



Five Year in Review

October 2007

The Issue

Island nations face both the greatest opportunities and greatest challenges for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the world. Three key factors set islands apart from other terrestrial ecosystems; 1) distinctive geographic, climactic and biological characteristics; 2) increased susceptibility to natural disasters; and 3) higher vulnerability to the effects of climate change. To meet these challenges, all nations striving to manage and protect their natural resources are finding that access to credible biological information is critical to the task.

Few will argue that a severe lack of access to biological information exists in the Pacific Basin. This deficit is primarily due to: a) differing levels of technical capabilities and understanding within different countries and organizations; b) a lack of basic infrastructure, including standards for interoperability across hardware, software, and data systems; and c) a lack of standards, applications, and tools to meet user needs. PBIF aims to meet these challenges by working to develop and improve information products, services and capacity for the region.

Brief History

Preliminary discussions to create the Forum began in 2001 at the third Global Biodiversity Information Facility meeting and an initial planning session convened in 2002. A workshop convened in Tsukuba, Japan in October 2003 under the auspices of the Pacific Science Association's task force on Biodiversity and Conservation more formally defined PBIF as a mechanism to support collaboration on common biodiversity interests in the region. A vision: "informed environmental decision-making in the Pacific supported by the improved generation and usefulness of

biodiversity information resources about the Pacific Region" was unanimously embraced.

PBIF Workplan:

- Develop links to existing information
- Publish bibliographies
- Compile species checklists
- Provide information products
- Establish outreach and networking activities

Projects and Products

Species Observation Database

When PBIF was created in 2003, three of the four top information needs identified by regional representatives involved the creation of regional, sub-regional and national taxonomic surveys. In support of these taxonomic pursuits, PBIF has been working to bring together available species information from around the globe into a consolidated base of data for the Pacific region (see Fig. 1). This information will

be made accessible via the PBIF website and CD-Rom.

Pacific Protected Areas Database

The PPAD is a work in progress to document protected areas in the Pacific islands region. The foundation for the database was a list of protected areas created at the 7th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas in the Cook Islands in 2002. Since that time, more than 100 protected areas have been added to the database bringing the total number of records to just over 500. Work is currently underway with UNEP-WCMC, IUCN-WCPA, MPA Global, SPREP and others to further develop the database and increase its usefulness and functionality to the region.

Website

The website houses a variety of information resources on Pacific Island biodiversity, the Herpetofauna of Papua New Guinea, an image gallery with over 4000 photos, Pacific-wide bibliographies and more.

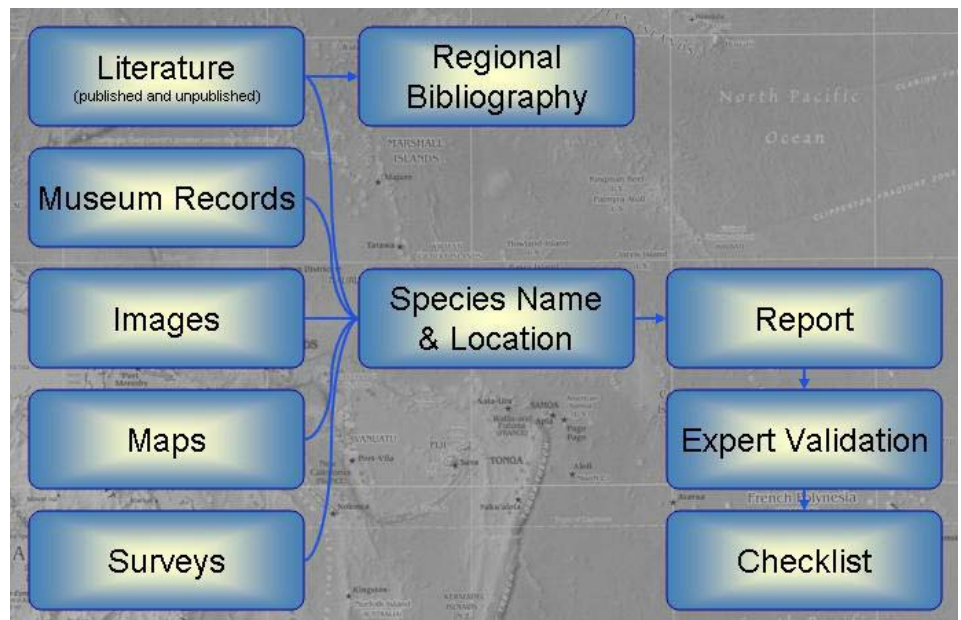


Figure 1. Conceptual process for publishing bibliographies and species checklists



