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Unlocking KU Leuven's natural science collections

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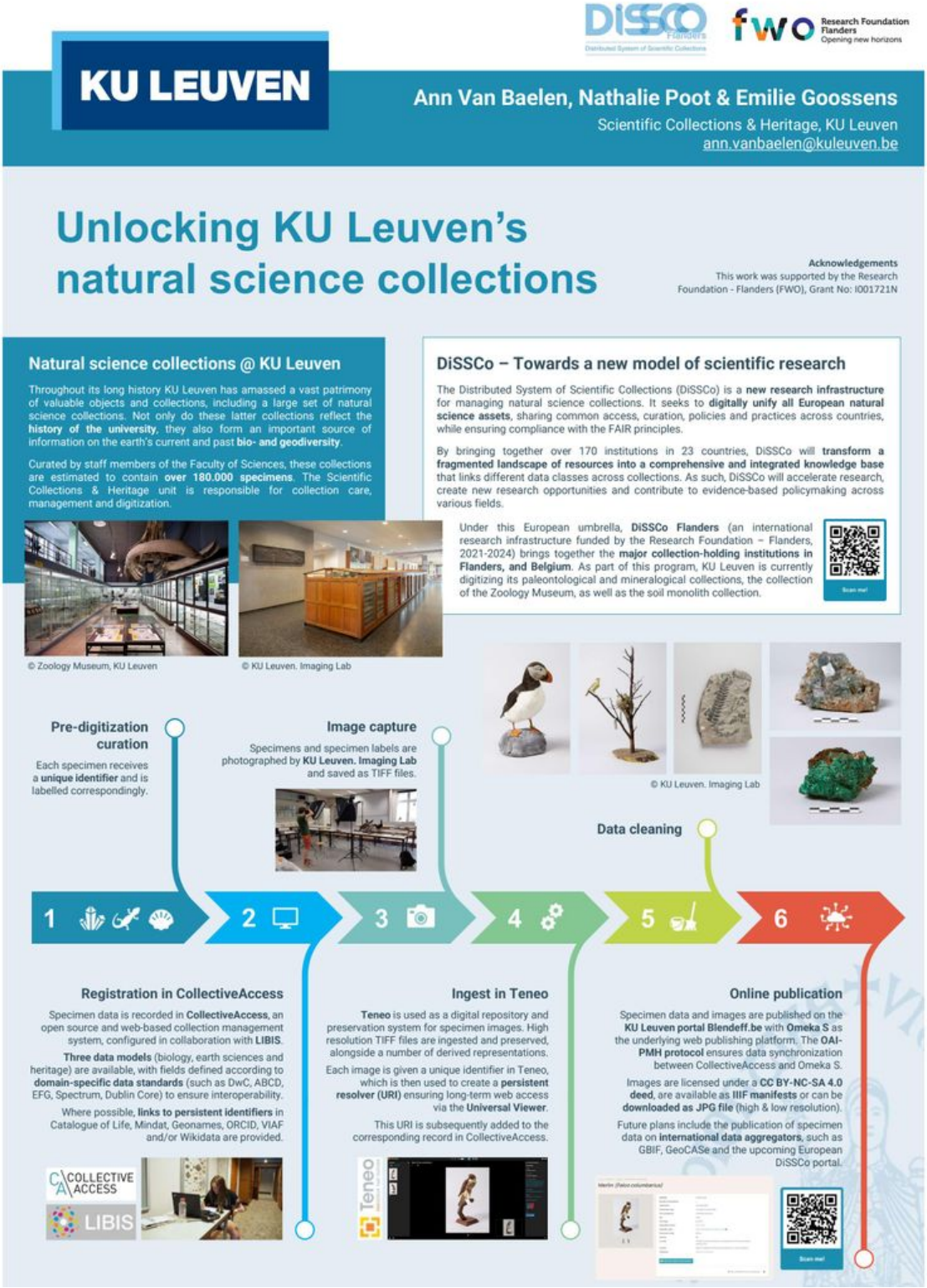
Abstract

Throughout its long history, KU Leuven has amassed a vast patrimony of valuable objects and collections, including a large set of natural science collections. Not only do these latter collections reflect the history of the university, they also form an important source of information on the earth's current and past bio- and geodiversity. As part of DiSSCo Flanders (Distributed System of Scientific Collections, Flanders), an FWO International Research Infrastructure (2021-2024), KU Leuven is currently digitizing several of its natural science collections. In total, these collections (paleontology, mineralogy, soil monoliths, and the Museum of Zoology) are estimated to contain over 180.000 specimens.

Information on specimens and their associated metadata is recorded in CollectiveAccess, an open-source collection management software. Configured in collaboration with LIBIS, it contains multiple data models (biology, earth sciences, and heritage) with fields defined according to the appropriate standards (DwC, ABCD, EFG, Spectrum, Dublin Core) to ensure interoperability. Where possible, links to persistent identifiers in Catalogue of Life, Geonames, Mindat, ORCID, VIAF, and/or Wikidata are provided. High resolution images of each specimen and associated labels are made by KU Leuven Imaging Lab in IIIF format, stored in Teneo, and are made accessible under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license.

As digitization continues, specimens and metadata will be published online through the KU Leuven data portal Blendeff, alongside international data infrastructures such as the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), Geoscience Collections Access Service (GeoCASe), and the future DiSSCo data infrastructure. By making these collections accessible following the FAIR data principles to researchers world-wide and to the wider public, they will contribute to the advancement of science, innovation, and policy.[1]

Poster



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Footnotes

1. This work was supported by the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO), Grant No: I001721N. ↩