



NEWSLETTER



Vol 4 No 6

Review of the Year

(BCG's contribution to the Specialist Groups Session of the Museums Association's 1986 Conference in Aberdeen. Written and presented by Peter Davis.)

As a founder member of BCG it is difficult to imagine that it was ten years ago that museum biologists took the first tentative steps towards the foundation of their own specialist group. So, instead of a 'Review of the Year' perhaps I should delve deeper into history. However, Graham Swift, in his novel WATERLAND (1), defines history as 'that impossible thing: the attempt to give an account with incomplete knowledge, of actions undertaken with incomplete knowledge; so that it teaches us no short-cuts to Salvation, no recipe for a New World, only the dogged and patient art of making-do'. So I will not bore you with a detailed account of what BCG has achieved, but leave those of you who seek that knowledge to explore for yourselves the cumbersome but precious bag of clues called history which lies within the pages of the group's NEWSLETTER. What a treasure chest - consider some of the titles 'Confessions of a punk naturalist', 'Biologist on the bottle' and 'Biodeterioration' - the latter of interest to all of us in a certain sense.

Briefly, BCG has provided a forum for discussion for museum biologists, an opportunity to bring together and share expertise, experience and concern. Three major threads of activity are evident throughout the last ten years.

First, biological recording - the collection, storage and dissemination of information about the natural environment.

Second, biological collections and their current status.

Third, a liaison and monitoring role which has been a fundamental activity as an awareness of environmental issues and environmental organisations have blossomed.

Major achievements which have resulted from

these activities include the development of a national network for biological recording, now as the 'National Federation for Biological Recording' making a plea for more adequate staffing and funding. On the collections front we have seen the rise of the Federation for Natural Science Collections Research (FENSCORE), the preparation of a national collections database at Manchester, and unprecedented regional co-operation in collections research and rescue. BCG has been responsible for initiating the 'Working Party on Natural Sciences Collections Resources', and we will hear more later from Peter Morgan about the 'WILLIAMS REPORT'.

In spite of these achievements, it seems that natural science, the main reason for the founding of many of our provincial museums, is now regarded as the Cinderella of the profession in terms of adequate funding. For example, in 1986 we see the Natural History Museum, because it is facing financial stringencies, plans to introduce an admission charge, so denying many thousands of visitors, especially children, the opportunity to exposure to arguably the most exciting, certainly the largest view of the natural world, in Britain. The Royal Institution of South Wales Museum in Swansea is threatened to a greater extent by withdrawal of University support. I find it difficult to cite a natural history museum or natural history department which has adequate staffing or funding in relation to its collections and responsibilities. Natural history in museums no longer has the prestige and kudos that for example 'art' enjoys, linked in part to the difficult problem of valuing natural history collections, but also to the lack of understanding, even within the profession, of what the museum naturalist is trying to achieve. The idea that natural history is stuffed birds in glass cases is unfortunately still alive and well. Even in the popularity stakes (if we believe that the Scots are representative of our public) natural science has been toppled by local and social history - 'the hay rakes and flat irons of the dear departed' as Reg Wagstaffe (2) branded that discipline.

In truth, 'local wildlife' was only 1% behind in that particular poll(3). There is an enigma here - isn't it odd, even incomprehensible, that financial support for natural history in museums in Britain is declining at a time when interest in the natural world and the environment is increasing? If we consider that the ultimate reason for having natural history museums and natural history displays is environmental or conservation education - and in this respect natural history is different from all other disciplines in that to be successful it must change attitudes and influence the visitor's subsequent behaviour - then there can never have been a more important and opportune time to put greater resources into natural history museums. Our natural world is disappearing fast - 20 million hectares of rain forest were destroyed in 1985; in spite of a worldwide moratorium 1500 minke whales were killed; famine engulfed much of Africa; the world population grew to 5,000 millions; Chernobyl terrified us - all of which indicates that we still fail to comprehend man's impact on the environment. I don't think that there can be any doubt that education is the key to conservation - especially so in the Third World. Recent work (4) in Tanzania and Rwanda has shown that change in attitudes towards wildlife and wilderness areas can be made by increasing people's awareness; surely this is an area where museums can make an impact. It's easy to be complacent and think ... well, it's not like that in Doncaster, Gosport, or Cardiff, even Aberdeen. But isn't it? The launch of the British Wildlife Appeal this year highlighted the problems closer to home: in the UK an area of prime natural habitat the size of the Lake District has been destroyed since 1949. In the interests of building food-mountains, we have lost 95% of our colourful hay meadows, 60% of heathland and 40% of natural woodlands for more quick profit. So we, in museums, must make people aware of such changes, we must record and monitor what biological resources we have in order to aid their protection; we must develop links with individuals and conservation organisations to promote environmental conservation. There is nothing new in this message, simply that its urgency is greater. In the words of the British Wildlife Appeal - 'tomorrow is too late'.

Naturalists in museums have a vital role to play in conservation, but finding adequate funding for this role is difficult. There is no equivalent of the situation in archaeology where 'rescues' can be funded and additional money made available for conservation of finds. Yes - many 'one-off' biological surveys have been made, or funded by, other conservation organisations - NCC, National Trust, County Trusts etc. But this is not enough - ongoing monitoring of sites is vital.

There are, of course, many success stories in conservation; success stories in which museum biologists and museum collections have played their part. Collections should not be forgotten in the conservation story - often it is necessary to make new collections to assess

a site, collections which must be maintained; it is also necessary to be able to consult well-curated collections to obtain correct identifications. Without correct names on the species, we are likely to reach the wrong conclusions about the significance of a site.

We must not ignore the role of the keepers of natural history - as identifiers, catalysts, recorders and collection managers. Those of you who are directors of museums may sometimes wonder what on earth your biologists are doing, as they give apunecture to insects, drown worms in alcohol and escape into the warm sunshine of a July day muttering 'fieldwork'. You could be forgiven for thinking that these individuals may have come to the same conclusion as the famous ichthyologist Francis Magri Macmahon 'that the study and the company of animals, plants and stones was more interesting, more pleasant and a good deal safer than that of most humans'. However, believe me, all of them recognise the wider remit and responsibilities of the museum biologist, his collections and records; BCG will continue to act as forum and catalyst for them during the next ten years.

P.S. Davis, 21.7.86

Hancock Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne

Notes

1. Swift, G. (1983). Waterland. London, Heinemann.
2. Liverpool Conference of the Museums Association, 1970.
3. Public Attitudes to Scottish Museums. SMC Research Series No.1 (1985). Scottish Museums Council, Edinburgh.
4. Harcourt, A.H., Pennington, H. and Weber, A.W. (1986). Public Attitudes to Wildlife and Conservation in the Third World. Oryx, 20.

Geoff Stansfield would like to hear from any BCG member who has access to the Cites Identification Manual.

- Vol 1 Mammalia
- Vol 2 Aves
- Vol 3 Amphibia, Reptilia, Pisces
- Vol 4 Parts and Derivatives I
- Vol 5 Parts and Derivatives II

The five volumes are priced at \$250.00 and are available from the Association of Systematics Collections, Kansas.

Geoff Stansfield, Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, 152 Princess Road East, Leicester LE1 7LG
Tel: 0533 523965.

Collections

The University of Liverpool herbarium: recently acquired by Liverpool Museum.

Arranging the transfer of an herbarium of around 80,000 sheets is never easy. However, I am happy to report that it can be done - even when one is reliant on using the same cabinets in the new store that were in use in the old.

The Liverpool University herbarium was first divided in 1974, when pressure of space in the Hartley Botanical Laboratories (on the University campus) led to the transfer of the British phanerogams and some cryptogamic material to the Museum. At the same time the rest of the herbarium, totalling (as we now know!) some 70,000 flowering plants and ferns and about 10,000 bryophytes, was installed at the University's Botanic Garden at Ness, South Wirral.

In the early 1980's a development plan for the Botanic Gardens was implemented which involved upgrading the catering and other visitor services. Despite major building work at the garden involving the construction of a new visitor centre/lecture theatre, conservatory and toilet block, it was clear that until the herbarium could be removed from the main building - which was due to house a restaurant, new offices, and other facilities - these subsequent improvements could not be started. In 1981 the bryophytes were transferred to the Museum; by 1984 we were ready to begin the big move of the remaining herbarium to the Museum.

The collections were stored in two main types of cabinet. The first, which had been the main form of storage prior to the 1960s, is a three-tier wooden cupboard internally divided into 2 x 4 pigeon holes. The second, which had been purchased at the time that FLORA EUROPAEA was forging ahead in Liverpool, was a metal Roneo-Vickers herbarium cabinet with internal 2 x 6 pigeon holes and magnetically dust-sealing doors. These were stacked into a double-sided block of 21 units (3 high), and they had all to be unbolted and emptied before they could be moved with difficulty. The wooden cupboards could be moved easily empty.

Folding cardboard boxes were pressed into service; the herbarium material was transferred in groups of two to four bundles per box, each box being numbered in sequence. No attempt was made, at the time, to reorder the sequence; this came later. We must have made about 15 to 20 round trips to Ness with the Museum van, carrying a mixture of empty cabinets and specimen boxes. Once the metal cabinets had been re-erected, in the former "History of the Ship" gallery at William Brown Street, material could be packed away

temporarily in sequence. By using the wooden cabinets (which had formerly housed bryophytes) as overflow storage it was then possible to rearrange the material in the sequence of FLORA EUROPAEA. We took this opportunity to merge the Museum's European collections with those from Ness, and to do the same with the non-European University material which until then had been stored in the family sequence of Bentham & Hooker's GENERA PLANTARUM.

The biggest job was the stamping, numbering and re-ordering of the material. With the assistance of a temporary member of staff, it took just over six months of continuous work. It proved possible, at the same time, to extract duplicates for exchange purposes; some of the collections already held at the Museum were duplicated in the University herbarium. We also formed a fairly accurate picture of the composition of the herbarium collections.

The University herbarium European material was arranged in order of FLORA EUROPAEA, so it was relatively simple to incorporate the Museum's European holdings. Being able to arrange a collection according to an up-to-date taxonomic treatment is a tremendous advantage, even though the work involved in putting plants into the correct folders is very considerable. Even where material is "fully" and "well" named, the names often bear little resemblance to those now in familiar use, and a considerable botanical library would be needed if one were to follow up and research every taxonomic conundrum. Fortunately one can always resort to the taxon of universal rank, "Indet."

Although most of the herbarium is now adequately curated, one section continues to pose considerable problems. We call it "the research material". This is what remains of the experimental material grown by research students, often consisting of badly-pressed vouchers bearing nothing more than a slide number (for cytological vouchers) or a name from a botanic garden seed list. While I fully endorse the desire of the Research Councils to ensure that voucher material is deposited long-term in a recognised institution, it is a pity that so few resources are available to curate these collections. Students finishing off a Ph.D. are generally disinclined to put the curation of their material as a number one priority; I know, having been one myself! Perhaps we need, as curators, to liaise more closely with students and to submit them to some training if we are to achieve proper standards of curation for the "research material" which so often remains in University collections, unmounted and certainly unloved.

John Edmondson
Keeper of Botany
Liverpool Museum

Fate of the Natural History Collections
at the Grosvenor Museum, Chester

Members may remember some years ago that concern was expressed about the future of the Natural History collections at the Grosvenor Museum, Chester. This followed the decision not to refill the then vacant post of Keeper of Natural History.

After discussion with the Museums Association, the Biology Curators' Group and the Geological Curators' Group, Chester City Council decided to transfer on long term loan, certain discrete collections to other museums, where their future use in research and their safety could be assured.

In the main these collections were either:

1 those that had special scientific or historical significance either regionally or nationally; or

2 those that had little or no relevance to the Grosvenor Museum or its locality under present-day collecting policy.

It was decided to appoint a part time Natural History Assistant to oversee these transfers, to curate the remaining collections and to develop their educational use at all levels.

Prior to the appointment a large collection of mounted bird specimens from the county of Essex was returned to Chelmsford Museum at their request. The birds had originally been passed to the Grosvenor Museum in 1957. Title to the Chelmsford Bird Collection has reverted to Chelmsford Borough Council. This case is distinct from subsequent transfers where the title remains with Chester City Council, and a long term loan period of 15 years has been agreed.

I took up the post of part time Natural History Assistant on 2nd September 1985 and began work on transferring certain collections where specific requests had already been received and accepted.

Following discussions with and advice from a number of other museum services, final decisions about other transfers were delayed until I had sufficient time to review the collections and research their historical and geographical associations with Chester and district, and to assess their suitability and potential for educational use within the Museum.

At the present time the majority of transfers have been completed. In some cases the receiving institutions have delayed their transfers until sufficient space to house them has been found. Final transfer of records and official transfer of documents has been delayed but should be completed soon.

For further information contact Fiona J. Mackenzie, Natural History Assistant, Grosvenor Museum, Chester.

Set out below is a simple listing of the collections which have been transferred.

GEOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS

Carboniferous plants: 40 specimens from Teilia Quarry, Gwaenysgar, Clwyd (includes type and cited specimens). Transferred to National Museum of Wales, Department of Geology on permanent loan.

Triassic vertebrate fossil footprints: the Osmund W. Jeffs collection of Triassic amphibian and reptile footprints from Storeton Quarries, Merseyside. To be transferred on 15 year loan to National Museums on Merseyside, Department of Geology.

Quaternary molluscs: the A.C. Nicholson collection from Gloppa Gravels, near Oswestry, Salop. To be transferred on 15 year loan to National Museums on Merseyside, Department of Geology.

BOTANICAL COLLECTIONS

Grosvenor Museum herbarium I flowering plants and ferns: primarily the collections of Eliza Potts with associated collectors.

Eliza Potts: mainly local specimens or northern bias, collected 1832-1866.
M.E. Feilden: Cheshire and North Wales 1880's
A.J. Thornton: Surrey 1919
T. Edmondson: local Cheshire material collected 1960's

Grosvenor Museum herbarium II flowering plants and ferns: collection of A. Pollitt, local (Cheshire), collected 1920's, and two volumes of alpine flowers collected by Leigh Mallory.

Algae: 3 volumes, 1 folder. Seaweeds collected by Miss E.E. Feilden from Isle of Wight and the Welsh coast 1840-1870.

Fungi: 3 boxes of microscope slides and plant hosts in envelopes with a manuscript list and notes collected and prepared by Dr. Theodore Green.

Seed collection: all on 15 year loan to National Museums on Merseyside, Department of Botany.

Algae: Stolterforth diatom slide collection and manuscripts, with slides including specimens from HMS Challenger. 15 year loan to British Museum (Natural History), Department of Botany.

ZOOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS

Invertebrates

Insects: British, 4 boxes of Albert R. Wright Hymenoptera specimens. 15 year loan to National Museums on Merseyside, Department of Invertebrate Zoology.

N.B. Other specimens will follow when full cataloguing has allowed us to assess the collections more fully. These will include:

British Macro Lepidoptera: data specimens from amalgamated reference series; most data specimens from A.H. Thompson; in store boxes.

British beetles: exceptionally interesting specimens only.

British Micro Lepidoptera: all data specimens.

British 'other insects': all data specimens.

Foreign hawk moths: small number of data specimens.

Insecta: Foreign, 40 drawers of assorted non-data foreign insects in a cabinet loaned to the Horniman Museum, Department of Natural History. Specimens to be used for display, educational work etc. and a small collection to be returned in presentable condition for use by our Educational Services.

