

Losing Species

We are losing species at an unprecedented rate. Now, some of you will have heard, or read in the newspapers, that we're losing 20 species every day, 50 species every minute, 200 species every second. I mean, you'll hear these predictions and estimates of how many species have been lost. But just think about it. A collection like this, which has a historical record, is tremendously important in really giving us a baseline about extinction. And let me tell you what I mean by that. We have collections here that were made at the turn of the century. We know exactly which species were living in a particular place at that time. We have all the information about them, which is attached to each specimen. So, for example, this specimen here, you'll see, as with every jar in this collection, has a number on it. Now, that number is its catalogue number. And attached to that number is a tremendous body of data. That data tells you who collected that specimen, how they collected it, at what depth they collected it, what the temperature was, what the water chemistry was, what kind of day it was, what the scenery around was, whether there was fringing vegetation around the stream. All of this information, like how many other species were collected

with it, is stored attached to that number. So you can imagine that that's a very, very important resource to have.