

**Guidelines and suggestions for attending a joint conference hosted by the
Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC) and
Biodiversity Information Standards (TDWG)**

By the SPNHC Networking and Career Development Committee (NCDC)
and SPNHC-TDWG 2024 Steering Committee



*Iriomote cat illustration by Prof. Mitsuru Moriguchi, Okinawa University.
Logo art by Ms. Takako Tomozawa, NPO Osaka Natural History Center.*

Dates: 2-6 September 2024

Location: Okinawa Convention Center, Okinawa, Japan

Theme: "Enhancing Local Capacity, Elevating Global Standards."

Table of Contents

- I. What is SPNHC?
- II. What is TDWG?
- III. Conference Events
- IV. Local Information
- V. Conference Preparation, Networking Tips and Tricks

NOTE: This document is geared towards preparing attendees for the joint conference in Okinawa, and its information should be especially helpful to first-time conference attendees regardless of whether they are SPNHC or TDWG members.

Updated: August 2024

What is SPNHC?

The Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC; pronounced as “spinach”) is an international organization devoted to the preservation, conservation, and management of natural history collections.

SPNHC was founded in 1985 and is recognized as a non-profit organization in the United States. The society’s leadership consists of a core council and various committees each with their own chair(s) and representatives. To read more about the society’s bylaws, policies, and leadership, please [click here](#).

The society’s website (www.spnhc.org) provides a plethora of resources for those in the field of natural history collections. You can find information on upcoming conferences, awards and grants, job opportunities, and more! The society also publishes a bi-annual newsletter and an annual journal titled the *Collection Forum*. We also recommend that you explore the SPNHC Wiki; this resource provides numerous documents and protocols for best curatorial practices.

The Networking and Career Development Committee (NCDC) is a committee of the SPNHC council. The committee was formed in early 2024 by merging the former Emerging Professionals (EPC) and Professional Development (PDC) Committees. The NCDC now oversees various aspects of promoting networking, mentoring, and career development through SPNHC programming and conferences. To achieve this goal, the NCDC connects individuals from a variety of disciplines and experiences who work with natural history collections. The committee also focuses to expand awareness and involvement from all levels of professionals and students into SPNHC. You can [read more about the NCDC](#) on the SPNHC website.

The NCDC is always looking for committee members and volunteers! Our members and volunteers help guide committee decisions and actions, prepare conference event logistics, and create content for sharing with SPNHC membership via social media and other platforms. Aside from the conference and related events, the NCDC typically meets monthly via Zoom to share updates and plan next steps. Please contact any of NCDC’s co-chairs if you would like to get involved or simply be added to our email list where you can hear updates on committee meetings and other work.

What is TDWG?

Previously known as the Taxonomic Database Working Group, the Biodiversity Information Standards (still referred to as TDWG; pronounced as “TAD-wig”) is a non-profit, scientific and educational association that aids in establishing international collaborations among creators,

managers, and users of biodiversity information. TDWG promotes the wider and more effective sharing of knowledge about the world's heritage of biological and geological diversity. TDWG develops and promotes standards and guidelines for the recording and exchange of data about organisms and provides a forum to discuss all issues relating to biodiversity information management.

Numerous resources, including information about TDWG, their data sharing standards, and resources such as their GitHub and Slack pages, can be found on their website (www.tdwg.org).

Joint Conference - SPNHC and TDWG

After a successful joint conference in 2018 in Dunedin, New Zealand, SPNHC and TDWG are partnering, once again, in 2024 to host a joint meeting in **Okinawa, Japan**. This joint meeting will provide networking opportunities for attendees from both host societies, bringing new opportunities to meet and collaborate with colleagues from East Asia and around the world. It is a first for SPNHC to meet in Asia, while TDWG last met in Beijing in 2012.

The conference is managed by a joint Steering Committee composed primarily of officers of both SPNHC and TDWG and other invested partners. The [Program Committee](#) is responsible for the structure and content of the conference. It is composed of volunteers, solicited from both societies, and members participate in task groups from abstracts to [Code of Conduct](#) to technology. Please feel free to reach out and talk to members involved in these committees, or email okinawa2024@spnhc.org.