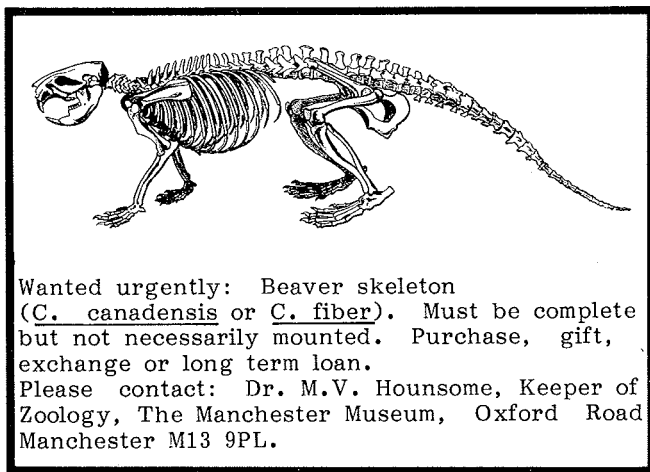
Mollusca: all data specimens (approximately 200), listed by Mrs N. MacMillan. 15 year loan to National Museums on Merseyside, Department of Invertebrate Zoology.

Vertebrates

Bird egg collections: all contained in five cabinets and several boxes. Main collectors: Webster, P.W., Elppick, G.B., Strefford, R., Broome, L., Dobie, W.H., Coward, T., Worthington. 15 year loan to Manchester Museum, Department of Zoology.

Mammal bones (cave material): 37 boxes from Cefn Caves, Prestatyn, North Wales. 15 year loan to National Museum of Wales, Department of Zoology.

F.J. Mackenzie
Natural History Assistant
Grosvenor Museum, Chester
October 1986



Wanted urgently: Beaver skeleton (*C. canadensis* or *C. fiber*). Must be complete but not necessarily mounted. Purchase, gift, exchange or long term loan. Please contact: Dr. M.V. Hounsome, Keeper of Zoology, The Manchester Museum, Oxford Road Manchester M13 9PL.

Letters

Further to the debate on the use of stuffed birds in displays, the following letter, sent by Richard Porter of the RSPB to Geoff Halfpenny at Stoke Museum, states the RSPB's position very clearly. The letter is reproduced with Mr. Porter's permission.

Dear Mr. Halfpenny,

As far as the RSPB's attitude towards the use of stuffed birds in exhibitions is concerned, I feel it would be helpful if I explained our current policy.

The RSPB has always given support to the ICBP recommendation that stuffed and mounted birds should not be used in any exhibition. This was unanimously adopted in 1968 at the ninth conference of the European Continental Section which stated:

"Recognising that the increased collecting of, and trading of, eggs and stuffed specimens for use in schools have now reached such proportions that they now constitute a menace to many species... recommends to Ministers of Education of European Countries that such teaching material should be discontinued and replaced by photographs, colour slides, films, tape recordings and other audio-visual aids presenting the birds in their natural setting, which corresponds more appropriately to modern educational methods".

In addition RSPB staff and anyone acting in the name of the Society, may not exhibit or show mounted (stuffed), specimens or eggs in any talk, exhibition or display. Furthermore, the use of preserved birds, study skins and parts of birds (eg. wings, feet, skeletons, feathers) and old nests may be permitted for use in talks and displays with discretion. Full consideration, however, should always be given to the use of alternatives, such as paper or polystyrene models. In any such exhibit, the specimens or parts must have been legally acquired and a note displayed stating their origin.

You will note that this policy applies to RSPB staff and those acting in the name of the RSPB. It does not, of course, apply to other organisations.

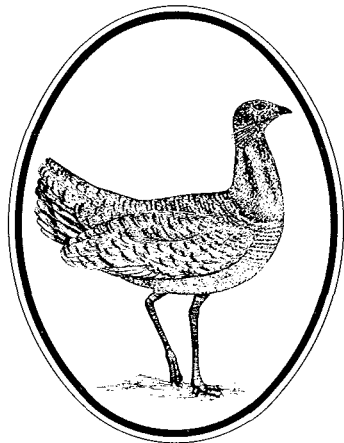
Clearly, the use of stuffed birds in exhibitions is a matter for individuals and others to decide upon for themselves. If anyone contacts us, we will inform them of our policy, but it would be presumptuous of us to insist, or even persuade them, to follow it. In addition we ensure they are informed of the laws governing the keeping and trading in stuffed birds; also that displays of stuffed birds can spark off an interest in the viewer which in turn might lead to an increase in demand for such specimens. This of course is impossible to quantify but a demand there

certainly is judging by the numbers of trading taxidermists. Most of these of course abide by the law but not all as demonstrated by the fact that in the last three or four years we have taken several prosecutions for taxidermy related offences.

Having said that, I fully accept that stuffed specimens clearly have an educational value and hence, of course, the reason the RSPB does not feel it can impose its own policies on others.

If you feel it would be helpful, then feel free to publish the relevant parts of this letter in one of your future newsletters, and of course if I have not made anything clear, please do not hesitate to come back to me.

Yours sincerely,
Richard Porter
Head of Species Protection
RSPB



Wanted - historical information on Bustards (Otididae).

Dear Sir,
The Great Bustard Trust was founded in 1970 with the aim of re-introducing these beautiful large game birds back into the British countryside after an absence of over one hundred and fifty years. Birds imported from Portugal and Hungary have been reared in an attempt to establish a breeding nucleus on Salisbury Plain, the project and immediate environment being protected within the confines of the Defence Establishment boundaries.

While the long-term scheme continues on a practical level, various aspects of the birds' history are being researched, especially the period prior to and during their decline and eventual extinction in Britain (around 1830). The Trust would, therefore, be very interested to learn of any data regarding Bustard specimens (skins, mounts, eggs, skeletons, etc..) of both indigenous and overseas species held in British museums. Also, to enable the historical record to be substantiated, it may be possible to tie in specimens with accounts in the county avifaunas, so references from these would also be of interest.

Information about the last Great Bustards (*Otis tarda*) in Britain is to be used to compile a record of the overall distribution and decline of the species; the data will be scanned for any patterns which may emerge. Information would also be welcomed regarding the other species which are known as sporadic migrants in Britain, namely, the Little Bustard (*Tetrax tetrax*) and the Houbara Bustard (*Chlamydotis undulata*). Again, avifaunas may hold references to sightings and 'shootings' in the 19th and 20th centuries.

All information will be greeted with great interest, and it is hoped that resulting data will contribute towards a display which the Trust intends to use to help generate interest in the species and its kin throughout the world, and to promote their conservation. Of the 23 species of Bustard, most are now considered 'endangered' on a world basis.

Expenses such as postage and photocopying will be refunded as necessary.

Yours sincerely,
Mark Newman-Wren
(Hon. Sec. Great Bustard Trust Ltd.)
'Remap'
Pentridge
Nr. Salisbury
Wilts. SP5 5QX

Dear John,

May I publicly thank all those who replied to my last query about sealing museum jars, which is now happily solved. I now have another problem to put to the combined wisdom of Biology Curators, so successful was this means of enquiry.

We wish to remount spirit specimens for display, putting them in phenoxytol with a view to preserving what colour remains, and even regaining some which has been lost in the past. Past preserving media include both ethanol and formalin. The problem is that we wish to include a display label inside the jar on the mounting board. In the past we have used tissue stuck with gelatin, but now are experimenting with both Letraset and letters produced on a Graphix machine (which cuts out letters to order from plastic sheet). For the mounting board, we prefer to use either Perspex or a newer, cheaper substance called Foamex rather than glass, simply because they are easier and safer to drill holes in for mounting the specimen. Unfortunately, in phenoxytol on Perspex or Foamex neither Letraset, nor Graphix letters nor tissue will stick for long using its regular adhesive. It now also appears that even in previous media, tissue and gelatin are not permanently fixed if the mounting board is Perspex or Foamex.

