Meeting Report: Image Management in Bio- and Environmental Sciences: New Directions

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An interesting and stimulating event, organised by the UKeiG and the IAALD (International Association of Agricultural Information Specialists). PowerPoints and other information relating to the sessions may be found at:
http://www.ouls.ox.ac.uk/isbes/forestry/fibs/fibs2

Roger Mills, of Oxford University Library Service, gave the first presentation, on finding images via the Internet. This excellent session was not just a list of websites (although he did include a very good list, available at the website above), but a fascinating discussion of the issues involved, with an excellent example of the difficulties involved in attaching metadata to images – a photograph of a monster from Dr Who!

Roger Mills' presentation integrated very well with the next talk, by Dr David Shotton of the Department of Zoology at Oxford University, on image analysis for retrieval. There are many millions of images available via the Internet. Most have no metadata attached and it is impossible to force image creators to attach valid, reliable, consistent metadata to each image. Dr Shotton showed how automation is attempting to solve this problem.

Dr Shotton then gave a further presentation, called 'Research images as first-class publication objects'. Journal articles include only a small sample of the images and data that are collected during research. Dr Shotton discussed how more of this information can be made available, with particular reference to Web 2.0 and Semantic Web technologies.

After a very pleasant lunch, Julia Hoare of the Linnaean Society explained how the Society is digitising its world-famous taxonomic collections. The programme includes creating digital images of every specimen in the herbaria and the Insect and Fish Collections, among others, and these images will then be made available on the Web. This will reduce wear and tear on the specimens, and will also enable global access. Web 2.0 technologies are also involved here – user tagging of images will be encouraged.

Anne Donnelly and Sara Bowler of Proquest-CSA introduced CSA Illustrata, which takes a new approach to retrieval of images and data found in journal papers. These are rarely indexed directly, but may contain much useful information. CSA Illustrata indexes images and tables so that they can easily be retrieved. Records include a citation for the article and links to the abstract and the full text of the paper. At the moment, only the natural sciences database is available, but coverage will be extended to technology, arts and social sciences in the future.

In the final session, Roger Mills returned to give us an introduction to Web 2.0 technologies in general and the issues associated with them.

Overall, this was a fascinating and thought-provoking day. The venue (John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester), hospitality and organisation were all excellent, and a brief trip outside in the rain (due to a bomb scare) in no way impaired our enjoyment, thanks to Anne and Sara of CSA Illustrata who bought us all refreshments while we sheltered in the Refectory!

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