Conference Events

SPNHC-TDWG 2024 is organized over the week of 2–6 September. This year's conference consists of 32 themed symposia, four workshops, two lightning talk sessions, democamp, virtual posters, and multiple sessions of contributed presentations. There will be five concurrent sessions throughout Tuesday–Thursday of the conference, featuring more than 380 presentations. All sessions will be recorded for later viewing. Lunch and morning and afternoon tea breaks are included while sessions are in progress. **Links to the latest program schedule may be found [here](#).** *Virtual attendees joining sessions by Zoom should note that all times are local JST.*

Poster presentations: Four large monitors will be set up for viewing posters during breaks and lunch, in addition to having them available for viewing on demand. In-person poster presenters will be scheduled to be present to answer questions during lunch and breaks Tuesday–Thursday.

Themed lunches: While bento box lunches will be distributed for attendees to disperse and eat where and with whom they want, special lunch gathering places are themed for Tuesday–Thursday in designated rooms. Newcomers (first timers) to SPNHC and/or TDWG may lunch together and enjoy an orientation from seasoned veterans on Tuesday. The annual SPNHC Networking and Career Development Committee ([NCDC](#)) networking luncheon is planned for Wednesday, September 4th. SPNHC-TDWG 2024 Diamond Sponsors will be featured at Thursday's lunch to reach a wider audience.

Social events: Special evening social gatherings will include a Welcome Reception on Monday; Biodiversity Bingo Night on Tuesday ([tickets sold separately](#)); and the Conference Dinner (and dancing!) on Thursday.

Bioblitz: Hosted on iNaturalist, there will be two projects—one based in Okinawa for in-person attendees and one worldwide, for virtual attendees. How-to information will be provided for those new to the process. An initial results announcement event (possibly with prizes!) will be held during the Closing Plenary Session.

Sponsors and Supporters: Please take the time to visit with the folks at the tables and booths of the generous [sponsors and supporters](#) of SPNHC-TDWG 2024. Their support has helped make this conference possible.

Business meetings: Each Society will hold separate open business meetings on Friday morning—come to see what each society has accomplished over the past year, find out where it's going and get a preview of what's planned for next year's conference.

Committee meetings: While SPNHC committees and TDWG Interest/Task groups will not hold formal meetings during the conference. The SPNHC Committee Chairs will meet in a closed session on Tuesday and the SPNHC Council meeting (also closed session) will meet on Wednesday evening.

SPNHC Members: Please refer to the [SPNHC website for Committee Chairs](#) contact information and reach out directly to join their listserv and/or attend future meetings held after the conference.

TDWG Members: Find out more about TDWG and [learn how to become involved](#) in the [TDWG Community](#). Interest and Task groups meet regularly throughout the year on Zoom and invite you to join them!

Excursions: Sign up for [pre- and post-conference excursions](#) before the **12 August** deadline. Many are *free* thanks to the generous sponsorship of the Japanese Government's Japan Tourism

Agency. Special this year for virtual participants are three pre-conference [Virtual tours](#) taking place in mid-August.

Daily Scheduled Events

An updated schedule of events can be found [here](#).

Monday, 2 September

Starting Monday afternoon, everyone will gather for the opening session, featuring two keynote speakers [Dr. Sara Beery](#) and [Dr. Tom Strang](#), followed by highlighted contributed talks after afternoon tea. Doors open at the nearby Laguna Garden Hotel for the Welcome Reception at 6:30 PM. Enjoy light snacks and beverages while greeting old friends and making new ones. Don't miss the Okinawa dancers starting at 7 PM!

Tuesday, 3 September

Beginning Tuesday morning at 9 AM, attendees will have difficult choices to make between attending one of five parallel sessions or racing between rooms to catch specific talks. Before FOMO (fear of missing out) strikes, know that you can catch up later on talks you missed by watching on-demand recordings, which will be posted for viewing by both in-person and virtual attendees alike. Topics for Tuesday range from AI to facets of collections management to data mobilization.

Newcomers to SPNHC or TDWG events are invited to lunch together today.

