

NEWSLETTER

November 1990

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Natural Sciences Curatorial Course, 1990

The Tutor's View

The decision to run this year's course in association with the Continuing Education Department of Sheffield University provided two main benefits, firstly the services of Bob Toynton who did an excellent job in administering the course as well as teaching on it, secondly the provision of accommodation close to Sheffield Museum (where as usual much of the action took place) in Earnshaw Hall. Although many of the facilities in Earnshaw were much of what might be expected for a hall of residence, the catering proved to be a revelation (vide Thompson and Nicol, 1990).

The twelve students on the course brought with them a variety of experience and opinions, a good mix for the lively discussion sessions. It was particularly pleasing to have two students from overseas, Sandy Gautier from the University of Natal Geology Museum, and Robert Stephens from the University of St John's, Newfoundland. Both had found out about the course late in the day, but managed to find the resources to attend at short notice. There must be a message here - the course is of value to the international museum community, but we need to advertise it well in advance to capitalise on this opportunity.

There can be no doubt that the course was much improved as a result of lessons learned during the pilot course of 1989. The number of museum visits was cut dramatically, and the time gained was used to good effect, giving visiting speakers more time, making longer discussion sessions possible, and

making the social scene a livelier one. Field work sites were chosen close to Sheffield, cutting travelling time and giving more opportunity for students to try out some of the techniques which were demonstrated. I felt the course was much better structured and the quality of handouts had also improved dramatically from 1989.

There can be no doubt that there is still room for improvement; the practical/participation element deserves more emphasis, more student involvement might mean less straight lecturing and note-taking, some demonstrations (especially anything involving computers and video monitors) can only be effectively demonstrated to small numbers at once. However, ... we're getting there.

Like all courses this one had its highlights. For me they were Kate Pontin's refreshing talk on education and the natural sciences, and the visit to Buxton Museum. Dorothy Harding had really gone to a great deal of trouble to make our visit to the Museum not only a very informative one, but a really splendid social evening - thanks to her and to David Sorrell and Mick Stanley.

Finally, my thanks to everyone else who helped on the course, making my task as resident tutor a real pleasure.

Peter Davis (resident course tutor)
The Hancock Museum

The Organisers' View

This course was designed with one main aim: to allow those in Natural Science within museums to gather and to exchange knowledge and experience. The best people to teach are those involved in the day-to-day practise of the subject and therefore the tutors were drawn from within the museum world. A great deal of gratitude is owed to those who volunteered, or were volunteered but gladly agreed to contribute to this course.

The course was structured with great care, though hopefully this manifested itself in smooth-running and sensible progressions rather than contrived juxtapositions of topics. Through the six days over which the course spread, the tasks of the museum curator were traced through a general sequence. After an introduction, this progresses from collection and acquisition, through enquiries, conservation, preparation and identification, recording, storage and display, to the problems of old neglected collections, and finally to the use of objects in education.

For those who would like to spot the deliberate mistakes, identification would have been better before conservation, and education before the objects became too old and neglected. On the other hand some constraints were imposed by the availability of tutors!

Of great importance within the programme was the outdoor work. This took the form of sessions on field techniques in Botany, Geology and Zoology, and the morning of outdoor interpretation.

A secondary aim of the course was to provide an atmosphere conducive to a free exchange of experience. No one person can be an expert in every field of Natural Science and yet in the small museum where there may be only one natural scientist, or with the approach of the diploma exams, the need arises to at least appreciate the scope and some of the basic techniques of areas of the discipline previously a mystery.

To paraphrase an apocryphal proverb: 'ask a question and you may feel a fool for five minutes; don't ask, and you may be a fool for life'. What we tried hard to do was to provide an atmosphere in which no-one would feel foolish even for a moment, and thereby the students could learn what they wanted and needed to know rather than what we thought they might want to know.

The final question has to be 'was the course

worthwhile'. From our perspective, we enjoyed it, and that is usually a good sign. For a less biased answer, questionnaires were sent to those who had attended the course. These are the views that matter, and will be fed into the next course.

Questionnaire replies

These percentages are rather 'blunt', since numbers were deliberately low.

1 How useful did you find the course?

very	100%
OK	0%
not at all	0%

2 Are the course fees (£175)

too low (very good value)?	12%
OK (good value)?	75%
too high (poor value)?	0%

3 How would you rate the accommodation (including food)?

excellent	63%
OK	37%
poor	0%

4 How would you rate the hall facilities (lecture room etc)?

excellent	12%
OK	88%
poor	0%

5 Regarding the course content was there (you may tick more than one):

too much practical?	0%
too little practical?	12%
too much lecturing?	0%
too little lecturing?	0%
too much group discussion?	0%
too little group discussion?	12%
a good balance?	88%

6 Would assignments during the course have been

a good idea?	12%
OK?	50%
a bad idea?	25%

7 Was the course content

too biased towards zoology? 0%
too biased towards geology? 0%
too biased towards botany? 0%
well balanced 100%

8 Should these subject disciplines have been separated into different courses altogether?

yes 0%
no 100%

9 Were the subject areas covered in enough detail?

yes 75%
no 25%

10 Were any subjects unnecessary?

yes 0%
no 100%

11 Are there other areas of Natural History Curatorial training that you would like to have seen included?

yes 63%
no 37%

12 Was the week

too intense? 0%
OK? 100%
too easy going? 0%

Comments on the questionnaire .. from the participants

1 Course content

'I was impressed and relieved that the skills and experience of the course members was recognised and used by the majority of the tutors. I felt that I could ask any question and that the answers would be helpful and not patronising. I really enjoyed the practical sessions and the lectures were good.'

2 From 'Any other comments, criticisms etc?'

'I thoroughly enjoyed the course'
'I think the course gives a lot of food for thought'
'A well organised and interesting week's education'
'Generally, an excellent course'

'A very intensive, well-planned, interesting and beneficial course'

3 There were several suggestions for 'other areas' that the participants would like to have seen included, for sets of printed notes to take away, and for more time for discussion at the end. We will bear those in mind for the next occasion, within the constraints of time and money!

