

# NEWSLETTER

Vol 5 No 1

## Uses of Biological Specimens: a Survey

In these days of financial stringency 'accountancy thinking' is beginning to pervade all aspects of public life and museums are not exempt from its influence. The Cardiff conference in July 1982 contained several references to the need for us to state clearly the importance of the natural history collections in our charge (Morgan 1986). The use of natural history collections for the basic museum purposes of taxonomic reference, biogeographic voucher and as a source for display are all well established, but perhaps because of their very familiarity tend not to have much force in discussions with county finance officers, bursars, local councillors and other members of management committees, when trying to convince these worthy people that it is worth continuing to expend expensive resources of space and staff, with their attendant overheads, on maintaining the museum's 'reserve' collections of natural history material.

There is a danger that it can be only two short semantic steps from "reserve" to "duplicate" to "surplus" - and therefore either jettisonable, or translatable into CASH. One suggestion, consciously adopted some years ago at Manchester Museum, is for staff never to refer to "reserve" collections, but always to call them "research" or "resource" collections, and always to correct anyone using the former term.

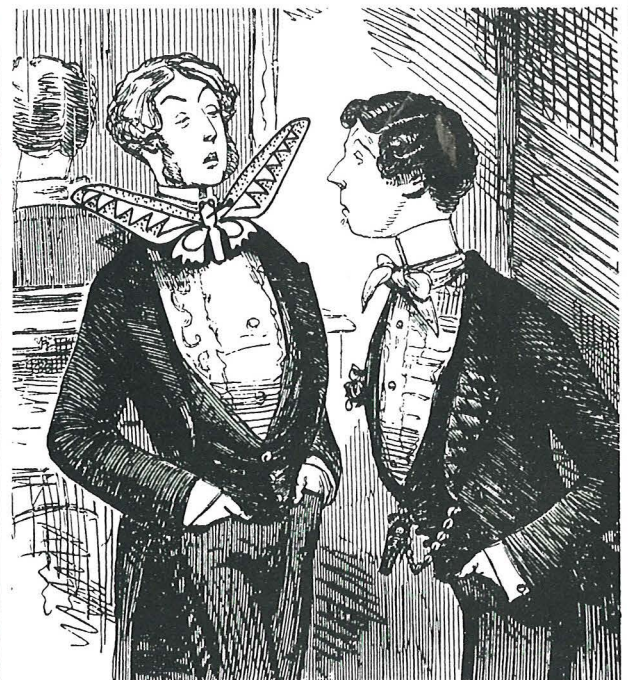
One has only to contemplate the recent sales of material by Chester Museum and Newcastle University and of books by Manchester University, or the involved 'lease-back' agreements arranged by some local councils searching for new ways to raise cash to realise that the scenario adumbrated above is by no means fanciful. Therefore to counter the challenge "Why are we keeping all this stuff?" I believe it would be wise for BCG members to pool our experience and form a source file from which each of us can extract examples of the uses to which natural history collections are known to have been put, examples with which to engage the interest (and hopefully sympathy) of the arbiters of

our fate. Some examples that spring to mind include the story of the Quagga DNA or the eggshell thickness/pesticide saga, and Penny Wheatcroft (1987) recently mentioned others; I feel, however, there must be many more examples known to our members.

At the last AGM in Bolton I volunteered to compile this source file and to see to the dissemination of the information. I expect the information to be of different kinds:

1. Anecdotal information, unusual uses that you have heard about, even if only vaguely; any odd snippet could be of

Uses of biological specimens (1)



Scene at the BCG dinner, 1988:  
Derek catches the eye sporting a magnificent Trogonoptera brookiana.  
(Thanks to Punch, c.1860)

[Redacted]

value as I may be able to track down firmer information from your clues.

2. Personal knowledge, unusual uses to which material in your collection has been put; if possible give dates, nature of usage and out-turn.
3. Documented instances, an unusual usage that has been documented, albeit perhaps only in correspondence.
4. Published references or reviews. Please send me the citation of any reference to unusual usages that you come across in the literature. Especially valuable would be a note about any review articles, similar to Genoways, H H (1979).

I think information on usage of overseas collections would be equally valuable, so do not restrict yourself to uses of collections in U K institutions. Also usages apparently only of local value should be reported, as they may well turn out to have wider implications.

I intend the project to be continuous so there is no final date for sending information; periodic progress reports will be made in the BCG Newsletter, and once we see the scale and scope of the information submitted the best method(s) of disseminating the information will be discussed with the Committee.

References

Genoways, H H, et al 1979. Systematists, other users and uses of North American collections of recent mammals. MUSEOLOGY No 3. Texas Tech. Univ., Lubbock, Texas.

Morgan, P J, 1986. A NATIONAL PLAN FOR SYSTEMATIC COLLECTIONS? National Museum of Wales/Biology Curators Group, Cardiff.

Wheatcroft, P, 1987. Merely Rubbish. MUSEUMS JOURNAL 87 (3): 133-134.

Charles Pettitt  
Manchester Museum  
The University  
Manchester M13 9PL

[Redacted]



NEW DIRECTOR FOR THE BRITISH MUSEUM (NATURAL HISTORY)

The Board of Trustees, with the approval of the Prime Minister has appointed Dr Neil Robert Chalmers as Director of the Museum, from 2 November 1988.

[Redacted]

Dr Chalmers, aged 46, has been Dean of Science at the Open University for the last three years, and was employed previously as a Senior Lecturer in Biology since joining the University in 1970. His first employment was as a Lecturer in Zoology at Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda from 1966 to 1969 and he was Scientific Director at the National Primate Centre, Nairobi, Kenya from 1969 to 1970. He has a First Class Honours Degree in Zoology from Magdalen College, Oxford, and a PhD in Zoology (Animal Behaviour) from St John's College, Cambridge.

