

Step-by-step guide to submitting records to the Virtual Museum projects of the Animal Demography Unit

1. The basics

Step 1: Register (or check if you are registered) as an ADU observer at <http://www.adu.org.za/register.php?project=vmus>

Step 2: Once you are registered, you can login to the Virtual Museums website at <http://vmus.adu.org.za/>, click on the "LOGIN" tab on the left-hand side of your screen and login with your email (the email you registered with) and password.

Step 3: On the left-hand side of your screen click on "Data Upload", a form appears. It is a two-page form. The first page collects the information, and the second page uploads the photos.

Step 4: Fill in the form. All areas marked with * are required fields: Year, Month, Day, Country, Closest Town, Locality, Latitude, Longitude, and the Source of your GPS coordinates. The "Gazetteer, at Step 3, If you do not have the GPS coordinates you can use the Google Map provided and pinpoint the area where you took the photo (i.e. find the general area, zoom in repeatedly, and click to place a marker on the map, trying to be as accurate as possible). If you use the Google Map, the operation of clicking automatically provides the coordinates. After completing the form click on "Save" at the bottom to save this information, and to move onto the second form.

Step 5: Select the project to which you want to submit your photo. Upload your photos (JPEG images no larger than about 1 MB) and click on "Submit" at the bottom of the form! After your photo(s) have finished uploading to the database, you will receive a confirmation of the submission. You can load up to three photos per record. The form makes provision for three photos at the site described on the first form. (Usually, there is one record per site, so you skip over the provision for records two and three right down to the bottom of the form, and submit it.) Once the record is submitted, confirmation of its arrival is provided by the appearance of a thumbnail version of your photo, and the basic details of your record.

Well done! You've successfully submitted your first record to the Virtual Museum. You are now a qualified citizen scientist and an ambassador for biodiversity!

The drill is the same for all the Virtual Museums of the Animal Demography Unit.

2. Frequently asked questions

Why are there so many options for GPS coordinates?

Some people set their GPS to use degree, minutes and seconds, others use degree, minutes and decimal minutes, and still others use decimal minutes. These are sometimes written as DD MM SS, DD MM.MMM, and DD.DDDDD respectively. So the Virtual Museum can accept all three GPS settings. Note that whichever setting you choose to use for latitude, you need to use the same setting for longitude.

Why do I need to give a nearest town?

This helps us to pick up some of the big errors in entering latitude and longitude. It is easy to interchange them. For make of the ways of doing this, the locality still ends up on land in southern Africa, so the “nearest town” provides a useful way to check if this mistake has been made.

What is the point of the “Gazetteer” on the first page, at Step 3?

Sometimes people take a lot of pictures at the same place. This is particularly true if you have a camera trap. Then, having the position of the camera in the gazetteer makes data submission a lot easier. There is an explanation on the use of the Gazetteer in the last part of Step 4 on the first page.

What if I forget to enter the project I intend the picture to be submitted to?

We will look at the picture and fill in the project! Please do not submit the record a second time!

I have more than three records for a site. Do I need to fill form 1 in over and over again?

At “step 6” the bottom of page 2 of the submission form there is a box which says “add more.” If you still have more records to submit from the current site, click on this, and then click “submit.” The three records just entered will be uploaded to the website, and a new set of three blank record forms will be generated. When you do the final submit,

I can't identify the species in the photo. Do you want me to submit this as a record?

Yes, please do submit it. One or more people from the ID panel will do their utmost to do an accurate identification. If the record cannot be identified, for one reason or another, the “Comments” field will be filled out, and an explanation given as to why positive ID is not possible. Sometimes, a record might only be identifiable to genus or family, and the identification will be assigned to this level.

I only managed to get a very poor photo. Do you want me to submit it?

In general, yes. The “photographic” or “artistic” qualities of the picture are of no significance whatsoever. As long as the ID panel has a reasonable chance of making the identification, please submit it. (There are pictures in the Virtual Museum which just show the tip of the Leopard's tail – if this is the best that is available, please submit it.)

Why can't I do the final identification of the record?

It is hugely helpful if you do identify the species, either using common name or scientific name. Someone from the ID panel then simply has to click on the species from a "drop-down" menu. The point of this is that it imposes a particular taxonomy on the records. If the IDs are done in any other way, discrepancies creep into the database in the form of mis-spellings (or alternative correct spellings) of names, or if an older taxonomy is used. Our strategy solves the problem that common names and scientific names are not always in one-to-one agreement with each other.

What is the security on the records? Can they be used unscrupulously?

All the ADU websites are protected by a "Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License." However, we cannot guarantee that everyone will respect this. Thus our recommendation is to make the resolution of your photographs relatively small, less than 1MB.

I have thousands of records I want to submit. Is there a quicker way to upload the photos than to do it one-by-one using the Virtual Museum website?

Yes, there is a bulk upload facility. Contact Rene Navarro (rene.navarro@uct.ac.za) for details. Basically, you enter the data in an excel spreadsheet. Then you email the spreadsheet to Rene, and put the photos on an FTP site.

I see that you already have 1000s of records of the species I have a photo of. Do you really want me to submit it?

Yes. Firstly, your record might well fill a gap in the distribution map. Secondly, your record confirms the continued existence of the species at the locality.

If the animal is dead, should I submit a photo of it?

Absolutely, yes. Roadkills are sad and unfortunate. But the dead animal, usually a snake or a mammal, can still make a contribution to mapping biodiversity. Hopefully, the roadkill is not the last individual of the species in the area! Roadkills are sometimes badly distorted, and the ID panel will do its best to make the identification.

Photos of marine mammals washed up on the shore should also be submitted.

Are there any sneaky differences between submitting to the various Virtual Museums to trip me up?

No. The only Virtual Museum that asks for additional information relative to the others is PHOWN (PHOTOS of Weaver Nests) – for this Virtual Museum you are asked to estimate the number of nests in the weaver colony, and there is a drop down menu which asks whether the

colony is in a tree, a reedbed or a human-structure (eg a Southern Masked Weaver colony in a fence – eg <http://vmus.adu.org.za/?vm=PHOWN-1>).

For which Virtual Museums are the photos most difficult for the ID panel to identify?

There are some groups of butterflies, lizards, dragonflies, small mammals for which identification to species level is quite difficult from just one photograph. If you have a specialist interest in the field, you will know which species these are, and you will know that for these species you need, for example, a picture of say the butterfly with its wings open and with its wings closed. But if you are not a specialist, simply submit the picture, and the “specimen” will be identified to genus or family level. In the comments section, the person on the ID panel will explain what additional information would have been necessary to make the identification to species level, so it becomes part of the learning curve.

Can I submit photos to more than one Virtual Museum?

Yes. Many people, quite naturally, tend to focus their efforts on one group of species, but occasionally there is an opportunity to take a photo in another group for which there is a Virtual Museum. Please take the photo and submit it.

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