

## The colour of biodiversity data

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Over the recent decade, the importance of information about biodiversity for the management of marine and coastal resources has increasingly been recognised. It has become evident that the model of sustainable development cannot function unless biodiversity aspects are fully taken into account in the process on the same footing as physical, chemical, and socio-economic data. Moreover, integrated models need to be developed including all these aspects, thus allowing forecasting of natural changes and prediction of the effects of human measures and intervention.

In order to improve our knowledge about biodiversity, large scale global and regional projects and programmes have been established, and have received ample funding. These include the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), the Census of Marine Life (CoML) and the European Network for Biodiversity Information (ENBI).

Changes in biodiversity, both increases and decreases, often are linked with changes in the physical and chemical environment. Therefore an interpretation of changes and trends in biodiversity requires an adequate access to environmental data. Moreover, an integration of the data from these different sources is needed to allow for an integrated analysis.

In most countries, the biodiversity community is quite remote from the community dealing with the traditional oceanographic sciences, and contacts are rare. As a consequence, the developments of procedures and tools for data and information management in both communities have taken place along separate tracks. The current trend towards integrated resource management implies the need for an integrated access to and management of biodiversity and other ocean data with dedicated tools and procedures.

ETI, the UNESCO Expertcentre for Taxonomic Identifications, has over ten years of experience in the management of biodiversity information. Besides a range of more than 60 CD-ROM products on various aspects of biodiversity, ETI has developed several on-line products, such as the World Biodiversity Database and the World Taxonomists Database. Furthermore, ETI has established a worldwide network of over 1500 biodiversity experts, of whom most have contributed to one or several of ETI's products. ETI has developed a series of ICT tools for biodiversity data management, that allow the users to build digital biodiversity data archives following standardised procedures and including a rigid quality control. ETI regularly provides training in the application of these tools. Finally, since December 2001, ETI hosts and supports the Netherlands Node for GBIF.

The paper will present the background, history and achievements of ETI in more detail, and will highlight its various products and services. The paper will also provide a more extended overview of current projects and programmes in marine and coastal biodiversity. The conference forms a unique and welcome opportunity for an exchange of experiences with data management tools and procedures. This might lead to a closer cooperation, which would definitely be in the interest of the final user.