Dr Chalmers emphasizes the astonishing size and richness of the Museum's collections, together with the popularity and educational importance of the Museum's exhibitions to visitors of all ages. "We are a world leader among Natural History Museums. Our work directly benefits science, medicine, agriculture and the natural environment. Our exhibitions will be lively and topical - we aim to educate our visitors while we entertain them."

The Director's appointment is for a fixed term of five years, renewable by agreement between all parties. He is responsible to the Board of Trustees for all aspects of the operation of the Museum, for advising the Board on policy and planning matters, and for ensuring the policies and plans are implemented. The Director is the Accounting Officer for the Museum and is responsible to Parliament for the proper expenditure of public funds voted by Parliament through the Office of Arts and Libraries.

[Redacted]

REFERENDUM RESULTS

The referendum resulting from a motion passed by a majority vote at the 1987 AGM has now been completed and the votes counted as follows:

I support the policy of the British Museum (Natural History) to charge visitors for entrance to the museum .....2

I do not support the above policy .....53

Abstentions .....2

The Committee has, in accordance with the wishes of the 1987 AGM, sought a mandate from the membership which clearly indicates that we should take action. Additional comments on the returned ballot forms are as follows.

What the Membership Says!

"Taxonomic research bears no relationship to the displays built by the display team. Why should school parties fund taxonomic research"

"The introduction of charges for entry to any national museum is deplorable. The statistics of attendance, post-introduction of charges usually indicate a sharp fall in numbers of

visitors. This is particularly sad in the case of BMNH where a great many of the visitors are children. I support any initiatives by the Committee to oppose charging for entry to museums"

"I deplore the current trend that everything must be paid for by the consumer, irrespective of means, rather than from the general public purse. The concept of free admission to museums is one on which I am prepared to make a stand"

"This policy deprives the public at large of what is legally and historically their facility. Past donors will turn in their graves as people walk past the door"

"I had better come clean and confess to working at the BM(NH). Charges are not popular round here. For one thing, British taxpayers have paid for the Museum already. Charging for specific exhibits, audio-visuals etc (changed regularly!) would be OK. We are improving our merchandise and trying to up sales; and are hiring out the big halls for parties, conferences etc. Latter is not without problems, but these are not insurmountable"

"I also deplore the "concessionary" entrance fee for museum staff. I know that the BM(NH) is to look at this issue in the near future. BCG should press for its replacement by free admission"

"I feel very strongly that all museums funded by central government or local government should have free admission so that they can be easily available to everyone regardless of ability to pay"

"Lobbying should be directed at restoring sufficient funds to remove the necessity to charge entrance fees. Would like to know figures of income and actual "profit" against loss of revenue from shop's counter sales etc"

"If there has to be a policy of charging - which I cannot accept as justifiable - then I would strongly advocate the introduction of a scheme for regular visitors"

"The contents of the National Museums belong to the nation ie the people. Why should the people have to pay to see what is in fact theirs?"

"Charging visitors undermines the educational role of the museum and encourages the development of "sensational" and unscientific displays in order to bring in visitors. This in time will tend to decrease the potential serious visitors"

"Probably the same as many others - National collection should be free at least to nationals. Question of tourists (non-British) paying is a different question"

"As one born and educated in London, to whom BM(NH) was my local nat hist museum, I feel strongly no charge should be made. My

lifelong interest in museums and natural history started in the BM(NH) in about 1946"

"I also feel that taxonomic assistance to fellow museum biologists, in the bona fide pursuit of their professional duties, should remain free, though I would not object to other bodies or the public being charged a small fee" \*

"It is also most regrettable that charges are being made for scientific services such as identifications, in some cases, to other museums. The obvious result of this will be the prevention of development of scientific research and the dissemination of knowledge" \*

"This seems rather untimely:

- 1 BMNH galleries still attract large numbers of visitors
- 2 The charges have led to withdrawal of the risk of immediate redundancies
- 3 Other museums are now charging/ investigating charges

[How many Galleries employing BCG members have charges?]"

"I can't complete this referendum because it is ambiguous - I think. If I support the policy implicitly I'm supporting the Thatcherite view that everything in life must be bought by the individual. On the other hand, if I don't support it, I gather that a lot of BMNH people would have to be sacked, so I've got to support it, but I can't so I won't. By the same token I can't support the protesters, because I don't want to jeopardise other people's jobs"

"As an employee of the BMNH I feel that it would be invidious for me to comment on the above, but am returning this to show that my refusal to comment is not due to lack of interest"

"Please find the enclosed referendum regarding charges at the British Museum. I personally feel that it is detrimental to museums as a whole for our national institutions such as the BM to charge entrance fees. These museums have had the goodwill of the public from both Britain and overseas, goodwill that will quickly disappear if the policy of charging at an economical rate becomes well established.

I hope the BCG will be able to put pressure on museum authorities, over this matter, as I have felt for quite a long time that it is not necessarily the attitude of the government that has brought this state of affairs, but the attitude of the profession as a whole"

Compiled by Derek Whiteley  
BCG Secretary

\*There is obviously some confusion here. BM(NH) staff have dealt with two of my enquiries during March 1988, without charge. It appears that some museums are being charged. DW.

Letters on any of the above issues are most welcome, but should be addressed to the Editor.

