, and is planned also for CETAF/DiSSCo), will help with that.

neilcobb #10 April 28, 2020, 2:47pm

So far we have indexed 300 arthropod collections in North America (Canada, Mexico, and US) and we are moving on to do the same for the other ~750 collections in the World. We have obtained fairly complete basic information from a collection's website. It also means that we do not not have to ask the curator or collection manager for information. This works for over 90% of the collections, meaning that we only have to email 10% for clarifications. Ideally, there would be a standard form that could be easily inserted into a collections website that allows their personnel to update the information and any catalog would have a link for automatic updates.

Collections Catalogue - Daily Summaries

Integrated summary from 17 to 30 April 2020

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gdadade #11 April 29, 2020, 7:05am

Agreed, a basic summary level of e.g. organism groups and preservation methods would help a lot. Within GGBN potential members are asked to fill out a questionnaire to collect this information. Special Interest Networks such as GGBN or VertNet can help a lot to provide additional information on certain collections. The more information we can feed into central registries the better so they can serve the special interest networks.
GGBN is the place to locate genetic materials, but only ca. 15-20% of our biobank collections are databased. Hence we encourage our members to use the GGBN registry and provide additional information about their biobanks. We hope we can migrate this content soon into a central registry.

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Collections Catalogue - Daily Summaries

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pzermoglio #12 April 29, 2020, 7:40pm

From **@ErikaSalazar** in this **Spanish thread**

The minimum level of information about taxonomic information of the specimens held in a collection could be the ones used in Colombia, through the **Registro Único Nacional de Colecciones Biológicas**, where taxonomic groups and subgroups held in collections are included. For example: Biological group: Aves; Biological Subgroup: mammals, aves, reptiles.
The ideal level would be that each collection reports the list of specimens they hold with the maximum level of taxonomic detail posible (e.g. genus or species level).

pzermoglio #13 April 30, 2020, 7:20am

From **@WUlate** in this **Spanish thread**
An estimation of the number of specimens by taxonomic group, Class, Order, subtribe, any kind of classification, is usually not useful for the experts (and can even be seen as a work, unpaid for burden, therefore incentives are key) but could prove extremely valuable for the collections management in different ways: space management, planning, staff hiring, aside from the abovementioned search for experts and potential partners and donors.

Also From **@WUlate** in this **Spanish thread**, probably related to:

> elyw:
>
> I think the question here is not who would *use* the information but who would write, compile and keep up-to-date the information? And what incentive would they have to do it?

Only when the benefits of the Catalogue have been internalized will it be kept up to date… in the meantime, we will depend on a combination of advantages for those that get on board first (carrot for early adopters) and that the managers and donors enforce directives (sticks for non-compliants).