Do we have to go back to alcohol, tissue/gelatin and glass, or has anyone else got a better method of producing clear, reasonably

large lettering (and even perhaps distribution maps) to go in phenoxyltol using mounting boards made of a modern, easily drillable material?

Yours sincerely,
Jenny Clack
Assistant Curator, Department of Zoology,
University of Cambridge, Downing Street,
Cambridge CB2 3EJ

Diary

Tuesday 17th and Wednesday 18th February 1987

Short course on 'Design, Production and Print buying of Exhibition Handlists, Guide Books, Brochures and Publicity Materials. Part sponsored by Museums Association at Book House Training Centre, Wandsworth. Contact: Mark Taylor, Museums Association.

Friday 6th March 1987

GCG meeting at the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, on the Chinese Dinosaur Exhibition.

Thursday 12th March 1987

Social History Curators Group and MPG joint meeting at the Yorkshire Museum, York: The Disposal of Museum Collections. Contact: David Fleming, Town Docks Museum, Queen Victoria Square, Hull HU1 3DX. Cost £6.00 (£4.00 members MPG or SHCG)

Friday 3rd and Saturday 4th April 1987

Museums Computer Group meeting at the Museum of London. Contact: Charles Pettitt, Manchester Museum.

Friday 3rd and Saturday 4th April 1987

BCG meeting at Sheffield; the full programme is included in the Newsletter. AGM will be held during that meeting. Bookings should be in by now, but contact Derek Whiteley at Sheffield Museum if you forgot.

Friday 24th and Saturday 25th April 1987

GCG meeting at Dorchester Museum and 'Geology in Dorset: Collections, Collectors and Museums Past and Present.

During the week 24th to 28th August 1987

GCG meeting in Belfast to coincide with the British Association meeting there. Subject: Geological Site Conservation.

Monday 21st to Friday 25th September 1987

Symposium on the storage of recorded images, New College, Oxford. Of interest to curators who have collections of slides or earlier photographic images in their care. Full programme to be announced. Call for

papers now. Contact: Miss H.M. Graves, Research Division, Kodak Ltd., Headstone Drive, Harrow, Middlesex HA1 4TY.

Friday 25th September 1987

BCG Seminar at Coventry Museum, 'Live Animal Displays in Museums: the Lower Vertebrates. Co-ordinated by Adam Wright, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry (see the short programme elsewhere in this Newsletter).

Thursday 1st and Friday 2nd October 1987

Joint GCG, Geol Soc and Pal As meeting at Burlington House, London, on 'Use and Conservation of Palaeontological Sites'.

Friday 4th December 1987

GCG meeting: 'Public Access to Collections' at Liverpool Museum.

Spring meeting and AGM, 1987

Theme: NATURAL HISTORY ON DISPLAY

Venue: City Museum, Weston Park, Sheffield

Dates: 3rd and 4th April, 1987.

Programme:

Friday 3rd April

10.00 Museum and Wildlife Gallery open

10.30 Coffee in the Large Lecture Room

11.00-12.30 Recent Developments at Sheffield Museum

Welcome - Philip Broomhead (Director)

The New Wildlife Gallery - Tim Riley (PK, Natural Sciences)

A Sideways Look at the Wildlife Gallery - Derek Whiteley (AK, Zoology)

The New Ecology Unit at Sheffield Museum - Ian Rotherham (Ecologist)

12.30-2.00 Lunch, with an opportunity to look round the Gallery and/or the Ecology Unit. A number of pubs and cafes are available.

2.00 (prompt)-4.00 Modern and Future Trends in Natural History Display

The Planned Geology and Wildlife Gallery at Peterborough Museum - Gordon Chancellor (Peterborough Museum)

Natural History Galleries - the Educationalist's Viewpoint - Keith Clarkson (Losehill Hall Field Centre)

GCSE Requirements and Biology Galleries - Cheryl Gill (Extension Services, Sheffield Museum)

The Natural History Centre at Liverpool Museum - Ian Wallace and/or Video (Liverpool Museum)

An Introduction to Design Techniques and Materials for Biologists - Roger Mann (Consultant Designer, Lincoln)

4.00 Biology Curators' Group AGM with tea and biscuits.

Evening session. A Review of Natural

History Galleries in Britain and Abroad -
Geoff Stansfield (Leicester University,
Dept. of Museum Studies)

area is attractive to entomologists who
may wish to explore. Lunch can be taken
in a nearby pub.

followed by discussion and bar.

Contact: Derek Whiteley, City Museum, Weston
Park, Sheffield S10 2TP, telephone 0742
768588.

Saturday 4th April

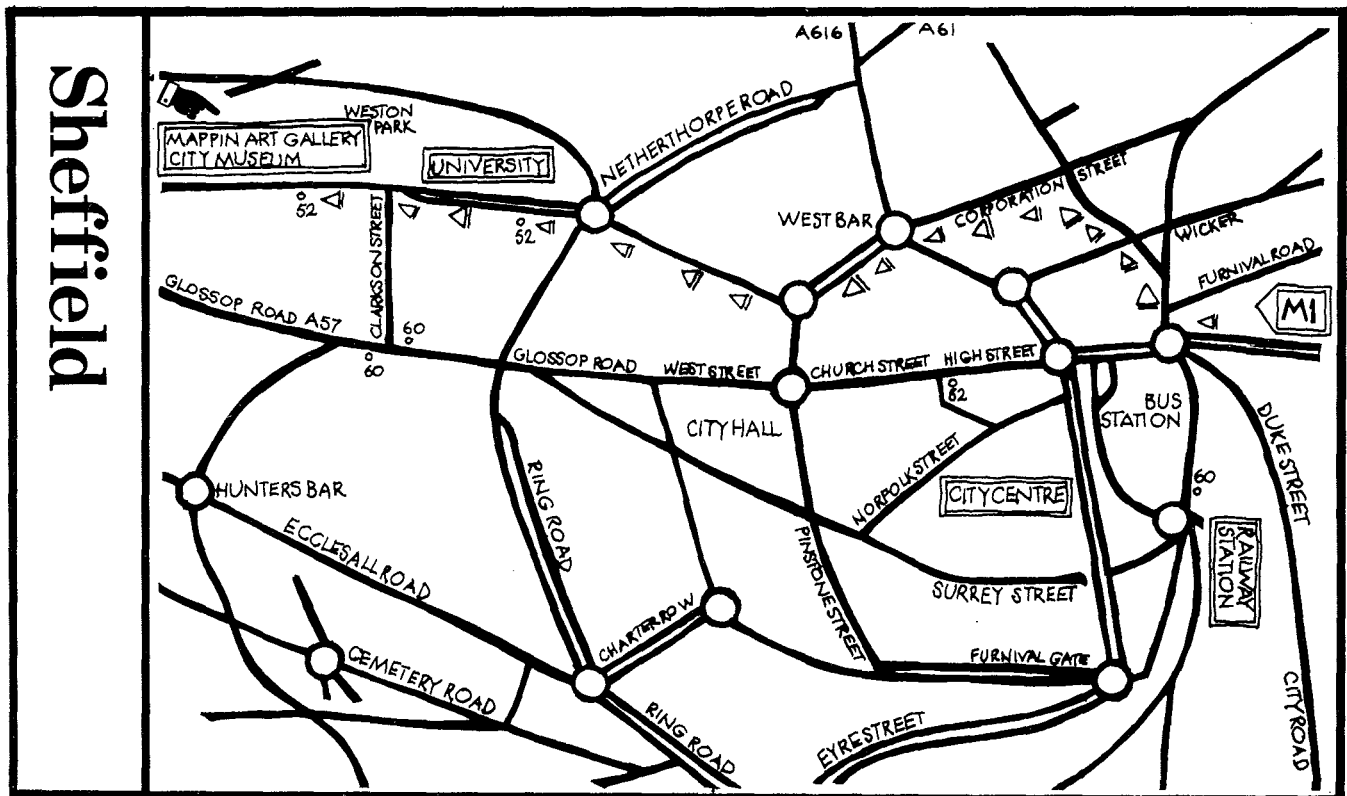
Morning session. For those who wish, and if
there is sufficient demand, an informal
discussion on the BERNICE WILLIAMS
REPORT can be arranged.

