

**1201 New York Ave. Suite 420
Washington D.C. 20005 USA**

Upcoming Events/Meetings:

AIFRB 50th
Anniversary Symposium
February 13-15
Seattle, WA

USNC Spring Meeting
TBD
Washington, DC

CoML All-Program
Meeting
November 14-16
Auckland, New Zealand



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The USNC Meets in Corpus Christi, Texas



The U.S. National Committee (USNC) of the Census of Marine Life (CoML) recently held its biannual meeting November 14-16, 2006 at the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies (HRI) in Corpus Christi, TX. The meeting was hosted by USNC member, Dr. Wes Tunnell, who serves as the Associate Director for HRI. This served as the first meet-

-ing chaired by Dr. Andy Rosenberg, taking over for Dr. Daphne Fautin, chair of the USNC since the program's inception in 2002. Fortunately, Daphne agreed to remain as a member of the USNC. Special presentations were made by Dr. Darryl Felder, who discussed the Biodiversity of the Gulf of Mexico project, and Dr. Tom Shirley informed the Committee about WWII shipwrecks in the northern Gulf of Mexico as surrogates for artificial, deep-water reefs project. Members of the USNC were also joined in their discussions by representatives of the US Regional OBIS Node, the Sloan Foundation, NOAA's office of Ocean Exploration, the University of Texas Marine Science Institute, the Mote Marine Laboratory, CORE, and the CoML Secretariat.

The major theme of the meeting was determining the future goals for the USNC and the lasting legacies of the CoML program within the United States. The Committee reviewed the 2007-2010 outreach strategy for engaging stakeholder interest as a means to help accomplish these goals. Mark Fornwall, of the US Regional OBIS Node, recommended that the USNC become a more active participant in the development and operation of OBIS USA by helping guide the node's direction, focus, and capacity as the project becomes more operational. CORE President RADM (ret) Richard West spoke to the Committee about Ocean Observing as one of the most important issues in ocean policy today, and suggested the USNC become more involved. The USNC followed suit, as the 2007 Workshop will focus on the Census of Marine life as the biological/biodiversity component of IOOS.

In addition to all the hard work, the USNC enjoyed a tour of the new, state-of-the-art Harte Research Institute and a field trip to Padre Island, where Wes Tunnell educated the committee about the rich history of the Island.

The next meeting of the USNC will be held this spring, in Washington DC.



USNC Holds Successful Workshop on Marine Biodiversity

On September 11-13 2006, the US Census of Marine Life National Committee hosted a three day workshop in Washington, DC entitled "Approaches for Researching the Roles of Marine and Coastal Biodiversity in Maintaining Ecosystem Service." More than 70 scientists and program managers from all over the US and Canada gathered to discuss the effect of marine diversity as a predictor of ecosystem function. Participants agreed that there are evolutionary / ecological differences in diversity among systems that affect ecosystem resilience, in particular low diversity systems are at risk because of low functional redundancy, whereas high diversity within a system results in more ecosystem resilience. Additionally, biogenic habitat complexity plays a key

role in determining biodiversity and ecosystem functioning, specifically the extent a single dominant species/ top predator plays a role in the regulation of food webs. The workshop concluded that although additional research and analysis is needed to map and determine the correlation between biodiversity and marine ecosystem management, it's clear that biodiversity is an essential factor in recognizing and maintaining the health of the oceans.

The workshop featured plenary talks by Drs. Diana Wall (Colorado St. University), David Allan (University of Michigan), Jay Stachowicz (University of California, Davis), Elliott Norse (The Marine Conservation Biology Institute), Michael Beck (The Nature Conser-

vancy), and Steve Palumbi (Stanford University). NOAA Assistant Administrator Jack Dunnigan also addressed the workshop participants during a dinner held Monday night at the Latham Hotel in Georgetown.

The workshop steering committee plans to publish a workshop report for presentation to the Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology (JSOST) and the Subcommittee on Integrated Management of Ocean Resources (SIMOR), both of which were created under the President's Ocean Action Plan, to assist in determining the future direction of biodiversity research and study within the agencies and the federal government. The workshop was sponsored by NOAA, the Alfred P. Sloan foundation and the Department of Energy.



(From left) Workshop participants chat during the Monday night reception, Elliott Norse presents, a speaker holds the attention of the group during a plenary session.



For presentations from the workshop, please visit: http://www.coml.us/?anchor=2006_biodiversity_workshop_presentations



OBIS Surpasses 10 Million Records

Two years ahead of schedule OBIS is now publishing more than 10 million records of the locations of 71,000 species from 142 datasets. OBIS, the biological data repository for the CoML, recently added records from the understudied southern oceans, in particular the waters around Africa, Australia, Antarctica, and South America. Datasets are diverse both taxonomically and in the way they were collected and include records for algae, plankton, mollusks, crustaceans, fish, cetaceans, and birds. Collection methods included trawls and sightings from shore and satellites. Six of the datasets were contributed by the Australian Antarctic Data Centre, five by AfrOBIS, and two from AR-OBIS in Argentina.

This amazing accomplishment reflects the hard work and dedication of many involved in OBIS around the world. For those who haven't visited OBIS lately, there have been other changes including the addition of the ability to accomplish polar projections. Take a look at the new look of OBIS at <http://www.iobis.org>.