Be sure to catch the bus leaving at 7 PM to [Biodiversity Bingo Night](#) (separate registration required) at the [Sky Bar Top Tree](#).

Wednesday, 4 September

Day two of the five-parallel-session smorgasbord features lightning talks in Specimen Spotlight; DemoCamp; herbarium techniques; workshops on Latimer Core and photography; updates on biodiversity knowledge linking (BiCIKL), Catalog of Life, and Specify; and more.

Networking Luncheon (formerly, the Emerging Professionals Luncheon): This event, hosted by the SPNHC Networking and Career Development Committee ([NCDC](#)) will be held during the Wednesday lunch break (***please sign up to attend when registering, there is no cost to register***

for this event). The NCDC encourages professionals of all stages to attend, especially those who identify as emerging or early-career professionals, students, and first-time attendees of a SPNHC or TDWG conference. The NCDC also invites more established professionals who are willing to highlight their expertise and guide discussions held over lunch. This event is a good opportunity for members of SPNHC and TDWG—at all stages in their careers—to connect and network with folks in their field!

If you did not register to join the Networking Luncheon, but have changed your mind, that's just fine. Just show up. If you'd like to receive communications in advance of this event, contact the luncheon hosts directly, NCDC committee co-chairs, Jessie Nakano (nakanojk@si.edu) or Megan King (megan.king@rutgers.edu) to be added to the event list.

Thursday, 5 September

The last day of the whirlwind [omakase](#) of conference topics features a workshop on Data Carpentry; symposia on collection practices; data practices including controlled vocabularies, alien species, and taxonomies; communicating through data; increasing access through community science; prototyping biodiversity digital twins, and more.

Diamond Sponsors will be featured at Thursday's lunch.

Join us at the Laguna Garden Hotel for the **Conference Dinner** and dancing (a SPNHC conference tradition!), and top off your experience with an evening walk on the beach.

Friday, 6 September

The SPNHC Annual Business Meeting will be held starting at 9:00 AM and continue until morning tea. This presents the primary opportunity for the SPNHC leadership, Council and Committee chairs, to gather and discuss important business while in person, including updates about future conferences, hosts, and dates. All are welcome to attend.

The TDWG Business Meeting will start at 11:00 AM after morning tea until lunch. Reports from committees, interest and task groups will be featured, as well as a sneak peak at plans for the upcoming conference in 2025.

The Closing Plenary Session will follow a shortened lunch, starting at 1:30 PM and winding up the conference by 3 PM.

Local Information

Be sure to keep an eye on the [conference website](#) for various conference details but especially for information about traveling to Okinawa, traveling around the city once you are there, where to stay, and what else to see and do while there.

In addition to the conference website, we encourage everyone to review the information provided by the Okinawa Convention and Visitors Bureau on their [Visit Okinawa Japan website](#). There, you will be able to find information about [how to get to Okinawa](#) and [how to travel around the city once you have arrived](#). There is also a page with [various tips and general information](#) that you need to know before visiting Okinawa and Japan; this includes considerations such as visas, weather, currency, outlet converters, travel insurance, etc. Lastly, be sure to explore this website for various activities, attractions, and food recommendations.

Otherwise, please note that since the conference is being held at the Okinawa Convention Center, there is not a hotel directly associated with this venue. Thus, the conference organizers are recommending folks to consider various hotels that are near the convention center. Those recommended hotels can be found on the Okinawa Convention Center's website under the ["Neighborhood Accommodations"](#) tab. Some of these accommodations are within walking distance of the convention center. Consider booking rooms at a hotel with fellow travelers if you are coming as part of a group.

Conference Preparation, Networking Tips and Tricks

Some of the most valuable takeaways from attending any conference are the relationships and contacts made through networking. The conference offers some great opportunities for developing these relationships, including the Networking Luncheon. While the thought of networking can be intimidating—imposter syndrome is real!—we've put together some tips and tricks to implement before, during, and after the conference to alleviate some of the fears and help you get the most out of the networking events.