Please try to attend. Overnight accommodation
should have been booked now (details were in
the last Newsletter), but for late bookings
please contact Derek as soon as possible. A
limited number of sleeping bags/floor spaces
are available for those hardy types with small
budgets.

Late morning and afternoon. A visit to
Creswell Crags Visitor Centre to view the
public displays and see behind the
scenes. The osteology collection,
contemporary and pleistocene, is one of
the best outside London. Creswell Crags
is one of the outstanding quaternary sites
in Europe. Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre
is not far away and can be included. The

There should be ample time for social
discussion, meeting old friends and making new
ones.

A small charge to cover expenses will be
collected on the day.



How to find Sheffield City Museum on 3rd April

From the west, the A57 Snake Pass (if free of
snow) enters Sheffield near the University.

By car: M1 from north or south, leave at
Junction 33 (Catcliffe) and take the link road
(Sheffield Parkway) to the centre of
Sheffield. Turn right at the terminal
roundabout and follow the signs for the
University (or A57 Manchester). The Museum is
situated about 1 mile to the west of the city
in Weston Park, close to the University.

Parking: possible but difficult on a number
of local side roads all day.

By rail: take the no.60 bus (every 5 minutes)
from outside railway station to the
University; there is a short walk to Museum.
Or, walk from railway station to High Street
and take a no.52 bus directly to the Museum.

AGM

Notice of Annual General Meeting - 1987

The Annual General Meeting of the Biology Curators' Group will be held at 4pm on Friday 3rd April at Sheffield City Museum, Weston Park, Sheffield.

Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 16th April 1986 at Cambridge
3. Secretary's report
4. Treasurer's report (to be circulated)
5. Editors' reports
6. Election of officers and committee
7. Date and place of next meeting
8. Any other business (any business under this heading should be notified in writing to the Honorary Secretary at least four weeks before the meeting).

Nominations are invited for officers and members of the committee:

Present position: (year of election in brackets)

Chairman: Tony Irwin
(Acting) Secretary: Derek Whiteley*
Treasurer: Adam Wright
Membership Secretary: Adam Wright
Advertising Officer: Adam Wright
Editor: John Mathias
Special Publications Editor:
Steve Garland

Committee:

Steve Moran (1986)
Gordon Reid (1986)
Derek Whiteley* (1986)
Howard Mendel (1986)
Graham Walley (1985)
Phil Collins (1986)
Geoff Stansfield (1984)

*Willing to stand only if no other nominations are forthcoming. All others are willing to stand for re-election.

The committee has the power to co-opt. Present co-opted members are Di Smith (GCG representative) and Rosina Down.

The present committee consists of nine posts of which only seven are presently filled.

Nominations for officers and committee members must be supported by two members of the Group. Nominations, in writing, must reach the Secretary at least two weeks before the Annual General Meeting. (A signed statement that the nominee is prepared to stand is also useful.)

Derek Whiteley (Acting Secretary)
City Museum, Weston Park, Sheffield
S10 2TP

Autumn meeting, 1987

Live Animal Displays in Museums:
the Lower Vertebrates

The BCG autumn meeting for 1987 is a seminar organised by Adam Wright at Coventry Museum titled 'Live Animal Displays in Museums: the Lower Vertebrates'. A full programme will be included in the next Newsletter, but here it is in outline.

Freshwater Aquaria - Tim Henshaw
(Bolton Museum)

Marine Aquaria - Dennis Murphy
(Liverpool Museum)

Live Animal Displays and the Law -
Gordan Reid (Horniman Museum)

Vivarium Design for Public Displays -
Nigel Platt (Cotswold Wildlife Park)

Sexing and Breeding Reptiles - Adam Wright
(Herbert Museum & Art Gallery, Coventry)

Contact: Adam Wright, Coventry Museum (0203 25555).

Biology Curatorial Course
16th to 20th November, 1987

Losehill Hall, in the heart of the Peak District, has been provisionally booked as the venue for a BIOLOGY CURATORIAL COURSE. (These dates have been chosen to avoid a clash with the Diploma 'B' course at Leicester, but we regret that a clash with the 'A' course is unavoidable).

The bargain-basement price is a basic £87 for five days but there will have to be an additional supplement to cover a mini-bus and lecturers' travel expenses. The latter may be grant-aided, but in any case the total cost should be less than £100.

The course will be aimed at Museums Association Diploma students, particularly those taking exams in January 1988, AND ALSO curators wishing to take a mid-term refresher course which will encompass a wide range of curatorial and practical techniques. IT IS IMPORTANT at this point in time to have some idea of the numbers likely to attend.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED in attending, please 'phone or send a short note to the Hon. Secretary. At this stage there is no obligation, but we need to have a rough idea of demand VERY SOON, to confirm our provisional booking, and plan the course in detail.

Write or 'phone Derek Whiteley, City Museum, Sheffield S10 2TP, Sheffield (0742) 768588.

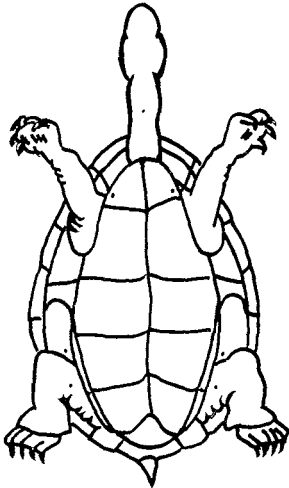
Book Reviews

BIOLOGICAL MUSEUM METHODS, VOLUMES 1 and 2

by George Hangay and Michael Dingley

Published by Academic Press Australia.
Price £95.50. ISBN 0 12 323301 1.

This is a major new work in the field of biological conservation, in many ways an update of the excellent PRESERVATION OF NATURAL HISTORY SPECIMENS by Wagstaffe and Fidler published 31 years ago. Reg Harris, formerly Senior Scientific Officer in the Zoology Department of the BM(NH), has prepared this page-by-page commentary and review of the work.



These two volumes are excellently produced and are a mine of information. To encompass such a wide variety of information is a daunting task and it is only too easy to find items which do not fully reflect the opinions of workers in the field of biological technology. I have listed some of the points I noticed when reading through the text.

Volume 1

On page 3 it is stated that Waterton decried the use of arsenic implying that it was because of the poisonous nature of the reagent. Yet he used almost exclusively during his working life vast amounts of mercuric chloride, not only as a preservative for specimens but to saturate his clothing and headwear to, as he put it, protect against the weather!

On page 5 there is, unfortunately, no reference to Gerrards Biological Supply House of Camden Town, London, who were prominent taxidermists, modellers etc. from the 1880s up to the present day, and were the first commercial business in the UK to prepare material for schools, museums, universities etc. They also pioneered the supply of biological material prepared for teaching.

On page 8 there is no mention of the tanning oil Lankrolene used to prepare skins that have been fluid preserved in alcohol or formaldehyde solutions.

On page 19 Yoshida's work on the use of Vitamin C added to preserving fluids for colour preservation is not mentioned although a reference appears in the source list. Reference should have been made here to the use of pyridine and nicotinic acid for a similar purpose.

On page 123 it is stated that "a solution of formaldehyde can be used if the skin is not to be relaxed". That is precisely why Lankrolene oil was introduced (ref: page 8).

On page 288 reference is made to the conversion of the respiratory pigment haemoglobin in colour preservation techniques. The presence of the converted pigment should be confirmed by spectroscopic analysis otherwise it is simply a hit and miss technique much practiced in medical museums during the past 90 years. The work of Kaiserling, Pick, Jores and many others did much to establish colour preservation in both plant and animal material.

