

Scientific World Opens Up Online At MBLWHOI Library

By JOSEPH CAPUTO

One of the best biological libraries in the world just got an upgrade. Down the block from the Martha's Vineyard ferry, the MBLWHOI Library, a resource shared by the Marine Biological Laboratory and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, is finding technologically-savvy ways to share its collection, now over a century old.

Although you can still trek to the library on MBL Street to comb the stacks or curl up with a book in the reading rooms, an evening at your home computer can yield an equally satisfying dive into the past and future of science. Whether you're an algae expert or a middle-school student, the four resources listed below are bound to get your mouse a-clickin'.

The Encyclopedia of Life

<http://www.eol.org>

The Encyclopedia of Life made international headlines for its ambitious goal to organize and digitize vast reaches of information about the diversity of life on Earth. When complete, each of the approximately 1.8 million known species of animals and plants will have its own web page, filled with images and vetted information.

The Biodiversity Heritage Library, a consortia of 10 libraries, including the MBLWHOI Library, is in the middle of scanning their combined biodiversity collections, equal to 10 million volumes, to be accessible to anyone via the Biodiversity Library portal and through the Encyclopedia of Life.

"I look at this as a giant common good," says Cathy Norton, director of MBLWHOI Library and vice chairman of the Biodiversity Heritage Library. "Ninety-five percent of all information about biodiversity comes from South America and Africa, and nearly all of the literature is owned by the great libraries in Europe and North America. This project is a repatriation of that information."

The Digital Herbarium

<http://www.mblwhoilibrary.org/archives/herb/>

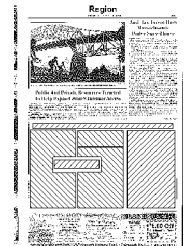
Keeping tabs on all the seaweed of Cape Cod is a tough job, but the MBLWHOI Library enjoys a challenge. Its collection of marine, freshwater and land plants gathered from the Cape, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket, dates back to 1850 and contains over 9,000 specimens. At the Digital Herbarium, you can access images of all the foliage in your backyard.

"We have a number of volunteers who come in, scan local flora into an image database, and make it available," Ms. Norton says. "If you need to identify any algae that you have in your marsh, this is a great repository."

TaxaToy

<http://taxatoy.ubio.org/>

To stake their claim in history, some people climb mountains, others find stars, but the more humble person identifies new species. It often happens by luck. A beetle expert on a hunt for samples may find one as it scurries under a rock. The scientist then publishes a paper, and his or her name is forever associated



with the insect.

The number of species discovered each year was hard to determine until the MBLWHOI Library developed a program that scours the literature for descriptions of new species. This Taxa-Toy, as it is called, can search for how many birds, snakes, or beetles have been discovered since the Latin classification system for species began. One interesting finding is that the number of species discovered during the World Wars declined overall while the number of bacteria discovered increased.

“When you start looking at it, suddenly you see new and different patterns,” Ms. Norton says. “That’s the excitement of building any bioinformatics tool.”

Virtual Exhibits

<http://www.mblwhoilibrary.org/exhibits/>

Rudolf Leuckart, considered the most famous zoologist of the 19th century, is better known at the MBLWHOI Library for his educational wall charts, each artistically depicting a family of marine creatures. The charts are accessible online via “Rudolf Leuckart’s 360 degree Virtual Tour.” Visitors can walk about the virtual gallery, admiring his detailed portraits of shapely sea anemones and urchins once used in his classroom.

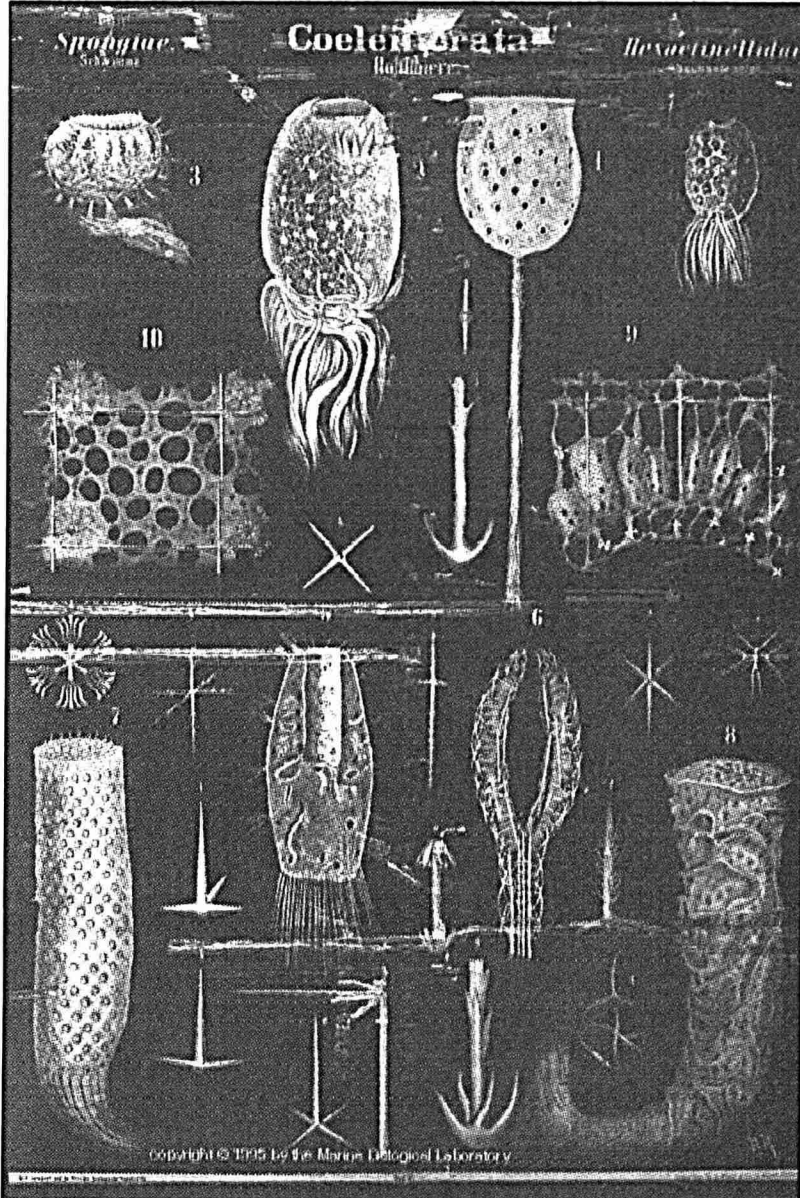
The tour is one of several online exhibits offered by the library. Others include “James Cook: The Art of Exploration,” which feature records from Cook’s 18th-century voyages through the Southern Hemisphere, as well as “Ernst Haeckel,” chronicling the work of the German scientist who coined the terms “Darwinism” and “ecology.”

MBLWHO Library hours are from 8 AM- 5 PM, Monday through Friday. For more information, visit <http://www.mblwhoilibrary.org>

(*Mr. Caputo is a summer science writing intern at the MBL.*)

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Cathy Norton, Library Director



Photograph courtesy **MBL**

Wall chart of coelenterata from "Rudolf Leuckart's 360 degree Virtual Tour," one of several online exhibits available through the MBLWHOI Library.