

Outside the box; Specimens of the Malacology Department, at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology

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The Department of Malacology at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology (MCZ) dates back to 1860, with the purchase of land and freshwater snail specimens from J.G. Anthony, who later joined the staff of the MCZ in 1865 as its first curator. Today, with our newest curator, Gonzalo Giribet, the department continues to grow and integrate new methodologies of specimen curation.

The MCZ's publicly available database, MCZbase, archives specimen data through the use of unique catalog numbers which correspond to our physical collection of over 500,000 specimen lots. We increasingly strive to capture, and make publicly available the many pieces of specimen data that relates to a cataloged lot. Each record, and thereby each specimen, extends beyond the information contained within a single box on a single shelf in the museum. Examples of this extended data include, but are not limited to: digital specimen data, morphological data, field images, associated microbial communities, and biotic interactions. These extensions, including the physical specimen and it's related pieces of data comprise the extended specimen. Through the use of our customizable database, MCZbase and it's collaborators have been able to integrate iterative levels of extensions through interconnected resources. Thinking broadly about what the future holds for the mollusk collection in the Museum of Comparative Zoology will ensure that we are able to continue to integrate unique specimen attributes.

