

Naming new plant species moves online

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The planet's diversity of plant species is huge and there are hundreds of new discoveries each year. Producing a scientific description for each new species is now more efficient as online-only versions can be published.

There are more than 380,000 plant species known to science, with many more around the world still to be found, identified and scientifically named. But this mighty task will now be more efficient for plant scientists, thanks to new rules that mean descriptions of new species can be published entirely online.

Previously, botanists had to create printed paper versions of the [species](#) descriptions, which were sent to and stored in various botanical institutions. But starting this month, species descriptions only need an electronic version, making the process more efficient by saving time, money and resources.

Reach a wider audience

Natural History Museum plant expert Dr. Sandra Knapp helped propose the changes to the International Code of Nomenclature for algae, fungi and plants (ICN), the set of rules and regulations that govern the naming of plants worldwide.

Dr. Knapp explains the impact of moving the process into the digital age. "These new changes will bring names of organisms to wider audiences and will increase the accessibility of biodiversity information when we need it most in order to help conserve what is rapidly being lost."



Leaves of new plant species *Solanum umtuma*. It was the first online-only plant description published on 1 Jan 2012.

More than 1 in 5 of [plants](#) are threatened with extinction and one of the greatest threats is the conversion of natural habitats to agriculture or

livestock use.

First online-only plant description

The first online-only plant description was published on 1 January 2012 by Dr. Knapp and Dr. Maria Vorontsova, also of the Natural History Museum. It was for a new species of aubergine-like plant called *Solanum umtuma* from South Africa.

Solanum umtuma is a shrub that has hermaphrodite and male flowers on the same plant and yellow fruit. It belongs to the genus *Solanum*, a large group that also includes aubergines, tomatoes and potatoes.

Knapp and Vorontsova used the Museum's collection of 6 million plant specimens to help them identify the new species.

New species descriptions

When scientists find a specimen of a new species, they produce a species description to summarise and share their findings.

As part of this description, they identify the key features of the specimen, determine what scientific group the new species belongs in and name it, a process called taxonomy.

Now that the detailed scientific descriptions can be published entirely online, more people will have access to this important information, and more quickly.

Provided by American Museum of Natural History

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