



Communication from the NSCF Co-ordinating Hub Team

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Participants at the NSCF forum, October 2017

From Michelle Hamer:

We had a very successful launch and forum for the Natural Science Collections Facility in the Drakensberg in October last year. It was really great to have so many of you together to talk about our collections and what the NSCF is trying to achieve and our plans and to see the enthusiasm and positive energy. As I said in my speech at the launch all of you who work in the collections are critical to the success of the NSCF. It is very important that we establish a strong team across institutions so that we can support each other, share knowledge and experience and equipment. One of the vital steps towards establishing this team is regular communication and so the NSCF Hub staff will be writing regular communications to keep you updated about what has been happening, to provide useful information and anything else that might be relevant. We are also happy to include news from your institution / collection in these communications.

What has been happening?

Hub staff

I am very pleased that the Hub staff now includes four of us – I continue my role as NSCF Lead, and we have appointed two Working Group Co-ordinators – Ian Engelbrecht for the Data WG, and Audrey Ndaba for the Collection Management WG. Shanelle Ribeiro has been appointed as the NSCF Project Manager.

Change Management process

We appointed excellent consultants (Desiree Paulsen and Ilze Olckers) to help the leadership at the participating institutions deal with establishing the NSCF. We have realised that the NSCF is a very new type of network or organisation – there are no models to guide us on how to make it work. This is challenging but the idea of creating something unique is also very exciting.

We are also aware that change is needed in the context of South Africa's past and current discussions and debates – issues of decolonisation, social justice, respect and appreciation for indigenous knowledge systems, racism, and oppression – these are all issues that are relevant for all of us and our work. We have held two intense retreats so far and these have been incredibly powerful. We have realised that change is a long road and this process will be ongoing over the next few years (yes years!!).



Collections Management staff attending the first change management workshop in the Eastern Cape

The NSCF website

For those of you who have not yet visited the website, please do so (www.nscf.co.za). If you have information that you want posted please send it through to me. I hope that we will be able to get some help with the website soon. I am not great at managing it. Charlene Janion-Scheepers from Iziko Museum has been helping – thanks very much to her.

Working Groups

Collection Management WG update – from Audrey



Tour of the National Herbarium, Pretoria, for Collections Management WG members

We had our first national working group meeting in the Pretoria National Botanic Gardens, in April, where twelve participating institutions were represented. We were able to discuss and review three of six of the drafted NSCF policies. It was recommended that participating institutions form smaller task teams in their regions. These have been formed and the Eastern Cape has successfully held their first regional meeting. The other regions are also scheduled to have their meeting in June and July. The next national WG meeting will be held in August in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape.

Two working group members, Zamawelase Mwelase of the Durban Natural Science Museum and Petro Marais of the Agricultural Research Council, responded to the call sent out by the NSCF (to sponsor international travel, open to all collection based staff), and have been awarded funds to attend the Collections and Data Conference hosted by the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC) in New Zealand this August.

Data WG update – from Ian

Type specimens are essential for taxonomic research, as they anchor the taxonomic names that scientists produce to actual living organisms. When a new scientific name is created, it can only be applied correctly to animals or plants that are considered to be the same species represented by the type specimen linked to that name. Type specimens are an important mechanism for ensuring stability in biological classifications, because they allow for questions of identify of names to be resolved by examining those types.

Type specimens are very important. If they are lost or damaged, it can be impossible to resolve the validity of the names they are associated with. Within the gambit of ensuring the long term security and use of specimen collections in South Africa, one of the NSCF goals is to image all of the primary type specimens for macrofungi, vertebrates and Karoo vertebrate fossils (the plants have already been completed through other projects) and place those images online. By doing so, we will be creating a mechanism for ensuring that the identity of type specimens is preserved in the long term, while minimizing the need to physically handle, and potentially damage those specimens. We also hope that placing the images online will stimulate more interest in taxonomic research on our biodiversity, as it will alleviate the requirement for specialists to travel, often from other parts of the world, just to examine one or two specimens.

During the last few weeks, I've been nagging museum staff around the country for the numbers of type specimens held in their collections so that the NSCF can appoint photographers to visit those museums to photograph their types. The largest type holdings for vertebrates and Karoo fossils are in the Ditsong National Museum of Natural History in Pretoria, a testament to the historical importance and research tradition of this institution. Among others that stand out are the Durban Natural History Museum which houses a large collection of bird subspecies types, and the Port Elizabeth Museum, with its large holdings of frog and reptile types.

I would like to extend a word of thanks to all those staff who have been receiving phone calls and emails from me in the last weeks, and who have been so forthcoming and helpful in providing the information needed for the NSCF. It is going to be absolutely marvelous to eventually see our precious types online.

Other Working Groups

The Staffing & Capacity Development and Outreach and Communication WGs don't have co-ordinators, but we will organise the meetings to happen in the next three months so that we can get started on the work for these areas.

From the NSCF Project Manager

From Shanelle:

Since my appointment in February this year I have had the privilege of meeting many of you at the working group meetings and change management workshops. The shift from a mostly plant orientated research environment to plants and animals has been very exciting and enriching for me. Setting up an online user-friendly reporting system for the NSCF institutions has been one of the many highlights during the past months. Your commitment in submitting your reports on time and using the newly developed research, data and collections outputs to the DST and in so doing showcasing the importance of the collections, and building a strong, resilient network. I look forward to more fruitful engagements in the future and assisting your institution to meaningfully contribute to and benefit from the network and our collaborative work.

Lastly, remember to send us your stories so that we can share it with the network and on social media.



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