

Dear All,

thanks for your warm encouraging words and feedback in response to my circular yesterday. From feedback it seems it may be useful to discuss a bit how NOW works. Please forgive for another long e-mail.

When asked what is NOW I say that NOW is the mammalian fossil record, not a sample or a snapshot, it is a summary of all about fossil mammals. A summary implies that it is not meant to cover every possible find, but it must be robust and representative of fossil mammals, their environments and their ways of life.

NOW started from the Neogene Europe, but it expanded over the years and is global now through the Cenozoic. It contains selected and intensively curated global occurrence data accompanied by traits, ecology, palaeoclimate, isotopes and more. Not everything is covered equally densely, some parts are very sparse, of course.

While refinement and addition of data is ever ongoing, NOW does not aim and never will be complete. It is primarily based on published data, yet the goal is not to have as many data points entered from as many published sources as possible. NOW aims at quality data and the main challenge is harmonization across various datasets. Consistency of treatment is critical in this task, that is why NOW relies so much on the Advisory Board. Dedicated coordinators for groups, regions and other aspects of the fossil record treat similar cases in similar ways, this makes global consistency (not easy but) possible to hope for.

So thank you for taking part in NOW and for the hard work that brought the database to the state that it is now, it is impressive and it is precious. Many many experts over many many years worked on this and I hope we will continue well. I also hope that most of you are willing to continue in your roles as coordinators. It is a community service and nowadays the demand for community services is high, on behalf of the community thank you for your time and effort. Those who wanted to move to the Emeritus Board hold on a bit, it will be established very soon.

Some of you who joined more recently asked to tell more about what exactly coordinators are expected to do. I see this as an editorial job, similar to that we do for journals and alike. The loads of NOW coordination vary from group to group, from region to region and from year to year, for most of the coordinators the minimum expected involvement is typically much less than that of an editorial role for a journal. The maximum involvement is entirely up to you and some coordinators do intensive hands on database edits, when they can, some do suggest edits, fixes or expansions when they notice, some look at their coordinated groups in NOW when they have time, and if something needs fixing either fix themselves (preferred) or send us comments (please do -> kari.lintulaakso@helsinki.fi).

But the main (and under plan minimum the only) role of a coordinator is to answer questions, when needed. Questions come in various forms, but typically they may be of nature like "is this occurrence real", "where does this belong taxonomically", "here is a list

of 10 species, can you look whether these affiliations are ok". Typically, coordinators do not get more than a few of those questions per year, sometimes none. Often coordinators can answer easily off-hand, but if not, the expectation is that you would look into it, maybe ask around and give your best guess. Typically there is no rush, NOW is large, it has a slow metabolic rate and it can wait.

The data, after it is curated, is public and will always be public. If you want to publish a paper first before telling the community – by all means do so, taking individual credits is important, especially nowadays. Again, NOW can wait for publications to appear. We do from time to time enter unpublished data and make publicly available as is, recently, for example, dental traits, body masses and such. But that is by no means expected from everyone, unless you want to. The primary focus is on large scale integrity of already published data.

I still need to say a few words about a database versus a spreadsheet, as well as about licensing, but this is getting long, so next time. I promise not to spam you with NOW letters too often, perhaps once every few months at most.

We are still waiting for proposals for hosting the anniversary meeting in 2021. Ray Bernor suggested that it should be in Helsinki. Helsinki is always an option, but it would be nice to move around and bring more attention to other active parts of the NOW Community. Warm countries would be particularly nice, since the actual anniversary is in December 2021. Or maybe somebody has access to Schloss Reisenburg? That's where NOW began.

And please keep in mind the call for chapters for the anniversary book. We got three proposals since yesterday. And do send suggestions, complains or ideas at any time.

Greetings from Helsinki now full of snow, which surprisingly appeared overnight.

Be well,

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