## TWO MUSEUMS FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

When I first saw this title on a BM(NH) press release I thought the government was going to run the Natural History Museum and the Geological Museum on the same amount of money it normally provides for one of them. BUT NO. The slogan is promoting the opening of a new link between the two museums so now both can be visited on a single ticket. The joint ticket costs £2.00 full rate, £1.00 half rate and (I quote) 'just £5.00 for all the family (up to 2 adults and 4 children)'. The times when entry is FREE are also given: Monday to Friday 16.30 - 18.00; Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holidays 17.00 - 18.00; children under 5 are free as are pre-booked school parties (UK only).

John Mathias  
Editor



# THE CONSERVATION UNIT

The following important information has been received from the Conservation Unit of the Museums and Galleries Commission

## CONSERVATION UNIT GRANT PROGRAMME 1989-90

Applications are invited for grants from The Conservation Unit for the financial year 1989-90. The main grant headings are:

### UK Conferences

Grants are available to assist with the costs of attending conservation conferences within the UK. Normally only a partial contribution can be made. The closing date for applications, which must be made on a form available from The Unit, is one month prior to the date of the conference.

### Overseas Travel

Grants are available to assist with the costs of attending conferences overseas; and with the costs of study tours to laboratories, studios and workshops. Normally only a partial contribution can be made. The closing date for applications will normally be two months prior to the conference or the tour. Application forms are available from The Unit for overseas conferences, but application for study tour assistance should be made by letter, with full documentation, including a CV and two references.

### Equipment

The Unit is able to assist with the purchase of conservation equipment. This may include equipment for inspection, and for measures to improve health and safety. Area Museum Councils are empowered to help with the

purchase of equipment for conservation laboratories in museums and galleries. Therefore, in order to make the most effective use of the limited sums available, and other than in exceptional circumstances, grants from The Unit will only be available to applicants from the private sector. Applications on forms available from The Unit must be submitted by 1 February 1989.

### Publications

The Unit may be able to contribute to the costs of publication of conservation literature. Intending applicants are advised to send a letter of enquiry in the first place. Final proposals will be required by 1 February 1989.

### Exhibitions

A small sum is available to assist with the preparation of exhibitions which promote conservation to a wider audience. Intending applicants should send a letter of enquiry in the first instance and final proposals will be required by 1 February 1989.

### Conservation Research

Conservation scientists who successfully apply to SERC for a CASE studentship may be able to have their institution's contribution paid by The Conservation Unit. A sum has been set aside for this purpose and The Unit would welcome advance warning of any such CASE application, at which stage we should be able to indicate the likelihood of such assistance being available. The critical dates will be those for application to SERC.

### Internships

The Unit will be offering post-primary internships for those who have recently completed formal conservation courses; and also advanced internships for those already having had some years of experience and who would benefit from a period of work alongside a senior conservator. Post-primary internships will be allocated with the assistance of training course directors who will be separately informed and applications should not be made to The Unit. Advanced internships, which will be in selected specialisms only, will be advertised at a later date. We are not currently inviting applications.

The Conservation Unit  
Museums and Galleries Commission  
7 St James's Square  
London SW1Y 4JU  
Tel: 01-839 9340

Note: Biologists and biological conservators and technicians CAN APPLY, and it is important that they DO APPLY. We should accept our share of government monies made available through The Unit!





## MUSEUMS & GALLERIES COMMISSION

MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES COMMISSION.  
REPORT 1987-88

The above volume recently arrived in the BCG postbag. A glossy and colourful 96 page account of the good work of MGC and its agencies, including The Conservation Unit. However natural history (excluding geology) hardly features at all. The appendices provide precise details of grants, which are summarised below:

MGC Local Museum Purchase Grants 1987-1988	
Administered by the V&A Museum:	£1,149,820
Administered by the Science Museum:	£ 130,352
amount spent on Biology	£       0
Conservation grants:	£ 179,935
amount spent on Biology	£       0
Conservation unit grants:	£ 41,823
amount spent on Biology	£       0
Capital Grants:	£ 220,325
amount spent on Biology	£ 5,850

These statistics are interesting to say the least. The disparity between the 'arts' and 'sciences' is more than apparent, but why so little spent on biological projects? Is it because there is nothing on the market for us to purchase? Is there a shortage of local money to match the grants? Are requests for grants being turned down? Are biologists aware of the terms of reference of these grants?

Any comments?

Derek Whiteley  
Secretary

## Letters

Dear Sir

I read Ms Pickering's criticism of First Impressions (Vol 4 No 9) with interest but was disappointed to find it ill-informed.

The objective of the exhibition was to look at early observation and recording of natural history in Australia, not to examine the social history or 'human' aspects of the settlement story. Contrary to the suggestion

that the exhibition only deals with the 'great men', over half of the original works of art displayed are by either George Raper, an able seaman, or Thomas Watling, a convict transported for forgery! These artists drew scenes of the first settlement and of native Australians, and these were included in the exhibition to give some idea of the atmosphere of the colony.

However, this aspect was not pursued any further for lack of exhibitable material; we did not wish to create a 'book on the wall' and social history is dealt with better elsewhere, eg Robert Hughes' THE FATAL SHORE. As for the Aboriginal question, contrary to the criticism, we chose deliberately to broaden the brief to acknowledge the effects of European settlement on the indigenous population; to quote from the AV 'First Impact', which summarizes and concludes the exhibition: "As so often happened greed and prejudice led to exploitation of the Aboriginal communities and a breakdown of their culture".

Yours faithfully

Dr Robert M Bloomfield  
Exhibition Content Co-ordinator  
British Museum (Natural History)

## REQUEST FOR CARCASSES

The Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge, is building up a reference collection of disarticulated skeletal material and would be grateful for whole skeletons or carcasses - male, female and juvenile, of the species listed below.

If possible the following information about the animal would be appreciated:

- 1 Total weight
- 2 Age
- 3 Sex
- 4 Where it died
- 5 When it died
- 6 Cause of death
- 7 Whether wild, domestic, or feral
- 8 Where possible height at rump and shoulder; and for small mammals total length, head and hind foot length
- 9 Any other details available.

### Mammals

Common rat (Rattus norvegicus)  
Shrew - all species  
Voles - all species  
Mice - all species except Field and Yellow-necked mice

Bats - all species  
Rabbit (Oryctolagus cuniculus)  
Brown hare (Lepus capensis)  
Mountain (Arctic) hare (Lepus timidus)  
Fat dormouse (Glis glis)  
Hazel dormouse (Muscardinus avellanarius)  
Garden dormouse (Eliomys quercinus)  
Red squirrel (Sciurus vulgaris)

Badger (Meles meles)  
Stoat (Mustela erminea)  
Polecat (Mustela putorius)  
Ferret (Mustela putorius furo)  
European mink (Mustela lutreola)  
European pine marten (Martes martes)  
Wild cat (Felis silvestris)

Seals - all species

Fallow deer (Dama dama)  
Red deer (Cervus elaphus)  
Roe deer (Capreolus capreolus)  
Deer - any other species  
Wild goat (Capra aegragus)  
Primitive sheep eg Soay  
Primitive cattle (Bos taurus)  
- Scottish Highland cattle  
- English Park cattle

Horse (Equus caballus)  
Pony - New Forest; Dartmoor

Primitive domestic pig

Hamster (Cricetus cricetus)  
Golden hamster (Mesocricetus auratus)

Amphibians and Reptiles

All types except Common Viper

Birds

We require all species except the following:

Mute swan  
Blackbird  
Grey heron  
Domestic duck  
Rook  
Mistle thrush  
Domestic chicken (but we do require old breeds  
of domestic fowl)  
Swallow  
Starling

If you have any of these species which are  
surplus to your requirements please contact:

Jessica C Hale  
Department of Archaeology  
University of Cambridge  
Downing St  
Cambridge CB2 3DZ  
Tel: (0223) 337733 Ext 3531

#### NEW ADDRESS

The North of England Museums Service has moved  
to: House of Recovery, Bath Lane, Newcastle  
upon Tyne, NE4 5SQ; telephone: (091) 2221661.  
The name of the new building seems suitably  
uplifting!

## In the Press

In its NEWSLETTER for July 1988 (no 52) the  
BRITISH ARACHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY'S Secretary,  
Michael J Roberts, gives a list of current and  
new projects. Among these is the formation of  
a reference collection for loan to members as  
an aid to identification. A good idea and  
worth noting by the local CRU (presumably the  
Sheffield area) and Museum.

In September, the BOTANICAL SOCIETY OF  
THE BRITISH ISLES issued its updated list of  
Vice-county Recorders. Notice was also given  
of a meeting at Exeter University on 6th to  
9th April 1989 on 'Species-mapping and the  
Biology of Plant Distribution' which will also  
be of interest to many BCG members.

The BSBI NEWS issues 48 and 49 (April and  
September 1988) have articles on collecting  
policy by three museum botanists. John Cannon  
at the BM(NH) outlines his Department's very  
specialised interests in British herbaria,  
saying in no uncertain terms that he thinks it  
'highly appropriate that good local  
collections should find their final resting  
places in relevant local museums, where they  
should be both used and valued as essential  
archival records of the local environment'.  
He also argues that the days of the individual  
general herbarium are past, but accepts the  
need for more specialised collecting towards  
specific ends. Eric Greenwood (Liverpool) and  
Mike Taylor (Perth) follow up with well argued  
support for the maintenance and use of local  
herbaria and Mike outlines the collecting  
policy in operation at Perth.

BSBI NEWS 48 also has five short pieces on the  
'use of computers for building distributional  
databases and plotting distribution maps  
(three for IBM-compatible machines and one for  
Amstrad PCWs) and a plea for consistency in  
the choice of computer systems to be used for  
county floras. A BSBI Computer Users group  
may be formed to offer recommendations to  
members about to embark on such schemes.

MUSEUMS JOURNAL vol 88 no 1 (June 1988) has  
a brief description by Stephen Locke of the  
Moscow State University Museum of Zoology,  
Moscow: an interesting account of an 'old  
style' museum with systematic displays and  
enthusiastic visitors reflecting "... in both  
its exposition and the response of its  
visitors, the early spirit of our own  
museums. I feel we have lost something".

CURATOR vol 30 no 4 (December 1987) is an  
invaluable reference resource: it is an index  
of the first 30 volumes of CURATOR by author,  
title and subject.

CURATOR vol 31 no 1 (March 1988) has a paper  
by Marie A Lawrence on a method of conserving  
mammalian type specimens which are in poor  
repair by constructing what she terms  
'archival containers' in which to store them.  
The specimens in question were bats from the

Wied-Neuwied collection purchased by the American Museum of Natural History in 1869, two of which were extensively damaged. The author gives full details of the construction of the sealed, transparent and biochemically inert boxes in which the specimens were secured and the wrappers which enclosed the boxes for protection and to keep out the light. Names and addresses of suppliers of materials are included.

Two publications which I have not seen but which will be relevant to most readers: MUSEUM COLLECTIONS: THEIR ROLES AND FUTURE IN BIOLOGICAL RESEARCH edited by E H Miller in the series of occasional papers of the British Columbia Provincial Museum (no 25); MAMMAL COLLECTION MANAGEMENT edited by H Genoways, C Jones and O L Rossolimo for Texas Tech University Press. If any BCG member has access to either of these publications perhaps he or she could submit a brief review for a future Newsletter.

The CENTRE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL INTERPRETATION at Manchester Poly has recently produced a leaflet on its very impressive list of courses offered in 1988 and 1989. Most are relevant to museum-based biologists and include: Working with the News Media; Interpretation and Education on Nature Reserves; Video in Interpretation; Design and Graphics for Interpretation; Communications for the Countryside, plus many more. The leaflet is available from CEI, Manchester Polytechnic, Bellhouse Building, Lower Ormond Street, Manchester M15 6BX.

I recently came across the published preprints for the UKIC 30th anniversary conference: CONSERVATION TODAY (10th to 14th October 1988) which contains an excellent review article by Robert C Child (Senior Conservation Officer at the Welsh Folk Museum) called FUMIGATION: A NEW DIRECTION? As well as reviewing the use of currently available fumigants it gives an independent assessment of the new RENTOKIL fumigation bubble which many readers will by now have heard about or used. Particular emphasis is placed on the use of CO<sub>2</sub> as a fumigant in the bubble and this should interest all of us who have to arrange regular fumigations with, say, methyl bromide but do so in the knowledge that we may be further damaging those items we wish to preserve. The preprints are available from UKIC, 37 Upper Addison Gardens, Holland Park, London W14 8AJ.

The NATURAL HISTORY BOOK SERVICE of Totnes is now the agency for a series of natural history videos from the National Geographical Society and World of Survival. They have over 50 titles at £11.99 each. The BBC is also marketing a new range of BIO VIDEOS ostensibly for use by teachers but looking most appropriate for gallery or schoolroom use in museums. The subjects are: Locomotion and Photosynthesis (no 1); Sexual Reproduction in Animals and Animal Senses (no 2); The Evidence for Evolution and Invertebrates (no 3). Each comes with user's guide, script, word list and worksheets. They cost £49.00 plus p&p each.

The SCOTTISH SOCIETY FOR CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION continues to disperse a broad spectrum of information through its BULLETIN and NEWSLETTER. BULLETIN no 10 (1988) is given over to geological collections - their conservation, curation and interpretation, with obvious emphasis on the Scottish scene. It's time we organised a similar thrust on behalf of biological collections! Any offers to organise one?

The CONCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER no 104 (March 1988) has a short note by Nora McMillan on that scourge of old shell collections and MA Diploma practical examinees: Byne's disease. She covers its recognition and, in some detail, gives the remedy which has kept in good condition some shells she treated in 1955.

STUDIES IN CONSERVATION vol 33 no 2 (May 1988) has a paper by Patricia Cox Crews on the effectiveness of clear versus yellow ultra violet filters in reducing fading of selected dyes. The results show that clear filters offered no protection against fading for some natural dyes. Yellow or amber filters proved much more effective, but of course these can be objectionable in a display setting because they distort the colour of the objects being viewed. The answer seems to be to keep illumination levels down to 50 lux. The clear UV filters were still effective in reducing deterioration caused by UV radiation, so they still have some value, but they did not protect fully from fading.

The JOURNAL OF BIOLOGICAL EDUCATION almost always has articles and papers of interest to museum biologists. The Autumn 1988 (vol 22 no 3) issue has an analysis of the biology content of GCSE science syllabuses by Sheila Martin and Sheila Turner. The science syllabuses for five examining groups were combed for biological subjects with particular reference to the four themes outlined in the National Criteria for Biology: diversity of organisms; relationship between organisms and their environment; organisation and maintenance of the individual; development of organisms and the continuity of life. The analysis is of value to all of us trying to make our service provisions more relevant to GCSE requirements.

In the same issue there is a fascinating study by Bryan Turner on using domestic pests for ecological studies in schools. Pests in a domestic environment represent an easily available alternative to the more complex systems usually studied: ponds, streams, woodlands, fields are examples. Dr Turner uses the booklouse *Liposcelis bostrychophilus* as the chief example, but most of the pests we take in regularly as enquiries are also featured. We could find ourselves advising on their ecology rather than extermination soon!

A new, revised edition of THE PREPARATION AND CURATION OF INSECTS by Annette K Walker and Trevor K Crosby has just been published by the Entomology Division of the Department of

Scientific and Industrial Research, Auckland, New Zealand. BCG has not yet received a review copy but should do shortly.

## DIPTERISTS DIGEST - A NEW JOURNAL ABOUT FLIES

DD is a new journal for diptera enthusiasts with interests in the recording, ecology, distribution and natural history of British and N W European flies. It will be of particular interest to museum biologists as new taxonomic keys, county and regional accounts, national distribution maps, new techniques and nomenclature changes will be regular features.

For example, the first issue includes an extensive review of French and N W European hoverflies with special reference and keys to those likely to occur in Britain (M C D Speight) plus a number of regional articles - examples are Buckinghamshire, Coventry and Merseyside. It has 48 pages and is A5 in size.

Future editions will include new and updated national distribution maps and reviews of museum collections.

Dipterists Digest is an independently produced journal.

Issue No 1 costs £3.

Advanced subscription to No 2 £2.50  
(£3 Institutions)

Advanced subscription to Nos 2 and 3 £5  
(£6 Institutions)

Note: Individual members of BCG can sample Issue No 1 for £2.50 post free.

Cheques payable to D Whiteley please.

