



RAPID DIGITISATION PROJECT

Deploying Volunteers to Digitise Fauna Collections

Australian museums house many millions of fauna specimens encompassing collections as diverse as mammalogy, marine invertebrates, parasitology and biological tissue collections. Together with the information gathered by curators and scientists over the last 150 years or more, these collections represent an important resource for the documentation of the global composition, identity, spatial distribution, ecology, systematics and history of known life forms. Collections are the raw research material for revealing the patterns, processes and causes of evolutionary and ecological phenomena. Access to these collections has in more recent years been facilitated by their digitisation and delivery online but the rate of information capture has been constrained by the capacity of institutions to deploy staff and provide them with the necessary infrastructure to digitise content rapidly and efficiently.

With the assistance of the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) and coordinated by the Council of Heads of Australian Fauna Collections (CHAFC), the Australian Museum (AM) and South Australian Museum (SAMA) have been developing rapid digitisation programs that utilise the services of volunteers under the supervision of dedicated project coordinators. These projects have allowed the two museums to develop and test complimentary programs that explore rapid digitisation methodologies from individual holotypes to bulk processing of whole drawers of terrestrial invertebrate specimens. Both museums have developed procedures, policies and documentation covering volunteer recruitment and training, imaging techniques and processes, data capture and quality assurance as well as ongoing assessments of imaging equipment, real-time use and fitness for purpose.

The project has made it possible for SAMA and AM to investigate and purchase high quality digital imaging equipment and conduct assessments of the compatibility of existing data and images with the standards necessary to make online publication and sharing possible. The employment of project managers has also made it possible to explore best practice in this area and to recruit, train and evaluate volunteers to undertake the work. Both museums have unearthed other challenges within their institutions as the projects have matured. The knowledge and experience gathered through these projects has proven invaluable for planning future digitisation activities and will inform digital imaging strategies well into the future. SAMA was also awarded funds towards the establishment of secure data storage which will ensure all multimedia assets will be safely stored and freely accessible within and beyond the organisation.

SAMA's project has focussed on generating high quality, high resolution images of individual terrestrial invertebrate holotypes, for in-house use and online publication. The project has also facilitated rapid databasing of those holotypes that had not previously been documented.

AM chose to explore and develop methods and technologies for engaging volunteers in digitisation and registration of museum specimens and their labels. The AM project focused on

the entomology collections because they are a big collection that is largely undigitised, yet lends itself to a volunteer driven image based digitising process.

A suite of resources ranging from volunteer handbooks to imaging methodologies have been generated by these projects and are available online:

<http://www.australianmuseum.net.au/Rapid-Digitisation-Project>

<http://www.samuseum.sa.gov.au/support/volunteers/museum-volunteers>

The development and implementation of volunteer based rapid digitisation programs at AM and SAMA have proven to be enormously successful not only in terms of enhanced data capture but also in informing future implementation strategies for the collections sector. Critical to the success of these programs has been the development and deployment of sound methodologies against agreed standards under the supervision of dedicated project coordinators.