



NSCF NEWS

Communication from the Natural Science Collections Facility Hub Team

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BEST WISHES FOR 2019!

One month of the new year has gone by already and we can already see that 2019 is going to be a very busy year. The first three-year agreement for the NSCF ends at the end of December 2019 and so we only have 11 months left to meet the targets that we set, and to be able to show the DST that the NSCF is a worthwhile investment. There is a lot of energy and commitment in the NSCF Hub office and we hope that with your help and support, we will have a productive and successful year.

PLANNING AND THE NEXT THREE YEAR BUDGET

We will be discussing the plans and budget for the next three year agreement when the Co-ordinating Committee meets in early March 2019 so that we can submit our new plan to DST by the end of that month. Please give some thought to how we can keep moving the NSCF forward, how we can have a real impact with our activities and discuss ideas and needs with your representative on the Committee so they can bring your thoughts to the meeting.

2018 INSTITUTIONAL VISITS BY THE HUB STAFF

In the second half of 2018 we visited most of the participating institutions, and the main purpose of this was to promote understanding about the role of the NSCF and the Co-ordinating Hub, and to hear what the main concerns of the staff are, and also to have a look at the collections.

At the start of the sessions with staff we asked about each person's understanding of what the NSCF is and their hopes and concerns. There was a wide range of answers and we hope that the discussions helped to bring a better understanding of what the NSCF is trying to achieve, and most importantly, how dependent it is on the participation and contribution of all staff at the institutions to succeed.



A listening room at Amathole Museum King William's Town

Some snapshots from our visits to institutions:



CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS

One of the most common issues raised by staff was about staff and time. We do recognise that most institutions are understaffed and there is only a limited amount that the NSCF can do to resolve this. We do also recognise that some staff are overstretched – trying to do far too much which means that some aspects of their work gets neglected. This is not a new challenge – it was first raised almost 40 years ago and has been regularly repeated over the years.

If additional staff cannot be appointed are there different ways of allocating responsibilities or re-organising collections? This was a discussion that the Staffing and Capacity Development Working Group had when we met in November and that needs to be further explored. Another concern that came up several times was about replacing taxonomists who will be retiring and filling vacant taxonomist posts. Where will appropriately qualified and experienced people come from? There is no easy answer to this and we will all need to work together to find solutions to this “wicked problem”.

Some staff also raised the concern that the NSCF will mean additional work for them. We have been mindful of this in planning and we have tried to assist with temporary capacity where additional projects are being done in institutions. So far we have appointed over 20 contract staff / research assistants to help with moving orphan collections, with sorting backlogs and to do scanning of plant specimens. We are also contracting out some aspects of the work to consultants, but we have to be careful that institutions do not become completely dependent on consultants and NSCF-funded staff.

So lots of innovative and creative thinking is needed.

Michelle

Visiting scientist, Dr Caswell Munyai working on the Iziko ant collection with Abusiswe Ndaba



INSTITUTIONAL REPORTS: QUARTER 3 OUTPUTS

A record 14 institutions reported on outputs for quarter 3 and we are happy to share what your consolidated efforts look like so far for the 2018/19 financial year.

Indicator	Q1	Q2	Q3	Year Total
Orphan collections: no. of specimens incorporated	1761	781	16392	18934
New specimens accessioned	9069	5703	56597	71369
Number of DNA samples added	827	51	500	1378
Number of tissue samples added	199	96	594	889
Number of DNA samples supplied for research purposes	328	198	93	619
Data provided to external users: no. of requests	137	83	52	272
Data provided to external users: no. of records	69579	290441	24982	385002
Number of specimens imaged	3437	4362	11403	19202
Number of specimens sent out on loan for research	5699	8785	5714	20198
Number of visitors using collection (national)	319	536	203	1058
Number of visitors using collection (international)	94	65	65	224
Number of new species described	38	23	63	124
Number of papers published based on collection	149	22	47	218
Number of specimens identified: external stakeholders	2854	1764	3426	8044
Number of outreach activities held	237	82	36	355
Number of learners/attendees exposed to the activity	3975	8301	1660	13936

(A reminder that the quarter 4 deadline for report submission is on 25 March, which is before the end of the quarter due to DST reporting deadlines)



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