US CoML Debuts New Brochure at MTS Conference in Boston



The new US Census of Marine Life brochure made its first public appearance this fall at the annual Marine Technology Society conference. The Oceans '06 Conference was held in Boston from September 18-21.

The extensive technical program emphasized what is new and innovative in the field of marine science and technology. Some of the topics included underwater acoustics, sonar signal processing, current measurements, seafloor mapping, deep ocean exploration and

engineering, undersea vehicles and submarine cables. Close to 200 exhibitors presented.

Michael Feldman, US CoML Program Coordinator, represented CoML at the CORE booth. Of the conference, he said, "I think the new brochure was very well received. It should help introduce CoML within the US to a much broader audience."

Michael Feldman, US CoML Program Coordinator, represents CoML at the CORE Booth.

If you are interested in obtaining copies of the brochure, please contact the program office at CoML@coreocean.org.



CReefs Researchers Complete Wildly Successful Cruise

"THEY DISCOVERED POTENTIALLY 100 UNDESCRIBED SPECIES AND SPECIES CURRENTLY UNKNOWN TO THE AREA...."

The global Census of Coral Reefs Project (CReefs) researchers have just completed a very successful cruise to the French Frigate Shoals where they discovered potentially 100 undescribed species and species currently unknown to the area. The organisms

will be studied further by taxonomists to determine if they are, in fact, new. The CoML researchers, led by Chief Scientist and CReefs PI, Dr. Russell Brainard, made these discoveries in just three weeks at sea aboard NOAA ship *Oscar Elton Sette*. The CReefs team has re-

ceived media coverage across the globe for their findings. The French Frigate Shoals are located within the recently appointed Northwestern Hawaiian Islands National Marine Monument. For more information on the CReefs project and cruise outcomes, please visit www.creefs.com.



NOAA Ship Oscar Elton Sette (left). An anemone hermit crab. They come in all shapes and sizes (right).

Seven Questions with MARK FORNWALL

A new feature of the US CoML Newsletter, we will ask Seven Questions. This edition features the Manager of the US Regional OBIS Node, Mark Fornwall.



At the most recent USNC meeting, **Heather Mannix**, Research Assistant with the USNC Program Office, was able to catch up with **Mark Fornwall** of the OBIS-USA team, to ask him a few questions about his work.

HM: Mark, tell me about your work with OBIS. What do you do?

MF: I am the Manager for the US Regional OBIS Node. In this role I provide the oversight and direction for the OBIS-USA team. This includes a wide range of tasks like deciding which data sets to pursue, helping data managers prepare their data sets for a broader audience and creating metadata to facilitate data discovery and application. Also, as RON manager I serve on the management committee for the international OBIS team (IOBIS). It is the OBIS MC that works cooperatively to build the global marine biodiversity information system.

HM: I'm not really familiar with the US RON. What is its function?

MF: We are largely facilitators. There is a tremendous amount of useful data collected by scientists at universities and museums as well as state and Federal agen-

cies. We work collaboratively with these individuals to gain access to that data, help them put it in a form useful to the marine biodiversity community. Our first goal is to serve the Census of Marine Life projects, then the marine biodiversity community (scientists and policy makers) and also the public.

HM: As far goals go for the project, what would you like to see accomplished in the next year?

MF: Right now we're working to establish a permanent long-term operational node for the US. The program began as a pilot 18 months ago and now we have begun to establish a permanent operational node. It is imperative that this be done to meet two very critical national activities. First is bring biodiversity data together with other marine data within the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) and second is to link these efforts to the marine theme of National Biological Information Infrastructure. A critical element is to secure base funding for its operation.

HM: What are your long-term goals for US RON?

MF: Once a permanent node is established we need to be able to do synthetic science; to use the large collection of data to test hypotheses and further our understanding of the ocean and its biota. We must also be able to make predictions about the future of marine biodiversity to support marine resource managers and policy makers. The ultimate goal is appropriate treatment and use of our precious marine resources

HM: How did you get started in informatics, especially with OBIS?

MF: I got my PhD in aquatic ecology and then worked for 13 years with the

Department of Energy on scientific and technological information policy and management. I wanted to get closer to science again, so I moved to USGS and the Center for Biological Informatics (CBI). It was through my work at CBI that I met Fred Grassle. Fred was well aware of the National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII) and its mandate to create a national biodiversity data system. I believe it was Fred's foresight in wanting to build on the NBII as the primary motivator that caused him to invite me to participate in those early OBIS scoping meetings. Once I saw the vision coupled with the draw of the ocean I was hooked. This is such an important project.

HM: What are your favorite and most challenging parts of your job?

MF: The reward and the challenge of this job is really the same thing; bringing the data from the scientists who created it (research) to others who can use the data to further science or set policy (practice). It's a real challenge "research to practice", but rewarding when it happens. I also really enjoy getting out and meeting other scientists and learning about the interesting work that they are doing. I'm really learning a lot.

HM: If someone gave you a million dollars to put towards your work with OBIS, what would use it for?

MF: I'd use it to invest it in the long term sustainability of OBIS-USA. I'd probably fund grants for work on data and information integration and for predictive models. That is really important, to understand and impact the future of our oceans.

