

Enchytraeid taxonomy hitch-hiking on big applied projects: The EcoFINDERS experience
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Enchytraeid species diversity is still poorly known even in comparatively well-studied regions such as Central Europe. Large numbers of specimens from different sites are currently being investigated in the framework of the EcoFINDERS project, financed by the European Commission and carried out by a consortium of 22 different institutions from 10 EU countries. The project aims at establishing soil biological indicators that help to define strategies for a sustainable management of soils in a future "Soil Framework Directive" of the European Union, and a large array of edaphological, microbiological and soil zoological data is being generated for this purpose.

Although taxonomy and Natural History are not the focus of this megaproject it nonetheless yields a large amount of taxonomic, faunistic, and biogeographic baseline data. In a first series of soil samples (ca. 250), ca. 30000 specimens of enchytraeids were extracted and 101 taxa distinguished, 66 of them with valid names, representing 32% of the known European enchytraeid fauna. 35 new or potentially new species were discovered. Barcoding of these taxa is under way to prepare automated molecular identification of entire soil samples, but also with the collateral benefit to solve taxonomic problems. To conclude, big applied projects such as EcoFINDERS are beneficial for fundamental taxonomic and Natural History research.

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