On page 302 the originator of the wax impregnation technique, Hochstetter (1927), is not mentioned.

On page 344 it is stated that "Harris (1959) modified the process of osteological preparation by using sodium sulphide and trypsin etc." I did, in fact, use pancreatin for a different and much better result.

On page 345, with reference to the reagent Antiformin. Its greatest use is in the preparation of skeletal material from hitherto fluid preserved or from sun dried sources. It is possible using this reagent to obtain skulls from reptiles, for example, with ear ossicles intact.

Volume 2

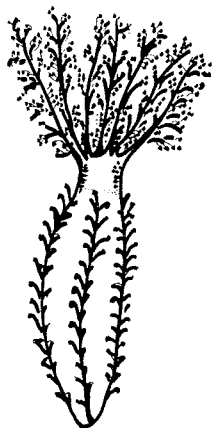
On page 7, with reference to the reagent Dowicil. It is most important to emphasize that this reagent is really a keeping solution prior to fixation. Although UNESCO workers use a fairly high percentage solution (15%) for preservation there is histological evidence that cellular integrity is not maintained and all tissues so treated should be fixed before any final preservation is carried out.

On page 8, with reference to difficulties in the solvency of propylene phenoxetol in aqueous solutions. Attention is drawn to the publication ZOOPLANKTON FIXATION AND PRESERVATION edited by H.F. Steedman, UNESCO Paris (1976), in which details of the use of propylene glycol is given as the solvent for the phenoxetol which also aids the penetration of the fixative.

On page 17 there is no reference to the Traill (1900) technique for preservation of

chlorophyll in plants. It is one of the few solutions which does actually preserve the respiratory pigment and this can be confirmed by spectroscopic analysis.

On page 32 it is stated that freeze drying is not essential for sponges in the dry state. I would suggest that it is essential that freeze drying be carried out to maintain cellular integrity.



On page 37 the authors talk about the preservation of anemones in plastics and are unsure (from the source quoted) whether colour is preserved. The answer is that the colour will not be preserved because of the oxidation effect on the anemone tissues by the polymerising plastic. Freeze drying does preserve colours in coelenterates and they can be kept in plastic boxes or glass jars and can also be wax impregnated.

On page 70 the use of formol-acetic-acid injected carefully into the freshly killed lobster, taking care not to drip the reagent on to the exoskeleton, followed by drying in a warm dry cupboard after positioning will preserve the blue colour of the lobster and any other colour of selected crustacean so treated.

On page 146 reference is made to the microscopical preparation of insects and this is very well demonstrated. It is a pity that the same type of information is not available for the other invertebrate phyla. The authors do recognise this absence on page 3 of this volume.

On page 178 it is suggested that small amounts of liquid nitrogen be applied to a specimen to be positioned etc. On no account should any specimen come into contact with this liquified gas. The vapour only should be used. Failure to do this will result in cracks appearing in prepared specimens months or even years after treatment.

Chapters 10, 11, 12 and 13 are concerned with aspects of display, modelling and diorama preparation. Whether these methods are likely to be used or practiced by curatorial staff in museums to which these volumes seem to be directed is a matter of opinion. The sheer amount of information and illustrations are most attractively presented.

My comments in no way detract from the immense amount of work that has been carried out to produce these two volumes. Whether the price of £95.50 will inhibit the sale of such a work remains to be seen. I think that these two volumes have a place on the shelves on any Area Museums Service Library.

R.H. Harris

A note from Steve Garland (Bolton Museum) about the Ordnance Survey Gazeteer on microfiche.

Having recently purchased the Landranger Gazeteer and found it very useful I thought other BCG members may be interested. It is a set of 34 fiches containing an alphabetically listed, grid-referenced directory of all names appearing on the 204 1:50000 scale Landranger maps of Great Britain. Absolutely invaluable for finding those elusive one word locality names on old specimens. Price £80 + VAT from: Fixed Price Services, Ordnance Survey, Romsey Road, Maybush, Southampton SO9 4DH.

AN ATLAS OF THE CARABIDAE (GROUND BEETLES) OF NORTHUMBERLAND AND DURHAM

by M.D. Eyre, M.L. Luff and S.G. Ball

Northumberland Biological Records Centre, Special Publication No 2, 1986. The Hancock Museum, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne. Price £5.50 (inc p+p).

This atlas follows the Special Publication No 1 which dealt with water beetles. It is in the same A4 spiral-bound format and it maps by tetrads 114 of the 210 species listed in the text. It is somewhat difficult to read off the co-ordinates of the tetrads on the computer-printed maps, but excellent distribution patterns are shown due to the remarkably even coverage which has been achieved right across the two counties.

The text includes tetrad records of all non-mapped species (i.e. those recorded from less than ten squares) and post-1950 records are indicated by bold type, although the printing quality does not show this up well.

For anyone working on this beetle family the book provides one of the few available up-to-date assessments of status in northern England and is therefore invaluable. For Northumberland and Durham coleopterists the introduction, with its potted history of collectors, collecting and recording in the counties, is very important and should enable anyone new to the area to find quickly any papers and collections relevant to their studies.

Steve Garland
Bolton Museum and Art Gallery

A CATALOGUE OF NATURAL SCIENCE COLLECTIONS IN NORTH-EAST ENGLAND WITH BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON THE COLLECTORS

Edited by Peter Davis and Christopher Brewer

Published by the North of England Museums Service, 1986. Price £9.50 (inc p&p).
ISBN 0 9510948 0 7

This weighty tome computed by Spires, printed by laser and produced by high quality photocopy represents the culmination of seven years work (by humans) amassing data relating to Natural Science material in Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and Cleveland.

The main catalogue ALPHABETICAL INDEX TO THE COLLECTIONS gives an alphabetical listing of 1049 records where the key element is the surname of the collector.

There follows 101 pages of BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON THE COLLECTORS which amounts to a publication in its own right, listing details of 466 collectors made possible by the ability of the Spires database package to handle textual data.

Two further indexes list the data in TAXONOMIC order and GEOGRAPHIC (place of origin of the material) order respectively.

It is natural to compare this publication with the REGISTER OF NATURAL SCIENCE COLLECTIONS IN NORTH WEST ENGLAND published in 1981. Having done this, I personally prefer the printed format of the earlier publication and find the Associated Collectors Index a valuable section lacking in the publication under review.

The present publication benefits by pagination, not so necessary in the alphabetical listing but most helpful in the Taxonomic and Geographic indexes.

Having played a small part in the yet to be published work of the All Midlands Collections Research Unit I can appreciate the amount of time and effort that has gone into the production of this catalogue. All concerned are to be congratulated on producing a publication worthy of a place in the library of anyone interested in the whereabouts and future well-being of Natural Science collections.

Geoff. Halfpenny
City Museum and Art Gallery
Stoke-on-Trent



AN ATLAS OF THE WATER BEETLES OF NORTHUMBERLAND AND DURHAM

by M.D. Eyre, S.G. Ball and G.N. Foster

Northumberland Biological Research Centre
Special Publication No.1, 1985

Published by Northumberland Biological Records Centre, The Hancock Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne. Price £5.00

This is a 66 page booklet spirally bound in thin card covers. The bulk of the publication is taken up by two sections. The first is a list of species together with the tetrads from which they have been recorded. The second section contains tetrad maps for the more commonly recorded species. For each species one sentence describing habitat and localities is appended either to the species list or the tetrad map. Although two symbols are used on the maps, I could not find a key to them.

Presumably they refer to two date classes as defined in the species list. There are detailed introductory sections on the history of recording water beetles in the area and on the topography of the region accompanied by informative maps.

Modern records mainly derive from one of the authors (GNF), and for such a large area the coverage is remarkably good. Older records have obviously been researched very thoroughly and go back to 1892. A full bibliography is appended.

