



Stanley Trauth | Special to The Sun

This photo shows one of the biological collections at Arkansas State University.

Biological collections get international certification

BY ALDEMARO ROMERO
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

JONESBORO — Arkansas State University has one of the most important biological collections in the Mid-South. More than a half-million specimens of plants and animals are housed in the science building of the Jonesboro campus.

Many of the specimens in those collections, as well as those needed by A-State scientists for their research, are on an international list of threatened and endangered species whose trade is closely regulated by national and international agencies. In order to send and receive those specimens, the institution in question needs to have a special certification. In the United States, that certification has to be issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The federal government has just renewed Arkansas State University's certification as a Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) site.

The aim of this international treaty is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. To be certified under the convention, an institution needs to fulfill a number of requirements in terms of size, maintenance and research purposes. After its application was reviewed by the federal government, U.S. regulators granted a renewal for ASU.

The convention closely regulates how specimens of those endangered species are traded internationally — whether they are for scientific, educational or commercial purposes. Today more than 30,000 species of animals and plants are covered by the convention.

CITES was drafted as a result of a resolution adopted in 1963 at a meeting of members of IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The text of the convention was finally agreed to at a meeting of representatives of 80 countries in Washington, D.C., in 1973. Today, 172 countries are parties to the convention.

The specimens at ASU are used for teaching and research and are managed by faculty members of the Department of Biological Sciences. That means that ASU faculty are kept busy curating them and using those specimens for their own research.

In the last 35 years, nearly 500 papers and presentations at scientific meetings have been produced that have acknowledged use of collection resources. In that same period, many graduate students and post-doctoral students have received part of their training working with the collection. More than 50 researchers have visited the collection, including professional researchers and non-ASU graduate students doing thesis research.

PLEASE SEE **BIOLOGY, A9**

BIOLOGY: First biological collection at ASU was of 2,000 plant specimens

FROM PAGE A8

The ASU collection has been an important center for research training for 60 years. The first biological collection deposited at Arkansas State University was one of 2,000 specimens of plants in the 1940s.

Specimens are sometimes used in public programs at ASU. These uses include

tours of the collection, loan of specimens for exhibits and inclusion of high school teachers and students into activities in the collections. Some of those specimens are exhibited in the Hall of Science at the Lab Sciences East Building.

There are plans to build a new facility on campus, the Biodiversity Center, with the goal of housing those collec-

tions under more modern standards.

The Mid-South part of the United States has some of the most interesting fauna and flora in North America, with a wide mosaic of ecosystems. Arkansas, with its five major and distinct temperate ecoregions, is among the most important states in terms of biodiversity — and at the same time, it

is a state that contains a large number of imperiled species.

For more information contact the Department of Biological Sciences at biology@astate.edu.

Dr. Aldemaro Romero is chairman and professor at the Department of Biological Sciences at Arkansas State University.