

FreshwaterLife Update

July 2003

FreshwaterLife has made considerable progress since beginning in January 2001. We now have an Information Management System powering the new website, a prototype Ecological Database and some trial online Identification Guides. All of this has been achieved in close collaboration with others, not least the worldwide FreshwaterLife Network of more than 200 member organisations and individuals.

Oct 2000	Scoping Study
Jan 2001	Project launched with website outlining FwL in 4 languages. First invitations to join FwL Network sent.
Jul 2001	SEFS2, Toulouse FwL participates in setting up the European Network for Biodiversity Information (ENBI)
Aug 2001	FwL Network membership passes 100 organisations & individuals from more than 20 countries
May 2002	Ecological Database prototype started, in collaboration with FishBase.
Sep 2002	1st public demonstration of prototype Ecological Database at FBA Annual Scientific Meeting.
Oct 2002	FwL session in Virtual Water Forum
Nov 2002	Information Management System (IMS) design started, in collaboration with UN Food & Agriculture Organisation.
Mar 2003	Presentation at 3rd World Water Forum
Jul 2003	SEFS3: Presentation and 1st public demonstration of IMS

Ecological Database: This highly structured database is able to hold detailed information on plant and animal species, ranging from general descriptions to detailed data on



Asellus (Dr Anne Powell)

life-history attributes and tolerances. Every fact is referenced to the source. The web interface allows the user to search for common names (in any language), scientific names or by topic. Generally, a list of easily confused species is presented, clicking one takes the user to a Species Summary page with access to more detailed data, if available. Users can also create a personal list of organisms that can be refined using parameters such as temperature tolerance, then used in the online analysis functions/graphs or for data export.

Collaborating with others: It has always been the policy of FreshwaterLife to work with other organisations and individuals. It is also our policy not to re-do work already carried out by others, or to 'reinvent the wheel'. FreshwaterLife has been putting these principles into practice with exciting results. We have been working with FishBase (ICLARM) to create the prototype Ecological Database and the FwL Information Management System (the software that powers the new website) has been brought about through collaboration with the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation. Currently we are working with the Expert Centre for Taxonomic Identification (Amsterdam) and Lucid (Brisbane) on trial online Identification Guides.

New addresses to take you straight to the content:
Home Page/Search FreshwaterLife: <http://www.freshwaterlife.info>
Ecological Database: <http://ecosearch.freshwaterlife.info>
Identification Guides & Keys: <http://id.freshwaterlife.info>
Information about FreshwaterLife: <http://www.freshwaterlife.org>

www.freshwaterlife.info

Information Management System:

The new FreshwaterLife Information Management System (IMS) is the power behind the new website. This software allows us to organise information sources, from books and journal articles to websites, databases, multimedia and even people! IMS forms the over-arching structure that will link the different parts of FreshwaterLife, including the Ecological Database and online Identification Guides. Once an information source has been added to IMS it contributes to the whole. For example, a search of IMS includes an automatic search of the first few pages of any website that is listed in the system. IMS uses a topic tree structure to organise information (amongst other techniques). This tree structure allows us to create 'user paths' or 'scenarios' so that each user is able to easily find their way to the information of interest to them. Branches are not completely separate however, they may split and recombine – a flexibility that should allow us to point users to related information that they may not otherwise have considered. Most importantly, IMS is fully interactive. Once a user has registered, they can suggest additions, take part in discussions, and even help create the structure of the site.

Network Services: IMS also allows us to provide services to Network members and registered users. These services are designed to



The new FreshwaterLife homepage

make it easier for members to get in touch with each other, discuss and interact.

Identification Guides & Keys:

FreshwaterLife aims to be the most comprehensive bibliography of identification guides and keys to freshwater plants and animals. This process is already underway and reference information for many different keys has been added. FreshwaterLife is currently working on trial online keys to freshwater species in conjunction with the Expert Centre for Taxonomic Identification and Lucid. The aim is to create evaluation versions of dichotomous and matrix or 'multi-access' keys for both expert and novice use. These trial versions will be used to gain feedback from the end user, through the FreshwaterLife Network and at events such as the Symposium for European Freshwater Sciences (SEFS).

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