

Title

AfReMaS & AfrOBIS: what can these systems do for scientists and how can scientists contribute?

Background

The African Register of Marine Species (AfReMaS) and the African node of the Ocean Biogeographic Information System (AfrOBIS) are two powerful systems – focused on taxonomy and biogeography - that can serve and support not only the African marine scientific community, but scientists worldwide.

AfReMaS aims at offering a complete register of all marine and coastal African species, including both the currently accepted species names and their synonyms. Several dedicated workshops with local experts have been organised in the past, to make this register more complete. Through contributing to AfReMaS, experts are indirectly also contributing to the completeness and quality of the World Register of Marine Species.

In a very similar way, African data managers have received training on how to mobilize, quality control and submit their data to AfrOBIS, thereby indirectly also contributing to the international OBIS.

Both systems however depend on voluntary contributions by the scientific community and the strength and useability of both systems is fully defined by the information that the scientific community feeds into it.

Goal

This special session aims to go more in-depth on both systems – AfReMaS and AfrOBIS – and their relationship with more global initiatives such as the international Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS), the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), the World Register of Marine Species (WoRMS) and LifeWatch. As an inventory of existing datasets for the West Indian Ocean is ongoing under the IOC-umbrella, - and these could possibly contribute to the above mentioned initiatives, the exploration of collaboration opportunities is high on the priority list.

Next to the general framework, the workshop also wants to actively engage the African scientific community in how to (1) use both systems in their day-to-day work related to e.g. general species distributions or to investigate specific links between species, their distribution and their ecological characteristics (so-called ‘traits’) and (2) contribute to one or both systems. By showing the advantages of sharing data and information on a regional and global scale, it is hoped that more data – both taxonomic and biogeographic – can be made available for this slightly under-represented region. Some easy-to-use tools and functionalities developed within the LifeWatch project will be demonstrated, illustrating how scientists can check the quality and completeness of their data before submitting, or how they can make use of already existing tools within their own research.

Additionally, the publication of data will be discussed. This can be done either through assigning a DOI (Digital Object Identifier) to the dataset or by actually publishing a data paper. Both these options can be seen as an incentive for scientists to (re-)consider to make their biodiversity data available through these systems so they can be put to use by the scientific community worldwide.

Convenors:

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