

Biodiversity Center Project at Arkansas State University

The Department of Biological Sciences at Arkansas State University has developed a project aimed at building a new facility to house its biological collections. Since the first specimens were deposited in the 1940's, these biological collections count now with more than 500,000 specimens of virtually all major biological taxa. The collections house dozens of type specimens, specimens from species considered as sensitive ones (different levels of threat) by federal and state agencies. Therefore, all these specimens are a valuable resource for state scientists, personnel at state and federal agencies, and the public at large. They document the diversity and distribution of fauna and flora species throughout Arkansas and the Mid-South providing, for example, direct records of environmental change via chemicals incorporated in their tissues. In the last 35 years more than 400 papers and presentations at scientific meetings have been produced that have acknowledged use of collection resources. In that same period, several graduate students and post-doctoral students have received part of their training working with the collection and more than 50 people have personally visited the collection, including professional researchers and non-ASU graduate students doing thesis research. The Department has received certification as a CITES (Convention for International Trade of Endangered Species) site by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is a voucher specimen repository for the National Park Service, and is a member of the Natural Science Collections Alliance. These collections continue to grow but are now housed under less than satisfactory conditions. We are in the developing phase of a Biodiversity Center as a place to house these collections in state-of-the-art facilities that will include space for research and teaching. The information from these collections will be computerized and will be made available via free and electronic access.

Romero, A. Department of Biological Sciences, Arkansas State University, State University, AR, USA

McKay, T. Department of Biological Sciences, Arkansas State University, State University, AR, USA

Risch, T. Department of Biological Sciences, Arkansas State University, State University, AR, USA

Trauth, S. Department of Biological Sciences, Arkansas State University, State University, AR, USA

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