4 And finally, were the subject areas covered in enough detail?

NO 'We only had one week. I don't know if we could have covered it all in a lifetime, therefore the answer is really YES - as much as it could be.'

NO '... a longer course would be useful ... there was little time to dwell in any area, particularly in practical sessions.'

YES 'For the time available.'

YES 'How about a week for Natural History specialists, one for geologists, one on geology for Natural Historians and another on Natural History for Geologists ... only kidding ... it was great to share ideas with some strange rock types.'

.... And from the Organiser

It may be a joke, but wouldn't it be nice if there was time and the finance, and a way of still mixing the groups together!

It is very gratifying to know that we got the balance, intensity and content of the course about right. There is always a need for more, but without increasing the intensity of the course to counter-productive levels, or increasing the length, and therefore the cost, of the course, rendering it unavailable to many who feel they would benefit from attendance, we can only do our best.

And finally

We would like to run this course again in 1991, taking on board the comments from this year, though keeping the length about the same and the price as close to this years as we can. It would be held in April, provisionally 14th to 19th at the University of Sheffield. If you would like further details, please contact Bob Toynton at the Division of Continuing Education, 85 Wilkinson Street, Sheffield, S10 2GJ (telephone 0742 768555 ext 4932) and you will be sent further details as soon as they are available.

Bob Toynton, University of Sheffield and Paul Richards, Sheffield City Museum (joint organisers)

A Personal View

Dear Diary

Sunday

Arrive 5 pm. Bob Toynton wondering where we've all got to. Brian Meloy takes three attempts to get into his room. Evening meal, very nice. Peter Davies kicks off the course with a talk, snappily entitled 'History, functions, organization and current trends'. Expects us to start thinking. We think we'll conduct the first of our daily in-depth studies of the local relaxing fluids.

Monday

Peter launches into the first full day with collections and acquisitions. Or, how to have a policy which restricts your collecting to your front garden while still being able to collect from everyone else. Leicester then sends round the two Johns (Mathias and Martin) to straighten us out about enquiries, followed by Tony Fletcher, giving us 101 things you never knew you could do with a documentation system. The afternoon consists of two field work options - Tony Fletcher picking plants and John Mathias displaying the 1990 summer collection of sieves, nets and traps or Bob Toynton taking us to a quarry and explaining why hard hats are not going to help when the likely size of a falling rock is of the proportions of a bungalow. Return to be duly impressed by the size of evening meal, after which Bill Ely tells us about recording biologicals and hints at wondrous things occurring at Rotherham Museum.

Tuesday

The day of the preventative conservation hit squad. Paul Richards sniffs and coughs his way through biological conservation and Chris Collins races through the geological side, tells us we're all stupid and the best thing to do is nothing. (At least we've got something right.) Geoff Stansfield informs us (with great authority) that we should keep the windows closed. Lunch attempts to outdo dinner, then we have another afternoon with two field work options. Gaynor Boon demonstrates that the main results of geological site recording are several pieces of soggy paper and bags of powdered rock, while Gerry Firkins and Derek Whiteley show us how not to stand on rare plants while wandering around pooting insects with a butterfly net over your head. Return, to be alarmed by size of dinner. The evening practical sees Derek sticking pins in insects, while claiming he hates killing things. He also produces a bat detector with which we detect Britain's first Daubentons flying common frog.

Wednesday

Sheffield Museum witnesses the merciless destruction of various biological and geological specimens, plus the odd finger and thumb, all in the name of practical experience. After a principally liquid pub lunch, most of us forego MODES in favour of witnessing the demonstration of Revelation Recorder at Rotherham Museum, where they have taken the imaginative step of putting their computer room in a blast furnace. Return, and most of us develop indigestion at the mere thought of another dinner. However, Peter informs us that we might be lucky enough to avoid having to eat anything at all the following day.

Thursday

Today we succeed in teaching our intrepid trouble shooter, Bob Toynton, how to construct a nature trail containing 10,000 points of interest spaced at 10 cm intervals. Unimpressed, he indicates that we may have a little to learn in this area. After an early afternoon trip to play space invaders with the live exhibits at Buxton micrarium, we are shown by Buxton Museum staff how to construct brilliant displays using no money. Later, having forced food and alcohol upon us, they give us a variety of silly objects to identify, having first made up a set of answers almost as dubious as the ones we made up. Afterwards, we feel we should really sample some of Buxton's local relaxing fluids, so we all adjourn to a neighbouring pub.

Friday

Simon Knell gives a talk on old and neglected collections - had we been a little less hung over, we would have pointed out that most of our collections are old and all are neglected. Kate Pontin's talk on education and natural sciences generates considerable discussion. We all agree that education is a Good Thing and what a pity there is so little of it about.

Peter Davies wrapped up the course by asking the question 'why are we curators', and offered us his own noble attitude which was to encourage in people an awareness of their environment. Being truly noble ourselves, we agreed wholeheartedly, and went home.

Coming back down to earth, on reflection we can say that we all took away a great deal from the course. Learning from what were felt to be mistakes in the 1989 course, this year's turned out to be a thoroughly packed but always relaxed week. The speakers were well chosen and the material was presented in a logical order, and we would certainly like to thank again all those who organized and tutored the course

for generously giving their time and efforts. We hope they enjoyed it as much as we did.

(PS A special mention should be made of Derek Whiteley, thanks to whom we need no longer fear genitalia.)

Steven Thompson
Clitheroe Museum
Ann Nicol
Leicestershire Museums Service
(students on the course)

In the Press

Plants and the proposed EC Habitats Directive

The proposed **Habitats Directive**, a draft of which was published by the European Commission in 1988, is 'potentially one of the most important legal instruments ever written for the conservation of plants'. These are the views of a Plantlife report published by the WWF and the RSPB in April 1990. But what are the implications for Natural History curators?

In the 'Supplementary Annexes' to the proposal for a Habitats Directive, which were published in March of this year, lists are presented of plant and animal species whose habitats are threatened in the European Community (Annex 1, which contains a separate list for the parts of Macaronesia which fall within the EC); of species of animals and plants which are threatened in the Community (Annex 2); and of plants and animals whose exploitation should be subject to a management plan (Annex 3). A list of natural and semi-natural habitats to be protected within the Community forms Annex 4.

