

***Curating Biocultural Collections: A Handbook.* Margaret Jan Salick, Katie Konchar and Mark Nesbitt (eds). Kew, Surrey: Royal Botanic Gardens [distributed by the University of Chicago Press], 2014. 250 pp.\***

Reviewed by Farid Pazhoohi

*Curating Biocultural Collections: A Handbook* is edited by Margaret Jan Salick, Katie Konchar, and Mark Nesbitt, and the volume's contributors are practicing researchers and experts in biocultural curating. The editors of this volume argue that many specimen and biocultural collections—which are repositories for plants and animals used by people, products made from them, and the information and archives about them—are often neglected, deteriorating, and inaccessible. They also argue that many institutions lack the appropriate information and equipment needed to curate and collect these pieces of information in a proper manner, if these collections do not languish in old cardboard boxes in storage rooms. Because of the variety in the form and function of biocultural specimens, the editors highlight the importance of biocultural collections and curation standards, which would lead into easier curating, cataloging, and accessing these materials (chapter one).

Due to the diversity of the specimens and the required conditions of curating for each of these specimens, the practical suggestions for housing, handling, and managing diverse ethnographic objects is detailed to minimize all threats such as moisture, exposure to light, dust, and pests (chapter two). Then the book provides instructions for specimen collection and voucher preparation and the required methods for specimen identification, collection, cataloging, protection, and transporting are explored (chapters three and four). Next, the collecting and curating of palaeoethnobotanical specimens, which are “either plant remains and tissues recovered from archeological sites, representing human-plant interactions, or plants incorporated into the archeological records” (67), is discussed (chapter five).

Next, the collection, conservation, and curation of ethnozoological and zooarchaeological specimens, which consist of animal remains that have been modified by humans, are dealt with in chapter six.

Additionally, chapter seven discusses how DNA collections can help formulate conservation strategies, manage biodiversity crisis and diversity assessment, provide information on genes and specimens' genetic makeup, and can play role in backup repository of genetic information if the organisms become extinct. Therefore, after discussing the history of genomic DNA banks and the current status of genebanks, methods and techniques for obtaining, extracting, and storing DNA specimens are reviewed. Chapter eight provides a variety of techniques to preserve these genetic resources and accessing protocol to these genebanks for ethnobiologists.

In chapter ten, the volume explores living plants and biocultural collections in botanic gardens and how these collections play an important role in the exploration, discovery, introduction and research, education, and conservation of many plants.

---

\* This editorially reviewed contribution was accepted for publication in *Museum Anthropology Review* on February 25, 2016. The work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

The next section of volume provides practical hints for curating reference materials and metadata. To fulfill this goal, the first chapter of the section addresses cataloging and online access and the possibilities for “interconnecting disparate biocultural collections databasing through a single portal” (151). The chapter details the possible use of online databases for information storage and retrieval and argues that online biocultural collections are important as a collaborative domain in which users benefit from shared data to tackle the problem of non-controlled vocabularies among the ethnobiologists (chapter eleven).

Proper curating begins in the field and chapter twelve considers the relevant ethnographic information and data that should be collected along with cultural artifacts. Chapter thirteen deals with other types of collecting associated with libraries and archives and their cataloging standards and practices for subscription services and professional organizations. The standardized methods for conservation would also help in the curation of digital sources of ethnobiological information, such as photographs (chapter fourteen) and audio-video collections (chapter fifteen).

Next, chapter sixteen deals with the legal aspects of biocultural collections, such as those concerning physical objects, intellectual property, and the specific issues regarding buying, selling, and stealing objects. It also discusses the legal issues that may arise regarding objects made from animals, plants, antiquities, and archeological objects.

After these medium and process chapters, Chapters seventeen to nineteen examine the attitudes that ethnobiologists should adopt for the work of curating indigenous biocultural collections, including the ways that ethnobiologists should interact with the indigenous and native peoples. Chapter twenty-one briefly reviews the usage of biocultural collections in other disciplines as diverse as archeology, cultural anthropology, ecology, geography, nutrition, and taxonomy. The volume’s final chapters deal with the importance of herbarium specimens in ethnobiological research (chapter twenty-two), the importance of biocultural collections for ecosystem conservation (chapter twenty-three), and for education (chapter twenty-four).

*Curating Biocultural Collections* is a simply written handbook that includes many high quality, colorful images and serves as a must-have companion for everyone who is engaged with biocultural curation and ethnobiology at any educational level.

*Farid Pazhoohi is an independent researcher in the social and biological sciences living in Shiraz, Iran. He has published research and reviews in Ethnobiology Letters, African Studies Quarterly, and other scholarly journals.*

<http://dx.doi.org/10.14434/mar.v10i2.21770>