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Smithsonian Scientists Address World Biodiversity Crisis with Innovative Online Publications

Scientists are increasingly alarmed at the staggering rate by which the world's biodiversity is decreasing. Senior Smithsonian researchers are confronting the world's biodiversity crisis with new online journals that will streamline the process of describing the plant and animal species still surviving on the planet. Terry Erwin, entomologist, and John Kress, botanist, both of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, are convinced that the foundation for slowing the disappearance of the world's species lies in improving the ability of scientists to conduct and disseminate taxonomic research—the practice of classifying living organisms. To that end they have teamed with an international group of researchers and technical experts to launch two innovative journals: *ZooKeys* and *PhytoKeys*.

ZooKeys is about animals, and it celebrated its two-year anniversary with its jubilee issue, <http://pensoftonline.net/zookeys/index.php/journal/index>. *PhytoKeys*, about plants, will soon debut its first issue, <http://pensoftonline.net/PhytoKeys.pdf>. These scientific publications will revolutionize the process of describing the world's species by using the latest advances in technology while providing the public with free access to this vital information.

“As our planet is threatened with even greater disturbance to natural habitats, our quest to preserve these areas and their endangered species begins with the establishment of good taxonomic information,” said Kress, editor-in-chief of *PhytoKeys*. “The race by scientists to inventory the world's biodiversity has accelerated. The advanced publication techniques represented by *ZooKeys* and *PhytoKeys* will significantly increase our chances of winning that race.”

Researchers at the Smithsonian and other institutions are working to catalog the diversity of life on Earth before there is further damage to fragile ecosystems. As the repository of the world's

largest natural science collections, the National Museum of Natural History is in the forefront of these efforts.

“The biodiversity crisis is real, and until now, scientists’ efforts have been hampered by an inability to quickly and efficiently share important taxonomic information,” said Erwin, editor-in-chief of *ZooKeys*. “These new online journals offer the best tools in decades with which to achieve our goal of identifying as many of the world’s species as possible before it is too late. By being accessible to the general public worldwide, we will also provide much-needed information in order for citizens and policy makers to have a positive impact on the preservation of biodiversity.”

While the Smithsonian is providing editorial leadership for *ZooKeys* and *PhytoKeys*, other key institutions have also joined in the efforts.

“It is estimated that there are between 7 and 15 million species on the planet and we have, in the past 250 years, described only about 2 million of them,” said Dave Roberts, head of microbiology at the Natural History Museum in London. “In order to make progress in documenting the diversity of life we must move the process of taxonomy into the modern age. Only then will we have any hope of truly protecting the diversity of life on Earth.”

Additional information on the most recent innovations in taxonomic publishing are available at <http://pensoftonline.net/zookeys/index.php/journal/issue/view/52> and from the partner organizations responsible for these advanced publication techniques, <http://pensoftonline.net/Partnering%20organisations-special%20issue-ZooKeys-50.pdf>.

Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History—Centennial Celebration 1910-2010

On March 17, 1910, a new museum dedicated to “understanding the natural world and our place in it,” first opened its doors to the public on the National Mall. It was the third museum in the continually expanding Smithsonian Institution. The curators and scientists of the green-slate domed museum set out on a quest to collect, nurture, share and protect the most important collection of natural science specimens in the world. Known initially as the United States National Museum, the museum took its present name in 1968. Today it is not only the most visited museum in the Smithsonian complex, but the most visited natural history museum in the world, recording more than 7.4 million visitors in 2009.

From its opening in 1910, the museum has grown to become the steward of the world’s largest natural history collections of more than 126 million objects and specimens, with seven departments: anthropology, botany, entomology, mineral sciences, invertebrate zoology, paleobiology and vertebrate zoology. The museum’s wide-ranging interdisciplinary research programs bring together

scientists from the museum and research institutions from across the United States and around the world to address topics of current importance—from biological diversity and global climate change to ecosystem modeling and documentation and preservation of human cultural heritages.

The Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History, located at 10th Street and Constitution Avenue N.W. in Washington, D.C., is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Admission is free. More information about the museum is available at www.mnh.si.edu or by calling (202) 633-1000, TTY (202) 633-5285. In addition to the website, learn more about public programs and get the latest updates and access to insider videos and images via [Facebook](#), [Flickr](#), [Twitter](#) and YouTube.

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