

## SYNTHESYS - unrivalled access to Europe's Natural History Collections

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SYNTHESYS ('Synthesis of systematic resources'), an initiative of CETAF (The Consortium of European Taxonomic Facilities), started in February 2004 resulting from the award of a five-year grant from the EU's Framework 6 Infrastructures Action, Integrated Infrastructure Initiative. <http://www.cordis.lu/infrastructures/>

One purpose of this project is to facilitate (and fund) access for researchers (Users) working in the European Community to the wealth of resources housed in Europe's premier Natural History collections.

20 institutions in 11 European countries have collaborated to offer this unique resource of zoological, botanical, entomological, geological and palaeontological specimens. SYNTHESYS is coordinated by the Natural History Museum, UK. In total the collections on offer comprise more than 337 million specimens. In addition Users can apply for access to analytical facilities housed within the 20 institutions.

SYNTHESYS is now entering its third successful year. There have been three completed calls for proposals to-date and access to collections and facilities has been granted to 673 Users from all over Europe (totalling more than 10,000 visitor days). Over half of the Users are first time Users of the collections.

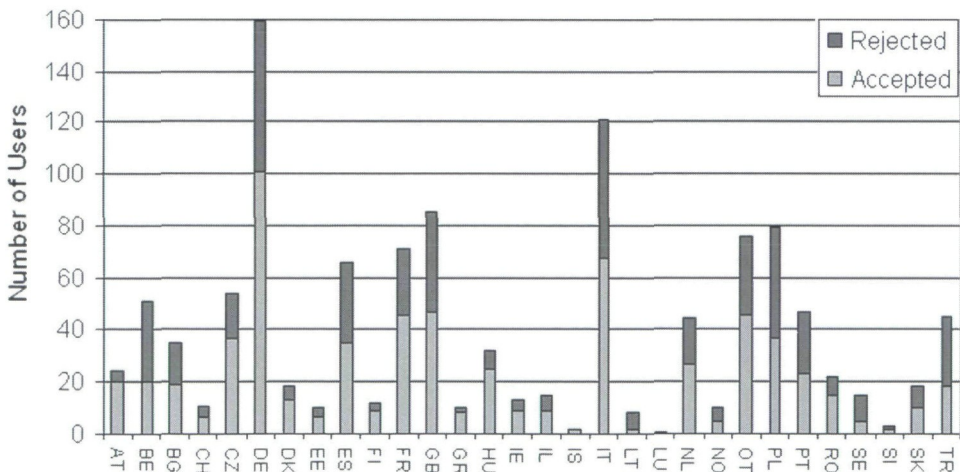


Fig. 1: Country of origin of the 1,157 SYNTHESYS applicants (cumulative data Calls 1-3).

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The only restriction on eligibility is that applicants must live and work in an EU Member or Associated state (see note 1). Successful applicants have ranged in age from 24 to 69 and are almost an equal ratio of male and female. Priority is given to first time Users plus to those who do not have similar collections or analytical facilities within their own country. All Users are expected to generate output as a result of their SYNTHESYS visit. Normally this is a peer-reviewed paper.

The fourth of eight planned calls for applications is currently open, and the next will be open in September, the deadline is **15th September 2006**. For further information on the project and how to apply for a funded visit to one of the 20 participating institutions visit website [www.SYNTHESYS.info](http://www.SYNTHESYS.info)

In addition to the Access, SYNTHESYS is using a range of Networking Activities to broaden and deepen the relationship between natural history facilities in Europe, including: developing museum standards based on assessments of the SYNTHESYS partner institutions; guidelines for the care, storage, access (both physical and IT) and conservation of collections; plus provision of training in curation.

**The SYNTHESYS participants are:**

The Natural History Museum - London, Royal Botanic Garden, Kew; Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, UK;

Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle - Paris, France;

The Natural History Museum of Denmark - Copenhagen, Denmark;

Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales (CSIC) and Real Jardín Botánico (CSIC) - Madrid, Spain;

Naturhistoriska Riksmuseet - Stockholm, Sweden;

Zoological Museum/University of Amsterdam - Leiden; University of Amsterdam; Centraalbureau voor Schimmelcultures - Utrecht; National Natural History Museum Naturalis, Netherlands;

Botanischer Garten und Botanisches Museum Berlin-Dahlem, Freie Universität Berlin; Museum für Naturkunde, Humboldt-Universität - Berlin, Germany;

Naturhistorisches Museum - Wien, Austria;

Hungarian Natural History Museum - Budapest, Hungary;

Museum and Institute of Zoology, Polish Academy of Sciences - Warsaw, Poland;

Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences - Brussels; Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika; National Botanic Garden of Belgium, Belgium.

**Note 1: Eligible countries are:**

Member States: Austria, Belgium, Denmark (including Greenland), Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France (including Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, La Réunion), Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.

Associated Countries: Switzerland, Iceland, Israel, Liechtenstein, Norway and Candidate Countries of the EU Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey.