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Subject: Ten Years NOW
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Dear Friends and Colleagues,

It's ten years since the official launch of the NOW database as a public resource, and although much remains to be done much has also been achieved. I'm tremendously grateful to all of you, and the many other individuals who have made contributions over the years. If you haven't recently visited the NOW website I strongly recommend you to do so and admire the work of Gudrun Evans, who has completely redesigned the database interface. You will find it at:

<http://www.helsinki.fi/science/now/>

We have been following up the usage statistics of NOW and it is clear that the new interface has led to our data being intensely used, at least for a fossil database. You may have a look at the statistics at

<http://pantodon.science.helsinki.fi/stats/awstats.pl?config=servoy>

(Does anybody happen to know who our heavy users from Poland and Turkey might be?)

If you have trouble with the Servoy client we have good news: Public NOW access will be transferred to PHP and will thereafter (within 2007) be available without any fuss. If you do not have technical problems and would like to edit the NOW data directly I encourage you to ask for a username and password for this purpose. Among the novelties, please pay attention to the comprehensive instructions and tips for using the interface. Note also the humble beginnings of the NOW Field Archives that some of us have discussed previously on various occasions. This is simply a way to help preserve the unique information collected at enormous expense by field projects that run for a few years, and is often sadly lost forever a few years later.

NOW started as a very concrete and limited undertaking in at a Schloss Reisenburg Meeting in 1992, which many of you will remember, and has changed much since. Originally, the acronym stood for "Neogene Old World",

and this is still officially the case, as you can read on our website. However, in reality our database has long contained large amounts of Pleistocene data, and an even larger amount of Palaeogene data has been compiled although it is not yet visible to the public. And we are in this context looking for new Board Members, regarding which I would be happy to receive suggestions. Please contact me first if you have ideas, since some colleagues have already become involved!

I'll write separately about these matters, here I just invite members you to use their imagination as to what the real and deeper meaning of NOW might be in this evolving context (not "Nervous Old Wives, I hope!). Networked, Novel, 'Ntuitive, Open, Original, Optimistic, Web, Wide, Wonder...?

Among other new developments is the database of Cenozoic stable isotope data that Ben Passey from Thure Cerling's lab in Utah is compiling. This will also be made accessible through NOW, and we discussed the technical details with Ben here in Helsinki last week.

Among the things not yet achieved are the implementation of our decision regarding qualified and uncertain taxon identifications – this now has the highest priority for new developments as it is required for several other critical and overdue tasks, such as updating the ecomorphology fields.

Another matter on which I would welcome input is a change in NOW Board membership rules. When we started we were not concerned with the distant future, but ten years later we are all that much further along, with everything that a decade brings in the life of a busy scientist. I have thought for some time that Board membership based on 5-year periods might offer several advantages, among which the most important would be that members would have a natural way of leaving the task in the hands of a follower, typically to be proposed by the retiring member. I would in fact like to propose that we start the first 5-year period on January 1, 2007.

Please let me know your thoughts on any of this!

Many thanks for your involvement, all the best for the next decade of NOW, and happy Holidays!

Mikael

PS here are some recent NOW statistics (March 2006). We've come a long way from the 329 localities and 381 species we listed in the first summary paper in the Kowalski volume back in 1996....

No of species: 9996

No of species associated with a locality: 9663

No of localities: 4207

No of public localities: 2957

No of locality_species combinations: 37945

No of locality_species combinations with public localities: 11258

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...per longem dentes