

# NSCF NEWS

Communication from the Natural Science Collections Facility Hub Team

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## Farewell to Ruth Muller

The NSCF community is sad to bid farewell to one of our own, Ruth Muller, from Ditsong National Museum of Natural History. She is going on retirement, and July was her last month working as Collection Manager for the Beetle Collection.

With great love and respect for nature, Ruth Muller is the outgoing Collection Manager for the Beetle collection at Ditsong National Museum of Natural History. She started working as a Collection Manager in 1981 and in those days, her main job was to label beetles, sort them into the drawers, supervise preparators, do field work, sort out traps, etc. Her day-to-day activities involve sorting beetles

"The beetle collection represents the diversity of our fauna. Collections in this Museum (Ditsong) are the library of our fauna."

from fieldwork and the specimens returned from scientists, keeping contact with scientists all over the world, labeling beetles, cataloging, databasing, and setting up beetle groups to systematical order, pest control, etc. Work in this collection is endless.

For Ruth, being a Collection Manager is fantastic, especially being the link between scientists from all over the world and the collection. Working in the beetle department was just a coincidence for Ruth. She did not like the job she had in wastewater research and applied when the job for a Collections Manager was advertised. She has always loved our natural world around us. Her first memory of the beetle collection was "horrible, I started with field work, setting ground-traps, sifting forest litter, beating bushes, very little water to wash and not knowing the beetle diversity I thought it is all so dirty and I will not stay in the Museum. Little did I know: it all became my fascination in life."

"My love for nature is unlimited. Through my work in the beetle collection this love just got deepened and I am thankful that I never had to change my career or think about it."

The diversity in the beetle world has been her biggest surprise.

When she realised that her work in the collection got acknowledged in the scientific world, was when she was most satisfied in her career, and this has been her proudest accomplishment. If there was one thing Ruth would do differently if she had a chance, she would study Natural Science.

Ruth's interest in the beetles started when Dr Endrödy-Younga, the scientist in those days, was a very active and passionate natural scientist. His great enthusiasm for science and the collection just drove the department forward and he took them all along and Ruth's interest in the beetle diversity started to grow. Dr Endrödy-Younga has influenced Ruth and her decision to work with beetles. She describes him as a dedicated and enthusiastic scientist whose love for life was remarkable. To keep this collection alive after his death, she had no other choice than to put a lot of effort in learning the taxonomy of the beetles. Very quickly she also understood that without the connection to scientists in different beetle families worldwide, she would not succeed to keep the collection active and also not keep up with the systematical order and taxonomical changes.

Ruth's most challenging part of managing collections is having colleagues who do not share the fascination for a collection. The best thing to happen since Ruth started working with beetles has been to meet scientists from different countries who work on our fauna. The worst is that no or too few scientists/taxonomists are employed in collections. Also that collections are no longer seen as research collection but a heritage object, which are counted by auditors, rules of recounting all specimens every year are set by auditors, respectable if it is for the benefit of the collection or not and auditors come every year and check if everything was counted and if curators complied to their rules. The biodiversity of the collection and research are no longer supported.

If Ruth could change one thing about the collections community, it would be to get more knowledgeable people/taxonomists, who have an understanding and love for our environment. "I wish more people would be aware that life is not possible without beetles. And also that people would know how important collections are for the study of our environment", said Ruth.

"More active taxonomists should be employed."

Ruth grew up on a farm in Angola where she attended school as well as in Germany and her family was just fantastic. Her parents had a great influence on her. When she is not working and on holiday, Ruth enjoys being away from towns and civilization where she can watch nature around her: beetles, other insects, birds, mammals, etc. It's where she finds her peace.

If she were to hand over a torch, she would advise her successor to see to it that Natural History Museums do not become a store house for collections. Natural History Museum collections are for research, which should lead to a better understanding of nature around us. Ruth would tell a young person who is thinking about working with natural science collection to treat all their specimens and research findings with respect and love the natural world around them.

