

NEWSLETTER

Vol 5 No 2

AGM 89 DUNDEE

19th and 20th May



BIOLOGICAL CURATORS GROUP
SEMINAR AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
DUNDEE, McMANUS GALLERIES

19th and 20th May 1989

- 9.30-9.45am Welcome to Dundee. Adam Ritchie, Curator, Dundee Museums and Art Galleries
- 9.45-10.30am The Environment and the Specimen. Jo Sage, Natural History Conservator, Dundee Museums and Art Galleries.
- 10.30-11.00am Coffee
- 11.00-11.45am Monitoring and Controlling the Environment. Graeme Scott, Conservator, Dundee Museums and Art Galleries.
- 11.45-12.30am Preventative Methods in Vertebrate Preparation. Phil Howard, Natural History Conservator, Scottish Museums Council, Edinburgh.
- 12.30-2.00pm Lunch
- 2.00-2.45pm Conservation of the University College, London, Teaching Collections. Rosina Down, University College, London.
- 2.45-3.30pm Disaster Planning. John McIntyre, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.
- 3.30-4.00pm Tea followed by discussion
- 4.30-5.00pm Annual General Meeting for BCG members only.

The Natural History displays and collections are based at the nearby Barrack Street Museum. This building will remain open until 6.00pm. Members of the Natural History staff will be on hand to show delegates the non-public areas and answer queries.

7.00-8.30pm Dinner in the restaurant of the Tay Hotel, Whitehall Crescent, Dundee (Cost £7.50)

8.30pm approx. 'Beetle-down results so far' a short, illustrated progress report by Derek Whiteley followed by an informal discussion session on current topics and BCG campaigns.

Please note

- 1 Batches of Beetle-down leaflets (new edition) will be available FREE at the AGM.
- 2 A BCG Shop will be selling Beetle-down.... merchandise and BCG publications.
- 3 There is a possibility that up to three new BCG leaflets will be available, and possibly the new Journal too! No promises, but we will do our best.

Excursions for Saturday 20th May 1989

As the Tayside area is well-endowed with a wide range of habitats from sea-shore to mountain top, a number of possible field excursions are detailed below.

It would be helpful, when booking for the trip, if you would indicate your first and second choice of trip. This is to enable suitable transport to be arranged according to demand.

- 1 Perth Museum and Kinnoull Hill

Perth, the 'Gateway to the Highlands', is situated at the Tay's uppermost point of tidal influence. The Museum has extensive natural history collections and its display gained second place in the 1985 Scottish Museum of the Year Award.

Kinnoull Hill overlooks the town. As well as panoramic views, there are mixed woodland and grassland with the opportunity of seeing Red Squirrel and Roe Deer.

2 Balgavies Loch and Montrose Museum

Balgavies owes its importance to its plant life and its winter wildfowl, although grebes and many species of duck also breed there. The loch is edged by mixed woodland, willow carr and reed beds. The area is a Scottish Wildlife Trust reserve. A hide overlooks the water as well as marginal marsh and woodland. Otters are known to visit the loch.

Montrose is the base for the Angus District Museums Service. Although the collections are not extensive, the displays nicely depict the local habitats.

A stop-over at the Lurgies - an area of reed beds on the western side of Montrose Basin - should show local waders and wildfowl.

3 Craig-a-Barns, Dunkeld, via Loch of the Lowes

Overlooking the town and the River Tay, Craig-a-Barns has a mix of habitats including oakwood, mixed woodland, moorland and open water. One of the few Scottish herds of Fallow Deer live in this area as do Roe Deer and Red Squirrel. The Mill Dam Loch provides refuge for wildfowl. By stopping off at Butterstone Loch and the better-known Loch of the Lowes there may be a chance to see the local ospreys.

4 Seaton Cliffs, Arbroath, to Auchmithie

The old red sandstone that forms the cliffs has been sculptured into some spectacular features. The most obvious inhabitants of the area are the auks - including puffins - and gulls, eiders, waders. Two species of seal and common porpoise may also be seen. There is also quite a variety of plants and associated insects.

Part of the area is protected by the Scottish Wildlife Trust.

PLEASE BRING SUITABLE CLOTHING,
FOOTWEAR AND PACKED LUNCH.

Excursions will start at 10.00am and return between 4 and 6.00pm.

Notice of Annual General Meeting - 1989

The Annual General Meeting of the Biology Curators' Group will be held at 4.00pm on Friday 19th May at Dundee Museum.

Agenda

- 1 Apologies
- 2 Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 15th April 1988 at Bolton
- 3 Chairman's report
- 4 Secretary's report
- 5 Editor's report
- 6 Treasurer's reports 1987 and 1988
- 7 Election of officers and committee
- 8 Date and place of next meeting

- 9 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: Steve Garland
Secretary: Derek Whiteley
Treasurer: Adam Wright
Membership Secretary: Adam Wright
Editor: John Mathias
Special Publications Editor: Gordon Reid
Committee:

Steve Moran (1986) retires
Howard Mendel (1986) retires
Phil Collins (1986) retires
Rosina Down (1987)
Clem Fisher (1987)
Colin Plant (1987)
Kathie Way (1988)
Willie Milne (1988)
Jerry Lee (1988)

All officers are willing to stand for re-election.

The committee has the power to co-opt. Present co-opted member is Di Smith (GCG representative).

The committee consists of nine posts; three members retire at the AGM.

Nominations for officers and committee members must be supported by two members of the Group. Nominations, in writing, should reach the Secretary at least two weeks before the Annual General Meeting.

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

Autumn Meeting
North Devon, October 1989

Make a note in your diary now! October 26-29th, BCG Seminar in North Devon. Jerry Lee has organised an excellent meeting based at Hallsannery Field Centre, with an emphasis on the care and curation of marine and microscopy collections.

The main events will take place on Friday 27th October, with OPTIONAL extras for those wishing to stay for the weekend, including:

a visit to the new Museum of North Devon, Barnstable;
Braunton Burrows National Nature Reserve;
Natural History Book Service at Totnes;
and even perhaps Lundy!

Further details in the next Newsletter. Any further suggestions or offers to speak on the above topics will be welcome. Please contact BCG Secretary or Jerry Lee at Museum of North Devon, The Square, Barnstaple EX32 8LN.

FENSCORE

FENSCORE Update

At their last meeting, on 17th November, 1988, the Committee of the Federation for Natural Sciences Collection Research (FENSCORE) set up a working party with the aim of examining the feasibility of the Museum Documentation Association (MDA) taking over from the Manchester Museum the maintenance of, and search service from the FENSCORE national database; the working party are to report back their proposals to the full FENSCORE committee when they meet at the Museums and Galleries Commission offices on 8th June, 1989.

The working party met on 10th February, 1989, and drew up the draft proposals set out below. They are reproduced here for the information of all interested curators, particularly those who have provided input to the database.

AGREED: the following POLICY PROPOSALS be submitted to FENSCORE.

1. The MDA will establish a National Database to agreed standards (see B below), working within its current financial/manpower resources up to April 1990.
 - 2.1 The Manchester Museum will hold a back-up copy of the National Database.
 - 2.2 The feasibility of also transferring copies of the National Database to other CRUs with access to suitable mainframes will be investigated.
 - 2.3 Back-up copies of the National Database will NOT be altered locally by the holders.
3. The responsibility for editing and adding new records to their own regional database will reside with each CRU.
 - 4.1 The MDA will offer an up-date service, inserting the latest version of a regional database into the National Database in place of the previous version.
 - 4.2 The MDA will be responsible for contacting each CRU once a year, and programming them into the updating process.
- 5.1 There will be a commitment by all parties involved to make the data transfer between the CRUs and the MDA as easy as possible.
- 5.2 The details of data transfer protocols and media will be worked out on a one-to-one basis between the MDA and each CRU.
- 6.1 A search service, initially off-line, will be offered by MDA, free to non-commercial UK and Eire users.
- 6.2 MDA will have discretion to charge overseas non-commercial users.
- 6.3 FENSCORE and the MDA will have to agree guidelines for the provision of, and charging for, information from the National Database to commercial users.
- 7.1 Copyright on all print-out remains with each CRU for their data.
- 7.2 All listings will carry a copyright statement, eg 'The copyright resides with the originators of the information. Enquiries in the first instance to the MDA'.
- 8.1 MDA will allocate four person weeks in the year to work on standardization and a one-off 'clean-up' of the existing National Database.
- 8.2 A programme for the major standardization work will be established, for the fields which are to be concorded.
- 8.3 To prevent the existing data being altered at two sites at the same time, the 'master' copy of a regional database may switch back-and-forth between the MDA and the CRU, according to an agreed timetable.
- 8.4 While the 'master' is with the MDA, new entries could continue to be entered and edited at the CRU, but as a separate 'file', to be added to the 'master' when it returns to the CRU.

Uses of biological specimens (3)



Intriguing use of *Diomedea exulans* study skin on long sea voyage; described in detail by S T Coleridge:

Ah! well-a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung.

From the 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner'.

8.5 The NW and YH CRUs are suggested as possible candidates to pilot the spring-clean operation, as data transfer protocols have already been established.

The detailed data standards were then discussed field-by-field. Mostly the existing FENSCORE approach will be continued, with all fields free text except those containing: Collection Name; Associated Names; Holding Institution; and Name of Recorder. The Subject and Geographical Source fields will continue to have sort-search codes added in separate fields, and a new code field is being created for the Period field. The opportunity is being taken to make some minor improvements to the detailed FENSCORE instructions and Code Lists, and these will be circulated after they have been approved by the full FENSCORE Committee.

If you wish to comment on the proposals please contact your local CRU representative, or, if you prefer, one of the following working party members: John Burnett (Royal Scottish Museum), Margaret Hartley (Cliffe Castle Museum); Richard Light (MDA); Charles Pettit (Manchester Museum).

Federation for Natural Sciences Collections Research

List of Representatives as at January 1989

A Collection Research Units (two voting members each)

CRU Chairman; other representatives

CRNAM Graham Walley; Geoff Halfpenny
CRNNE Peter Davis; Chris Brewer
CRNNW Charles Pettitt; Steve Garland
CRNSE Gordon Read; Rosina Down/Paul Hyam
CRNST Mike Taylor; Geoff Hancock/
David Heppell
CRNSW Charles Copp; nomination vacant
CRNYH Bill Ely; Margaret Hartley

B National Museums and Manchester Museum (one voting member each)

Institution: nominated representative

British Geological Survey: A W Medd
British Museum (Natural History):
Neil Thompson
Manchester Museum: C W Pettitt
National Museum of Wales: Peter Morgan
Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh:
James Cullen
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew: G L L Lucas
Royal Scottish Museum: John Burnett
Ulster Museum: Philip Doughty

C Institutions invited to send Observers

Institution: nominated observer

Biology Curators' Group: Steve Garland
Biological Records Centre: Paul Harding
Geological Curators' Group: D I Steward
National Museum of Ireland:
Nigel Monaghan

National Museums of Merseyside:
Eric Greenwood
Museums and Galleries Commission:
Rosemary Ewles
Museums Association: nomination vacant
Museum Documentation Association:
Andrew Roberts
Soc Bibl Nat Hist: nomination vacant
Systematics Association: Dr G P Larwood

The Scottish, Welsh and the seven English Museum Area Services are all invited to send observers to FENSCORE meetings.

D Institutions and people receiving FENSCORE documents 'for information'

American Museum Computer Group (Editor SPECTRA); Association of Systematic Collections, USA (Stephen R Edwards); Dr Howard Brunton; Canadian National Museum (Natural History) (C C Eades); Dr P F Lingwood; Director, Manchester Museum.

Charles Pettitt
Manchester Museum

Letters

Dear Dr Mathias,

I would like to bring your members up to date on some activities of the Association of Systematics Collections. We recently completed a report on Systematics Collections Resources for the 1990s that reviews a survey of systematics collections in the US and Canada, and presents the results of a workshop held in Washington, DC, in October of 1988. The report has been presented to the National Science Foundation and its governing body, the National Science Board. We hope that as a result of the report, the National Science Foundation will provide new programs for the support of computerization and networking, graduate training in systematics, and curation of specimens resulting from efforts to inventory and preserve biological diversity worldwide. Other programs are also recommended. [NB see separate note on this item - Editor.]

The US Congress is considering legislation to provide funding for a National Center for Biological Diversity. The Center would review and make available existing databases on biological diversity, organize efforts toward a national biological survey, and identify critical areas in need of study and/or preservation. Its activities would not be limited to the United States - it would also be concerned with the loss of biological diversity worldwide. We have been advising Congress on the legislation. It is possible that the Center would be located within the Smithsonian Institution, but would be able to give funding to other institutions and organizations through contracts. Those interested in summaries of the legislation should write to ASC.

ASC has been asked to organize a workshop on training and job opportunities for systematists/curators worldwide, at the 1990 meeting of the International Congress on Systematics and Evolutionary Biology to be held July 1-7, 1990, at the University of Maryland. For a circular describing the meeting, contact Cheryl Blackman, Room 1123, Microbiology Building, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742, USA.

ASC has recently published two new books which will be of interest to BCG members. A GUIDE TO MUSEUM PEST CONTROL, edited by Zycherman and Schrock, is available for \$36.00 (plus \$9.00 for overseas airmail postage) and SYSTEMATICS: RELEVANCE, RESOURCES, SERVICES, AND MANAGEMENT: A BIBLIOGRAPHY, by Knutson and Murphy is available for \$9.00 plus \$3.60 for overseas airmail postage.

Sincerely,

Dr K. Elaine Hoagland
Executive Director
Association of Systematics Collections

Dear Sir,

MGC Annual Report 1987-88

In your recent newsletter (Vol 5, No 1) Derek Whiteley drew attention to the small amount of money spent by the MGC on biological projects in 1987-88. It is only fair to point out however, that grant-aided projects listed in our annual reports (eg capital grants to provide new stores) tend to be described in general terms and can benefit natural history collections together with a range of other types of collections. In addition, it should not be forgotten that we fund the English Area Museum Councils which provide grants towards biological projects, undertake subsidised conservation work and support surveys of natural history collections (although these are not listed in our annual reports). The Conservation Unit has also been active in supporting conferences concerned with the conservation of natural history collections. Notwithstanding these points, there IS a lack of money spent on biological projects and the reason for this is chiefly a paucity of applications (good or bad!).

The recent publication of BIOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS UK has highlighted the desperate plight of many natural history collections. The MGC intends to react positively to this report and we are convening a meeting of interested parties to discuss the best way forward. We shall of course be inviting representatives of the BCG to this meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Newbery
Deputy Secretary
Museums and Galleries Commission
7 St James's Square
LONDON SW17 4JU

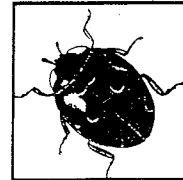
DERBY **FINAL** Evening Telegraph

Beetle off to see the things that bug you

The nationally-based Biology Curators' Group is launching a campaign this week entitled, **Beetle Down...** to your local museum.

Museums throughout Britain are organising special exhibitions and events to make people aware of the varied work that goes on in natural history museums.

At Derby City Museum the National History staff-keeper Bill Grange and assistant keeper Mick Moyes — have prepared a special exhibit. It focuses on the



identification of household pests, which form a high proportion of inquiries from the public.

The display features a mock-up of a corner of a kitchen complete with a selection of realistically nosed insects and other

small bugs — some of them harmful pests, others harmless intruders.

Cockroaches munch through biscuits, clothes moths devour a sock, a spider crawls up the wall — and the blowflies on a dish of cat food are particularly revolting!

Another exhibit shows how specimens and habitat models are prepared for displays, featuring freeze-drying and other modern techniques, and which are hoped to be used in the proposed Derby Nature Museum of Allestree Hall.

The museum is open 10 — 5 Tuesday — Saturday, admission free.

BETTER-DOWN AT DERBY CITY MUSEUM

Beetle-down came at an opportune time for us. Nick Moyes (Assistant Keeper) and myself in the Natural History Section here were in something of a despondant mood as it looked (and still does) that a project to create a new 'Derby Nature Museum' at Allestree Hall, just north of the City, was to be 'axed'. We had been working enthusiastically for the last two and a half years on some far-reaching and exciting plans; but in May the Conservatives took over from Labour in the local elections.

No official decision has come to us at the time of writing, but murmurings in the press and other reported remarks lead us to fear the worst. In addition a top councillor who visited the Museum recently was heard to mutter, as he swept through the Natural History Gallery, "I don't see the point of putting stuffed birds on show". Admittedly, the quality of displays in the existing gallery are not terribly inspiring — what we had planned for the new project was light-years away in concept.

Beetle-down gave us the opportunity to present what we are all about to the public. We immediately thought of an exhibition. Instead of a temporary affair, we decided to mount a small 'permanent' display within one of the existing cases in the natural history gallery of the main museum, as part of a general upgrading of a rather unexciting and obsolete room.

We rejected a straight systematic account of our work and decided to 'focus down' on a particular aspect. 'Beetle-down' sparked off the idea of dealing with the identification of household pests. Enquiries in this field make up a significant proportion of those coming from the general public, and many are passed on via the Environmental Health Department. It was a good subject to cover, we thought, as it highlights our close relationship with the local community, dispelling any 'ivory tower' image.

The exhibit, although housed in a case measuring only 9ft x 3.5ft x 2.5ft, packs much into a small space. The introductory section comprises a mock-up of a corner of a 'typical' kitchen, though rather liberally populated with a selection of common pests and other intruders - all dead, but carefully posed in life-like attitudes. For example, a house spider creeps up the wall, cockroaches nibble at a biscuit which has fallen to the floor and blowflies swarm over a dish of (simulated) cat food. Above this arresting spectacle a caption reads 'Is your house bugged?If so Beetle-down to Derby Museum'. The second half of this caption forms part of the central section of the display, complete with enlarged ladybird logo and captions summarising all of the work carried out in our Department.

Below a photograph of Nick, peering intently down a microscope, is arranged a series of mounted household pests, together with enlarged colour illustrations of each species and short captions describing any damage they may do, or if they are merely harmless intruders from the garden.

The exhibition is completed by a section showing how specimens are prepared for display including the use of our freeze-drier, and how environmental elements such as trees and rocks are cast and modelled. A reconstructed cross-section of a Derbyshire moorland stream forms the centrepiece of this last part of the exhibit.

A press-release on the exhibition and the Beetle-down campaign was circulated before the promotional week in July. Our principal local

paper, the Derby Evening Telegraph carried an eye-catching little piece, complete with ladybird logo - a pity that 'natural history' became, inevitably, 'national history'.

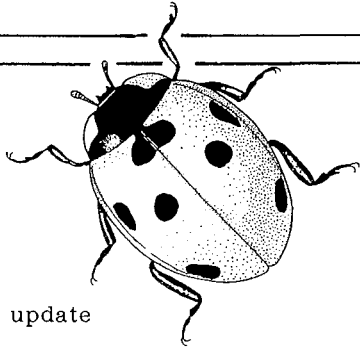
BBC Radio Derby actually did two interviews - one concentrating on the pest element, the other, conducted by the excellent Graham Knight (who has made his name nationally), on the general work of our department. The question of the uncertainty of the new Derby Nature Museum project was also covered and gave me the opportunity to stress what a wonderful facility will be lost to Derby's citizens if the politicians knock it on the head!

During the launch-week of Beetle-down, our Education Officer showed groups of children (many from deprived inner-city areas of Derby) behind the scenes to see something of the work of the natural history department. I also organised a practical session on creating miniature wildlife habitat models as part of the Museum's annual Family Day during the same week. This proved to be immensely popular, so much so that supplies of leaf litter, seashore shingle and shells, etc, almost ran out.

All in all Beetle-down was a great success with us and provided something of a 'shot in the arm' (if one can safely say that nowadays) during a frustrating time at Derby.

Bill Grange
Keeper of Natural History
Derby City Museums





Beetle-down update

- * 59 museums took part in the 1988 campaign by ordering packs of leaflets and stickers
- * 34,000 leaflets were distributed in 1988
- * 38,000 amended leaflets have just been printed by CEGB for 1989
- * WATCH distributed leaflets to all WATCH leaders
- * 99 museums are listed in the leaflet
- * 83 museums have 'stars' ie a resident curator of biology
- * At least 24 museums organised special events for Beetle-down week in July/August 1988
- * Several museums presented the campaign to their governing bodies and distributed leaflets to local politicians
- * The campaign and events received masses of local press and radio coverage, but the national response was poor. The 1989 campaign will initially concentrate on national media coverage.
- * Some specialist groups (eg Diptera recorders) have been directly mailed. We need contacts for others.
- * Some museums have appointed additional staff or unfrozen posts following direct action by BCG. The threat of 'removal' from the Beetle-down accredited list has been used on several occasions.
- * The campaign continues. Wherever possible we are linking Beetle-down to Museums Year '89 to gain extra publicity.
- * This summer we are concentrating on publicising the services outlined in the leaflet. The message is: NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS ARE GOOD VALUE FOR MONEY.

- * 30 JUNE will be B D-Day! Each museum will be asked to contact the local press to publicise the campaign and leaflets. Leaflets will be made available to the public; each museum will be urged to present copies of the leaflets to all members of their governing bodies. (If anyone has difficulty here, contact BCG in advance and we will contact the relevant chairperson directly.) The general idea is that all those in positions of influence should be made aware of what goes on in natural history museums.
- * BEETLE-DOWN WEEK this year has been planned to coincide with autumn half term in schools (October - early November). Plenty of time to plan your special events.
- * Beetle-down merchandise has been reprinted
Car stickers 30p (15p - 10 or more)
Window stickers £1 (75p - 3 or more)
T-Shirts £4 (M or XL) post free

How to obtain Beetle-down leaflets

- 1 Collect from Sheffield Museum - FREE.
- 2 By post from Sheffield Museum - you pay for post and packing only; £4 per batch.
- 3 At BCG meetings. Dundee in May and North Devon in October (and possibly MA Conference in York in September).

NOTE There is a £5 subscription fee to Beetle-down only for museums which did not subscribe in 1988. This includes your window sticker and car sticker, and a 'starter' batch of leaflets.

Extra car stickers, window stickers and T-shirts are available. All payments to 'Biology Curators Group'.

Derek Whiteley
BCG Secretary
Sheffield Museum

PAUL BELLONI DU CHAILLU (1831-1903)

Paul Belloni Du Chaillu (1831-1903), a self-trained naturalist and explorer born in Paris and raised in Gabon, was one of the most flamboyant and controversial figures of nineteenth century science. A naturalized US citizen, Du Chaillu made two major collecting expeditions in West Africa (1855-1859 and 1863-1865). These served as the basis for a series of popular lectures and books for adults and young readers, including: EXPLORATIONS AND ADVENTURES IN EQUATORIAL AFRICA (1861), A JOURNEY TO ASHANGO-LAND (1867) and THE WORLD OF THE GREAT FOREST (1900).

Many of the specimens collected on Du Chaillu's first trip are in the care of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (which helped to finance the expedition), but there are no field notes and

very little surviving manuscript material relating to Du Chaillu or his relationship with the Academy or other scientific institutions of his day.

For a comprehensive biography of Du Chaillu, Robert M Peck is requesting any information concerning the whereabouts of: letters to, from, or about Du Chaillu; contemporary press accounts of his travels or lectures; specimens; manuscripts; photographs; or memorabilia of any kind.

All letters will be gratefully acknowledged by:

Robert McCracken Peck
The Academy of Natural Sciences
19th and The Parkway
Philadelphia, PA. 19103
USA
(Phone: 215-299-1138)

Collections

Britain's least-known xylarium?

It is well-known that Liverpool Museum offers the public an aquarium, a planetarium, a vivarium and even (behind the scenes) an herbarium. Until the appearance of INDEX XYLARIORUM, in late 1988, almost no-one was aware that the Museum also contained a xylarium.

How to define a xylarium? It is an institutional wood collection, which normally consists of sets of standard-sized reference blocks of timbers as well as random-sized pieces of wood from field collections. It can also include sets of thin sections of timber, and even microscope slides containing prepared sections.

Uses of a xylarium

When it is part of an institutional herbarium, a timber collection can greatly enhance the value of pressed specimens if both are adequately cross-referenced. When the Natural History Museum's timber collections were transferred to Liverpool in 1986, they included a set of New Guinea timbers collected in 1885-1886 by Henry Ogg Forbes; he later became the Director of Liverpool Museum. The timbers were part of a collection whose herbarium specimens had been identified by the Natural History Museum staff, and a catalogue published as a Supplement to the JOURNAL OF BOTANY in 1923.

It included several new species which were described from Forbes' collections, and the existence of timber samples from these type collections was apparently unknown to the botanists who described the new species. This is the sort of problem which inevitably results from storing pressed specimens separately from other voucher material such as wood or seeds. While this in itself is good curatorial practice, the cross-referencing of the two sets of specimens is not always carried through. This is one of the problems which can be overcome when a collection is documented on a computer. Collection numbers can easily be sorted and then matched with numbers in a published catalogue. By doing this, we now know the scientific names of Forbes' timbers; it would have been impossible to have identified the timbers from the wood anatomy alone.

Another reason for developing collections of timber is to provide reference material to which one can refer when identifying wooden objects by means of their anatomical structure. A recent case at Liverpool Museum came from the Department of Ethnology, who received an enquiry from a member of the public consisting of a carved wooden statue, origin unknown. The Assistant Keeper of Botany, Angus Gunn, identified the wood as

Agathis australis, Kauri Pine, a native of New Zealand; this enabled his colleagues in Ethnology to identify the piece as a Maori carving, and thus to give a more complete answer to the enquiry.

Timber identification is also a key area of research on wooden ships, particularly when species unfamiliar to ship conservators are encountered. Samples were recently brought back for identification from the Falkland Islands by staff of the Merseyside Maritime Museum who had been out to examine a Liverpool-built vessel, the 'Jhelum', which was beached at Port Stanley. The data on the different woods enabled a more complete report to be prepared on the conservation of the ship. In this case, too, it was very helpful to have named reference material for comparison.

How to publicise the existence of a timber collection.

INDEX XYLARIORUM is a directory of the world's corporate timber collections, and contains entries on 134 institutions. The 1988 issue is the third edition; previous editions were published in 1967 and 1978. It is edited by Professor William L Stern, of the Department of Botany, Florida State Museum, who circulated a questionnaire three years ago which provided the data on which the index is based.

Very few British institutions are listed: only nine. It is my belief that several natural history collections up and down the country containing significant wood collections have not been included. I was surprised to see no reference, for instance, to the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh. The following are included: Bangor (University College of North Wales), Cardiff (National Museum of Wales), Kew (Wood Museum and Jodrell Laboratory, both at the Royal Botanic Gardens), Liverpool (NMGGM), London (Natural History Museum and Horniman Museum), Oxford (Oxford Forestry Institute) and Princes Risborough (Building Research Establishment). It should be noted that this last collection has recently been transferred to the BRE's premises at Watford as a result of the closure of the Princes Risborough Laboratory; this event came too late for inclusion in the third edition of the Index.

Until the publication of this edition, the timber collections of the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside could claim to be one of Britain's least-known timber collections, as it was not even included in the previous edition. As nothing had been published about the timber collections at Liverpool, few clues existed which might have prompted the compilers of the index to send us a questionnaire.

Timber collections are an important asset to a Museum, and knowledge of the existence of named sets of timbers is one of the ways in which Biology curators can help to provide a public service. I hope this article will

prompt any other museums holding such collections to write to Liverpool Museum for a questionnaire. The results will be summarised in a later issue of the BCG NEWSLETTER. It will be some time before another edition of INDEX XYLARIORUM is prepared, and if this exercise helps to dispel the impression that Britain has only nine institutional wood collections, it will have been worthwhile.

John Edmondson
Keeper of Botany, Liverpool Museum

Museum development in Buckinghamshire

As Museums Year gets under way, Buckinghamshire County Museum is marking the occasion in what at first sight seems a very perverse way. On 31st March we are closing most of the museum building to the public.

That the two events should coincide was not a deliberate choice on our part. Circumstances have forced the timing on us; if we do not move out of the premises soon to allow renovation work then we will have to be evacuated before too long anyway.

The County Museum is situated in an attractive old quarter of Aylesbury and occupies a group of buildings dating from the fifteenth through to the nineteenth century. A recent structural survey showed serious defects in the fabric of the buildings. A considerable amount of money needs to be spent to restore them to meet the terms of the County Council's lease from Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society. The option of carrying out restoration work in stages so that the museum could remain open was considered to be too impractical and potentially harmful to the collections. Reluctantly, we have had to accept the prospect of moving staff, fittings and one hundred thousand objects to a temporary home for some three and a half years while the structural repairs are carried out.

A positive side to all this upheaval is the opportunity it presents to take stock of the museum's assets and to make a radical plan for the future. It allows us a virtual clean sweep of the displays. We have the chance to install modern galleries around a coherent display policy instead of having to change things in a piecemeal way. This will of course require large sums of money in addition to the one million pounds which may have to be spent on building renovation. We have no illusions about this being available from the County Council's budget. Much of it may have to come from grant-aid and business sponsorship.

Not all of the museum galleries will be closed on 31st March. The recently fitted 'Aylesbury Gallery' and Temporary Exhibition gallery will remain open to the public throughout the closure period. At our temporary premises six miles away in Halton, the museum service should resume some sort of

normality after recovering from the move itself. Visitors and enquirers will still be welcome to come and consult the staff and to make use of the collections. The Department of Biology and Geology is shortly to gain a 100% staff increase in the form of an Environmental Records Assistant, which will free the Keeper of Biology and Geology to carry out more work on the collections and to prepare for the new galleries. We hope to keep a high profile in the local community by setting up travelling displays, organising special events, and distributing a regular newsletter.

Buckinghamshire County Museum has received a lot of attention during the past year. Soon after Colin Dawes was appointed as County Museums Officer (to succeed the retiring Curator, Christopher Gowing) he was asked to undertake a major appraisal of the Museum Service. This comprehensive survey was presented to the Library and Museum Sub-Committee in December last year. Running almost concurrently with this was an exercise by the Area Museums Service for South Eastern England called the 'Aylesbury Special Project' (nicknamed the 'White Tornado'). AMSSEE allocated £10,000 grant-aid towards a series of seminars and advisory visits by specialists, concentrating on Buckinghamshire County Museum's problems and making suggestions for ways forward. AMSSEE's main report did not pull any punches and it was no surprise to be told that there was a great deal of work to be done on the natural history collections. Ancillary reports by specialist advisors did contain much constructive and detailed advice on how to improve matters in the short and long term. With an extra member of staff for Biology and Geology there is actually a chance that significant improvements can be made while we are at Halton.

One way or another the staff at Buckinghamshire County Museum have had a traumatic year, with the big migration still to come. No doubt there will be new developments to report in future issues of the BCG Newsletter once we have all got over our shell shock. Watch this space!

Kate Rowland
Keeper of Biology and Geology
Buckinghamshire County Museum

Free to a good home!
(Genuine offers only considered)

Disembowelled Red Deer, complete with guts cast in resin and tastefully painted arrow hole. Reclining on side, good set of antlers. Previously used in a display showing prehistoric hunting techniques.

Contact: Clem Fisher, Curator of Birds and Mammals, Department of Zoology, Liverpool Museum, William Brown Street, Liverpool L3 8EN. Telephone 051-207-0001 ext. 248.

Collections Research - is there a market?

THE REGISTER OF NATURAL SCIENCE COLLECTIONS IN YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE was published in August 1987. It represents the culmination of eight years work by the members of the Yorkshire and Humberside Collections Research Unit, and contains 343 pages of catalogue arranged by collector's name with indices to subject and associated collectors.

Surprisingly, of the 300 printed only a modest number have been sold after fourteen months. Very few have gone outside the Yorkshire and Humberside region, in spite of circulars sent out with BCG and GCG literature. Most of the museums in Britain with natural science curators do not have a copy. Overseas sales are nil.

What is the problem? Are we too parochial in outlook or too poor? Are we too busy or just disinterested? I would like to think that none are true, and that each museum with a practising naturalist would require this and the complimentary registers of the other collection research units.

Please support the collection research initiatives if you are able. The Yorkshire and Humberside Register is available for £18.00 plus postage and packing (£10.00 plus postage and packing to members of the Yorkshire and Humberside Council).

Orders and enquiries to: Mrs J Platt, Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council, Farnley Hall, Hall Lane, Leeds LS12 5HA. Tel 0532 638909.

Tim Riley
Sheffield City Museum



ASC to hold workshops on Collection Management and Preservation; Education of Systematists

The 1989 Annual Meeting of the Association of Systematics Collections will be held at the University of Nebraska State Museum, Lincoln, Nebraska, on May 18-20, 1989. The meeting will feature a workshop on collection management and preservation on May 19-20. The purpose of the workshop is to bring together elements of the natural history community who are responsible for the collections to explore common problems from different perspectives. Collections managers, curators/researchers, and museum directors will be given an opportunity to share views. Some innovative collection assessment and preservation programs at natural history museums will be reviewed. Representatives of funding agencies such as NSF and the Institute for Museum Services and representatives of organizations such as the National Institute for Conservation (NIC)

will discuss strategies for funding and successfully completing collection assessment and preservation projects. The workshop is co-sponsored by the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections.

A second workshop at the ASC meeting will discuss education of curators/systematists. Many people feel that universities are educating fewer systematists, and manpower needs will become acute in the next ten years. The state of the academic discipline of systematics, university programs in systematics, university-museum consortia, and curriculum needs will be discussed.

For a list of speakers and registration information, contact ASC, 730, 11th St NW, Second Floor, Washington, DC, 20001, (202) 347-2850. Hotel reservations can be made directly with the Lincoln Hilton at (402) 475-4011 or 800-HILTONS. Discount air fares are available from Goodlife Tour and Travel, Lincoln, NE 800-635-0204.

[NB The Editor has the provisional programme and application form for this meeting. If any BCG member would like further details please contact John Mathias at Leicestershire Museums, tel: (0533) 554100.]

The latest ASC NEWSLETTER (Vol 16 no 6, Dec 1988) is mainly concerned with reports from the survey and seminar in 1988 on 'Collections Resources for the 1990s'. The aims of the seminar were to evaluate progress made by ASC in the past 10 years and to map out directions for development over the next decade. As a starting point, all major holders of systematic collections were circularised with questionnaires to update information on size, funding levels and staffing over the past 10 years as well as a current perceived needs; a second questionnaire was sent to managers of collections in each major taxonomic discipline; a third was sent to workers with an identified interest in, or knowledge of, computer programmes associated with systematic collections and institutions.

Returns from the surveys were entered into a computer and form an updatable data base. They also formed the basis for discussion on the three days of the seminar: 'Institutional Needs'; 'Collections Resources as seen by the Taxonomic Disciplines'; 'Computers and Networking'. The major result of the workshop was a manifesto for action that went a long way to unify the systematics community and the administrators of collections.

The manifesto for action cannot be reproduced here, but it makes essential reading for anyone working with biological collections.

On reflection, this seems to be a preferable way to approach the dissemination of information resulting from a large scale survey to the one adopted in the UK. Here the whole survey was published in a report which is expensive, indigestible and

difficult to use, with a set of rather bland recommendations tacked on at the end. The US approach is to computerise the data and produce a series of reports and recommendations on various aspects of the survey results: brief, up to date, backed with relevant statistics, and aimed at a particular problem or funding agency. Rapier compared with bludgeon!

The other important difference of course is that the survey results in the US were discussed at a three-day seminar, whereas in the UK the report 'BIOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS UK' seems to have entered a kind of limbo. We now desperately need the conference which brings together the users, curators, administrators and funding authorities to discuss the problems which 'BIOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS UK' has, in its ponderous way, highlighted.

John Mathias
Editor, BCG

In the Press

The MUSEUMS JOURNAL (vol 88 no 4, March 1989) covering the Leicester University conference of December 1988 'A Future for Museums' has a summary of the paper given by Neil Chalmers, new director of the BM(NH). Called 'Defining our Mission', it discusses what Dr Chalmers sees as the future course for the museum in fairly general terms, including safeguarding and developing the collections, new areas of research and preservation (with an emphasis on genetic material), display and education.

An interesting item is Dr Chalmer's commitment to producing travelling exhibitions and distance learning materials based on the collections - a significant new development. One criticism might be that the curatorial activities and responsibilities of the BM(NH) have not been given a higher profile, and research into the preservation and conservation of specimens is not mentioned at all - which is one field in which the museum was once a traditional and undoubted leader.

In the same issue is a paper by R E Child: 'Fumigation in Museums - a Possible Alternative' which summarises the fumigation methods presently available and describes Rentokil's 'fumigation bubble' development. This has been noted in previous BCG Newsletters.

The British Dragonfly Society has now got its act together very nicely. It has been in existence for six years and in that time its publications have evolved from the 'interesting but scruffy' newsletter approach to what is now a very professional looking

JOURNAL and a series of associated booklets and leaflets. Two which caught my eye in the December 1988 mailing were:

- 1 CODE OF PRACTICE for collecting dragonflies in the UK, which contains a series of guidelines for collecting common species, rare, vulnerable species and isolated populations of common species;
- 2 POND CONSTRUCTION FOR DRAGONFLIES which is a very useful practical guide.

Enquiries for these should be addressed to the Editor, S J Brooks, 25 Salisbury Avenue, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 4UB.

Book Reviews

A PROVISIONAL ATLAS OF THE SEPSIDAE (DIPTERA) OF THE BRITISH ISLES
by A C Pont

Published by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, 1986. Price £3.00
ISBN 1-870393-00-7

This atlas provides distribution maps for the 27 known British species of Sepsidae. Accompanying each map is a paragraph of text giving information on frequency of occurrence, flight period, habitat preference and world distribution. There is also an introductory section to the atlas, giving interesting information on Sepsids, their distribution, and the sources of records used for plotting the maps. A table provides information on the number of records received per species, and on the number of 10km squares in which each species has been recorded.

Mr Pont has taken considerable care to avoid misidentifications being accepted, and the bulk of the records are from museum collections, or from material identified after the publication of the Royal Entomological Society's Handbook on Sepsidae, published in 1979. Thus historical published records have not been included.

One thing which I did find frustrating was that the maps only show the presence or absence of records - there is no means of telling how old a record is unless it is specifically mentioned in the text.

That criticism aside, I found it a most interesting publication containing much information. I am also far keener on the A5 format than the old, spiral bound A4 atlases.

Adam Wright
Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry

INFORMATION POLICIES FOR MUSEUMS
by Elizabeth Orna

Published by the Museums Documentation
Association, Cambridge, 1987.
ISBN 0-851158-300-2 Price £9.95

INFORMATION POLICIES FOR MUSEUMS should be read and inwardly digested by all museum directors and decision makers. It points out the central role that information should have in the operation and management of all museums. Museum information is not solely about collections documentation and management. Information policy should be at the core of the management of all museum functions. The availability of information is not just vital to the management of a museum's collections, but also in managerial decision making (such as the allocation of resources) and in the development of publications programmes etc. The information policy should stem directly from a museum's aims and objectives and should provide one of the main frameworks for the achievement of the museum's goals.

Orna places great emphasis on the need for an information manager post in museums. This proposal is relevant both to large and small museums. In the latter case information should be part of the responsibility of a single individual. The author recognises that it is essential that the post holder is part of the management team, and is closely involved in, for example, staff selection and training. The information manager should not just be viewed as a documentation assistant.

Orna's philosophy is many years ahead of that of most museums. She recognises the opportunity that advances in information technology will represent to museums. Interestingly, most of the examples of development along the lines she is advocating come from the realms of natural history, both from this country and overseas. At present few museums have integrated collections management information systems, let alone the wider integrated information systems Orna envisages. Perhaps this reflects the lack of natural historians at directorial level in museums in this country?

The paper was first published in 1980. It has now been updated to take into account the advent of Modes, and more importantly the development of affordable mini-computers, computer networks and advances in office automation. The paper's one major failing is in its design and layout. It is of three column format. In general the first column is either blank or contains a strange graphic motif. This would be acceptable if the typeface was of a reasonable size. Unfortunately it is small enough to be difficult to read if not positively painful. In addition the headings to some of the illustrative tables in column three are placed in column one, making the layout somewhat confusing.

Despite these problems, the paper should be essential reading for all museum managers and not just documentation experts. If museums

are to exploit the advantages that developments in information technology will bring, it is essential that museum decision makers address the issues Orna raises.

Phil Collins
St Albans Museum

Future Programme, 1990

A seminar has been arranged in conjunction with the Museums Association on the subject: **NATURAL HISTORY FOR NON SPECIALISTS.**

Quote from the MA Seminar programme:

'Biological Collections UK revealed alarming gaps in the maintenance of natural history collections - nearly 200 museums with such collections have no specialist curator and even those that do often exist in an environment where the management/governing body have little idea of the philosophy, value, use and conservation of the collections. This seminar is aimed principally at those non-specialists who have some natural history responsibilities.

Bookings should be sent to: Museums Association Seminars, 852 Melton Road, Thurmaston, Leicester LE4 8EN.

Please tell non specialist curators who have charge of biological collections about this seminar and urge them to attend. Some biology curators may wish to send their boss to it!

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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