Digital Preservation, Mobile Access and Interdisciplinary Collaboration

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Connecting Content, an IMLS National Leadership Grant

• “A collaboration to link field notes to specimens and published literature.”
• Harvard University Herbaria
• Missouri Botanical Garden
• Harvard University Museum of Comparative Zoology
• New York Botanical Garden
• Smithsonian Museum of Natural History
• California Academy of Sciences
Creating digital objects, collecting metadata

The first 2 years...

• Field notebooks scanned (BHL/IA)
• Archives and library metadata collected (BHL)
• Biological specimens imaged (EOL/GBIF)
• Biodiversity metadata created (GBIF)
How to Connect?

• I started as Academy tech lead in year three, then took over as PI in year four.
• Working with metadata from 6 institutions, created by 3 separate disciplines, housed in 4+ separate aggregate datasets online (not counting institutional databases).
• Images sometimes linked to metadata, sometimes not (and sometimes available only within institutional network).
• Began with a survey of available metadata, and a survey of researchers/potential users.
Automation?

- API: “Application Programming Interface”
- JSON: “JavaScript Object Notation”
- Tried to generated automated links between GBIF records and BHL content.
- Metadata hurdles aplenty!
  - Locality data handled differently in different disciplines.
  - Metadata interpreted differently between institutions.
  - APIs each came with their own quirks.
Changing Gears

• So what worked?
  – Scientific names: common among all records, and a controlled vocabulary (mostly).

• What are our strengths?
  – Archives
  – Research
  – Citizen Science, iNaturalist

• (Archives + Research + Citizen Science) * IMLS Funding = mobile app
Biocaching
A platform for future projects

• Expand BHL integration
• Strengthen the “field notes concept”
• Gamify the app further
• Report on findings and update the specimen record
Thank you!

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