



## Communication from the NSCF Hub

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### From Michelle Hamer:

Dear NSCF community,  
Through the change management workshops and process in the first six months of the year we have been looking at clearly defining what the NSCF is and what the role of the NSCF Co-ordinating Hub is. This is very important so that everyone has a clear and similar understanding and we all know what is expected of us.

### What the NSCF is NOT!

You might remember the illustration below that I showed in various presentations and in different NSCF documents. This shows the structure of the NSCF relative to the Hub and the institutions.



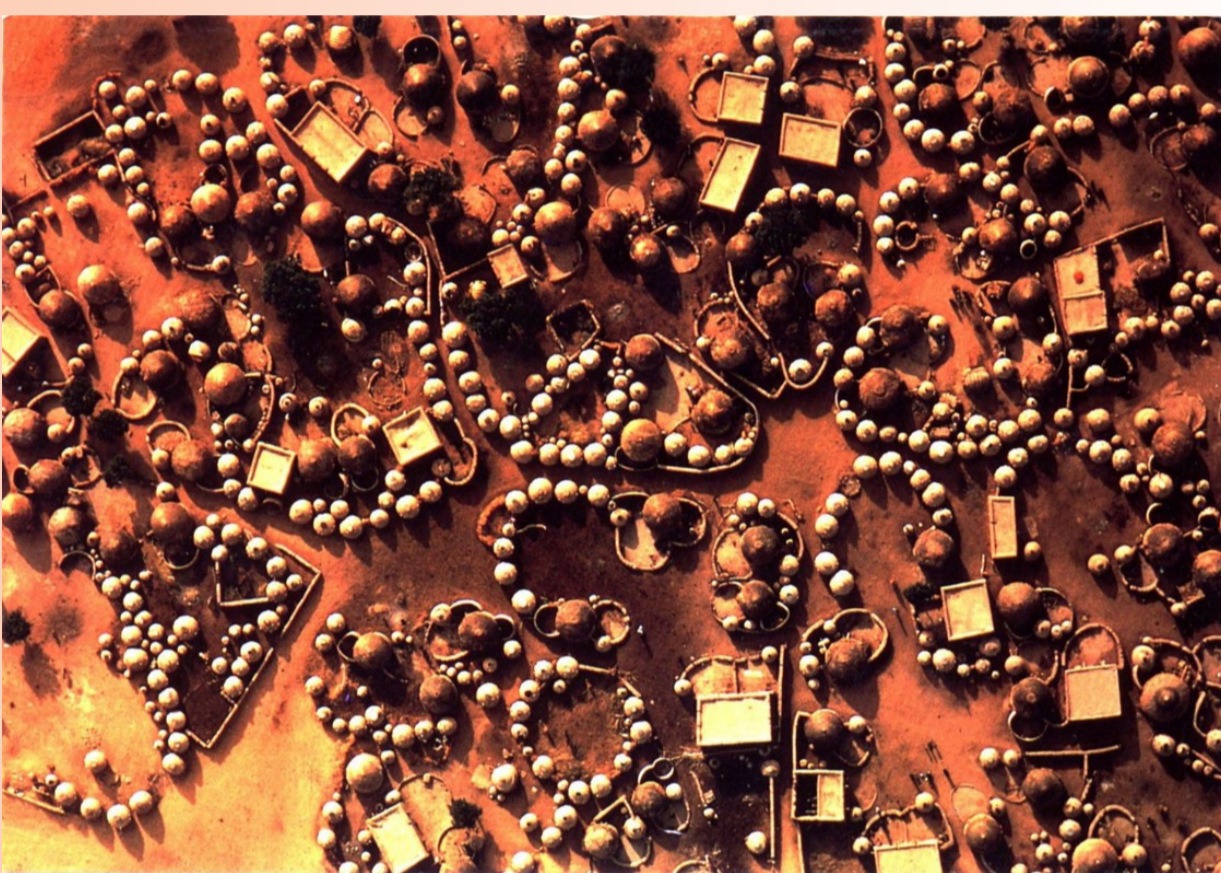
However, at the change management workshops we realised that this is actually a very poor representation of the NSCF – it does not show the interactions between the different institutions, which is a critical aspect of the NSCF. The illustration also makes it look like the Co-ordinating Hub is central – and the institutions all report in to and possibly even serve the Hub – which is also not how the relationship between the institutions and the Hub are meant to be.

### What the NSCF should be

After lots of discussion and brain storming, the participants at the change management workshop in February came up with various ideas of how we can show that the **NSCF is dynamic, interactive and adapts to changes and that the Hub exists to support and enable and facilitate this type of structure.**

### The African village concept

One of the ideas was to represent the NSCF as an African village, which shows that the institutions exist through supporting and helping each other, and that there are regular interactions between institutions. The Hub could be the paths between the huts that enable this interaction.



### A sociable weaver nest?

In May I visited Namibia on holiday and sat watching a sociable weaver nest. This also reminded me of the NSCF – where there are many individual birds and pairs in their own compartments in the nest, but they all communicate and co-operate to protect and repair the communal nest, and to find food.



