

Report of ASPT Systematic Collections Committee 2007–2008: Alexander Krings, Chair

The 2007–2008 ASPT Collections Committee has five members: Alexander Krings (Chair), Wayne Elisens, Tim Lowrey, Zack Murrell, and Richard Rabeler.

The Systematic Collections Committee (hereafter “Committee”) discussed a number of issues:

1. The Committee drafted, discussed, and revised a resolution regarding National Park Service (NPS) policy toward collections ownership (see attached). Committee member Rich Rabeler has been closely following this issue and along with James Solomon (MO) organized a discussion section entitled “NPS Biological Collections Forum - progress towards further cooperation” to be held at Bot2008 in Vancouver. The Committee feels strongly that ASPT should adopt a resolution on the NPS issue and has forwarded a draft resolution to the Council for discussion and vote.

2. Letters of support for herbaria closing or in danger of losing support were written by the Committee and sent by president-elect Bruce Baldwin for president Paul Berry, who was out of the country. Letters were written in support of collections or positions at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas (UNLV), the University of Northern Colorado, and Utrecht. The Committee is concerned that closure appears an omnipresent danger not just for small collections, but even for significant collections, such as Utrecht and UNLV, which has been designated as one of only 105 National Resource Collections by the National Science Foundation. Our judgment from the current climate is that research productivity, historical significance, and/or outreach services, while important, are increasingly not critical factors for the continued support of collections by institutions. Funding is most critical to collections and we urge Council to take up discussions on how to increase ASPT’s role in influencing collections funding at the national level. Funding will also be an integral component of a workshop organized by the Committee at the upcoming Bot2008 meeting (see 3. below).

3. The Committee remains concerned with how to support the creation and maintenance of herbarium networks (see 2006–2007 annual report). To this end, the Committee organized a workshop to be held at Bot2008 in Vancouver, entitled “Virtual Herbaria: Regional progress in organizing, fundraising, and delivering content”. Representatives from nine regional networks will provide updates on their efforts and three speakers will focus specifically on fundraising from non-NSF sources. Break-out groups will discuss fundraising and organization further. The draft agenda follows:

Updates from networks:

Southeast (SERNEC): Dr. Zack Murrell

Central: Dr. Carolyn Ferguson

Great Lakes: Dr. Rich Rabeler/Dr. Anna Monfils

Texas-Oklahoma (TORCH): Dr. Wayne Elisens

Northeast: Dr. James Macklin

Southwest: Dr. Tim Lowrey

Northwest: Ben Legler/Dr. Richard Olmstead

California: Dr. Brent Mishler/Dr. Lucinda McDade
Canada: Dr. Luc Brouillet
Update on Informatics tools: Dr. James Macklin

Tapping into non-NSF funds:

Update on the NIMSS WDC012 project: Dr. Mary Barkworth
Oregon flora project/Digital field guide: Dr. Linda Hardison
Funding the Consortium of California Herbaria: Dr. Brent Mishler/Dr. Lucinda McDade

Break-out groups by region:

Developing strategies and working groups for coordinating regional and state-level funding for network projects

4. Representatives from the Committee (e.g., Elisens, Krings, Rabeler) attended the joint Natural Science Collections Alliance/Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections meeting in Oklahoma City. Following the formal meeting, a curators meeting was held in Norman to discuss various collections and network related issues. Krings also traveled to the University of South Carolina to meet with John Nelson, president of the Society of Herbarium Curators (SHC), to discuss his vision for the society and its relationship to the Committee and ASPT. Subsequently, we invited him to present and join discussions at the annual curators meeting in Vancouver.

5. Discussions from last year continued regarding the idea of adding a representative of every network as ad hoc members of the Committee to assure contact between ASPT and the networks. There have been some concerns about swelling the size of the Committee to unworkable numbers. In addition, the role of the relationship with SHC remains unclear. It is clear that to move forward, ASPT needs to clearly define the future role and objective of the Committee. Some discussions on the role of the Committee with regard to herbarium networks and the SHC were held at the NSCA meeting in Oklahoma City (attending: Barkworth, Elisens, Krings, Rabeler, Prather, and Solomon). This issue will be a central discussion item at the curators meeting at Bot2008 in Vancouver

6. The Committee organized a general curators meeting for Bot2008 in Vancouver. The meeting will be held Monday, July 28, 7–9pm and moderated by Alexander Krings.

30 Apr 2008

ASPT Resolution on National Park Service Collections Policy

Whereas the collection, identification, and curation of biological specimens are essential to the study of biodiversity and the evolutionary origins and patterns of life; and

Whereas significant expertise and resources are needed to collect, identify and maintain scientific collections of biological specimens in a manner that will assure their continued existence and convenient availability to qualified researchers; and

Whereas high standards of maintenance of the specimens and associated databases, are necessary to provide the scientific information that should be the fundamental purpose of such collections; and

Whereas biological specimens may be collected on National Park Service property; and

Whereas current National Park Service policy mandates that biologists who collect and identify these specimens and the institutions that curate and store them do so only on a long-term loan basis, subject to recall at any time; and

Whereas museums and herbaria cannot commit to the expense of indefinitely housing and maintaining specimens that are not legally their property; and

Whereas few National Parks have the expertise and facilities to properly identify and curate biological specimens; and

Whereas the current National Park Service policy concerns biologists and institutions because it may jeopardize the long-term integrity of research collections and potentially makes access to specimens collected on National Park Service property more difficult for qualified researchers; then be it therefore **RESOLVED** that the American Society of Plant Taxonomists calls upon the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service to work cooperatively with the research/museum community to develop policies that allows more permanent deposition/retention of biological specimens collected on National Park Service property by institutions with a history of curatorial responsibility in maintaining scientific collections.

[Based on a resolution passed by the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists]