

Biodiversity Heritage Library

In early 2015 the Biodiversity Heritage Library announced that they had implemented the Altmetric badges across their online articles and other reference content. We spoke to Outreach and Communication Manager Grace Costantino to hear about the work the BHL does, and how they hope to make use of Altmetric data.

About the Library

The Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) is a consortium of worldwide libraries, headquartered at the Smithsonian Libraries in Washington D.C. Launched in 2007, the BHL online resource site receives over 80,000 unique visitors a month, and currently includes over 46.6 million pages of natural history literature from over 96,000 titles.



The library's vision is to inspire discovery through free access to biodiversity knowledge; anyone in the world wherever they are should be able to make use of their content. Access to such information is a particular necessity to biodiversity-related sciences, as historical data and species

classification underpins the work that scientists are doing today.

Why the interest in altmetrics?

In 2014 the BHL received an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant to transform BHL into a more social, semantic digital library. As part of this "Mining Biodiversity" project, they are further integrating with social media, enhancing search functionality, and improving their semantic metadata.

"We wanted to see where people were talking online about our content – and help our readers see those conversations too."

Crucially, Grace and her colleagues are keen to find ways to make it easier for their audience to discover more info about their collections, and share thoughts and knowledge about those collections using social media.

The first step they took to encourage this was to add better sharing buttons to BHL, but they also wanted to more easily capture the online conversations surrounding their content and let others see what people had been saying.

Implementing Altmetric

Although some of the BHL content is assigned a DOI, this is not consistent across all of their content. Grace and her team worked with Altmetric to instead track mentions to their content based on the URI (the unique identifier) of each piece of content.



BHL has now launched the Altmetric badges across their online platform, and are using the Altmetric Explorer internally to monitor and report on the online attention across their collection.

They also added an overview of the Altmetric data and what it offers their readers to their Wiki, helping users of the platform understand what the data shows and how it can be interpreted.

Up and running

Grace reports that the BHL are finding the Altmetric data really valuable for discovering conversations that they didn't know were happening – particularly as lots of people will share a link to the content they are talking about but don't necessarily mention the BHL, making this activity difficult to track by keyword alone.

To announce the roll-out of the Altmetric badges Grace and her team put together a program of blog and social media content, and will also include announcements in their newsletters and quarterly reports. Already they are using the Altmetric Explorer to identify what types of books are really popular with audiences, and making additional efforts to offer similar content.

“Through the Altmetric data we identified that our marine books in particular are really popular. Information like this helps us better tailor our posts and the content we share to ensure maximum engagement.”

With altmetrics providing an up-to-date measure of the success of their ongoing promotional and engagement efforts, in future the BHL hopes to use altmetrics to help determine ongoing outreach and engagement strategy to ensure the continued awareness and success of their valuable content.

Key stats

- Biodiversity Heritage Library digital platform launched in 2007
- Includes over 46.6 million pages of natural history literature from from over 96,000 titles
- To date, Altmetric have seen over 10,000 online mentions of BHL content
- Almost 2,500 of those mentions are in the form of Wikipedia references