The intention in publishing these lists is similar to that pursued by the Wildlife and Countryside Act, which designated 62 plant species as being given special protection. Subsequent reviews have added a further 31 species to this list, some of which feature in the EC lists. If collecting (for whatever purpose) is restricted or forbidden within the EC, specimens already in Museum collections acquire an enhanced value. There ought to be a presumption in favour of encouraging work on these specimens so as to avoid having to take further material from the wild.

It would be a worthwhile objective to document Museum holdings of species designated as endangered within the EC, though not all these species are at similar risk on a world scale. It is also feasible to 'adopt' a species whose habitat is close at hand, and to gather information on its autecology or reproductive biology. Annex 3 includes such familiar plants as the Horned Poppy, *Glaucium flavum*, the Sea Holly, *Eryngium maritimum* and the Box, *Buxus sempervirens*. Annex 2 contains the Ghost Orchid, *Epipogium aphyllum*, and Annex 1 mentions the Bog Orchid, *Hammarbya paludosa* and Slender Cotton-grass, *Eriophorum gracile*. One could consider mounting a travelling exhibition which contained examples from these lists. The Liverpool Museum's exhibition 'Wildlife, the Law and You' had a successful tour promoting the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

These are simply draft proposals; there will be a lengthy period of consultation before legislation is finalised, and (as was the case with the Wildlife and Countryside Act) we can expect pressure groups to respond vigorously in their own defence. One thing is clear: European legislation will provide additional scope for Museum curators to justify projects to conserve and document their collections. Perhaps we should also try to influence the content of this legislation, by making representations to the committee of the European Parliament which is considering these proposals. Is anyone interested in taking this further?

Copies of the Plantlife report (which has the same title as this article) can be obtained from Ian Hepburn at the RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy Beds. SG19 2DL.

John Edmondson
Liverpool Museum

Curator (32:2) has a short piece on an inexpensive apparatus for degreasing skulls - in this case small mammal and bird skulls - by F J Jannett and J G Davies. It describes a boxed unit of 36 cells for the bulk handling of 36 skulls or parts of skulls in degreasing and washing liquids. Due care is taken of the data labels, which is vital with mass handling techniques of similar material like this; the whole apparatus lasts for several dozen applications and costs next to nothing.

In the same issue there is a fascinating paper by Karen Wonders of the Department of Art History, Uppsala University, Sweden, on the progress of taxidermy through various phases of development:

'Exhibition Fauna - from Spectacle to Habitat Group'. She covers the eighteenth century entrepreneurial shows by Lever and Bullock, later links with romantic painting and sculpture, the 'tasteful' decorative displays popular with Victorians, trophies, the use of specimens in early photography, the growth of commercial taxidermy and its links with museums, and the development of the 'group method' of arranging specimens. The second part of the paper deals with the evolution of the 'habitat group' method of display, mainly in North America, and how these groups formed a focus for the popularization of natural history and the various 'back to nature' movements in the early twentieth century.

For those who like to theorise on the upsurge in popularity of conservation and natural history and how the average person can 'experience' wildlife as a leisure activity there is an interesting paper in **Biological Conservation** (53:3) by D A Duffus and P Dearden called 'Non-Consumptive Wildlife-Orientated Recreation: A Conceptual Framework'. It is concerned with the change in attitudes in North America from killing wildlife in a regulated way (hunting) and the management values this requires to what the authors' call the non-consumptive use of wildlife (photographing; 'experiencing wildlife' at first hand) and the differences in management philosophy and practice this more enlightened approach requires.

It may seem odd to try to rationalise a recreational activity in this way, but when mega-bucks are involved (in 1981, 3.6 millions Canadian spent 2.1 billion dollars on non-consumptive wildlife-orientated trips; in 1988 whale-watchers generated expenditure estimated at 4.2 million dollars on Vancouver Island) the providers such as national park managers, reserve wardens and conservationists in general need a way of assessing customer satisfaction at 'wildlife encounters'; counting the corpses in the bag doesn't work any more! It makes an interesting read once you penetrate the transatlantic jargon.

'Evaluating Interpretation' is the theme of the July 1990 issue of **Interpretation**, the Bulletin of the Centre for Environmental Interpretation. The whole issue is concerned with how we judge visitor response to interpretative exhibitions through the use of techniques like interviewing visitors in structured or unstructured ways, in groups or singly;

questionnaires; observation of visitor behaviour and using live interpreters who can answer visitors' questions directly. The techniques are summarised on the centre pages with a useful discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each and an evaluation of what each is likely to cost.

BSBI News (55) has a paper by A O Chater on the financing and publication of local floras which is relevant to all museum curators with hopes of publishing works on any aspect of local natural history. It draws on the returns (52) from questionnaires sent to the organisers of 58 local floras published within the past 20 years. Of particular interest are sections on total sales, print runs, pre-publication offers, costs, sources of funding and procedure. There is also a formula for calculating the selling price of a flora. The paper has a lot of practical information drawn from the real experiences of people who have actually done the job and is all the more valuable for that. But one fact is clear - with careful planning and costing, publishing a local flora need not cost you an arm and a leg; but it won't make you a fortune either.

All those members who attended the AGM on the Isle of Man this year will be interested in the following note from **Habitat** (26:8). 'A plan by the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) to help maintain and increase the small breeding population of Choughs on the Isle of Man, has been awarded £40,000 by Manx Airlines over the next ten years. The project will develop work already carried out by NCC on the Hebridean Islands of Islay and Colonsay - the only other Chough stronghold in Britain. The grant will go towards the costs of maintaining traditional buildings associated with long-established agriculture based on stock rearing and make permanent their otherwise temporary use as chough nest sites.'

The Conservator (14) has a paper by Haupt, Dyer and Hanlan which may be of interest to biological conservators who like to use traditional materials when renovating old biological preparations - 'An Investigation into Three Animal Glues'. The glues in question are rabbit skin glue, gelatin and isinglass and the test procedures included pH, surface tension, viscosity, film characteristics and mechanical characteristics (elongation) at various relative humidities. There is no 'best' choice between these;

it is more a case of fitting a glue's physical characteristics to the supposed requirements of the substrate. However, the results do allow the conservator to predict how a glue will behave under a range of conditions, and this is useful when deciding which glue to use.

