
PROPE-taxon - Web Accessible Taxonomic Expertise in MARBEF: PROviding a e-Platform for the European Taxonomists

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PROPE-taxon is an RMP which intends to create an e-Platform for the European taxonomists, based on existing technologies.

In the period May 2006 – May 2007, the main focus was on: (a) the development and publication of a questionnaire in order to collect specialists' opinion on what kind of information should be delivered by the portal; (b) the final choice of the system and of the web infrastructure. Additionally, it was decided that the PROPE-taxon Consortium should meet at least annually, during the GA MarBEF meetings. These meetings would enable members to discuss the various emerging issues and to make decisions on the very important ones without spending much of their budget. The feeling shared by all members was that resources should be spent to develop the system and web infrastructure and, most importantly to populate the system, rather than to travel. Links with other running Projects with similar interests have been established in Europe (e.g. EDIT, LifeWeb, Species 2000, Europe, NBI, Fauna Europaea, Algaebase) and in the USA (Encyclopedia of Life - EOL).

The results of the information accumulated from the answers to the questionnaire are now in the form of a formal Report, which will be presented to the General Assembly meeting: (a) so far scientists from 18 Countries in Europe and overseas have provided information to the questionnaire; (b) most of them were taxonomists but other specialists are also included such as geneticists and molecular taxonomists, and scientists working on Aquaculture, GIS and Conservation; (c) most of the scientists who visited the questionnaire value as high the information on the description, taxonomic identification keys and biogeographic information although many think that ecological information (e.g. habitat preferences) should be also included in taxonomic portals; (d) most of the scientists are well aware of technical terms such as wikipedia and Life Science Identifiers (LSIDs) and a few of them are also aware of the modern terms of Semantic web and Tagging; (e) scientists still use mostly portals with literature resources and portals with species information, such as names (e.g. ERMS, Species 2000, ITIS), distributions (e.g. OBIS) and descriptions (e.g. Fishbase, Algalbase, CLEMAM); (f) an "ideal" taxonomic portal should include, according to the answers delivered so far, mostly literature resources and links, distribution data and maps, identification keys and reliable classification.

The area of computer aided taxonomy (or cybertaxonomy) is a fast evolving field of research and development. A number of unexpected deliverables for the PROPE-taxon RMP have thus been achieved during the last year. These deliverables are:

- (i) A PhD student (Sarah Faulwetter) has been appointed in HCMR and she is currently working on the interface between the PROPE-taxon and the EOL, as part of her studies;
- (ii) The student has recently (December 2006) visited the Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL) in Woods Hole (USA) and explored the opportunity to link at least some of the main actions of the RMP to those adopted by the Project they developed, under the EOL Project. The latter is particularly important for saving resources on one hand and on the other as being part of the largest running Project in the domain on the Planet. All major organizations and initiatives, such as GBIF, Species 2000, International Code for Zoological Nomenclature, Fish Base, and other EU funded Projects (e.g. EDIT) are currently linked to the activities of the EOL. The benefits for the PROPE-taxon are considerable, mainly in having access to software needed for the development of the PROPE-taxon modules and in taking part in the development of the architecture of the new system, under EoL. Also, access to resources will be largely improved by linking to such a large network of Projects and initiatives.
- (iii) PROPE-taxon has been represented during the first meeting, *informatics*, of the EoL (08-09/02/2007);
- (iv) The *Names Summit* meeting of the EOL (19-20/02/2007) has been hosted by the HCMR, in Crete; report on this meeting is on the EOL website;
- (v) PROPE-taxon has also been represented in the EDIT WP6 Workshop in London (26-27/04/2007), where some important links have been established. During this Workshop, another technical meeting has been suggested to be held in Crete, in the late summer or autumn 2007.