Figuring out how the NSCF and the Hub and the institutions will all work together to achieve a common goal is still a work in progress – we welcome any comments or suggestions, or if you have any ideas for how to represent the NSCF please do send these to us.

We also hope to discuss this further with all of you when the Hub team visits the different institutions over the next few months.

### From Ian Engelbrecht:

#### Snippet from the data working group: towards an online taxonomic backbone for Southern African animals

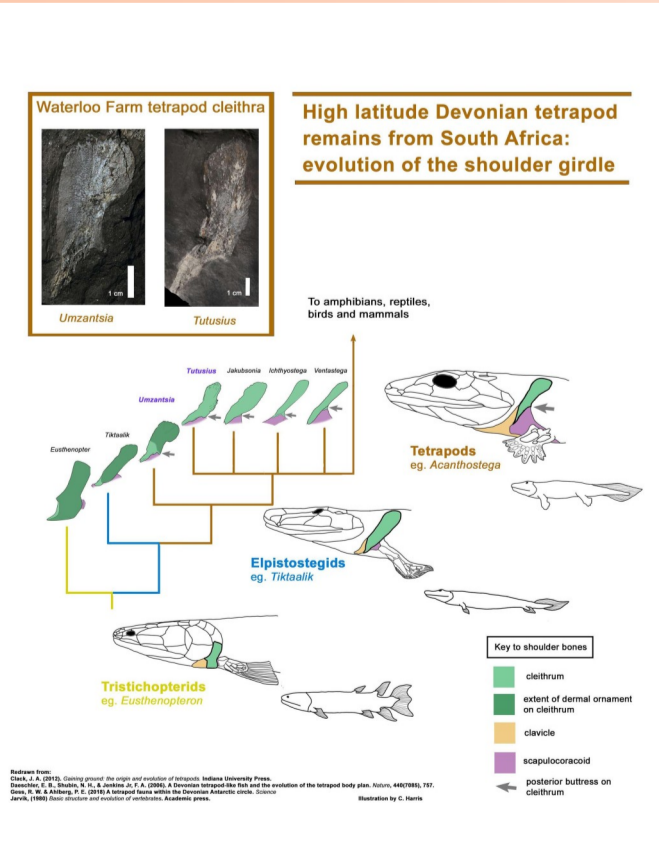
For the last few years, the Zoological Systematics unit of SANBI under the guidance of Michelle Hamer, has been developing species checklists for animals in conjunction with taxon experts around the world. Keeping these checklists up to date for the 70 000 or so animal taxa we have in the region has been a gargantuan logistical exercise. We're now hoping to alleviate this difficulty in some part by moving these checklists to the Specify database system and making them available online.

Specify is collections management database designed for curating museum specimens, but it also has functionality for managing taxonomic names, hierarchies, synonyms and references. These are needed for specimen identifications, but we hope to use this functionality to store classification information for animals in a single location, making it easier to manage. Through Specify 7, which is a web based interface for the Specify database, groups of experts will be able to collaborate on keeping the taxonomy up to date for the groups of organisms they work on. Checklists can then be drawn from the database periodically and made publicly available for download.

For our work in the NSCF this will have a significant impact on how we are able to manage and improve on specimen identifications in museum collections. One of the major challenges for individual collections database managers is keeping taxonomy up to date. By having a single, centralized taxonomic authority, collections will be able to synchronize their own records and keep them up to date.

For the last few weeks the NSCF and SANBI Biodiversity Information Management (BIM) teams have been collaborating to amalgamate the animal checklists and move them to Specify. We expect that experts will be able to access the database and begin updating the lists within the next few weeks. We're excited to see how this progresses and look forward to seeing the impacts it will have on collections data management.

### News from Albany Museum



The first fossils of African Devonian tetrapods were discovered by Dr Robert Gess of the Albany Museum and described in June 2018 in *Science* by him and Per Ahlberg of Uppsala University in Sweden.

The two new species, named *Tutusius* and *Umzantsia*, are Africa's earliest known four-legged vertebrates by a remarkable 70 million years. The approximately metre-long *Tutusius umlambo* (named in honour of Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu) and the somewhat smaller *Umzantsia amazana* are both incomplete. *Tutusius* is represented by a single bone from the shoulder girdle, whereas *Umzantsia* is known from a greater number of bones, but they both appear similar to previously known Devonian tetrapods. Alives, they would have resembled a cross between a crocodile and a fish, with a crocodile-like head, stubby legs, and a tail with a fish-like fin. They lived in a coastal estuarine lake with mixed fresh water and marine influences. The fauna and flora preserved at Waterloo Farm comprise the most comprehensive record of life in and around a latest Devonian estuary known in the world.

[Read more here](#)

Infographic of evolution of the shoulder girdle across the fish to tetrapod transition. Includes the proposed position of the cleithra of *Tutusius* and *Umzantsia*.



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