

The Evolution of Databasing at the INHS Insect Collection: Lessons Learned From Migrating Three Decades of Digital Data Into TaxonWorks

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The Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS) Insect Collection recently migrated from several legacy collection management systems and into TaxonWorks, a biodiversity data management system developed by the SpeciesFile group and its collaborators at INHS. The migration process had several immediate outcomes. First, it unified semantics over five separate databases that were throttling collection management. Second, new interfaces illuminated past issues arising from inconsistent use, conflicting goals, and poorly constrained standards. Third, the migration itself introduced issues originating from the complex mapping of old to new data models. Once the migration was in place, we had the opportunity to quickly iterate on improvements in collections management workflows in conjunction with developers of TaxonWorks. Adoption of the new system allowed us to fully absorb digital assets, including several hundred thousand images and collection objects in collection management “limbo”. We discuss how to manage such a move, what we could have done better, and how valuable the relationship between museum professionals and behind-the-scenes coders can be. As we move closer to recording our millionth digital accession, we are excited to imagine the possibilities that a flexible and evolving biodiversity workbench means for innovation within collections digitization and downstream uses of digital data.