ASC Newsletter (18:3) contains all the usual news from natural history museums and systematics scientists in the United States, but this issue concentrates on natural history archives, their use, organisation and development from the viewpoint of the curator, the professional archivist and the systematic scientist. There is a report on a survey of natural history archival holdings in US institutions, with special reference to museums, and shorter pieces on the integration of archive and specimen data and the necessity to formulate a strategy for maintaining an effective archive storage and retrieval system in parallel with, or integrated into, specimen storage and retrieval systems. The value of effective links between specimens and archival collection data is forcefully made.

In the same issue is a discussion of the restrictions on the international movement of plants for scientific research (eg. herbarium sheets): 'Research Botanists and Plant Import Restrictions' by D W Stevenson. Although written from the American viewpoint, with US import regulations discussed, it covers CITES regulations in some depth and is relevant to any museum curator who collects abroad and wants to return with herbarium material or living plants. The US permit system is explained which again will be of value to botanists travelling to the USA.

Reprinted from the Daily Telegraph of 1st August 1990

Clumsy museum left with rare egg on face

by Geoffrey Lee Martin in Sydney

One of only two eggs left in existence from the extinct moa bird has been broken by a bungling worker at Christchurch Museum in New Zealand.

The 600-year-old egg, valued at more than £100,000, was shattered during an attempt to make a copy to sell to Tokyo's Abiko Museum.

Ignorant that museum staff were supposed to use existing copies of the egg to make such casts, the worker took the real one from its locked exhibition case.

The egg was shattered while the worker, whose identity is being kept secret by the museum, was coating it with a plastic mould. This apparently shrank slightly, applying sufficient pressure to break the egg into several pieces.

Museum staff are now painstakingly reassembling the shattered eggshell, which will eventually be put back on display with its value considerably diminished.

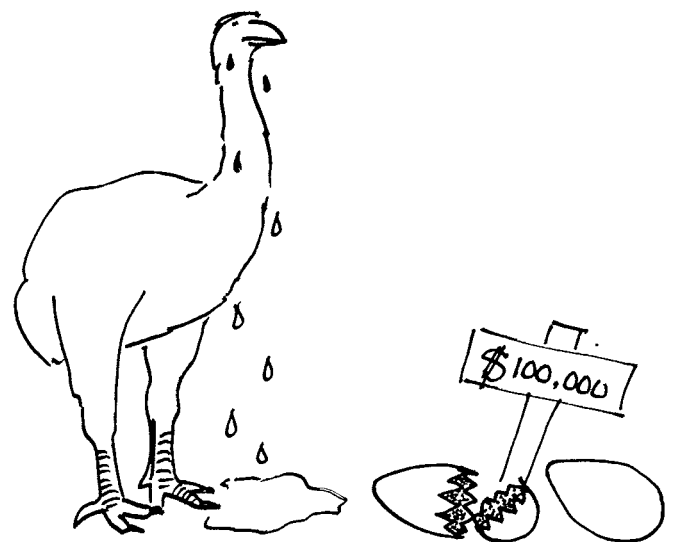
The last remaining intact moa egg is under careful guard in Wanganui Museum.

Moas, huge flightless birds up to 10 ft tall, were wiped out more than 500 years ago soon after the Maoris arrived in New Zealand from the Cook Islands.

They were a good source of protein for Maoris in a land that had virtually no land mammals other than the original inhabitants, the Morioris, who are now also extinct.

Several New Zealand museums have been supplementing their dwindling public funding by selling copies of rare indigenous exhibits - including moa skeletons and eggs - to Japanese museums.

No comment!



ONE DOWN AND ONE TO GO!

In **The Linnean** issue for January 1990 (volume 6 part 1) there is an impassioned plea from R H K Disney for the continued funding of taxonomy in this country. He clearly points out the Catch-22 which is effectively blocking Research Council funds for taxonomic research: Research Councils will fund an investigator's salary only in 'exceptional circumstances' because workers are normally expected to be employed in UK Higher Education Institutions; the Higher Education Institutions are no longer interested in taxonomy for many reasons (it doesn't pull in corporate cash; it's unfashionable etc) so they don't employ taxonomists; therefore Government funding is effectively denied to taxonomic research. So who funds taxonomy?

Disney tried to get funding from a variety of private and government sources to continue his research and his analysis of the results is fascinating. The most nigardly response came from government organizations (zero); the most positive from 'mega-millionaires' (averaged at £5.59 per mail shot). I think the moral of this is that mega-millionaires are worth cultivating!

In the same issue the current position regarding Flora Europaea is outlined, including changes to the Editorial Committee and Secretariat (which is now based at Liverpool Museum).

It was heartening to see a short piece in **Focus** (8), the Newsletter of the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, celebrating 60 years of museum work by Norah McMillan (Mrs Mac). Her first job was in the Ulster Museum but she has been at Liverpool Museum for many years where she is the fount of all knowledge concerning the Mollusca and the Museum's shell collections. There's a lovely picture of her too!

Biological Collections UK - MA Report

I have obtained a couple of mint-condition copies of this enormous tome to sell at the bargain basement price of £10. First-come, first-served. Postage (quite substantial, I should imagine) is extra.

Derek Whiteley, City Museum, Sheffield S10 2TP

Programme

1991

April 4-7 AGM meeting at Liverpool with the title **Dead or Alive: Museums and Green Issues**.

Accommodation at the University. Booking forms sent out with this Newsletter. Return to Clem Fisher at Liverpool Museum as soon as possible. Details below.

July 22-26 **Museums Association Conference on the theme: Interpretation**. BCG hopes to run one of the workshop sessions and one of the trips will be to the Farne Islands. There will be a BCG stand for the first time.

Autumn meeting to be arranged, possibly on the theme: **Valuing Collections**.

1992

April or May AGM meeting with the proposed theme: **Natural History Archives**. Venue to be agreed, but hopefully in the North-East of England.

