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Internet Reviews: The Global Biodiversity Information Facility

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The Global Biodiversity Information Facility.

Access: <http://www.gbif.org>.

In 1999 the Biodiversity Informatics Subgroup of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recommended the creation of a single and unified utility to make the world's vast biodiversity data freely accessible via the Internet. The Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) was formally established in 2001, when the OECD science ministers endorsed this idea and participating governments entered into a memorandum of understanding, thus creating this facility. In 12 years this effort has grown into a worldwide data collection utility of staggering proportions, with 52 participating countries, dozens of participating scientific organizations, nodes in countries around the globe, and, most importantly, a stunning collection of species information with no rival.

As of this review date, the combined facilities provide a single unified access point to more than 417 million individual occurrences of organisms. Of these, more than 357 million are georeferenced and can be mapped and analyzed via longitude and latitude coordinates. Data and datasets are usually available for download, manipulation, and geospatial analysis. The GBIF Backbone Taxonomy contains 1,426,888 species occurrences of named organisms, based on three centuries of exploration and observation. There are, additionally, 14,684 datasets contained within the facility from 574 global publishers.

The three most commonly used searches appear to be by species, country, or dataset, and initially determining how to limit searches may challenge the new user. A search for occurrences of the North American Clark's Nutcracker, for example, retrieves nearly 32,000 records, more

than 30,000 of which are georeferenced. One may then limit by a broad variety of filters: latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates, using a clickable world map, specific country or publishing country, year or date last modified, collection date, or even by altitude. The description section of an individual entry for Clark's Nutcracker then provides textual summary information on the species, along with details on food, nesting, range, and unique characteristics of the species. Entries also include links to the web-based *Encyclopedia of Life*, the *Catalogue of Life*, and the Biodiversity Heritage Library.

Because of the dizzying breadth and depth of data and the many paths one may take to locate species information, this utility may appear a daunting task at first glance. GBIF, however, provides a stunning and unparalleled view into the vast populations of species on our planet unmatched by any other Web utility, and will appeal to serious students, faculty instructors, and research scientists working in the life sciences who seek information on species populations and concentrations.—*John Creech, Central Washington University, John.Creech@cwu.edu*

The Newberry. Access: <http://www.newberry.org/>.

The Newberry, Chicago's independent research library, was founded in 1887. It is open to the public, free of charge, and provides a well-informed staff to assist researchers and the general public in their search for information. The library's collection of rare books, maps, music manuscripts, and other printed materials spans six centuries and many of the materials are well represented in digital form on the library's website.

The website provides an excellent introduction to the library and its collections. At the top of the opening page is a central display that rotates between several highlights with links for further information. On the left side is a general menu directing the user to public events occurring at the library and the right side provides links to areas of frequent interest, including

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genealogy research, fellowships, and teacher resources. Below the opening center display are the links to the core collections. These include “Manuscripts and Archives,” “Genealogy and Local History,” “American Indian and Indigenous Studies,” and “Maps, Travel and Exploration.” The links take the researcher deeper into the site and open up a vast number of resources based on the collections in the library. “Digital Resources” is especially rich, taking the user to digital images from collections such as the Ayer Art Collection or exhibits like “Ballistics and Politics: Military Architecture Books at the Newberry.”

“Manuscripts and Archives” provides information on collection highlights and finding aid resources for over 15,000 linear feet of materials. This section does not seem as intuitive as others, but persistence will help the user find sufficient introductory material. Of course, as with many other archives, the most interesting materials are only available when the researcher visits the physical site, but a researcher is able to discover what materials are available in a collection before heading to Chicago and the Newberry.

Part of the Newberry mission statement says that the library staff promotes and provides “effective use” of the collections, “fostering research, teaching, publication, and life-long learning, as well as civic engagement.” This site is a useful tool in promoting the resources of this library and allowing users access to information and images they might not be able to visit in person.—*Rose Marie Walter, Willamette University, rwalter@willamette.edu*

The Society Pages. Access: <http://thesocietypages.org>.

Established by the University of Minnesota’s Department of Sociology in partnership with the publisher W.W. Norton & Company Inc., The Society Pages (TSP) provides an abundance of social science information and knowledge. Students, professors, researchers, sociologists, and others interested in the social sciences will find this site a gold mine of substantial research and discourse.

This social sciences “hub” provides current and thought-provoking articles, visual and mul-

timedia materials, classroom activities, blogs, and other resources for the study of sociology. Although academicians write the documents on TSP, they are jargon-free and appropriate for novice researchers.

TSP is well organized and navigation for the website is clearly labeled and includes several key sections. “Features” contains edited and peer-reviewed white papers written by scholars taking a particular social scientific viewpoint on an issue or topic. In addition, this section includes edited special features articles and commentary.

In the weekly “Editors’ Desk” section, editors-in-chief Doug Hartmann and Chris Ugen outline and highlight the latest resources added to TSP, as well as provide their own remarks about social science in current news. “Roundtables” consists of top social scientists and graduate students discussing key topics in the news headlines, such as mass violence and the media and international criminal justice. Edited by students at the University of Minnesota, “Citings and Sightings” summarizes social science research in the media and in sociology literature in a succinct way, making this section a practical tool for anyone who wants to stay current on hot topics in the social sciences.

One of the site’s most popular features, “Office Hours,” contains podcasts with social scientists discussing their research. The “Reading List” and “There’s Research on That,” contain additional links to classical and new social science research. “Teaching TSP” is a blog about teaching sociology and includes practical materials about classroom syllabi, readings, active learning exercises, and other resources that can be used to teach sociology.

The site offers ample opportunities for users to leave comments and engage with each other and the scholars who are featured on the site. TSP is highly recommended. The scope of issues covered and variety of resources make this site a useful resource for students, professors, and anyone interested in sociological research. It is a fantastic resource for discovering social science research and a useful tool for the classroom.—*Colleen Lougen, SUNY New Paltz, lougenc@zmail.newpaltz.edu* 