

Web hosting of Digital Fischer Herbarium of IFGTB

Fischer Herbarium of the Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding, Coimbatore had its beginning in 1911 and is known internationally under the acronym 'FRC'. It contains about a century old plant collections made by T.F. Bourdillon, C. E. C. Fischer, M. Rama Rao, C. A. Barber, J. S. Gamble, P. F. Fyson, M. A. Lawson and A. W. Lushington, which form the nucleus of the herbarium. Collections made by other taxonomists subsequently have also been deposited in the herbarium. The total number of plant collections available at present is about 23,000 and some of these precious collections form the part of the Flora of Madras Presidency. The herbarium has been recognised as the 'National Repository' by the Govt. of India under the Biological Diversity Act-2002.

The outreach of information on plant specimens kept in conventional herbaria is limited in general, as it is accessed mostly by professionals in the field. In the present world of communication, the information available in such collections can be made available to a variety of users around the world through digital and information technology. For this purpose, IFGTB has initiated the digitization of the herbarium specimens in a phased manner recently. The first phase of digitization has been completed and the digital herbarium was web hosted during a function organized on 12th April 2016.

The programme was started with welcome address by Dr B. Gurudev Singh, Group Co-ordinator Research. Dr. K. R. Sasidharan, Scientist-E, Biodiversity Division presented an account on the Fischer Herbarium, highlighting the efforts made by different taxonomists in building up of the herbarium and services rendered by it over a period of time. Dr. G.V.S. Murthy, Scientist-G and Head of Office, Botanical Survey of India, Southern Circle, Coimbatore, during his felicitation address, described difficulties faced by taxonomists for accessing herbarium specimens earlier and how the digitization has become a handy tool to circumvent the problem. Shri V. Ganesan, IFS, Conservator of Forests, Tamil Nadu Forest Department opined that the foresters have immense opportunity to connect their field knowledge with the database available with herbarium, so as to discover new things. Shri R.S. Prashanth, IFS, Director of IFGTB launched the digital herbarium. He appreciated the efforts taken by the Biodiversity Division to digitize the herbarium and requested people to visit the site www.frcherbarium.org and come back with suggestions for improvement. Shri K.H. Hussain, Consultant, Beehive Digital Concepts, Kochi explained about the digitization work and demonstrated various search facilities available therein. Dr. C. Kunhikannan, Head, Biodiversity Division proposed vote of thanks.

Moments of the programme



Dignitaries on the Dias



Dr. B. Gurudev Singh, GCR, welcoming the participants



Dr. K.R.Sasidharan, Scientist E briefing about Fischer Herbarium



Felicitation by Dr. G.V.S. Murthy, HO, BSI Coimbatore.



Felicitation by Shri. V. Ganeshan IFS, CF, TNFD



Shri. R.S. Prashanth, Director giving the presidential address



Shri. R.S. Prashanth, Director seeing the digital herbarium after hosting it in web site



Shri. K.H. Hussain, Consultant, demonstrating the digital herbarium in the web site



The audience

Rare plant specimens are now just a click away

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Coimbatore: More than 6,000 specimens at the 105-year-old herbarium in the Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding (IFGTB) can now be accessed by the click of a mouse, as the Institute plans to digitise it.

The digitisation will help preserve the fragile specimens, prone to damage due to constant physical handling.

The Fischer Herbarium, which was started in the year 1911 on the Forest Campus in R S Param, was created as a repository to house the many collections made by British forest officer Cecil Ernest Claude Fischer. He had an extensive collection of specimens from the Nilgiris, Palanis, Coimbatore forest divisions, Seshachalam Hills and Ganjam District of Andhra Pradesh. The herbarium also houses century old collections by forest officers, T F Bourdillon and M Rama Rao from the Travancore presidency. The herbarium was brought under IFGTB's control in 1988.

The herbarium, considered a national repository by the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), contains 2,864 species, 254 families of plants and 1,257 genera, some of them as rare as the one by forest officer J R Drummond in 1879.

"The herbarium is visited by a lot of taxonomists and botanists. So, when they discover a unique species but have heard of similar looking species being present in a herbarium in another part of the country or world, they often have to physically visit the herbarium to cross check the facts," said IFGTB director R S Prashanth. "But now they can cross-check with the image and data available online," he said.

The digital herbarium, which can be accessed through the website www.ifcgherbarium.org, currently contains 6,231 of the total 23,000 specimens available with the IFGTB. "This digitisation was done by former librarian at the Kerala Forest and Research Institute K H Hussain," said the head of the biodiversity division at IFGTB C Kunhikannan about the project which cost Rs 6 lakh.

"The website has uploaded the herbarium's sheets and allows people to zoom into the image to take a closer look at the specimen and the officer's own writings," said Hussain. "We will be shortly applying for more funds to digitize the rest of the herbarium's data," said the director. The Institute, however, admitted that they were yet to review all the data on the website and eliminate spelling errors that might have occurred since the data entry personnel were not taxonomists.




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Press coverage about the event in Times of India 13.04.2016.