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USDA and Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History Strengthen Scientific Partnership

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 27, 2023 – The Smithsonian Institution and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) are joining forces to protect U.S. plant health from invasive species. The National Museum of Natural History's Sant Director Dr. Kirk Johnson and APHIS Associate Deputy Administrator Matthew Rhoads have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This MoU celebrates the expanding relationship between the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) and APHIS in exotic insect, seed, and plant identification, agricultural quarantine inspection, entomological and botanical curation, and more.

APHIS and the Smithsonian work together to protect agricultural and natural resource health through invasive species identification. The collaboration advances the scientific community's knowledge and resource collection of exotic insect species as well as weed seeds and other contaminant plant parts.

"Together, we ensure accurate and timely pest species identification, which supports a strong agricultural economy and protects our natural resources," said Matthew Rhoads, associate deputy administrator for APHIS' Plant Protection and Quarantine. "This collaboration also reinforces our shared dedication to ground-breaking science and benefits both agencies, the nation, and the international scientific community."

This MoU provides USDA entomologists and botanists laboratory space in the museum and access to the Smithsonian's collections and libraries, and in turn, these scientists will invest their expertise in the curation and enhancement of those collections, which rank among the finest and most comprehensive in the world. The NMNH entomology collection, for example, includes more than 35 million specimens, while the United States National Herbarium houses a world-class collection of over five million plant specimens at the museum.

This strategic partnership will focus on providing identification of and information about arthropods and plants of agricultural importance while simultaneously providing scientific services to a wide array of researchers, stakeholders, and the public.

Johnson added, "I am excited to renew the collaboration between the National Museum of Natural History and APHIS. This MoU provides the framework for our organizations to conduct mutually beneficial scientific work together while advancing our collective knowledge. Strengthening our collaborative work together ensures the accuracy, currency, and continued growth of our expansive arthropod and botanical collections."

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