

The Biodiversity Heritage Library

About the Biodiversity Heritage Library

Ten major natural history museum libraries, botanical libraries, and research institutions have joined to form the Biodiversity Heritage Library Project. The group is developing a strategy and operational plan to digitize the published literature of biodiversity held in their respective collections. This literature will be available through a global “*biodiversity commons*.”

Participating institutions:

- American Museum of Natural History (New York, NY)
- The Field Museum (Chicago, IL)
- Harvard University Botany Libraries (Cambridge, MA)
- Harvard University, Ernst Mayr Library of the Museum of Comparative Zoology (Cambridge, MA)
- Marine Biological Laboratory / Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (Woods Hole, MA)
- Missouri Botanical Garden (St. Louis, MO)
- Natural History Museum (London, UK)
- The New York Botanical Garden (New York, NY)
- Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (Richmond, UK)
- Smithsonian Institution Libraries (Washington, DC)

The participating libraries have over two million volumes of biodiversity literature collected over 200 years to support the work of scientists, researchers, and students in their home institutions and throughout the world. The 10 member libraries of the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) members now have over 1.124 million pages of key taxonomic literature available on the web.

The BHL will provide basic, important content for immediate research and for multiple bioinformatics initiatives. For the first time in history, the core of our natural history and herbaria library collections will be available to a truly global audience. Web-based access to these collections will provide a substantial benefit to people living and working in the developing world -- whether scientists or policymakers.

Contributing Members

- The University Library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
UIUC has agreed to participate in the BHL as a contributing member by digitizing important biodiversity journals originating in the state of Illinois.

The Biodiversity Heritage Library Project will actively seek to incorporate data and content from other digitization projects.

Legacy Taxonomic Literature

The partner libraries collectively hold a substantial part of the world's published knowledge on biological diversity. Yet, this wealth of knowledge is available only to those few who can gain direct access to these collections. This body of biodiversity knowledge, in its current form, is unavailable to a broad range of applications including: research, education, taxonomic study, biodiversity conservation, protected area management, disease control, and maintenance of diverse ecosystems services.

Much of this published literature is rare or has limited global distribution. From a scholarly perspective, these collections are of exceptional value because the domain of systematic biology depends -- more than any other science -- upon historic literature. The “cited half-life” of natural history literature is longer than that of any other scientific domain. The so-called “decay-rate” of this literature is much slower than in other fields such as biotechnology. Mass digitization projects at large research libraries lack the discipline-specific focus of the Biodiversity Heritage Library Project. These other projects will fail to capture significant elements of legacy taxonomic literature.

Open Access

The Biodiversity Heritage Library Project strives to establish a major corpus of digitized publications on the Web drawn from the historical biodiversity literature. This material will be available for open access and responsible use as a part of a global Biodiversity Commons. We will work with the global taxonomic community, rights holders, and other interested parties to ensure that this legacy literature is available to all.

Partnership

The Biodiversity Heritage Library Project must be a multi-institutional project because no single natural history museum or botanical garden library holds the complete corpus of legacy literature, even within the individual sub-domains of taxonomy. However, taken together, the proposed consortium of collections represents a uniquely comprehensive assemblage of literature.

The Biodiversity Heritage Library Project will immediately provide content for multiple bioinformatics initiatives and research. For the first time in history, the core of our natural history museum libraries and botanical garden library collections will be available to a truly global audience. Web-based access to these collections will provide a substantial benefit to all researchers, including those living and working in the developing world.

More Information

- For questions or more information about the Biodiversity Heritage Library Project, *please email:* BHL@si.edu
- Biodiversity Heritage Library Prospectus (PDF)
<http://www.sil.si.edu/bhl/supportdocuments/BHLP-prospectus10-05.pdf>

Can I use your images?

Yes, please! All of the images on BiodiversityLibrary.org are free for non-commercial use, as long as you abide by the terms set down in the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 2.5 license. As more materials are added to the Biodiversity Heritage Library our usage terms will evolve to allow multiple licensing models. The Biodiversity Heritage Library is committed to keeping public domain materials in the public domain.

News and updates from the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, online at
<http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.