I would have preferred to see more interpretation of the records, but this is a very complete work and as such will be of interest and value to all students of water beetles.

Derek Lott
Leicestershire Museums Service.

In the Press

MUSEUM is a glossy quarterly published by UNESCO which occasionally has articles of interest to biologists. Volume 150 is a review of museums of science and technology, and it carries an article by Genevieve Meurgues (National Museum of Natural History, Paris) called 'The Preservation of Natural History Specimens'. It is no technical treatise, but takes the form of a dialogue between a museum biologist and a visitor/user critical of natural history display standards. The biologist is, naturally, on the defensive and explains the problems associated with the preservation of the major groups of animals and plants. It provides a broad, non-technical summary of methods which members might find useful.

One snippet of advice: to stop colour deterioration through oxidation in freeze-dried plants, keep them in an atmosphere of inert gas. Does this mean sealed display cases full of anhydrous argon? I should think this makes changing temporary exhibits tricky, but it would keep the pests out! There are one or two nice quirks of translation; quote: 'certain kinds of fish were preserved in herbaria'. Your guess is as good as mine!

Volume 151 has a photograph on the cover of one of those cranky nineteenth century botanical collections which crop up occasionally and are irresistible. What looks like a series of seven books, each with the name of a tree embossed on the rough spine, turns out to be a series of boxes full of material associated with the species. The 'book' is made from the wood of the tree, the rough 'spine' being a section of bark. The open 'book' shows specimens of fruit, leaves, sections of various kinds and objects made of the wood. The 'spine' is hollowed on the inside to take a written account. They are called 'Xylotheques', and are clearly meant to be kept in a bookcase. There is nothing further about them in the issue, except that they are in 'The Joanneum', Styria's Provincial Museum (Austria).

For those members whose curatorial duties include the supervision of museum botanic or period gardens, MUSEUM NEWS (the Journal of National Heritage) no 37 includes a background article on the new Museum of Garden History, opened recently in Lambeth on the site of John Tradescant's tomb. A knot garden has been planted near the tomb and a museum opened in the old church (St. Mary-at-Lambeth). It is run by the Tradescant Trust. Incidentally, the same issue reports extensively on the current financial plight of University Museums, which was also the subject of Alan Warhurst's address to the Museums Association Conference, reported in the latest MUSEUMS JOURNAL (vol 86 no 3, December 1986).

The Humanities Exchange, is an American company which runs a TRAVELLING EXHIBITION INFORMATION SERVICE. Its NEWSLETTER is quarterly and contains information on museum travelling exhibitions under a series of headings, including Natural History. The first European edition is available and has details of natural history travelling exhibitions in France and GDR which could be booked for UK circulation. It's a good idea, but expensive: a £20.00 subscription buys four Newsletters.

THE WILSON BULLETIN vol 96 no 4 (December 1984) carries a paper by Ned Johnson et al called 'Suggested Techniques for Modern Avian Systematics'. It is lengthy and full of technical detail, but the message is clear: the traditional methods of bird skin and skeletal preparation are inadequate for the demands of modern avian systematics. More of the specimen should be preserved so that a greater range of phenotypic and genotypic characters (using electrophoretic techniques) can be assessed for each individual collected.

In order to preserve more from each specimen than is the current practice, what are termed 'skin-skeleton' preparations should take the place of traditional cabinet skins. A full range of tissue samples should be removed during preparation and stored in ultra-cold freezers. Various methods of preparing skin-skeletons are discussed as are the problems of low-temperature tissue storage and liquid nitrogen handling.

I'm not sure how practicable these procedures are for provincial museums in the UK with their limited resources, but we ought at least to be aware of them.

For those curators who rely on Vapona for pest control in their collections, there is an article by M.L. Johnson and E. Kritzman in ACTA ZOOLOGICA FENNICA (vol 170, pages 75-76) reviewing its use over an eighteen year period in the Natural History Museum, Tacoma, USA: 'Vapona for Pest Control in a Museum, 1964-1984'. It is deemed safe and effective and the most appropriate concentrations are discussed.

MUSEUMS JOURNAL vol 86 no 2 (September 1986) contains a fascinating report by Don Steward on the tracking down and prosecution of a thief of geological specimens from museum stores: 'A Case Study of a Museum Thief'. In the same issue Geoff Stansfield examines trends in museum natural history displays - a discussion based on reviews of new exhibits at Devizes, Manchester, Inverness and Bagshaw museums. This is also Geoff's theme for the evening session at the next BCG meeting in Sheffield.

'The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.'

E. FitzGerald: Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

An apt quote for another look at inks - this time the felt-tipped pen variety. Following the paper in CURATOR on ink permanence noted in the last Newsletter, I have had two further articles brought to my attention: CONSERVATION NEWS no 27 (July 1985) has the results of a comprehensive marker-pen trial carried out by archaeological conservators at York (Artline, Berol, Edding and Pentel products recommended); CONSERVATION NEWS no 30 reports on marker pen tests for light-fastness carried out at Glasgow Museum when the Staedtler Pan Color range came out best (consult the references for full details). Incidentally, nearly all the reds are notoriously impermanent, but one, Staedtler Pan Color 303 red, is reported to be very stable. Mind you, I don't know if they tested it against Piety, Wit, or Tears!

One small but valuable publication which appeared in December 1986 is the BSBI NEWS (no 44) SUPPLEMENT by JR Press (BMNH). It is an annotated list of botanical identification manuals covering the general areas of Western Europe and the Mediterranean. Aimed at people like me - the interested amateur on holiday - it gives a two-line run-down of the more popular botanical identification guides, some in English to buy here and take with you, others to look for when you arrive.

The current ASC NEWSLETTER (vol 14 no 6), December 1986) has two major articles: 'Collections of the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences' is a detailed account of the Buffalo Museum of Science biological collections; 'Third World Perceptions of Scientific Imperialism' is concerned with the view from scientific communities in the third world that natural scientists from developed countries act in a high-handed way by collecting and describing native species (which are then held in a small number of foreign museums and herbaria) with little or no reference to the scientific and educational establishments in the country of collection. The legal niceties are complied with but there is no commitment involved. The article has a code of conduct for visiting scientists which any future 'expedition' members would do well to follow.

Two papers in STUDIES IN CONSERVATION (vol 31 no 4, November 1986) may be of indirect interest to biological curators. The first 'The Yellowing of Thymol in the Display of Prints' by V. Daniels and B. Boyd notes the yellowing effect on paper caused by thymol in the presence of daylight (even when u-v screened). Thymol is widely used as a fungicide in natural history collections and displays; we know that natural history

objects fade in light; could the thymol effect noted for paper also occur with specimens? Would anyone like to find out?

The second paper 'The Yellowing of Epoxy Resin Adhesives: Report on High-intensity Light Aging' by Jane Down is concerned with the tendency of room temperature-cure epoxy resin adhesives to yellow under high intensity light. These adhesives are widely used by biological conservators (skeletal repair is one example that comes to mind). A wide range of commercially available products were tested and those with less tendency to yellow are recommended.

Although not in a current publication, I recently came across the paper by Tennent and Baird which re-examines Bynes disease in mollusc collections: 'The Deterioration of Mollusca Collections: Identification of Shell Efflorescence' in STUDIES IN CONSERVATION vol 30 (1985). This paper dispels several myths about the 'disease', laying the blame for the shell efflorescence firmly with the acids (acetic and formic) liberated into the atmosphere in closed hardwood storage cabinets (mainly oak). It is a classic paper of its kind and should be read by anyone curating a marine mollusc collection (or sitting the MA Diploma examinations).