May 10-15 SPNHC sponsored meeting, joint with many international museum organisations, to be held in Madrid on the theme: **The Preservation and Conservation of Natural History Collections**. Further details elsewhere in this issue. Booking form has been issued. Contact: Julio Gisbert or Fernando Palacios, Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales, José Gutiérrez Abascal, 2, 28006 Madrid, Spain.

September 18-20 Joint meeting in Liverpool with BOU and Society for the History of Natural History on the theme: History of Ornithology.

BCG AGM Meeting 1991 Dead or Alive: Museums and Green Issues

April 4th to 7th 1991

Dale Hall, University of Liverpool

This conference will explore our role as curator in the 'green' age where we are increasingly used as spokesmen on environmental issues.

Thursday 4th Registration

Friday 5th 'Making your museum environmentally friendly': talks on recycling, museum shop

products, nature gardens, 'eco' products, energy conservation, hardwoods, archival material.

Saturday 6th 'Local museum involvement in conservation issues' and 'International conservation issues', followed by the **AGM** and Annual Dinner.

Sunday 7th Access to Liverpool Museum collections, tour of Natural history Centre and/or local field trip.

Costs are likely to be in the region of £75 for accommodation, food and conference fees Thursday night to Sunday morning.

Please complete the enclosed booking form if you would like to attend this meeting and return to: Clem Fisher, Dept of Zoology, Liverpool Museum, William Brown Street, Liverpool L3 8EN. **It is very important that we know the likely numbers attending the meeting.**

International Symposium on the Preservation and Conservation of Natural History Collections Madrid, May 10-15, 1992

Preliminary announcement

Hosting Institution:
Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales
Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas
Ministerio de Educacion y Ciencia (Spain)

The Symposium will focus on the concerns of the natural history community for the status and future of anthropological, biological and geological collections in a world that is changing technologically, politically and environmentally. Issues such as education and training, methodologies, research, resource utilization for collection care, and cooperative programs, will provide an attractive agenda for most individuals associated with these collections.

**For further information, please contact
Programme Coordinators:**

Julio Gisbert and Fernando Palacios
Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales
J Gutiérrez Abascal, 2, 28006 Madrid, Spain
Tel: 4111328 ext 1145
Fax: 5645078

AGM 90

Secretary's Report 1989/90

BCG Committee met five times during the year at London (UCL), Halsannery Field Centre Devon, Sheffield Museum, Leicestershire Museum and yesterday here at the Manx Museum. Once again we would like to thank the governing bodies of the above institutions for providing free and comfortable facilities.

A record number of general meetings was held during the year. Last year's AGM at Dundee was linked to a one-day symposium on conservation of biological specimens. It was well-organised by Jo Sage and colleagues, well-attended with a strong Scottish contingency. The meeting was also notable for the BCG launch of the Sunflower Campaign and the alternative Beetle-down Campaign.

In October BCG visited the south-west for an excellent study weekend on 'Marine and Microscopical Collections' based at Halsannery Field Centre, North Devon. Jerry Lee organised a very stimulating four days of lectures, study visits, field trips and tours, including BCG's unforgettable first trip across the water to Lundy Island. (Our second trip across to the Isle of Man yesterday was equally memorable.)

In February a full-house packed the meeting room at Tring Museum for a one-day seminar on Birds Egg Collections. Again, this meeting was superb, very useful and well-organised by Kathie Way, Richard Sutcliffe and colleagues. In March, a joint meeting with Geology Curators Group at Peterborough Museum was successful and well-attended, although the BCG contingency was rather low. Rosina Down stepped in at the last minute to keep our flag flying (my apologies!).

Somewhere in between we co-organised a six-day curatorial course with GCG and Sheffield University, based in Sheffield. Paul Richards did most of the organisational donkey work on our behalf and many members contributed to the teaching programme. Once again Peter Davis was an admirable resident course tutor.

Last September a BCG 'Hit-Squad' found a different audience at the Museums Association Centenary Conference in York. Steve Garland, Peter Davis and

myself took the opportunity to put the propaganda machine into action delivering illustrated lectures relating to our two big campaigns. Conference delegates were also lobbied and leafleted, and we came away feeling that we had made our presence felt. The highlight of the day was actually a reference to our Sunflower Campaign in the Centenary Presidential Address.

On the negative side, the proposed joint seminar with the MA in Glasgow was undersubscribed and cancelled by the MA despite widespread publicity.

For me, it has been a busy year dominated by our two campaigns. Our Neglected Natural Heritage - the Sunflower Campaign has so far proved to be very successful. Coverage in the national press and national radio and support from the MA and other museum bodies, has helped to publicise our plight, leading to a promise of some extra funding. The 'Beetle-down ...' campaign has had a second successful year, including a reprint of 38,000 leaflets, merchandise and another successful Beetle-down ... week of events across the country. The resulting official file is itself proving to be useful ammunition in the fight to save natural history services.

We now operate two 'watchdog' schemes, on 'collections at risk' and 'biology posts lost and created'. Direct lobbying of those in authority has helped to save posts (note - posts not individual jobs - we do not have the role of a trade union) and helped to create new posts - Oldham being the outstanding example. We maintain useful contacts with the Museums Association, MGC, the Conservation Unit, MTI and NFBR.

My personal aim is to continue providing a service to the membership and to curatorial biology by leaflets, lobbying and direct action sanctioned by committee.

It has been a very, very active year for BCG; possibly the busiest yet. Next year is looking just as good and I take this opportunity to thank all Committee members for their hard work.

Derek Whiteley
BCG Secretary

[Report condensed from an illustrated report delivered to the 1990 AGM, Isle of Man]

Book Reviews

A Guide to the Postcranial Bones of East African Animals

by **Rikki Walker**

Published by Hylochoerus Press, Norwich. 1985.
ISBN 0 9511105 1 9 (PB). xi+285 pp. Appendices.
Index. Illustrated. £13.95.

There is an apocryphal story concerning an up-and-coming South African archaeozoologist who offered colleagues (all experts in bone identification) a kind of Kim's Game or Witch Doctor's bag-of-bones as a test of their ability and consistency in identifying fossil material from his excavations. Needless to say, of the dozen or so experts consulted, each gave an entirely different set of identifications, causing a great deal of amusement. What the community lacked of course was a set of standards to go by; not all departments had the same quality or quantity of modern or fossil comparative material, and each operated to its own rules.

