



Linnaeus Link

Project Update

Carol Gokce. The Natural History Museum. October 2002

Updated by Cathy Broad September 2004

Project Background and General Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Linnaeus Link Project is an international collaboration aimed at producing a union catalogue devoted to the work of the great eighteenth-century naturalist-physician, Carl Linnaeus (Carl von Linné; 1707-1778), supported by web-based descriptions of significant Linnaean collections world-wide. This work will support the dissemination of Linnaeus' ideas and will provide a significant scholarly resource and educational tool.

The Linnaeus Link Project is supported by a consortium of partners led by the Natural History Museum (NHM) in London. The partners are:

- The Natural History Museum (London)
- The British Library
- Danmarks Natur- og Laegevidenskabelige Bibliotek (Copenhagen)
- Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation (Pittsburgh, PA)
- Kungliga Vetenskapsakademien (Stockholm)
- Linnean Society of London
- Stockholms universitetsbibliotek
- Uppsala universitetsbibliotek

As part of its early work, the Project will identify other institutions with a significant interest in this development. These will be invited to contribute to the Project as associate members.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The Project's fundamental aim is to create a comprehensive catalogue of publications by Linnaeus and his students prior to 1831, reflecting the holdings of major research collections world-wide. These works are important today, both as practical tools to support scientists in the identification of animals, plants, rocks, fossils and minerals and by providing an important record of eighteenth-century science and culture. The cut-off date has been set at 1831 as this marked the end of the hand-press era. Post-1831 works are included as a separate stage of the Project.

2. Organisation and Partnership Arrangements

The Project is managed by the consortium of partners listed in section 1.1, formally constituted by a Memorandum of Agreement.

2.1 Project Team

Day-to-day running of the Project is the responsibility of the Project Cataloguer, whose position is funded by the Linnean Society of London as a two-year secondment. This work is supervised by the Project Co-ordinator. Post-1831 items are being catalogued on a part-time basis by another NHM cataloguer. Together with the Head of Cataloguing and the Electronic Services Librarian, these constitute the Project Team, who meet monthly to discuss standards, policies and problems.

The NHM provides a co-ordination role, which, until recently, was filled by Carol Gokce, Collection Development Manager in the General Library, taking on the role of Project Co-ordinator. Carol has now left on a temporary secondment, and the Interim Project Co-ordinator is the Museum's Head of Cataloguing. Five percent of this post is committed to the Project for its duration, as is that of the Electronic Services Librarian.

In addition, the NHM will provide technical support to enable the creation of the web resource of Linnaean collection descriptions and to undertake an analysis of the technical architecture required to move the Project beyond the first phase. A further staff member will be recruited to develop the system for the technical architecture of the catalogue. This post will also be funded by the Linnean Society and located at the NHM.

2.2 Steering Group

A steering group, comprising contact representatives from each of the consortium partners, oversees the progress of the Project and has responsibility for policy decisions. The Project Co-ordinator reports on progress to the Steering Group at each of its meetings, which are held annually.

2.3 Advisory Committee

Further input on the direction of the Project will be taken from an advisory committee, composed of representatives of the user community. This would meet at least once a year.

3. Methodology

3.1 Timetable

The Project will run for two years. The major tasks of the Project have commenced, using contributed resources from the consortium partners. This includes establishing a preliminary web presence. Extensions to the website and the setting up of a core catalogue will proceed in parallel. Extension of the core database to a full union catalogue will begin once a critical mass of titles has been reached. Work on the core catalogue and website should be completed in two years. It is anticipated that

further records will continue to be added beyond that date and within the resources of contributing institutions.

3.2 Survey

A large-scale survey is underway, conducted by Charlotte Tancin of the Hunt Institute, to identify and gather statistics on significant Linnaean collections world-wide. This is being conducted by means of a two-part questionnaire, distributed to institutions identified by the consortium partners. A brief introductory section enables institutions to respond with an expression of interest or very briefly if they have no relevant collections. The second section asks for detailed statistics and summary descriptions of Linnaean materials held and their current state of cataloguing.

The holdings survey will fill several purposes – it will identify possible associate institutions; enable the compilation of holdings statistics; and generate the collection level descriptions that will be a key element of the Project website.

To date, 400 survey forms have been sent out and responses from 55 institutions have been posted on the Project website. Statistics and descriptions are available from the preliminary survey. Considerable effort will be required to analyse and compile statistical data, to create and edit descriptions and to render both in a format suited to web presentation.

3.3 Web Design and Development

A Project website has been established at <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/library/linn/>. At present it contains background information on the Project and documentation, including an information sheet, a PowerPoint presentation and funding information. The survey form and results are included, as are digitised versions of Soulsby's bibliography¹ and Sherborn's Index², and links to other Linnaean resources. In time, the website will include:

- a searchable database of collection level descriptions of all significant collections surveyed, subject to permission from participating institutions;
- summary statistics in tabular form of Linnaean holdings world-wide, derived from the survey results; and
- the union catalogue.