Photographer: J.Maragos 2002

Projects and Products (continued)

Image Gallery

We are continuing our effort to digitize and catalogue the work of local scientists in order to preserve and make available vast amounts of Pacific-relevant photography. The images help create a historical record for the biodiversity of the Pacific Islands region and will help track changes over time. Several local biologists have donated thousands of images to be catalogued in the PBIF gallery and are available on the website copyright free for non-commercial purposes.

Herpetofauna of PNG

Bishop Museum scientists have been working in the Papuan Region for more than 60 years and the Museum holds the world's largest biological collections from this megadiverse area. The Museum has conducted more than 80 major field survey expeditions to various parts of New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. These include nearly 20 major expeditions since 2000 funded by the U.S. National Science

Foundation that have focused mainly on amphibians and reptiles. This work has resulted in discovery of ~130 new species of frogs and reptiles and hundreds of range extensions of previously named species. A partnership between the Bishop Museum and PBIF is making this information available via the PBIF website and on CD-Rom.

Information Management Support

Roundtable for Nature Conservation

PBIF is a member of the Roundtable for Nature Conservation. The Roundtable is a growing coalition of conservation organizations, donor agencies and government representatives created to increase effective conservation action in the Pacific Islands. The diverse group of meets every year in a different location in the region and principally examines progress, gaps and issues related to environmental conservation. In 2005, PBIF became the chair to the data and information management working group within the Roundtable. In this role, PBIF provides general information management support as well as manages a variety of information related projects including the Pacific Protected Areas Database (PPAD) and the Pacific Projects Inventory Database (PPI).

Action Strategy for Nature Conservation

The Action Strategy for Nature Conservation in the Pacific Islands (2003–2007) is the Pacific's overarching framework for biodiversity conservation. The Action Strategy provides a broad framework for conservation in the Pacific involving partnerships between conservationists and governments, the private sector, and civil society. Members of the Pacific Island Roundtable collaborated in the drafting of a report on the progress of the Action Strategy to be presented at the 8th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas. The report highlights the work done on conservation and suggests recommendations on the contents of the strategy and how to improve operations of the Roundtable. Progress was

difficult to assess because of the breadth of the objectives encompassing the environment, economy and society with 77 targets. The report recommends a narrowing of focus to conservation and reducing the number of objectives and targets. PBIF will continue to be engaged in this strategy and provide data management support.

Global Taxonomy Initiative

In 2004, 60+ regional representatives convened in Wellington, NZ and generated 15 high-priority bilateral/multilateral projects aimed at increasing the depth and capacity for taxonomic knowledge in the Asia/Oceania region. As a co-convenor of the workshop, PBIF has been tracking the progress of each project over the three year term and is pleased to report significant progress has been made towards regional objectives.

As of August 2007, of the 15 projects, four have been funded and six others have either been submitted for funding or report significant progress through related projects. Given the limited funding and considerable work-load on all members involved, this is fantastic progress and clear evidence of everyone's commitment to overcome such resource limitations.

PACINET

The Pacific Island Partnership Network for Taxonomy or PACINET is the Pacific regional LOOP of BioNET International. PACINET is a key component in further understanding the regions biological resources by improving taxonomic capacity, human resources and regional knowledge. PBIF and PACINET have formed a partnership to complement and strengthen each respective program of work. PBIF staff provide technical support, maintain the PACINET website and are helping to develop a database of taxonomic experts for the Pacific Islands region.

Contact Us! www.pbif.org
Mark Fornwall: mark_fornwall@usgs.gov
Allison Baum: abaum@usgs.gov
Rhyn Davies: rdavies@usgs.gov

 PACIFIC SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