Dipterists Digest  
c/o Derek Whiteley  
730 Eccleshall Road  
Sheffield S11 8TB  
Tel: Sheffield 668487

## Techniques

Kless, J. (1986): "Ein neues Verfahren zum Aufweichen unpräparierter Käfer" in Ent. Blätter, 82, pp 120-121 (kleine Mitteilung 2051)

A method is described for relaxing unsoftened beetles, either completely dry or from formalin, in cases where the normal relaxation techniques prove ineffective. The specimen is placed in a solution of pepsin (1g per 100ml water) activated with 1ml concentrated hydrochloric acid, which destroys the muscular protein without damaging the chitinous exoskeleton.

Small species become relaxed after three or four days submersion, whilst large species can take up to 14 days. No deterioration in colours is reported and soft bodied species have been successfully treated. Even submersion for 10 months does not harm specimens. An added bonus is that specimens emerge from the solution thoroughly cleaned. No mention is made of the effect on pubescence.

Derek Lott

## CONSERVATION INFORMATION NETWORK

The Conservation Information Network is a new international service offering conservation information. It is a database containing: abstracts of virtually all conservation literature published (with well over 100,000 citations); information on materials used in conservation including adhesives, consolidants, coatings and pesticides; information on suppliers and manufacturers of conservation materials and equipment.

Access to the system can be direct by subscription or indirect via The Conservation Unit and MGC. Subscription is not very expensive: £30 covers registration and operating manuals and £10 buys the communications software; thereafter access time costs about £30 an hour but communication is fairly rapid. Subscribers need a computer - IBM, IBM compatible or Apple Macintosh or ASCII terminal and a modem link to the telephone network. Alternatively, search requests can be directed to The Conservation Unit and the charge will be for Network usage time only. For subscribers a Support Service is available run by The Conservation Unit and MDA.

Another benefit of the service is an electronic mailing system - ENVOY 100. Messages can be sent instantaneously to any other subscriber anywhere in the world (the Network is based in Canada).

So much for the blurb. The Leicestershire Museums Service subscribes to the Network so (with considerable technical help) I tried to estimate the extent of the biological information in the bibliographic databank. The database is interrogated through a series of keywords; the on-screen display can be tailored to those parts of the (very comprehensive) record you wish to see. Getting the hang of the keywords takes a little time but is not difficult. Thus the stem BIOL\* was recorded in 277 documents; TAXIDERM\* in 25; HERBARI\* in 2; FUMIGATION in 292. Using combinations of keywords cuts down the size of the data set to be displayed. Thus SPECIMEN appears in 204 documents, NATURAL in 1188, HISTORY in 9426, PREPARATION on 67; combining these sets gives PREPARATION and NATURAL and HISTORY and SPECIMEN appearing in 43 documents. These could be displayed or downloaded onto disc in about 10-15 minutes. One of the standard formats would give for each item: literature



type; author; title; source; page numbers; language; abstract; subject keywords (which the initial search interrogates). The latter category gives clues as to which other keywords might prove useful in further searches.

Although I approached this exercise with some scepticism, thinking that biology as a discipline has been poorly served by the conservation community in recent years, I was surprised to find so many references to biological (and, incidentally, geological) sources. There are many obvious gaps in the coverage, but perhaps BCG should be pressing to fill these, linking with the Network through The Conservation Unit at MGC. In the meantime, I can recommend that biological conservators try to arrange access to the Network and make use of its obvious advantages.

John Mathias  
Editor

#### MDA TERMINOLOGY GROUP - BIOLOGICAL DATA STANDARDS

I have received the following examples of data standards for biological objects, and my thanks go to the following members for responding so promptly:

Margaret Reilly, Hunterian Museum, Glasgow  
Bill Pettit, Manchester Museum  
Nick Moyes, (ex Kirklees) Derby Museum  
Bob Allkin, Kew

Clearly the next step is to prepare a set of standards for new/future users, using the above as examples. This is quite a large job and requires a volunteer to co-ordinate and liaise with MDA Terminology Group. I have applied to MDA for a small grant/bursary for someone to undertake this work, and I await their answer.

Derek Whiteley  
Secretary

#### BIOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS UK

This report was officially launched by the Museums Association on 4th August 1988 and elicited a sympathetic response from the quality press - notably the Independent and Guardian. It is expensive to buy, but BCG has received a complimentary copy from the Museums Association. I propose that this copy is made available for circulation on a short-loan basis to members of BCG who would like to see it. It is quite heavy (600+ A5 pages), so return postage would be appreciated.

Please apply to:  
BCG Secretary,  
Derek Whiteley,  
City Museum,  
Sheffield S10 2TP

#### FOR LOVE OF BIRDS

An exhibition to celebrate the centenary of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds which was founded in Didsbury, Manchester in 1889.

This exhibition is available for hire from 1 July 1989 to 31 December 1990.

The exhibition looks at the history of the RSPB and bird conservation from 1889 to the present. It is produced by Bolton Museum and will be hired through NWMAGS to museums around Britain.

If any museums are interested please contact Steve Garland, Bolton Museum, Le Mans Crescent, Bolton BL1 1SE (tel: (0204) 22311 ext 2211) for further details.

#### BLACK KITE (*Milvus migrans*)

The Dorman Museum was fortunate enough recently to receive a donation of a Black Kite specimen from Mr David J Britton, on 20th May 1988.

Three recorded sightings have been made in April and May this year of Black Kites around the Teesmouth area. Mr Britton actually sighted a Kite at the South Gare of the Tees on 5th May 1988 and continued to observe it over about five days. As all sightings were made around the same area, it may have been the same bird, although this can only be speculation. It is certainly interesting to think that more than one Kite has visited Cleveland in such a short space of time, particularly as this specimen is the first record for Cleveland. The Black Kite is a national rarity, although Martin Blick (ornithologist with the Cleveland Nature Conservation Trust) informs me that several Black Kites have been seen further south this year, along with the usual Red Kites.

The specimen now in the museum was found dead on the tide line at Teesmouth by John Wilmot on 18th May. It was thought to have been dead about a week. The bird has been identified by Chris Brown (Cleveland Group RSPB leader) and David Britton (Member of the British Birds Rarities Committee) who has photographed and described it for submission to the Committee.

Due to its rarity, the museum specimen is being mounted as soon as possible. A NEMS grant has been obtained towards the cost of taxidermy and Eric Morton, taxidermist at the Hancock Museum, Newcastle is carrying out this work. The Kite will then be added to the Dorman Museum permanent collection and, hopefully, will be available for inspection by museum professionals and other bona fide enquirers, if not put on display. Enquiries should be directed to the Museum's Curator.

Leigh Lampard  
Assistant Curator, Kirkleatham Museum  
(formerly at Dorman Museum)

# AGM 88

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
HELD AT THE TOWN HALL, BOLTON ON FRIDAY  
15TH APRIL 1988 AT 3.30PM

1. Apologies were received from Geoff Halfpenny, Adam Wright, Tony Tynan, Steve Moran, Rosina Down.
2. Minutes of the 1986 AGM at Cambridge were read and approved, proposed by Geoff Stansfield and seconded by Paul Richards. Minutes of the 1987 AGM were approved, proposed by Geoff Stansfield and seconded by Don Steward.
3. Chairman's Report. Steve Garland read a report on the Committee's activities (to be published in the Newsletter).
4. Secretary's Report. Derek Whiteley read a report on the Committee's activities (to be published in the Newsletter).
5. Editor's Report. John Mathias read the Editor's Report (to be published in the Newsletter).
6. Treasurer's Report. Unfortunately the accounts were not available, and the item was deferred to the 1989 AGM. The Treasurer had reported by telephone that the Group is financially sound and recommended subscriptions should stay the same.
7. Election of Officers and Committee

Chairman: Steve Garland  
Secretary: Derek Whiteley  
Treasurer: Adam Wright  
Membership Secretary: Adam Wright  
Editor: John Mathias  
Special Publications Editor: Gordon Reid.

There were no other nominations. All were re-elected, proposed by Geoff Stansfield and seconded by Bill Pettit.

Committee.

Geoff Hancock and Graham Walley have served three years and retire.

Steve Moran, Rosina Down, Howard Mendel, Phil Collins, Clem Fisher and Colin Plant were re-elected, proposed by Peter Davis and seconded by Don Steward. The committee consists of nine posts of which six are filled. Three nominations were received:

Willie Milne (Kendal), proposed by Steve Moran and seconded by Derek Lott.  
Jerry Lee (Exeter), proposed by Derek Whiteley and seconded by Steve Garland.  
Kathie Way (BMNH), proposed by Clem Fisher and seconded by Steve Garland.

8. Date and place of next AGM: Scotland (Dundee or Glasgow). Date to be announced in the Newsletter.

9. Any other business

Affiliation to Museums Association

Steve Garland outlined the history of meetings and discussion with the MA. Discussion followed, and the general feeling of the meeting was against affiliation to MA for the time being, until the benefits become clear. Affiliation to learned societies (eg. Linnean Society, Institute of Biology, Systematics Association) is to be investigated by Committee and report back.

There was no other business and the meeting closed at 4.30pm.

Derek Whiteley  
Secretary

## EDITOR'S REPORT 1987/88

The teething troubles I had with Newsletter production in 1986/87 have now largely been resolved and three issues were published in 1987/88. The main difficulty now is the variable time the printing takes. I try to take this into account, but something usually crops up to cause a delay. However, the very competitive prices we are charged and the convenience of 'in house' production make any delays easier to bear. The next issue will be a 'special', containing the papers from the BCG autumn 1987 meeting at Coventry: 'Live Animal Displays in Museums : the Lower Vertebrates'.

The leaflets advertising the proposed Journal of Biological Curation have been printed. Several promises of articles have been received, if not the articles themselves, so all seems to be going well for a spring 1989 launch. Designs and costings still have to be obtained.

The Manual of Curatorship project has made some progress. Geoff Stansfield has now done some fleshing out of the outline and an application for funding the project has been made to the Museums and Galleries Commission. Further discussions have to take place, but I am very hopeful that our financing will come from this source.

Finally, please continue to support the Newsletter with your comments, notes, short articles, pictures and the like; they are all very welcome. Also, bear in mind the Journal for those longer papers you write in a fit of enthusiasm and then don't know what to do with. I look forward to hearing from you.

John Mathias  
13 April 1988

SECRETARY'S REPORT 1987/88

Your committee met five times during the past year, yesterday here in Bolton, once at the Museums Association offices, and three times at University College London which has become our adopted home. I would like to thank all our hosts for their kind hospitality, and particularly Rosina Down (UCL) for her special efforts which make committee meetings a pleasure.

