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## **Smithsonian Institution Teams with Major International Natural History and Botanical Libraries to Digitize Biodiversity Holdings**

Eight of the world's major natural history and botanical libraries are working together to develop a strategy and operational plan to digitize the published literature on biodiversity that they jointly hold and make it freely accessible to all on the Web. The project, the Biodiversity Heritage Library, will establish a major corpus of publications drawn from each of their collections. Much of the published literature is rare or has limited global distribution and is available in only a few select libraries. From a scholarly perspective, these collections are of exceptional value because the domain of systematic biology depends—more than any other science—on historic literature.

The eight participating libraries have more than 2 million volumes of biodiversity literature collected over 200 years to support scientists and students throughout the world. Until now, this body of biodiversity knowledge effectively has been unavailable for wide use in a broad range of applications, including research, education, taxonomic study, biodiversity conservation, protected area management, disease control and maintenance of diverse ecosystems. The participants are:

- Smithsonian Institution Libraries and the National Museum of Natural History, Washington
- American Museum of Natural History, New York
- Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Mass.
- Harvard University Botany Libraries, Cambridge, Mass.
- Missouri Botanical Garden, St. Louis
- The Natural History Museum, London
- The New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, N.Y.
- Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Surrey

The participating organizations will work with the global taxonomic community, rights holders and other interested parties to ensure that their collective historical heritage is available to all who seek it. Web-based access to the collections will provide a substantial benefit to people living and working in the developing world who have not been able to benefit from the information held in these collections.

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This could have major implications for biodiversity and ecological research. Cristián Samper, director of the National Museum of Natural History said, “The Natural History Museum and botanical libraries hold a wealth of resources that describe and explain the diversity and depth of life on earth. Mining these texts for research and other vitally important uses is difficult, time-consuming and often leads to redundant efforts. By opening this important biodiversity literature to the world, the Biodiversity Heritage Library will immeasurably advance science.”

“The Web gives us new opportunities to share our collections with people all over the world, especially with those who previously would have had to visit us to gain access. This is particularly important for the developing world, where much of the planet's biodiversity is to be found. With more than 25,000 periodicals in our collections, as well as a huge number of books, we are eager to work with the other institutions involved in the Biodiversity Heritage Library,” said Dr. Richard Lane, director of science at the Natural History Museum in London.

The consortium is in discussion with the scientific, biological and computer science communities to take the project to the next stage. More information about the Biodiversity Heritage Library is available at <http://www.bhl.si.edu>.

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