That kind of operation is on its way out, and not in the least due to the type of publication reviewed here. While not the last word in making fossil or sub-fossil material easy to identify, Mrs Walker's Bone Book sets out in a constant style, illustrations of all the most frequently preserved bones of most of the animals (mammal + reptile + bird) found in eastern Africa. It is essentially a practical book, to be used as a constant companion in the laboratory alongside the material being worked on. It has copious notes and procedural guides to help track a bone through to its final identity, which with a little experience, will bring most up to the level of expert in a decently short time.

A most useful innovation is a set of seven plates showing the mid-shaft profiles of the long bones of everything from an elephant to a Suni antelope. However, I would have thought that they would have been better incorporated in the main text, as in the way they are presented they will become very tatty very quickly. Perhaps an inspired afterthought?

For anyone working in the field of identifying African animal bone, this is a must. It might be worth buying even if your interests lie outside Africa, but involve looking at eg interglacial exotic mammals. And at the price, who can lose?
Arthur Cruickshank, c/o Leicestershire Museums

The Management and Welfare of Invertebrates in Captivity

Edited by N M Collins

ISBN 09515804 OX. Available from The Secretary, Zoo Federation, Zoological Gardens, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RY. Price £6.00 including postage and packing (£9.00 to non-members of the Zoo Federation).

As biology curators, most of us will experience varying degrees of involvement with living specimens either through fieldwork, assimilation into reference collections or as the focal point of living displays. Those who study, interpret or display living invertebrates will find a useful source of information and further reading in the above report of the proceedings of the first conference of the Invertebrate Working Group, held in December 1988 and convened and sponsored by the National Federation of Zoological Gardens of Great Britain and Ireland - otherwise known as the Zoo Federation.

Ten papers which were presented by speakers from Universities, Research Institutes, Zoos, Public Aquaria and Butterfly Houses have been assembled into a series of articles giving brief insights into such diverse topics as captive invertebrates and the law, display management and interpretation, agricultural pests, disease control and the captive breeding of endangered species. There is also a summary of three workshops which were held on research, conservation and buying or breeding for exhibition. A useful list of the names and addresses of contributors rounds off an interesting and thought provoking booklet.

Denis Murphy

Horniman Appeals for Sponsors

London's Horniman Museum has launched a sponsorship appeal to raise £150,000 towards the development of the £300,000 Living Waters aquarium. The remainder will come out of core funding from the Museums and Galleries Commission.

Living Waters will open in the spring and has been designed to bring environmental issues to life. The habitats recreated behind glass at the museum will include an Asian river, a coral reef, a British pond and an East African lake.

The exhibits will be accessible to small children and people with disabilities. There will be a sound-commentary and the chance to watch Gordon Reid, keeper of natural history, working in the various exhibits.

Reid says: "There have been various propositions for the leisure use of the Horniman conservatory which has been restored by English Heritage. We are planning to develop a Living Rainforest display in it with a walkway link."

The museum hopes to raise an additional £5,000 to fund a feasibility study for the walk-through forest which will include butterflies and reptiles.

The rainforest will cost a further £200,000 and is scheduled for 1992.

Work on Living Waters, which has been designed by architect John Toovey, will begin in September. The opening of the aquarium coincides with the introduction of conservation to the National Curriculum.

This photograph was taken by the late Dr Burke from Cheshire and was found amongst a collection of books which was given to Ludlow Museum. Dr Burke was an analytical chemist and keen entomologist, also an authority on mosquitos. He seems to have been a keen biker as well. Is the instrument a pedal-powered microscope or an optical bike? Would the modern day equivalent be a scanning EM tied to a 750 cc Suzuki? I wonder what he called it? All suggestions to the editor for the next Newsletter.



Letters

Dear Derek,

An enthusiast or another would-be profiteer from a small museum's under curated collections?

We were recently visited unheralded by someone claiming to be Keeper of Micro-lepidoptera at the Natural History Museum. He had neither introduction nor proof of identity and was not named in the **Museums Yearbook**.

In the absence of the Assistant Keeper responsible for natural history he attempted to browbeat the receptionist and attendant staff into affording him access to the reserve lepidoptera collections.

He was then most insistent that he came in again to talk about the pretext of his visit, that a student had been told by someone at an Oxford museum that material from the Walker collection had been sent to the Isle of Man.

Even when he had been told: a) that the policy of the Manx Museum was not to acquire non-Manx material, b) that the collections had been thoroughly worked through by several experts and, c) that the collections were currently inaccessible because of gallery reorganisation, he continued to hector the Assistant Keeper. He was accompanied by a woman who exhibited surprising ignorance of the British distribution of the aquatic plants she was stated to have researched.

A subsequent phone call established that there was indeed a person with the name supplied on the Natural History Museum staff list, but the Manx Museum staff were left wondering was this a genuine enthusiast faced with a wholly unexpected opportunity to search for 'lost' collections, or a would be profiteer looking for under-curated material in a small museum.

Since any of us may have such an opportunity may we commend the carrying of some form of institutional identification and, perhaps, a more conciliatory attitude.

Yours faithfully

Larch Garrard
The Manx Museum

Dear Mr Whiteley

Natural Sciences - Lancashire Museum Service

Further to your letter of 11th June and our subsequent telephone conversations, you will be pleased to learn that our Committee agreed yesterday to establish a post of Senior Assistant Keeper (Biology), Scale 6. It is intended that the post-holder will spend six months of the time on peripatetic work with museums in Lancashire and the remainder of the time dealing with our own collections and displays, including arranging for the return of the Harris Museum material to Lancashire. I hope that the post will be advertised in late September/October with a view to filling the vacancy from the beginning of January 1991.

There is no doubt that the Biology Curators Group have been instrumental in encouraging greater care of natural science collections in Lancashire, and it must be regarded as a real success story for the Group. Congratulations!

Yours sincerely

John Blundell
County Museums Officer

Dear Derek

Thank you very much for inviting me to give a talk at the BCG meeting (in North Devon).

