

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) is digitising its archives and placing them online

Marie Teissier

World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)

Origins

The incursion of Rinderpest in Europe, and especially the epizootic in Belgium in 1920, was the triggering factor in the creation of the OIE in 1924.

Founded several years after the International Office for Public Hygiene (IOPH), it was the culmination of a process of international consultation going back to 1863. At the initiative of France, an International conference was held in Paris in 1921 to which all countries were invited and forty-two States heeded the call.

Creation

This Conference expressed the wish that an International Office of epizootics for the control of infectious animal diseases be created and set up in Paris. Within less than three years, twenty eight states adhered and an “International Agreement” was signed on 25 January 1924.

Publications

The OIE, or World Organisation for Animal Health as it is now known, began publishing in 1927. For almost sixty years its main publication remained the “*Bulletin of the Office international des epizooties*”.

It was a miscellaneous collection of reports on its activities, containing:

- Epidemiological and regulatory information
- Scientific articles
- Texts on events relating to the Office
- Proceedings and reports of the annual General Session of the International Committee
- All official documents of the Office and its activities with other International Organisations
- Original articles on epizootic diseases
- Documents and information on International Meetings and Conferences, Conventions, Laws and Regulations
- Statistics on the animal health situation in Member Countries
- Reports of Specialist and Regional Commissions

The 93 volumes of the ***Bulletin*** from 1927 to 1981 reflect the true history of the Organisation since its creation.

However, it soon became apparent that one publication could not give a precise account of its main missions.

- **To protect world trade and food safety and promote animal welfare, health standards were elaborated:**
 - *The International Animal Health Code*, the regulatory basis for world-wide trade in animals and animal products, first issued in 1968, is revised annually.
 - *The Manual of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines*, a contribution to the international harmonisation of methods for the surveillance and control of the most important animal diseases, was first published in 1989.

Both international standards, originally written for *terrestrial animals* only, have been published for *aquatic animals* since 1995.

- **To collect, analyse and disseminate veterinary scientific information, a new quarterly trilingual periodical appeared in 1982:**
 - The *Scientific and Technical Review*
- **To provide information on the world animal health situation, disease information was published separately:**
 - *Statistics on Animal Health* started to be published annually in 1959, and became *World Animal Health* in 1985.
 - The information contained in *Monthly Epizootic Circular*, then *Weekly Disease Information*, is now available via the OIE Website.

This information has been available electronically through two databases, *HANDISTATUS* from 1994 to 2004 and *WAHID* (World Animal Health Information Database) since 2005.

Since 2002, the *Bulletin* has been published in magazine format four times a year.

Thematic publications, Technical items, Newsletters and Conference proceedings have been, and still are, published in the three official languages of the OIE, English, French and Spanish.

Digitisation

The need for information has considerably increased since the last two decades of the 20th Century with the fast and continuing development of information technology through data computing and access to the World Wide Web. Digitisation programmes have been undertaken all over the world to provide 24-hour access to extensive collections for users worldwide via the Internet. Soon, students and perhaps researchers will only search online: what is not there will not be considered. It will soon be almost as if what is not online did not exist.

Katie Hafner, in the New York Times article, "History, Digitized (and Abridged)," quotes Edward L. Ayers, historian and now president of the University of Richmond, as saying:

"There's an illusion being created that all the world's knowledge is on the Web, but we haven't begun to glimpse what is out there in local archives and libraries. Material that is not digitized risks being neglected as it would not have been in the past, virtually lost to the great majority of potential users."(1)

Our access to information has been completely changed by the big digitisation programmes undertaken worldwide: we increasingly share a huge collective collection of books, but lack of money, lack of time, lack of interest can lead institutions to forget their special collections, leaving them hidden and unprocessed, running the risk of disappearing if they are invisible. We don't need only to keep and preserve these collections, we also need to make them accessible, and, for knowledge purposes, digitisation should also provide increased access to hidden information.

A specialised Organisation like the OIE, which has started publishing about its activities since its creation, has accumulated through the years a unique and accurate source of information in the field of animal health, animal diseases, diagnostic and control means and measures, scientific research and sanitary regulation.

The OIE Member Countries and Territories are entitled to access the information about the evolution of their situation since they first joined the OIE, and they are now growing keen on collecting data on their own national history in the field. By increasing access to its collections through digitisation, the OIE will be able to meet its Members expectations and greatly expand its information potential.

The communication and sharing on the Internet of the new historical resources emanating from the digitisation programme should more generally meet the need for information of Governmental Authorities, Diplomatic Missions, Delegates to the OIE, Observers from other International Organisations, on the one hand, and the many Academies, Learned Societies, and Teaching Faculties, particularly the many veterinarians, biologists, laboratory workers, epidemiologists, statisticians, livestock producers, historians, and students, on the other hand, who, in their various way, are interested in the work and the accomplishments of the OIE over the years.

The *Bulletin*, together with the scientific articles published since 1981 in the *Scientific and Technical Review*, the International health standards published in the “*International Animal Health Code*” since 1968, the “*Manual of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines*” since 1989, statistics on animal health worldwide published annually in “*Statistics on Animal Health*” and “*World Animal Health*” since 1959, are a valuable contribution to the improvement of animal health worldwide and a rich historical resource in the field of public health.

This is the reason why the World Organisation for Animal Health decided in September 2008 to undertake the huge task of digitising these main archives in order to make them available to the public on its website. With this digitisation project, the OIE is focusing mainly on providing information that could not be found elsewhere. We need to provide, on the Internet, what researchers want and use. But we are aware that by increasing access, we also make our publications better known and we increase the perceived value of our information.

Conclusion

This project started in September 2008 with the digitisation of the complete collection of the *Bulletin* from Volume 1 (1927) to Volume 93 (1981), together with the *1921 Paris International Conference*, which is at the origin of the creation of the OIE.

The digitisation of the *Scientific and Technical Review* from 1981 to 2000, before the articles became available online started in November. The project will continue with the first editions

of the “*Code*”, the “*Manual*” and “*World Animal Health*”, and is due to finish by the end of 2009.

The objective of the project is not only to make the collection available, but to link it to other resources online. The electronic files obtained from the digitisation process will be integrated into the online public access of the OIE bibliographic database(2) (extracted from the database online on the OIE Intranet site), which at the present time gives access to more than 4500 referenced OIE documents, with about 1700 “full text” documents).

With this addition, the public online access to OIE’s documents will be considerably enriched with several thousand documents being available reflecting the history of the OIE activities through more than eighty years of existence.

At the moment, “electronic” publications and software include disease information from 1996, early warning and weekly disease information; International Standards (*Codes, Manuals, etc.*); *Scientific and Technical Review* (contents and abstracts); *Bulletin*, scientific and general information on OIE activities, animal diseases including zoonoses, media resources, press releases and editorials from the Director General. All are available in English, French and Spanish on the OIE Website at: <http://www.oie.int>

Notes

(1) Hafner, K. History, Digitized (and Abridged). New York Times, March 10, 2007

(2) The new OIE Website will soon launch this public access to the OIE document database where its main publications, including books, articles, Conference proceedings, reports of Working Groups, Specialist and Scientific Commissions, resolutions and recommendations... can be searched by English or French keywords.

References

-Erway, R. Supply and Demand: Special Collections and Digitisation. *Liber Quarterly* 18 (3/4), December 2008, 324-336

-Erway, R. & Schaffner J. Shifting Gears: Gearing Up to Get Into the Flow. Report produced by OCLC Programs and Research, 2007. Published online at: www.oclc.org/programs/publications/reports/2007-02.pdf