¹ Soulsby, B. H. *A Catalogue of the works of Linnaeus (and publications more immediately relating thereto) preserved in the libraries of the British Museum (Bloomsbury) and the British Museum (Natural History)*. Second edition. London, 1933.)

² Sherborn, C. Davies *An Index to the authors (other than Linnaeus) mentioned in the catalogue of the works of Linnaeus preserved in the libraries of the British Museum*. London, 1936.

3.4 Digitisation

The main elements of the digitisation programme are navigable, machine-readable versions of Soulsby's bibliography and Sherborn's Index. These works have been digitised by the NHM as part of its contribution to the Project. Digitisation of several key works of Linnaeus is planned.

3.5 Core Catalogue

The core catalogue will comprise a bibliographic database of detailed title records, based on Linnaean materials at the NHM, in MARC21 format, catalogued using DCRB³ guidelines (which follow the AACR2⁴ and ISBD (A)⁵ standards) and *Guidelines for the Cataloguing of Rare Books*⁶, searchable via the web using a variety of standard OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue) search options. The catalogue will support the import and export of records via the Z39.50 search and retrieve protocol or XML (Extensible Markup Language).

Population of the database is being undertaken by the Project Cataloguer, who commenced this task in January 2004. The core collection will be based on the Linnaean holdings of the NHM, which correspond approximately to the works listed by Soulsby. It is estimated that this initial database will contain approximately 4,000 records. Some records already exist and need only the addition of copy-specific information. Some items have been previously catalogued, but very briefly – often only author, title and publication details were given – and need more extensive amplification.

Many works have been catalogued only on cards, which have not been converted into electronic format. These need to be catalogued from scratch. Where they exist, records available from online bibliographic services, such as RLIN and OCLC, are imported as a basis for catalogue entries, with additional information taken from the book itself, as well as copy-specific information.

Given the complexity of the material and to ensure quality of records, an average cataloguing rate of ten items per day is the target. Based on 210 productive days per working year the core catalogue will be completed in two years. Further details of the pilot cataloguing project conducted at the NHM, on

³ *Descriptive Cataloguing of Rare Books, (DCRB)* 2nd ed. prepared by a Working Group under the auspices of Office for Descriptive Cataloguing Policy, Library of Congress and Bibliographic Standards Committee of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, Association of College and Research Libraries, American Library Association. (Washington: Library of Congress, 1991.)

⁴ *AACR 2* (Ottawa : Canadian Library Association ; London : Library Association ; Chicago : American Library Association, 1988.)

⁵ *ISBD (A): International Standard Bibliographic Description for Older Monographic Publications (Antiquarian)*, 2nd ed. (Munich ; London ; New York ; Paris : Saur, 1991.)

⁶ *Guidelines for the Cataloguing of Rare Books* (London : Library Association Rare Books Group, 1997.)

which these figures are based, and the agreed Linnaeus Link cataloguing methodology, are available on request.

In the first six months of the Project, over 400 records were either created or upgraded to the Project standard.

3.6 Union Catalogue

Location information will be added to the core NHM collection, corresponding to 'duplicate' holdings elsewhere. Provenance information relating to individual copies will be included where available in order to aid research into the dissemination and reception of Linnaean ideas. Additional title entries will also be created for materials not represented in the NHM collection.

The union catalogue may be a physical union or a virtual Z39.50 clump. An early deliverable of the Project will be an assessment of the technical architecture most appropriate for the Project. This decision will be taken on the basis of a technical analysis of the compatibility of local catalogues within the consortium. Technical support will be provided by the NHM to undertake a full analysis.

4. Monitoring and Dissemination

4.1 Monitoring

The quality of the catalogue records is assured by the NHM's chief cataloguer at 5% x 1 FTE. The Project Team holds monthly check-point meetings. The progress of the Project is monitored by the Steering Group, based on regular reports from the Project Co-ordinator.

More general evaluative input will be gathered from the Project Advisory Committee and through other targeted activities, including the provision of feedback facilities on the Project website, the collection and monitoring of access statistics for the site in general and the union catalogue in particular, and regular statistical checks on the growth of the union catalogue.

4.2 Publicity and Dissemination

At a local level, the Project is promoted within member institutions through email communications and reports of work completed. The main route for wider dissemination of Project information is the website. Attention will be drawn to the site at key stages in the Project through announcements on relevant email discussion lists.

Other promotional activity to date has included:

- presentations given by the Project Cataloguer at two conferences in 2004, and a web version of the presentation has been included on the Project website;
- short talks to a number of groups of librarianship students visiting the NHM;
- articles written by the Project Cataloguer have appeared in the journal of CILIP's Cataloguing and Indexing Group and the *Waterhouse Times*, the staff magazine of the NHM.

Further articles are scheduled for publication in *The Linnean* and the *Newsletter of the Society for the History of Natural History*. Other opportunities for publication are being explored.

The Project will consider a major international conference to be held at the Linnean Society of London to publicise, and increase access to, the results of the Project. This will be the object of a separate funding proposal as appropriate.