Here today, gone... [date unknown]: Databasing a historic accession and deaccession record

Eva M. Biedron, Depts. of Invertebrate Paleontology & Vertebrate Paleontology, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

Why review accessions and deaccessions?

• Confirm and preserve specimen history
• Inventory collection to understand holdings
• Discover connections between agents
• Understand how collection’s past impacts its present holdings

Manageable scope

• Vertebrate Paleontology only
• Only review (de-)accessions w/ documentation
• Here, documentation = paperwork in any form

Concerns

• Material conservation: torn, fading paper
• Inventorying specimens efficiently
• Incomplete data or lack of specificity

Outcomes

126 accession & 111 deaccession records evaluated
Includes 1507 unique catalog numbers

Summary of evaluated specimens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accessions</th>
<th>Deaccessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unique Catalog Numbers</td>
<td>1026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Catalog Numbers</td>
<td>559*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalog Numbers Maximum</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Including casts with the same number as the original specimen

The process we used

1. ID unique (de-)accessions
   • Group documents w/ "temporary ‘batch #’ in spreadsheet w/ one row per item of material- add/remove records as understanding evolves

2. Inventory specimens
   • Match material to MCZ #, locate specimens transaction-by-transaction, & update specimen data in MCZbase

3. Database transactions
   • Accession #s are MCZ-wide numeric sequence, deaccession #s are collection specific, by year (or current year if date unknown)
   • Unknown info noted in remarks

4. Digitize media
   • Scan and attach for easy curatorial access from the transaction page

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A century of documents: 1896 - now

Documents relating to protect agents and locality information

Document types:
including but not limited to a) transaction forms, b) curatorial lists, c) duplicate specimen labels, d) correspondence, and e) notes.

Conservation concerns:
Casted & torn paper, blurred & faded ink

Data woes:
repurposed forms, absent/vague data, field #s and un-catalogued material, multiple runs of casts

Lessons learned & improvement ideas

Expect complexity
• Specimens may have both incoming & outgoing documents
• Existing transactions may be combined/split

Inventories take time but are worth it
• Idea: Search for taxonomic groups at once- quicker than by transaction?

Opportunity to clean up other info
• # and type of parts, material, & cabinet location
• Ideas: Review locality data, flag for conservation or rehousing

Collaboration is key
• Other institutions may have missing data
• Idea: Accession/deaccession working group to share info, processes, and data standards

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