Where to from here? "Having more time for myself and my two dogs." - says Ruth.

## Institution Outputs 2019/20 for Quarter 1

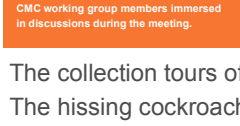
We are happy to announce that all 16 NSCF partner institutions submitted reports this quarter. 70 papers were published, and 72 new species were described from April to June. Well done to everyone!

A reminder that the deadline for the 2nd Quarter Report is 25 September to allow us to meet the DST deadline for report submission.

Indicator	Q1
Orphan collections: no. of specimens incorporated	11236
New specimens accessioned	54831
Number of DNA samples added	65
Number of tissue samples added	128
Number of DNA samples supplied for research purposes	542
Data provided to external users: no. of requests	99
Data provided to external users: no. of records	33233
Number of specimens imaged	19272
Number of specimens sent out on loan for research	5615
Number of visitors using collection (national)	408
Number of visitors using collection (international)	53
Number of new species described	72
Number of papers published based on collection	70
Number of specimens identified: external stakeholders	3559
Number of outreach activities held	72
Number of learners/attendees exposed to the activity	18997

## Collections Management & Conservation (CMC) Working Group National Meeting

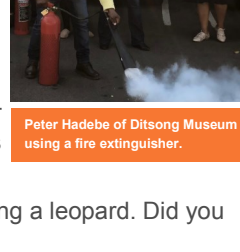
The CMC working group members hands up! Hahaha just kidding!



CMC working group members immersed in discussions during the meeting.

The WG met on 29 and 30 July 2019 at the Durban Natural Science Museum to discuss collection ethics, risk assessment and management, as well as health & safety guidelines. Wasn't that basic fire safety training cool?

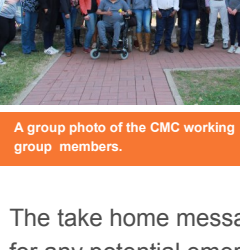
See how people had fun with releasing CO2 while also getting invaluable practical experience using fire extinguishers.



Peter Hadebe of Ditsong Museum using a fire extinguisher.

The collection tours of DNSM Collection were all interesting. The hissing cockroaches were an unexpected surprise – Natasha Govender sure made them the coolest insects ever, she is a natural with them!

From the mammal collections the WG was indulged with interesting foetuses, look at Usisipho admiring a leopard. Did you know the spots are actually on the skin?



A group photo of the CMC working group members.

**Were you involved in the fun or did you miss out? In attendance was:**

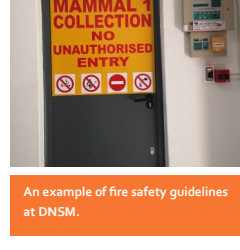
**EastZulu-Cape:** Albany Museum and SAIAB

**KwaZulu-Natal:** Durban Natural Science Museum, KZN museum, KZN SANBI Herbarium and UKZN Herbarium

**Western Cape:** SANBI Compton herbarium and Iziko Museums

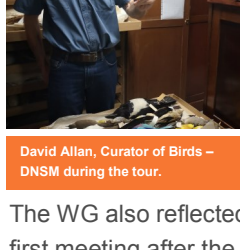
**Gauteng:** SANBI Pretoria Herbarium, Ditsong Museum and Wits – ESI

The take home message was the importance of **preparedness** for any potential emergencies that can take place in the institutions. The risk assessment is very important, it helps with identifying necessary **prevention** for potential emergencies in your collections. You plan your **responses** best if you have an idea of emergencies you're collections are vulnerable to. Lastly, also important are the **recovery** plans and readiness that should be in place.

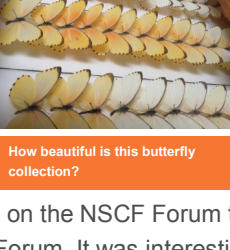


An example of fire safety guidelines at DNSM.