I did enjoy this occasion very much and I appreciate especially the care you gave to the preparation of the seminars. Most of the speakers are very interesting. I, as an overseas member could truly feel your intention to make the meeting a successful one and I am grateful for your hospitality to the stranger from Taiwan who had only his museum to demonstrate. I have only recently started my research and I still have a long way to go.. It may be that in the future I shall have cause to request some further help!

With best wishes

Francis Y T Chang (Mr)

Information

Sunflower Campaign

Shopping List

As the next stage in the **Sunflower Campaign** we are going to publish a shopping list of requirements for the storage, curation, conservation and study of biology collections. (Not including displays, exhibitions or biological records centres.) Simply jot down on a scrap of paper all your large scale urgent requirements, and all your small scale urgent requirements with an approximate cost. For example:

Large Scale

- Visitor study area with facilities
£40,000
- New biology store to replace leaky old building
£500,000
- Ten new insect units to accommodate new material
£8,000
- Conservator for one year to work on bird skins
£15,000

Small Scale

- Additional stereomicroscope for use by visitors
£1,200
- A set of essential reference books on insects
£450
- A microscope slide cabinet
£800
- A drawer unit for small skeletons
£80

The aim is to grasp some idea of current requirements to bring biology collections and study facilities up to scratch. We will then lobby hard for more 100% grants, and for local authorities and industry to find matching money for 50% and 70% grants.

This is the next phase in the **Sunflower Campaign**. It is **IMPORTANT**. Do it now! It should only take a few minutes of your time. (If you wish to remain anonymous simply enter the name of your AMC eg AMSEE - area museum.)

Send your shopping list to:

Biology Curators Group
c/o City Museum
Sheffield S10 2TP

Initiative Money (or Sunflower Money)

How is it being spent?

The extra £75,000 allocated by MGC to biology collections is a good shot, with a promise of more to come. But how is it being spent? Yorkshire and Humberside AMC has made £20,000 gross available in the form of 70% grant aid for a RECAP project (Reclassification of Collections Access Project). The objective is to make sections of unaccessible collections accessible by sorting into scientific order. During 1990/91 entomology collections have been given priority status. What is happening elsewhere? Are your collections benefitting? BCG is monitoring the situation. Keep us in touch.

New Leaflet

Your committee is working on a new campaign leaflet to keep things on the boil. We are seeking additional sponsorship and hope to print 10,000 copies on recycled paper by the late winter/early spring.

Derek Whiteley
BCG Secretary

Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections

The Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC) is a multidisciplinary organization including individuals within the fields of anthropology, botany, geology, paleontology, zoology and others who are interested in the development and preservation of natural history collections. Natural history collections include specimens and supporting documentation, such as audio-visual materials, labels, library materials, field data, and similar archives. Preservation refers to any direct or indirect activity providing continued or improved care of these collections and supporting documentation.

The Society publishes a journal and a newsletter, each of which is distributed twice a year. The Society also conducts an annual meeting that includes presentations, posters, workshops, and other activities. Individual membership to SPNHC can be acquired by supplying the details listed below and

sending a cheque or money order for \$15 (payable in US currency) to: SPNHC, 5800 Baum Boulevard, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15206-3706, USA.

Details required: full name; institution; address; discipline; area of activity (eg administration, collection care, education, exhibits, research); special interests.

Museums and Galleries Commission Report 1988-89

A glossy and colourful 92 page account of the MGC and its agencies recently arrived in the BCG postbag. Biology features a little more than in the previous year, and there is even a photograph of a senior taxidermist at work on a sparrowhawk. Appendices providing precise details of grant are summarised below:

Administered by the V&A Museum	£1,043,166
Administered by the Science Museum	£147,887
amount spent on Biology	£250
Museum Conservation grants	£0
(£179,935 in 1987-88)	
amount spent on Biology	£0
Conservation Unit grants	£88,228
amount spent on Biology	£250
Capital Grants	£350,250
amount spent on Biology	£5,000

Note - some general stores and grants to attend UK Conferences will have a biology component, but are not included in the above figures.

Once again these statistics make interesting reading to say the least. Despite a slight drop in V&A administered grants and a slight increase in Science Museum administered grants, there is still a massive disparity between the 'arts' and 'sciences'. Conservation Unit grants have doubled, but biologists seem to be slow on the uptake.

Nevertheless these figures are depressing. What is going on? Art museums, industrial museums, science museums, social history museums and applied art museums are finding the money. Over £10,000 was granted to geology. We await the next report with interest!

Derek Whiteley
BCG Secretary

[NB see 'Initiative Money' elsewhere in this issue]

F W Frohawk, his life and work

F W Frohawk (1861-1946) was a Victorian naturalist and fine illustrator who is best known, indeed revered, amongst entomologists for his classic work on British butterflies. Through the kindness of his daughter Valezina, Viscountess Bolingbroke, I was able to put on a museum display of his work which developed into a book. Frohawk was a man of many parts and the book follows his childhood in East Anglia, the countryside immediately outside London, wildlife on the London commons, his art work at London Zoo, a long career illustrating and editing for **The Field**, a similar long association with the British Museum and its scientific staff, a range of techniques in art work which half tone printing made possible for use in books, recollections of places, people and events over 100 years ago from Frohawk's unpublished memoir and many illustrations of his work from rough sketches to final art work for book illustration.

This book was published in 1987, but has now been made out-of-print and as author I have bought up the remainder stock. Therefore signed copies of this colourful and well produced hardback book are available at a greatly reduced price. They can be obtained by post from Dr June Chatfield, Anglefield, 44 Ashdell Road, Alton, Hampshire GU34 2TA for £7.50 including postage. The previous price was £20.

Stop Press Sheffield Under Threat!

Amongst the Director of Museums' proposals to 'redress the budget' for 1990/91, one post is to go from the Natural Sciences Section at Sheffield City Museum before the end of the current financial year.

The Natural Sciences Section has a staff of four plus two members of the City Ecology Unit, and includes Derek Whiteley, Secretary of BCG.

Source: Sheffield NALGO

When were your collections collected?

