

Reorganizing the Systematics of 6 Million Herbarium Specimens

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After a fusion of four herbaria (Leiden, Utrecht, Wageningen and Amsterdam) at the Naturalis Biodiversity Center, a move to a permanent and satisfactory building was urgent. This involved the move and decontamination of almost 6 million specimens. A unique opportunity presented itself: update the order of the Leiden boxes from the Dalla Torre & Harms (1907) taxonomic system to the APGIV (2016) system. In addition, the Utrecht collections could be changed from an alphabetical APGII (2003) to reflect the new Leiden systematics.

Preparations started a year before the move which was planned for January 2019. Peter van Welzen, a taxonomic researcher at Naturalis, passed each of the 55,000 Leiden and 17,500 Utrecht boxes and assigned every genus to its current family. Using Peter's list and his notes on the boxes, we could begin a picklist of our own to prepare for the move. Coloured cards indicated where families broke into multiples, or where they were integrated into one. Our list was the backbone for the next step: placing stickers on the boxes denoting the new order. Finally, post-it notes with an easy to follow start/stop system were used to communicate the mammoth task of getting the roughly 600 individual sections of between 2 and 2,000 boxes onto the pallets into the taxonomically correct order. To round off the project, the BRAHMS database has been changed to reflect the APGIV system, adding the new family codes. At the time of writing, the move has been completed and the Leiden and Utrecht herbaria are in working order.

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