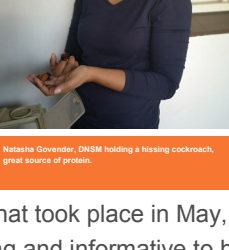
It's always good to have a plan, it guides one. Institutions should have emergency plans, salvage collection plans, and recovery plans. They should also have clear communication plans. They should work on offering regular training of what to do when a real disaster strikes. This not only helps them know what their roles are in an emergency, it also strengthens team spirit within the institution.



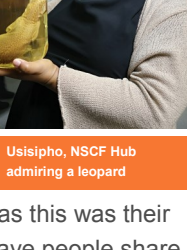
David Allan, Curator of Birds – DNSM during the tour.



How beautiful is this butterfly collection?



Natasha Govender, DNSM holding a hissing cockroach, great lover of protein.



Usisipho, NSCF Hub admiring a leopard.

The WG also reflected on the NSCF Forum that took place in May, as this was their first meeting after the Forum. It was interesting and informative to have people share their experiences and feedback, said the co-ordinator.

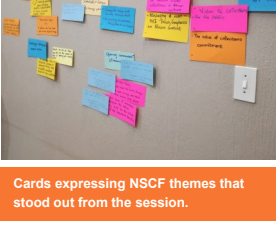
## Organisational Development—Hub Session

As a project, the NSCF has embarked on an organisational accompaniment journey with Africa Spirals of Change, which consists of Ilze and Desiree as the facilitators and recently, Rubert as the Evaluator. They met with the Hub team on 24-25 July 2019, in Pretoria. On the agenda was the review and reflection of the NSCF's past activities and the journey ahead.

Africa Spirals of Change describe themselves as "Africa Spirals of Change contributes to the strengthening and transformation of teams and organisations. We do this by tapping into collective wisdom and courageous integrity assisting them to become more authentic, purposeful and effective in their vision and mission in the world. Our processes revitalize, renew and harness individual and organisational energy, knowledge, expertise and skills from within. This contributes to improving the lives of individuals and organisations on our continent and beyond its borders."

Most of you have already been involved in their sessions and can agree that they are what they say they are, and they do what they say they do.

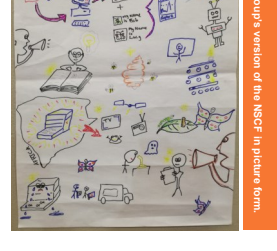
Activities involved using the U-Process by Otto Scharmer as a tool to review and reflect on the NSCF, looking at a couple of photos and selecting the ones most attention-grabbing for you, journaling, using a picture to write a poem, and drawing your deliverables.



Cards expressing NSCF themes that stood out from the session.



The first group's version of the NSCF in picture form.



The second group's version of the NSCF in picture form.

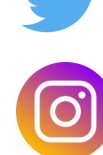
## Join us on Social Media

Like/follow, share/retweet and comment



@NSCFSA—aimed at the public audience

'Natural Science Collections Facility' facebook group—aimed at communicating to institutions, and not the public.



@NSCF\_SA—aimed at the public audience



@nscf\_sa—aimed at the public audience

### Let's connect!

Follow each link and **like/follow** the NSCF pages on social media, we will like/follow you back.

### Send us your news, to feature in the NSCF newsletter!

What exciting thing happened at your institution? - did you discover a new species, did you get a new staff member? Was your institution featured in the media? Did you attend a great event?

Send your news to: Fulufhelo Gelebe, [f.gelebe@sanbi.org.za](mailto:f.gelebe@sanbi.org.za) ... you can call her Fulufhelo.

The NSCF is a virtual Facility, comprised of a network of institutions that hold natural science collections that are accessible to external researchers. The NSCF was established as part of the Department of Science and Technology's Research Infrastructure Roadmap and co-ordinated by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI).

Natural Science Collections Facility (NSCF)  
South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI)  
Pretoria National Botanical Gardens

2 Cussonia Avenue, Brummeria, Pretoria, 0184

Tel: +27 (0) 12 843 5183

Web: [www.nscf.co.za](http://www.nscf.co.za)