

Transfer of the US-National Parasite Collection

Over the past 120 years since its founding in 1892, the United States National Parasite Collection (NPC), a cornerstone of global and North American parasitology, has been maintained by scientists and curators of the Agricultural Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Initially held in Washington, D.C., for over 70 years the collection has been curated at the Beltsville Area Research Center in Maryland. The NPC holdings include in excess of 100,000 catalogued specimen lots (potentially thousands of individuals per lot) of animal parasites focusing on helminths and to a lesser extent other groups; included are approximately 3,000 holotypes and 7,000 type series. Historically among the most active parasite collections in the world, annual growth is estimated to be between 1,000 and 1,500 specimen lots, and loan activity has been significant in support of a broad global community. The history of the collection has been summarized previously (Becklund, 1969, Andrews, 1987, Lichtenfels *et al.*, 1992, Hoberg, 2002). In addition to the collections at the Harold W. Manter Laboratory of Parasitology (University of Nebraska - Lincoln) and the Parasitology Division, Museum of Southwestern Biology (University of New Mexico), the NPC is one of the largest museum repositories and archives for parasites in North America, and among the most significant in the world, serving as an irreplaceable resource for research programs emphasizing biodiversity and systematics of parasites and complex host-parasite systems.

Transfer details

In 2013 an agreement was articulated between the USDA/ARS and the Smithsonian Institution to transfer the NPC in its entirety (fluid specimens, slide specimens, frozen tissues, and reprints)

to the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) in Washington, D.C. Current collections staff, including senior curator Dr. Eric P. Hoberg and support scientists/managers from the ARS will be transferred with the collection and with adjunct appointments in the NMNH will provide continuity and assistance for curation and accessibility during and after the relocation. New curatorial controls will be established under NMNH guidance by Dr. Anna J. Phillips and collections management policy of the NMNH as implemented by the Department of Invertebrate Zoology.

Operational responsibility for curation and management of the NPC, including new accessions, cataloging, loan processing, information requests and visitor support will be shifted from the ARS to the NMNH on 2 June 2014. Smithsonian protocols will be adopted, and stakeholders and users of the collection are asked to refer directly to the NMNH. Information about procedures for donation of specimens, policies for loans, including requests for destructive sampling, and arranging scientific visits can be found at the website for the NMNH Department of Invertebrate Zoology Collections (<http://invertebrates.si.edu/collections.htm>). The web interface of the NMNH Department of Invertebrate Zoology specimen catalog can be accessed at: collections.nmnh.si.edu/search/iz/. During the transition, the final version of the NPC database as it exists on 30 May 2014, will be available as a single downloadable Excel file from the NMNH Department of Invertebrate Zoology website. We anticipate a migration of this database into the EMu platform of the NMNH during the coming 24 months.

New material/specimens should be sent with advance notice to:

ATTN: IZ Collections Manager – NMNH Invertebrate Zoology, Smithsonian Museum Support Center, 4210 Silver Hill Road, Suitland, MD 20746, USA.

The physical move of the collection is expected to begin in October 2014. In anticipation of this process we ask the community to: (1) Return all outstanding loans of NPC specimens (to ARS, Beltsville) prior to 2 June 2014 or retain the loans until the transfer has been completed, (2) Expect that new loans during this period (up to the time the transfer is completed) will not be processed, other than in exceptional cases and at the discretion of the current curator, (3) Accept our apology for the disruption of normal services (loans and accessions) during the time frame of 18-24 months following the transfer of operations. After 2 June 2014, individuals planning to deposit large series of specimens (i.e. greater than 50 lots) are encouraged to either retain materials until after the transfer of the NPC is completed or to arrange for deposition in alternate parasitological collections. During this period, NMNH on a case-by-case basis and with advance notice may be able to accept specimens with a high scientific priority (i.e. publications pending and types).

Please go to the NMNH Department of Invertebrate Zoology website (<http://invertebrates.si.edu>) for updates on the transfer and transition of the NPC.

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References

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