



The Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network

Sharing biological knowledge across international borders

Environmental challenges can be addressed most effectively when knowledge is shared across international borders. Knowledge-sharing helps coordinate activities, informs decision-makers about the factors affecting biodiversity and the conservation measures that have worked, and multiplies the value of research.

The Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network (IABIN)—supported by 34 national governments, many inter- and non-governmental organizations, private sector institutions, and the Organization of American States—promotes greater coordination among Western Hemisphere countries in the collection, sharing, and use of biodiversity information relevant to decision-making and education.



Photo credit: John Mosesso, Jr.

White-nosed coatis, native to nine countries of the Western Hemisphere

Partnerships Are Key

IABIN links participants – from national networks to individual institutions – to others in the Western Hemisphere, and to the Clearing-House Mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility. Collaborations among agencies at all levels of government, nongovernmental and inter-governmental organizations, universities, and private sector enterprises ensure that efforts are complementary and build on each other. All organizations are invited to participate.

It was mandated by the Summit of the Americas to support sustainable development and implement the commitments set forth in Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration.

Implementation Supported by More Than 70 Institutions

Over 70 institutions throughout the hemisphere have committed a total of over \$30 million toward a 5-year implementation project. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded a consultative process through which IABIN participants, in collaboration with the Clearing-House Mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity, defined how to build the network. The plan resulting from this process became part of a proposal to GEF for a \$6 million project. The project will develop an Internet-based, managed, decentralized network to provide access to scientifically credible biodiversity information.

The implementation will initially focus on six Thematic

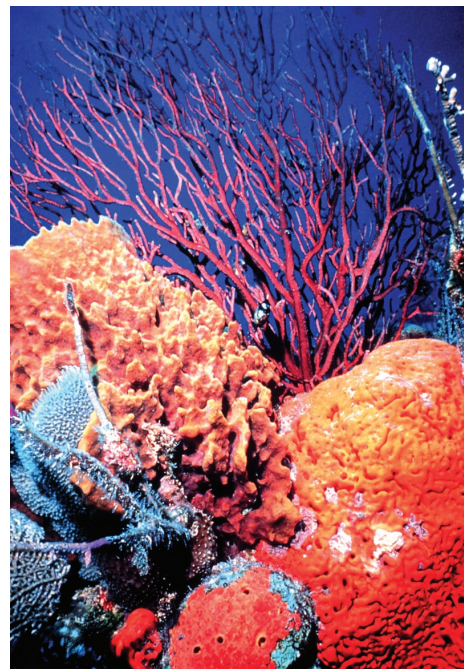


Photo credit: Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Staff

Sponge, coral, and searod in the Caribbean
Networks (TNs): Specimens, Species, Ecosystems, Invasive Species, Protected Areas, and Pollinators. Each led by a different Coordinating Institution, the TNs will provide access to information, coordinate technology transfer on a regional basis, build capacity for information exchange, and facilitate the inclusion of biodiversity themes in national agendas.



Female Tucson Banded Gecko (Coleonyx variegatus bogerti) from the southwestern United States

Invasive Species and IABIN

The most effective way to build network content is through pilot projects in select thematic areas. Invasive species, which pose increasing risks to human health, native species, ecosystems, and national economies, have been a priority. Participants in the IABIN Invasives Information Network (I3N) inventory and document their information on invasive species occurrence, projects, data, and experts. I3N then provides global access to all records from a single entry-point that includes a cross-country search capability.

The U.S. State Department and the U.S. Geological Survey distributed seed grants to 11 IABIN countries to initiate this network. Five additional countries joined or are preparing to join.

Contributions From the United States

Free and fast access to biodiversity information is the common goal of IABIN and the U.S. National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII). The NBII links diverse, high-quality biological databases, information products, and analytical tools maintained by NBII partners and other collaborators. The NBII also develops standards, tools, and technologies that make it easier to find, integrate, and apply biological information. Both the NBII and IABIN endorse the development of a common set of standards to ensure that retrieval and exchange of information can take place across political, linguistic, and institutional boundaries; and both emphasize that ownership of the data remains with their source.

The NBII actively supports IABIN as the U.S. Focal Point and as Chair of the IABIN Council. The NBII furthers

IABIN by establishing cooperative linkages with national, regional, and global initiatives; recommending standards; evaluating software tools; developing pilot projects; hosting a key IABIN Web site and, in the future, a mirror for the IABIN gateway; and seeking support for projects that build capacity within participating countries and institutions. For example, the NBII led the I3N development effort, described above, and continues to manage the project, facilitate communication, and host data for institutions that cannot host the data themselves.

For More Information

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Tools for Sharing Information

IABIN benefits from NBII-developed software tools, such as a cataloger that provides a simple way of creating invasive species data descriptions and sharing these with others in the network. The NBII also continually expands access to scientifically validated content relevant to all of the Americas. For example, it created a searchable catalog of biodiversity data sources in Latin America and the Caribbean—in Spanish, Portuguese, and English—that allows users to locate data sets, publications, and museum collections. The NBII supports a project that rescues and catalogs Paraguayan biodiversity databases. In partnerships with several organizations, it will create a scientifically validated, searchable repository of thousands of images of South American birds, Paraguayan vertebrates and landscapes, and North American animals.