

Creating a National Biodiversity Database in Gabon and the Challenges of Mobilizing Natural History Data for Francophone Countries

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Abstract

Language is a major barrier for researchers wanting to digitize and publish collection data in Africa. Despite being the fifth most spoken language on Earth and the second most common in Africa, resources in French about digitization, data management, and publishing are lacking. Furthermore, French-speaking regions of Africa (primarily Central/West Africa and Madagascar) host some of the highest biodiversity on the continent and therefore are of great importance to scientists and decision-makers. Without having representation in online portals like the Global Biodiversity Information Facility ([GBIF](#)) and Integrated Digitized Biocollections ([iDigBio](#)), these important collections are effectively invisible. Producing relevant/applicable resources about digitization in French will help shine a light on these valuable natural history records and allow the data-holders in Africa to retain the autonomy of their collections. Awarded a [GBIF-BID](#) (Biodiversity Information for Development) grant in 2021, an international, multilingual network of partners has undertaken the important task of digitizing and mobilizing Gabon's vertebrate collections. There are an estimated 13,500 vertebrate specimens housed in five institutions in different parts of Gabon. To date, the group has mobilized >4,600 vertebrate records to our recently launched Gabon Biodiversity Portal (<https://gabonbiota.org/>). The portal also hosts French guides for using Symbiota-based portals to manage, georeference, and publish natural history databases. These resources can provide much-needed guidance for other Francophone countries—in Africa and beyond—working to maximize the accessibility and value of their biodiversity collections.

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