

The Museum of Natural History, University of the Philippines Los Baños, and the Philippine Water Bug Inventory Project

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Abstract

The Museum of Natural History of the University of the Philippines Los Baños is an important repository for biological specimens, especially arthropods, in the Philippines. It supports biodiversity research in the Philippines by international cooperations like the Philippine Water Bug Inventory Project. The establishment of Philippine collections provides Philippine scientists with reference specimens for future studies.

Key words: Philippine Water Bug Inventory Project, museum, Los Baños, Philippines, biodiversity, arthropod repository, documentation, research

The Museum of Natural History (MNH) belongs to the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB), which is situated at the foothills of the Mount Makiling, a "classical" research place about 65 road kilometres South of Manila. The museum is a center of documentation as well as a repository of biological specimens. It is a Philippine center of biological research, information, and education. Its role parallels that of a library for written records.

The MNH was established in 1976. It was organized out of the staff and physical resources of the existing collections of the different colleges of UPLB. In 1993 the MNH managed to acquire its own building for its integrated exhibits and offices. The MNH has more than 200 000 biological specimens; more than half of them compose the Entomological Collection, which includes insects, mites, and other arthropods. A good number of sample specimens is on long-term exhibit at the MNH building at the College of Forestry campus. Because of space limitation, the rest of the collections are still housed in other units of UPLB.

The self-image of the MNH is that of a national research institution of international importance. Therefore, for several years, the MNH has encouraged foreign scientists to cooperate: to work on its present collections (identifications) and to enrich them by additional samplings and donations of reference specimens. The establishment of good reference collections seems to be most important for present and future activities of Philippine and guest scientists. At least for entomological collections, the MNH is presently the scientific center in the Philippines.

The Philippine-Austrian cooperation on aquatic and semiaquatic Heteroptera (Philippine Water Bug Inventory Project) began already in 1993. Research contracts are concluded annually. The cooperation includes Philippine and Austrian scientists, but expertise of an international group of entomologists is necessary. Several field trips have been carried

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out. Half of the new samplings, including the holotypes, are deposited in MNH. It is important that, for the first time, a nearly complete set of Philippine species of a certain insect group is deposited in our country and enables easy access for future Philippine research.

Because of the lack of national funds, a more intensive integration of Philippine scientists in international projects like the Philippine Water Bug Inventory Project is desirable.