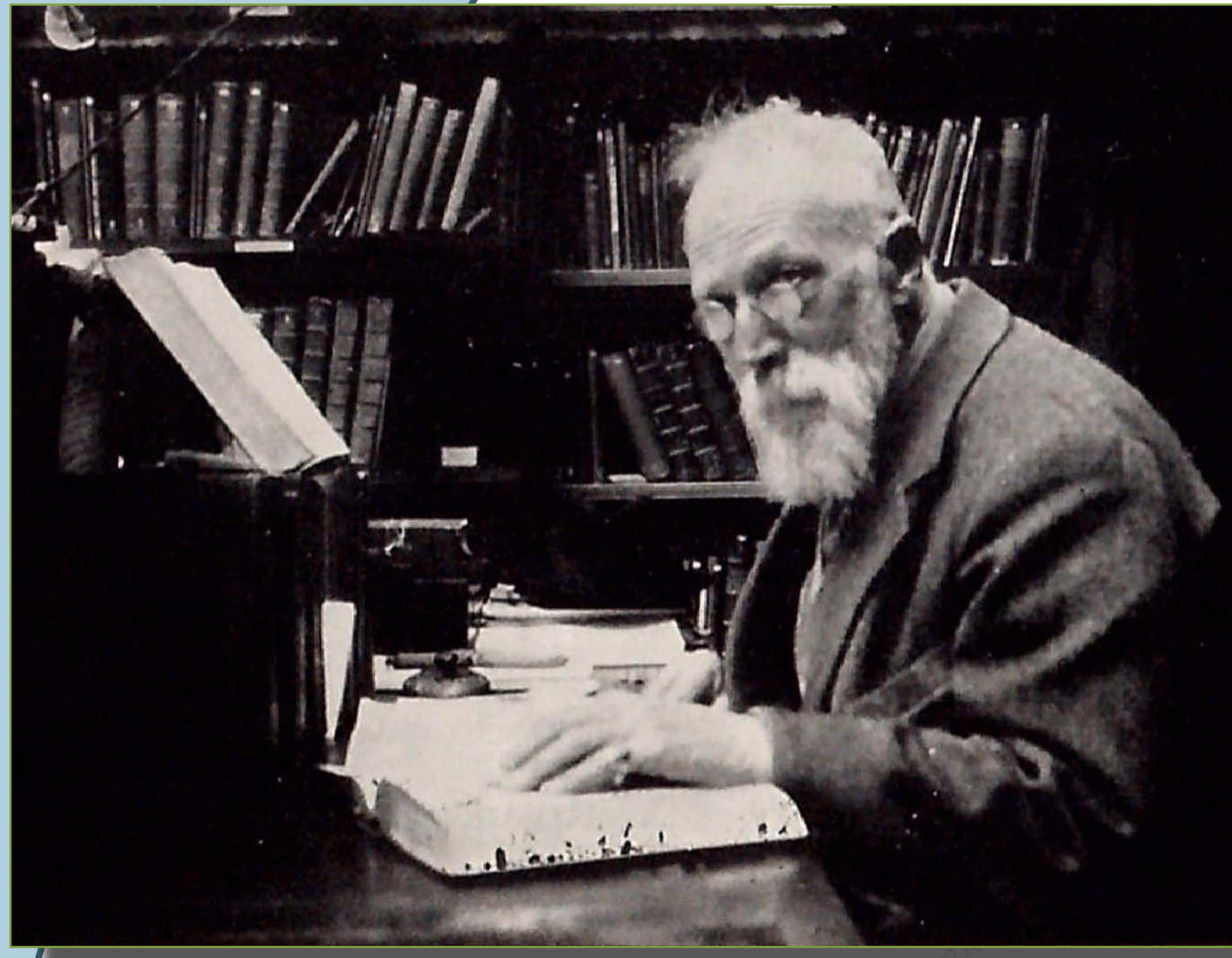


# Online Synergy: Sherborn's *Index Animalium* & the Biodiversity Heritage Library

By Leslie Overstreet & Grace Costantino, Fall 2011



Sherborn at the Museum in 1935. (In Squire by J.R. Norman, London, [1944].)

