

JRS Announces Five New Grant Awards for Access to Biodiversity Data

SEATTLE, Washington -- August 12, 2014 -- The JRS Biodiversity Foundation today announced the five grant recipients from its January 2014 call for innovative grant proposals in the field of biodiversity informatics. These grants cover diverse approaches to collecting and creating access to biodiversity knowledge and underscore the foundation's commitment to advancing biodiversity informatics, investment in sub-Saharan Africa, and to capacity building to increase knowledge of biodiversity.

"JRS is pleased to announce the support of five talented project teams whose work is on the leading edge of applied biodiversity informatics and that builds upon prior investments of the foundation in these species and geographies," said Executive Director, Don Doering. "Each of these projects make significant investments in African capacity for biodiversity data access and use and offers vital new data and tools for conservation action."

[*California Academy of Sciences*](#) - Digitizing Southwestern-African Herpetological Collections, \$180,000

Angola and Namibia form a hotspot for reptile and amphibian biodiversity, however, decades of civil war and a lack of expertise in biodiversity informatics has made much of this data inaccessible. This means that much of the scientific collections that document the diversity and distribution of this unique fauna remain unknown. In partnership with African institutions, the project team will collaboratively digitize and geocode data from the principal herpetological collections for Angola and Namibia and distribute these globally under a Creative Commons license. In addition, amphibian and reptile specimens from Angola and Namibia in other collections in South Africa, Europe, and the United States will be geo-referenced. Generated data will be used to update conservation assessments for reptile and amphibian species, many of which have not yet been assessed or are currently assessed as Data Deficient. In-country training focused on database creation, maintenance, use, and downstream conservation applications to facilitate current priorities in these countries for biodiversity documentation.

[*Institute of Ecology at National Autonomous University of Mexico*](#) - Mexico National Bat Monitoring, \$162,500

Despite the threats that many bat species face (habitat destruction, wind farming, diseases), large-scale, long-term monitoring programs that enable researchers to determine bat population trends are non-existent in most countries. Existing monitoring programs are limited in time and space due to high costs and amount of human resources needed. The goal of this project is to design, implement, and use a innovative, nationwide, long-term acoustic bat monitoring program in Mexico, a country with the sixth largest amount of bat fauna, integrating the latest technology in bat detectors and data analysis. Monitoring data will then be integrated with metadata into an open-access database deposited at Mexico's National Commission for Biodiversity (CONABIO), an internationally renowned national institution for its effort at systematizing biodiversity information and making it publicly accessible for its use in research, mitigation, restoration and conservation. The lessons and technology from the Mexico experience will be transferred through training and partnership with bat researchers in Africa.

[Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew](#) - Madagascan Plants Threat Assessment, \$160,700

Plants are poorly represented on the IUCN Red List, the foremost authority on extinction risk assessment for the Earth's organisms. As little as ~6% of plants have been assessed to date. There has been little progress in the production of assessments, particularly in areas where there is most need like areas such as Madagascar where there is high diversity and many threats to that diversity. The funded program will employ recent developments in bioinformatics, web mapping, and citizen science to transform this process and significantly increase the rate of new assessments and ultimately more effective conservation actions. Activities will build capacity in Red List assessment theory, hire and train 20 local staff on Red List methodologies, and facilitate the assessment of at least 100 key target species as part of a global monitoring scheme helping to achieve global biodiversity targets, with a wider goal of 500 species.

[University of Ghana](#) - West African Biodiversity Data, \$230,000

Biodiversity data for sub-regions such as West Africa have long been unavailable, either frozen in non-digital formats (specimen labels) or out of circulation as far as educating conservation decisions and biological insights. This project is a novel prototype of a cost-effective solution to this problem by linking together 5 West African herbaria with 6 major herbaria in Europe and North America to develop a large-scale, quality controlled data resource for West African plants. This will be especially beneficial to developing countries that have not had the opportunity to develop their own information resources sufficiently. This project is particularly significant for flowering plants for which large numbers of specimen typically populate herbarium and museum collections, leaving significant portions of biodiversity information inaccessible to scientists and policy-makers.

[Wildlife Conservation Society](#) - Camera Trap Data Repository for Biodiversity Monitoring, \$202,929

The Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD) relies on published data for monitoring and policy formulation but recognizes gaps in monitoring data from tropical zones and the time lag between data collection and publication. Camera trap data is one efficient solution to this problem, and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) is the single largest holder of such data. However, the vast amount of data produced from this method of monitoring remains largely unanalyzed and is held in many different countries in a form that is not standardized or proofed for public consumption. In partnership with Conservation International and the Smithsonian Institution, WCS will organize 25 years of legacy data (approximately 3 million images), publish the data online, make it available for analysis, and, ultimately, create a framework for coordinated data entry in the future, thereby improving the ability to deliver timely analyses of important wildlife conservation issues.

About the JRS Biodiversity Foundation – Founded in 2004, the JRS Biodiversity Foundation focuses upon supporting biodiversity data and knowledge that are used to preserve and to sustainably manage biodiversity, especially in those developing economies where it is most threatened. Since 2007, the foundation has awarded \$12.4M in grants. For more information contact Don S. Doering, Executive Director at info@jrsbiodiversity.org, (206) 454-7915.

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