Until recently I had not seen the serial publication MUSEOLOGY from Texas Tech University. It is an irregular series of monographs on natural history curatorial subjects. No 6 (1984) is 'The Care of Tanned Skins in Mammal Research Collections' which includes preparation, storage, labelling, documentation, pest control etc; an excellent, readable and practical booklet. No 7 (1986) is called 'Guidelines for Managing Bird Collections' and covers about everything you can think of associated with bird collection management: from ethical standards and acquisition policies through preparation, documentation and storage to use of computers for data retrieval. There are even examples of invoice forms to accompany specimens in transit and sample exchange agreements. It is an excellent guide/handbook (available at \$16.00 from the Texas Tech Press Sales Office, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409, USA) and should be in every museum library.

Also from America, the AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY, TECHNICAL REPORT No 4 is a review of fumigation procedures called 'A Current Status Report on Fumigation in Museums and Historical Agencies' by R.F. McGiffin. Although not aimed specifically at natural history museums it is a useful round-up of fumigation methods in use in the USA with notes on health hazards and possible specimen damage resulting from each of the chemical treatments examined: ethylene oxide; methyl bromide; sulphuryl fluoride (Vikane); PDCB; naphthalene, dichlorvos (Vapona). There is also a bibliography.

On a very different subject, the following is taken from the August NEWSLETTER of AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (letter writing section). The AI Information Officer has no further information and so it is reproduced here at face value.

Pavel Krivka, an ecologist who worked in the District Museum in Jicin, was sentenced on 21 November 1985 by the District Court in Hradec Kralove to three years' imprisonment under Article 98 of the penal code ("subversion").

The charge followed a letter he had written in February 1985 to a friend in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) criticizing the Czechoslovak authorities for their neglect of ecological problems. He gave the letter to a friend to post from Yugoslavia, but it was intercepted by the State Security Police. He was also accused of putting up maps indicating places where ecological problems were neglected, inventing crossword puzzles which "vilified" the government and its representatives and writing a parody on a Czech Christmas mass in which, the authorities said, he defamed the President and expressed hostile criticism of official policies.

His friend, Pavel Skoda, who worked in a college of further education as a science assistant, was sentenced under Article 100 ("incitement") to 20 months' imprisonment at the same time for being co-author of the parody.

Please send courteous letters appealing for their release to:

JUDr Gustav Husak
President of the CSSR
11 908 Praha - Hrad
CSSR

The price of fossils

Angela Milner and Ian Rolfe are collecting information on historic and present prices of fossils, as a guide to current pricing practice (and thus to insurance and indemnity values of museum collections). To make this study reliable, they would welcome dated examples of prices that museums and others have paid for fossils, or for collections of them. They need examples of expensive, mid-range and cheap fossils; copies of old priced lists of fossils are particularly welcome, as are illustrations of priced specimens, references thereto, and references to discussion of this topic. Results will be presented at a Geological Curators Group/Palaontological Association/Geological Society meeting in London in early October 1987, and published thereafter.

Please contact them at the Palaeontology Department, British Museum (Natural History), Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD (01-589 6323 ext 27) or the National Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1JF (031-225 7534 ext 239).

ICOM



International Council of Museums
14th General Conference - 15th General
Assembly
Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1986.
Draft Resolution No 3

The Threat to our Natural Heritage

Whereas there is a grave and immediate threat of the loss of a great proportion of our people's natural heritage through the rapid destruction and degradation of our natural environment, particularly in those regions of the world that have not yet been significantly altered, and

Whereas the quality of all peoples is reduced and endangered by the continuing indiscriminate and unplanned elimination of great numbers of plant and animal species, and

Whereas little is known even today of the great majority of plant and animal species with which we share this globe, and

Whereas the responsibility for discovering, describing, and preserving examples of this biological diversity rests today almost exclusively with the world's natural history museums and their scientific personnel, and

Whereas the university training of young scientists has changed focus so that the number of those who are able to understand and record this diversity of life has rapidly declined in the past decade;

Therefore this, the 15th General Assembly of ICOM meeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on 4 November 1986, urges natural history museums and zoological and botanical gardens and nature reserves throughout the world to work together and with both public and private entities to train young scientists in the essential research of documenting the earth's biological diversity and to develop mechanisms for preserving sufficient habitats for this diversity to continue to exist and flourish for future generations.

This resolution was passed unchanged by the General Assembly and now becomes part of ICOM's policy statement.

ICOM advises UNESCO (and therefore the UN) on matters concerning cultural and, to some degree, natural heritage and through these organisations (and, of course directly) can have an impact on governmental policy makers. This resolution, therefore, is to be welcomed by everyone concerned with the conservation movement and with the maintenance of systematic collections (which are vital tools in the '... essential research of documenting the earth's biological diversity ...'). Unfortunately, the British Government has withdrawn from UNESCO.

Important Seminar on The Disposal of Museum Collections

Organised jointly by the Museum Professionals Group and the Social History Curators Group, this major seminar is to be held at The Yorkshire Museum, York on 12th March 1987.

The subject is the disposal of museum and art gallery collections, a contentious issue which crosses all disciplinary boundaries and which the profession has to confront. Bulging stores full of ill-documented, duplicated, deteriorating materials are the symptoms of an oppressive problem which has yet to be solved. Do we need to dispose of collections, and if so, how?

Speakers will address a variety of issues, including cultural restitution, the legal framework for disposal, the Code of Conduct, and regional co-operation. Specialists will assess the state of their own disciplines, and propose ways forward. Ultimately, if the profession cannot tackle the problems in a rational way, will others make the decisions for us?

Cost £6.00 (£4.00 to members of MPG/SHCG). Forms available from David Fleming, Town Docks Museum, Queen Victoria Square, Hull HU1 3DX.

Countryside Commission Grants for Interpretive Displays

The Countryside Commission recently gave a 50% grant (amounting to £2,400) towards the cost of showcases, graphics and equipment in the interpretive display at Coombe Abbey Countryside Park, Coventry. The Park is owned by Coventry City Council and is run by the Leisure Services Department, which also controls the City Museum Service. The site is of great interest as an important SSSI.

The display was mounted, devised and researched by staff at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry, and covered the following topics:

The making of the landscape at Coombe
Habitats at Coombe
The Fishery
Animal tracks, trails and signs
Biological recording
Insects at Coombe
A key to insect orders found at Coombe

The Countryside Commission were most eager to assist in funding the displays (perhaps because the exhibition tries to encourage active visitor participation) and indeed they asked whether we wished to do similar displays at other sites. Their money was used for a variety of functions, including:

purchase of microscopes
purchase of entomological cabinet
purchase of wood and perspex for display cases
purchase of reference books for public use
lighting
photographic enlargements and photostetting

Whilst I believe that the fact the display was undertaken at a local Country Park was the

reason that we originally gained grant approval from the Countryside Commission, there are many other museums who have (or may wish to have) "outposts" at their local Country Parks and who may wish to exploit this route of grant-aid.

The next question is whether or not the Countryside Commission would consider part-funding of exhibitions in a town or city centre museum?

Adam Wright
Herbert Art Gallery and Museum
Coventry

Dodgy offer from the Philippines

Some members may have received a letter from PETER CUA, a taxidermist working in the Philippines, offering for sale study skins of Philippine birds. The letter has no mention of import/export licences or any other legal restrictions which may apply to the transport of natural history specimens from that part of the world.

Derek Foxwell, Natural History Conservator based at Bristol Museum, checked the legal implications of the offer with Mr. P. Lewis of the Endangered Species Branch of the DoE at Bristol and was told that the Philippines operate a total ban on the export of their wildlife (including parts and derivatives) and so no licences would be granted by the Department for imports from the Philippines; this covers all species, not just those on CITES lists.

So, be warned if you were thinking of responding to the letter.

Subscription rates are £6.00 for individual membership and £10.00 for institutional membership. Contact Adam Wright, Herbert Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry, for application forms.

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Edited by John Mathias, Leicestershire Museums Service, 96 New Walk, Leicester LE1 6TD (Tel: 0533 554100 ext.3030) to whom all contributions should be sent. Back numbers are available from the Editor.

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