

Proposal: Mobilizing Small Herbaria
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Small herbaria constitute a large fraction of small U.S. biological collections. These collections are usually held in small or moderately sized colleges, universities, or regional biological research stations. Compared to larger institutions, small herbaria often lack staff to participate in regular exchange activities. Hence, their specimens tend to be isolated from and unduplicated in larger collections, making them a valuable target for digitization activities. Recent iDigBio workshops and communications suggest that interest in digitizing small herbaria is very high, and that rapid and complete digitization of these collections can be accomplished efficiently, quickly, and with relatively small investment. In short, digitizing these collections is imminently achievable.

The proposal outlined herein includes several initiatives.

1. Establish a small herbarium interest group. This is currently underway from interest expressed at the recent Association of Southeastern Biologists meeting in Charleston, WV, where iDigBio co-sponsored a digitization symposium and a digitization workshop. Both of these sessions were dominated by small herbaria. Several papers presented at the larger conference were directed at the value of and strategies for digitizing small herbaria. About a dozen curators/directors at the conference expressed interest in being part of this group, to which can be added nearly the entire state of West Virginia, who are seeking guidance in digitizing what is essentially a state of small herbaria. Gil Nelson met with the West Virginia contingent for several hours one evening at the conference for the purpose of assisting in planning and launching a statewide digitization effort.
2. Design and host one or a series of herbarium digitization workshops restricted to herbaria with collections of 100,000 or fewer specimens. These workshops could easily be done in 2 days, would build on what was learned at the Valdosta workshop in September 2012, and would allow us to streamline content to address a homogeneous group of collections managers with very similar needs. We would design and have available for hands-on preview 2–3 recommended imaging stations complete with specifications and designated vendors who sell the components of these work stations. We would present Specify and Symbiota as a database/portal combination and offer the SERNEC Symbiota portal to receive participating institutions' data, relieving small institutions of much of the stress associated with developing local cyber infrastructure and IT support. Participants would leave the workshop with the specific information and configurations needed to launch a digitization program. Follow up for individual institutions would be provided.
3. Potentially offer targeted 1-day workshops in association with Botany 2014, ASB 2014, and SPNHC 2015 to participants who are ready to begin digitizing.

Workshop Calendar

Schedule at two small herbarium workshops, the first to be held in late 2013 or early 2014, with the second to follow shortly thereafter.

April 2014, ASB Conference.

July 2014, Botany 2014.

June 2014, SPNHC 2015.