Two general meetings were held; Sheffield in April with a record-breaking attendance, and Coventry (Live Animals in Museums) in September was also well-attended for a second meeting of a more specific nature. Again our thanks go to the organisers and host museums. We hope to continue with the same formula; a major meeting combined with an AGM and an attractive package of lectures, discussions and visits; and a second meeting will give us the chance to discuss a specialist subject or visit a new venue, or a far-flung outpost. The emphasis is on making the meetings interesting, informative, enjoyable and cheap. In 1990 BCG will stretch its wings to visit the Isle of Man, by invitation of the Manx Museum. We will be able to take advantage of cheap accommodation, free brand-new conference facilities, an opportunity to meet our colleagues from Ulster and the Republic, and a chance to explore the island (and duty free). We feel that after the success of Sheffield and this weekend's meeting here in Bolton, that we can boldly go where no AGM has gone before. A second meeting for 1988 has been arranged at Exeter Museum in September. Your committee has worked hard throughout the year, and many of our efforts should bear fruit during the coming year. If all goes well, 1988/89 could be an exciting year for the Group. The launch of a new Journal, the Beetle-down ... campaign, a publication on 'Disposal of Collections', a residential curatorial course at Losehill Hall in October, the publication of a Manual of Biological Curation, and the publication and response to Biological Collections (UK) are all exciting events in the coming year; events for which we need your solid support and assistance.

Our relationship with the Museums Association is not all it should be. The Director General attended one of our committee meetings, and prospects thereafter looked quite good. However the MA have since failed to provide some financial support for our curatorial course, and BCG committee decided by a very small majority not to affiliate to the MA until the benefits of membership become clearer. On the other hand the MA provided ten free places to their 1987 conference and it is likely that additional places will be available for the 1988 Belfast conference. Phil Collins has represented BCG at the MA Specialists Groups Meeting and useful dialogue has developed. Gordon Reid is establishing useful links with the MGC Conservation Unit. Close links with GCG continue. Rosina Down and several other members have attended GCG committee meetings, and Diana Smith reciprocates as GCG rep on our committee.

Kathie Way keeps us informed of developments at the BM(NH).

Amongst our bread and butter work we have commented on current issues such as the Hale Report, MDA Terminology Group, CP schemes (liaising with Institute of Field Archaeology), National Heritage 'Museum of the Year'; awards, MGC Conservation Unit and a regular feature on our agenda is 'Collections at Risk'. Here the committee operates a 'Watchdog' on the disposal and well-being of collections. In the coming year we are extending this to biology staff. We are also pushing hard for 'Curatorial Biology' to be established as one of the optional 'modules' in the new style MA Diploma, based on the Manual of Biological Curation as a syllabus. An exciting new development is the approach made to GCG and BCG by Sheffield University's Division of Continuing Education with a view to running regular curatorial courses in the natural sciences. The future looks very promising.

I am pleased to report that for the first time in several years there is some stability on committee. All the current officers are willing to stand for re-election.

The year ahead looks very exciting. I would like to thank fellow officers and members of committee for their hard work during the past year, and ask for your continuing support during the coming year.

Derek Whiteley  
BCG Secretary  
15 April 1988

Uses of biological specimens (2)



A little girl called Alice playing croquet with a study skin of Phoenicopterus ruber and a stuffed Erinaceus europaeus, both doubtless borrowed from the zoological collections of the Oxford University Museum. (After John Tenniel).

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Obituary - Robert Boyne

It is with deep regret that we report the death of Bob Boyne, the Museums Officer (Natural Sciences), Tyne and Wear Museums Service at Sunderland Museum, at the early age of 40.

Bob was, primarily, an invertebrate zoologist gaining wide experience on both sides of the Atlantic, including teaching posts at Clemson University, South Carolina and Miami University, Ohio and more recently as temporary assistant at Perth Museum and Art Gallery.

During his time in the U S A Bob specialised in the Ephemeroptera, something that stood him in good stead for his subsequent entomological work at Perth and Sunderland.

Whilst at Sunderland, he devoted much of his time to the entomological collection; in particular the storage and documentation of specimens collected as part of the 1981-1982 Durham County Conservation Trust Survey.

His other great talent was the care and maintenance of live animal displays - something that he developed whilst at Sunderland. The condition of the freshwater and marine aquaria reflected his careful planning and dedication.

Bob was a perfectionist, devoted to his work and collections. He was extremely popular with all his colleagues for his professionalism and sense of humour. He will be sadly missed by friends and colleagues alike at Sunderland and our sympathy goes out to his mother, Marie.

Alec Coles



The 1989 AGM meeting will be held in Dundee Museum on 19th to 21st May inclusive.

The AGM will be on the 19th and the theme for the formal part of the meeting is 'Conservation of Biological Specimens'. There will also be a fieldwork programme and visits to some Scottish museums. The full programme will be in the next Newsletter.

## DUNDEE

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### REMEMBER

Uses of biological specimens - details to Charles Pettitt at Manchester Museum. Illustrations in a lighter vein to the Editor.

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Beetle-down ..... Campaign

As I write, reports are coming in from all over Britain about successful events associated with 'Beetle-down .....' week and the national campaign. It seems that we have reached a large number of local politicians, museum managements, press and media, not to mention the public at large.

To date 57 starter packs have been sold; 34,000 leaflets distributed, and we are looking for sponsorship to print a further 35,000 for general distribution.

I need:

- \* photocopies of press cuttings
- \* loan/donation of slides/photographs of events
- \* statistics - visitors? radio coverage?

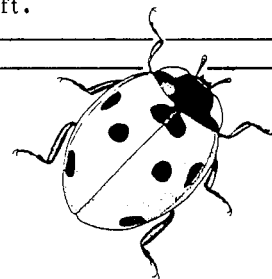
A provisional report will be given in a future Newsletter, and a full report at the Dundee AGM in May 1989. In the meantime, the campaign continues. Please keep up the good work.

Derek Whiteley  
Secretary

PS We have plenty of window stickers, car stickers and T-shirts left.

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next issue:  
Beetle Down  
reports.



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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