## SCIENTIFIC NOMENCLATURE

The collection-based science of taxonomy provides internationally recognized names for biological groups (primarily genera and species) and creates the necessary foundation for effective forestry, fisheries, and wildlife management, biodiversity studies, endangered-species preservation, and many other applied sciences. To ensure the stability of scientific names, researchers build on a body of historical literature going back to the mid-18th century, when Linnaeus promulgated the modern system of binomial nomenclature. Over time, competing publications and revised classifications have given most taxa more than one name, and researchers frequently need to investigate all such synonyms – as well as the description attached to the current, accepted name – to clarify taxa identifications and to establish the most comprehensive and accurate information about them.

## THE INDEX ANIMALIUM

Finding the original published text for each of the scientific names that have been applied to a species over the centuries would be an impossible task for most researchers, if only for the lack of access to the monographs and journals involved. With the unparalleled resources of the British Museum (Natural History), now the Natural History Museum (London), at his disposal, Charles Davies Sherborn was able to accomplish this in the *Index Animalium*, an invaluable compilation covering the zoological literature from the 10th edition of Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* in 1758, the official start-date of binomial nomenclature in zoology, to 1850. Find it at <http://www.sil.si.edu/digitalcollections/indexanimalium/>.

## THE BIODIVERSITY HERITAGE LIBRARY (online)

Identifying the published text is the first step, but actually obtaining it is another matter. Biologists, especially those in developing countries and biodiversity “hot spots,” have stated that inadequate access to the scientific literature is a major impediment to their research. In response to this need, the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) was established to digitize and make freely available on the Internet the historical literature in the natural sciences. BHL is an international, multi-institution consortium, supported by Internet Archive. To date BHL has scanned and mounted on its website millions of pages of the taxonomic literature, including 896 rare books from the Smithsonian Institution Libraries' Cullman Library (as of Aug. 2011). Explore it at [www.biodiversitylibrary.org](http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org).

## SMITHSONIAN LIBRARIES' CULLMAN LIBRARY

Serving the curators, researchers, and visiting scientists at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, the Joseph F. Cullman 3rd Library of Natural History holds more than 15,000 volumes published from 1490 to 1840. Subject strengths include voyages of exploration and scientific expeditions; early natural-history museums, and 18th- and 19th-century directions for collecting and preserving specimens; and taxonomic and systematic monographs on plant and animal groups. See our website at [www.sil.si.edu/libraries/cullman](http://www.sil.si.edu/libraries/cullman); search the online catalog of the Cullman and all 20 branches of the Smithsonian Institution Libraries at [www.siris.si.edu](http://www.siris.si.edu).



Dr. Clyde Roper, National Museum of Natural History (Smithsonian Institution), consults Carl Chun's classic work on cephalopods. Both the German original (*Die Cephalopoden*, 1910) and the modern English translation (*The Cephalopoda*, 1975, edited by Dr. Roper) are available in BHL.

Top: *Turdus splendens*. Leach, William. *The Zoological Miscellany*. (1815) v. 2, tab. 71.  
Middle: *Gymnopode spinifera*. Duméril, C. *Erpétologie Générale, ou, Histoire Naturelle Complète des Reptiles*. (1854), Atlas, pl. 22.  
Bottom: *Mygale icterica*. Koch, C.L. *Die Arachniden*. (1839) v. 5-7, plates, tab. 150.  
Right Top: *Ursus maritimus*. Schreber, J.C.D. *Die Säugethiere in Abbildungen nach der Natur*, tab. 141.  
Right Bottom: *Delphinus albimanus*. Peale, T.R. *The United States Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842*. (1848) Atlas, Mammology, pl. 5.

