

Systematics Collections Committee

Annual Report 2008 – 2009

Members: Mary Barkworth (UTC; Chair, USVH representative); Wayne Elisens (OKL); Carolyn Ferguson (KSC); Tim Jones (LSU, student representative); James Macklin (HUH); Jack (Zack) Murrell (BOONE, SCH representative); Richard Rabeler (MICH, representing SPNCH).

The committee acquired its present composition in January 2009, after the resignation of Wayne Elisens as chair and Tim Lowrey as a member. Carolyn Ferguson was then added as a regular member and the committee was expanded to seven members in order to include both a student member (Tim Jones) and someone active in the area of bioinformatics (James Macklin).

There has been one new initiative undertaken by the committee. Rabeler is leading a group working on a revision of the Report of the Committee for Recommendations in Desirable Procedures in Herbarium Practice and Ethics, II (*Brittonia* 25: 307–310). Members of the group include Rabeler, Murrell, Macklin, and Ferguson. Ferguson will lead a discussion of the draft recommendations at the annual Curators' Meeting.

In the last few years, the committee has written letters to support herbaria threatened with closure and/or significant loss of staff but the consequences were not always positive. This year, the committee asks that the Society send letters of appreciation to Christy Malone and Arnold (Jerry) Tiehm who, with Paul Tueller, of RENO are maintaining the activity of that herbarium. All three work entirely as volunteers but, with their help, RENO continues to be active, growing, databasing its specimens, and sending out loans and exchanges. It recently developed a web site which provides basic capacity for searching its database. What makes Christy and Jerry's contribution particularly outstanding is that they are not, like Paul, retired faculty members. Indeed, Christy's part time position in the herbarium was, like most part time positions at the university, cut in response to Nevada's budget crunch; Jerry has never had a paid position at the university.

Two areas were suggested as topics for the Curators' Meeting, the annual meeting that was initiated by the Systematics Collections Committee several years ago and grown to become a well attended open forum for issues concerning herbaria: Annotations and voucher specimens. The purpose of the discussion will be to assess whether failure to provide either is becoming increasingly common and, if so, to identify means of addressing the problem. Bruce Baldwin will lead the discussion on annotations. Because the report of the workshop on "NEON and the curation of biological specimens, physical samples and associated data" is now available, it has been added to the agenda as a topic for suggestion. Some of the individuals who participated in the work shop have been asked to lead the discussion and answer questions.

A concern that was raised, but not pursued, was the lack of clarity concerning the roles of and relationships among the ASPT Collections Committee, the USVH project, and the Society for Herbarium Curators. The ASPT bylaws (see below) do not address the issue:

"Systematic Collections. - The Systematic Collections Committee shall consist of three members, the Chair of which shall be the representative to the Association of Systematics Collections. Each member shall be appointed for a three-year term, one retiring each year. Normally, the

member serving his or her third year shall preside as Chair of the Committee. The Committee shall be responsible for informing the Society on matters of interest concerning systematic collections, helping provide a liaison with other societies concerned with systematic collections, and obtaining and publishing information about systematic collections when necessary.”

The practice of including representatives from the Society for Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNCH), the Society for Herbarium Curators (SCH), and the USVH project is presumably designed to address the issue of liaison with those groups but it is not required by the bylaws. Moreover, there are other organizations concerned with systematics collections with which there is no formal linkage, for instance, that Alliance of Natural Science Collections.

This topic is also on the agenda for the Curators’ Meeting. It will also be addressed, albeit briefly, at the annual meeting of the USVH project that will be held on Sunday, July 26.

Mary Barkworth, Chair,
ASPT Systematics Collections Committee