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International Informatics Collaboration
Creates Latest Encyclopedia of Life Platform

Center for Library and Informatics at the Marine Biological Laboratory plays central role in development of new version of Encyclopedia of Life website

Woods Hole, MA – October 18, 2011 – The Encyclopedia of Life (EOL), a sponsor of the 2011 Biodiversity Informatics Standards/Taxonomic Databases Working Group (TDWG) conference, presented details today on the latest version of EOL to conference attendees. This new site aggregates data from nearly two hundred content partners using tools that gather, organize, and present biodiversity content in an easy-to-use, modern interface localized in English, Arabic and Spanish. Representing EOL were members of the EOL Biodiversity Informatics Group (BIG) from the Center for Library and Informatics at the Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL), an EOL cornerstone institution in Woods Hole, MA.

As part of MBL's Center for Library and Informatics, BIG is responsible for creating and administering the software that powers EOL. The Group's infrastructure aggregates data from hundreds of sites into species pages in EOL. The Center provides state-of-the art development facilities at the Marine Biological Laboratory that allow the team to follow best practices in software product management. The EOL website itself is served from a modern data center operated by Harvard University, an EOL partner institution.

Over the past 18 months, the BIG team partnered with the professional design firm Hashrocket along with informatics experts at the Library of Alexandria in Egypt and at Harvard University to design, develop and deliver the new infrastructure for EOLv2. Throughout the development process, this international team made use of virtual environments to track progress and work collaboratively.

"By collaborating with colleagues at the Library of Alexandria, Harvard University, and Hashrocket, we were able to build a new platform that meets the diverse needs of our users," said Nathan Wilson, Director of the Biodiversity Informatics Group. "The work we have done together will serve as a model for EOL's global hosting infrastructure as we keep pace with the growing demand for this online biodiversity resource around the world."

Founded in 1888 as the Marine Biological Laboratory

EOL runs on an Open Source Ruby on Rails web application framework combined with a MySQL database management system. The Encyclopedia uses the Solr platform for fast searching and a modern, internally-developed content delivery system for handling large media. As part of EOL's commitment to global access, all software is open source, available for re-use, and stored on the code-sharing site GitHub. The EOLv2 website also was developed using a strategy of "progressive enhancement," a method for web design that maximizes the accessibility of the site.

Gary Borisy, MBL President and Director, is thrilled that this global collaboration is helping make large scientific data sets available to both experts and the general public. "The Encyclopedia of Life is making fundamental advances in bioinformatics and I am pleased that MBL can support this important work," he remarked.

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The Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL) is dedicated to scientific discovery and improving the human condition through research and education in biology, biomedicine, and environmental science. Founded in 1888 in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, the MBL is an independent, nonprofit corporation.

The Encyclopedia of Life (EOL) operates as an ongoing collaboration of individuals and organizations who share the vision to provide global access to knowledge about life on Earth. EOL is supported by founding sponsors the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Additional support comes from EOL member institutions and donations from around the world.