Before the conference

- Review the [Code of Conduct](#) for the conference and [conference webpage](#).
- Review and obtain travel documents for Domestic or International Travel.
 - A visa may be required for some international travelers. Please review the [Visa Requirements](#) section for helpful links to determine if a visa is needed.
- Plan ahead and choose the sessions you want to be sure to attend in person, while marking those you may want to view on-line later.

- Have some goals and objectives of what you want to get out of the event and perhaps who you would like to meet, but remain flexible—some of the best connections are serendipitous.
- Consider preparing by reading the latest article authored by the person you want to chat with, check out an institution’s blog posts or social media, and/or connect with specific people on Twitter. This will ensure you have your initial question or comments prepared.
 - You can find folks whom you may be interested in meeting by checking out the online program on Oxford Abstracts ahead of time. Find presenters who may be talking about topics you find interesting or who may have job titles that you would like to learn more about!
 - Similarly, if you know you want to speak to a particular person it can be useful to send them an email before the event. Let them know that you are interested in their work and that you would like to take a few minutes to introduce yourself at the conference. It never hurts to ask them to meet up during one of the breaks! Everyone who attends is very friendly and most would be happy to find time to meet with you.
- Prepare your “elevator pitch”
 - When first meeting someone at an event, the most common question is “what do you do?” Without being prepared for this, you might mumble a few things that immediately come to mind and then walk away thinking of all the great things about yourself that you forgot to mention! Having a prepared bio can mitigate this risk.
- Make sure your professional documents and webpages are ready
 - If you have a résumé/CV, a LinkedIn profile, a professional website, a business card, etc., make sure that they are up-to-date with your most recent information. Be ready to provide folks with your contact information and a possible way to find you once the conference has ended. Business cards (digital cards such as [Bling](#) or [HiHello](#)) or a QR code to your website can be great ways to make sure folks can find you!

During the conference

- Remember to adhere to the [Code of Conduct](#) during the conference.
- Attend social events and make an effort to meet new people
 - Join a lunch table with people you don't yet know
 - Ask your mentor to introduce you to people they may know
- Consider general conversation starters for people whose work or background you are unfamiliar with.

- There's always the classic “what do you do?” and “What brings you to the conference?”
- or think of open-ended questions such as “What are you most looking forward to seeing/doing while you’re here?” or “What’s a project you’ve been working on recently?”.
- Glean information on name tags for clues about their home institution, role(s) in the conference, and attendee status. These can be quick ways to identify folks who may be at a similar career stage as you (thus a bit less intimidating to strike up a conversation with) or established professionals who are eager to talk to folks who may be new to SPNHC or TDWG.
- Be approachable. Don’t spend all your time looking at your phone. If you circulate, looking open and engaged increases the chances that someone will approach you.
- Have an exit strategy. It can feel uncomfortable to end a conversation so you can move on to talk to other people. However, given that you are at a networking event the other person will understand that you want to work the room and is probably happy to do the same. Wait for a natural break in conversation, say something about how great it was talking to them, and either suggest you talk again later and ask to exchange contact details, or wish them a good rest of the event.
- Take care of yourself. Make sure you are well rested, hydrated, etc. Find some time each day to call friends/family back home, read a book, go for a walk, or otherwise take your mind off of things. You cannot network at 100% if your battery isn’t charged!

After the conference

- While the details are fresh in your mind, jot down a few key points about the people you were speaking to. Keep a small journal for this and for summarizing any fun things you learned from the talks you attended.
- Follow up. When the conference is over, you should have some contact details of people you met. Get in touch with them, summarizing an interesting point from your conversation and suggest whatever follow up is appropriate—remember that “let’s keep in touch” is a valid follow up.
- Both SPNHC and TDWG greatly appreciate your feedback by participating in post-conference surveys and sharing your experience and observations to make the next year’s meetings even better.

Contact Information

SPNHC-TDWG Steering Committee: okinawa2024@spnhc.org

SPNHC NCDC Co-Chairs: Jessie Nakano (nakanojk@si.edu) = *Attending conference in-person*

Megan King (megan.king@rutgers.edu) = *Attending conference in-person*

Kevin Krajcir (kjkrajcir@gmail.com)