

# The science of understanding...

The Harrison Institute was founded in 1930 as a zoological museum. Today, it is a UK registered charity, CITES listed, and is dedicated to promoting the study of taxonomy – the science of understanding and describing the diversity of nature.

The institute's research activities are divided between fossil faunas, primarily in the UK, and the study of living mammals and birds, principally in the Old World tropics and subtropics.

Outcomes have included classical monographs, 248 research papers and the description of 13 new mammal species, including seven, all bats, since 2004. Palaeontological studies have covered a time period of some 55 million years.

Training is central to the institute's work. Much time and resources are devoted to increasing capacity in the biodiversity sciences, especially alpha taxonomy, in the tropics. This work, primarily supported by the UK government's Darwin Initiative, has centred on the belief that biodiversity information and expertise should be based in the areas of greatest biodiversity richness.

For this reason, the Harrison Institute is currently co-developing a centre of excellence in biodiversity training and research in Southeast Asia. Based in peninsular Thailand at the Prince of



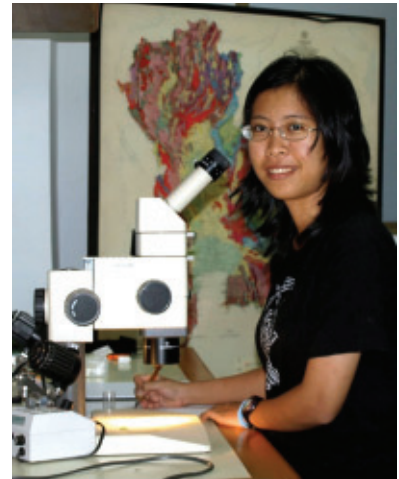
Songkla University, it seeks to build academic capacity in the biodiversity sciences not only in Thailand but throughout the region.

A taxonomic network encourages the exchange of staff and students between universities and institutes in Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar, and network members are encouraged to think regionally and internationally. Biodiversity does not respect political borders and nor should biodiversity research. Collaboration and networking are the watchwords. Studies are trans-border. Field teams are multinational. Publications are multi-authored, with in-country scientists publishing their research in international journals.

Working in isolation has always been an impediment for those outside the traditional centres of science. Therefore, we host workshops and conferences in the tropics and invite the world's biodiversity experts to come and give talks. Many have been excited by what they see and have set up their own collaborative programmes. This growth in new academic linkages has been particularly rewarding. In addition, much emphasis has been placed on enhancing library resources in the new centres, principally through digitising much of the most important literature.

It may seem daunting to try and repatriate the world's biodiversity knowledge from the West to new centres in the tropics. Our experience suggests that it is not only feasible but it is also exciting, excellent value for money and essential. Our horizons are already expanding to elsewhere in Asia and Africa. The day is not so distant when we will see – from the broadleaf forests of Bhutan to the

...and describing the diversity of nature...



*There is a new generation of young, in-country, biodiversity scientists*

miombo woodlands of Zambia and from the ancient deserts of the coastal Namib to the mountains of northern Vietnam – a whole new generation of young in-country taxonomists researching, describing and disseminating biodiversity information. Target audiences will include fellow zoologists, of course, but also, crucially, policy-makers and those that will design and implement the conservation initiatives of the future.



Dr Paul Bates  
Director

Harrison Institute  
Bowerwood House  
15 St Botolph's Road  
Sevenoaks  
Kent TN13 3AQ

Tel: +44 (0)1732 742446  
Fax: +44 (0)1732 742446

pjbbates2@hotmail.com  
www.harrison-institute.org