As discussed in **Natural History Conservation**, no.4 (1989) 3-5, planning for the conservation of specimens needs knowledge about the numbers, types and requirements of the specimens. There is little hard information to back up the scattered personal experience of those caring for natural science collections. As a first step in addressing this question, I have gathered data on collections relating the category of specimen to the date of collection, ie the length of time it has been preserved. This may be correlated with the physical well being of the specimen, though the relationship has yet to be tested.

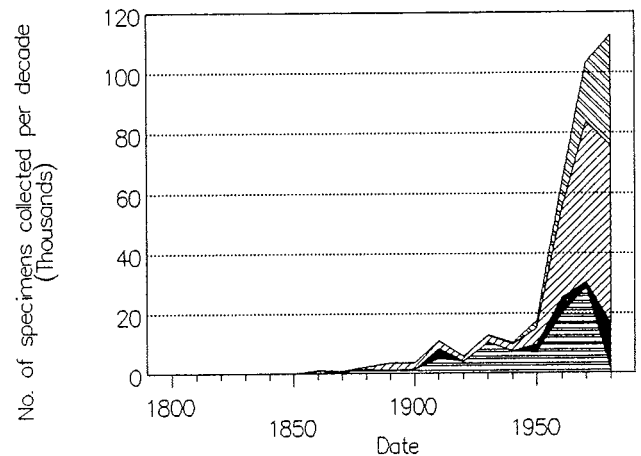
Information has been gathered from collections whose data is available in machine readable form. Some collections have achieved nearly 100% data capture while most others have far less. Data capture is only partial and idiosyncratic. The data have been amalgamated and summarised in the accompanying graphs, which show the considerable difference between collections, and presumably their problems, in contrasting countries, the United Kingdom and Australia. No data has been gathered from N America and very little from the rest of the world.

I am therefore requesting help. If you have or know of specimen data that can be easily abstracted in the form of number of specimens per decade (eg 1900-1909, I should be pleased to add the information to the data bank). The data is being collected in the smallest convenient subdivisions. For example, vertebrate data are divided into categories of reptiles, fish, mammals etc, and study skin, mounts, skeletal, spirit etc. Similar subdivisions are made in botany and earth sciences (including rocks, minerals, fossils).

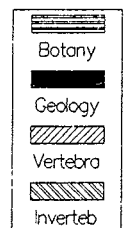
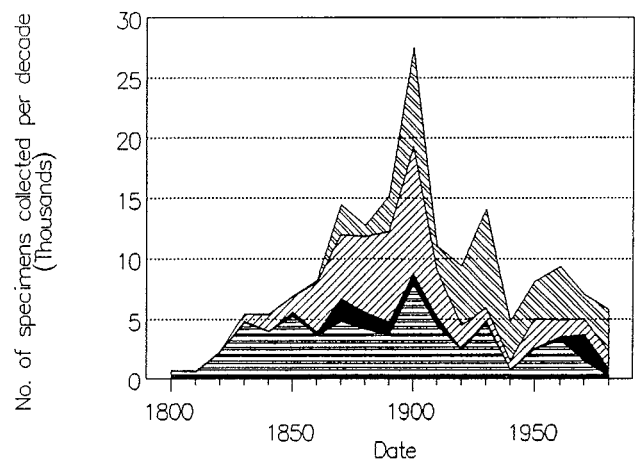
Acknowledgements

Data from Australian institutions came from: Tasmanian Museum (Mr D Greg), Queen Victoria Museum, Tasmania (Mrs L Beck), South Australian Museum, Adelaide (Miss L Queale), Queensland Herbarium (Mr R W Johnson), Queensland Museum (Mr P Jell), Northern Territory Museum of Arts and Sciences (Mr C Jack-Hinton).

Natural Sciences collections (Aust.) Age profile



Natural Sciences collections (UK) Age profile



Data from UK museums came from:

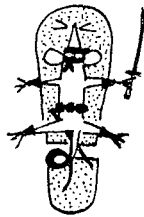
Inverness Museum (Mr S Moran), The Hancock Museum, Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Mr P S Davis), Ipswich Museum (Miss S Dummer), The Manchester Museum (Mr C W Pettitt), Liverpool Museum (Mr P W Phillips).

C V Horie, The Manchester Museum, The University, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, UK

BCG SPORT

Sir Rat - picks his spot and scores again!

Greetings Rat fans! It's once again time to catch up on the news with your viewer from the sewer.



Things are certainly very quiet at the moment on the transfer market. Luckily I'm being kept busy fending off lawsuits after my last article It really warms the cockles to know that I have such a sensitive readership!

It's no surprise that everything has been so quiet. What with the long hot summer and everyone suffering Post-Mondial Syndrome. Still, all this hasn't stopped our leading London Club - The Academicals - from putting their first, second, third and reserve teams up for transfer, on masse. The fate of these 60 players - a fair proportion of our National squad - is rather up in the air but if they're of the same mind as the manager they'll no doubt join the fans in America. These charmers seem to prefer the glitzy incidental entertainments to a player's actual skill on the ball. All very Micky Mouse if you ask me (not that I've got anything against a fellow rodent you understand!)

Perhaps our Internationals should be looking to move to Wales despite the seemingly insurmountable language barrier. We have after all noted potential vacancies there for NATIONAL scientists (sic). You should be OK if you remember two very useful phrases; 'Mine's a Felinfoel' and 'Mae hi'n bwrw glaw'. For those looking to get even further away, Caithness is a tempting prospect. I understand it's a world class keeper they're after. Something their National team have long yearned for. For a complete break why not follow Merseyside duo Climie/Fisher's example and try Australian rules for a change. They wouldn't give a XXXX for a job in London.

Sir Rat has always been keen to name names but my scouts don't have much for us this month. There is news of a new sweeper at Devizes however. Andrew Tucker ('Tazza') has come from out of nowhere to fill this most fluid of positions. Recent Liverpool centre half Jo Sax ('Jazza') seems to have moved on after her mention in Rat 2. Was it something I said? Perth

are now back up to strength with the addition of Anne Abernathy ('Abernazza'). Yet another success from the Leicester training squad - remember Banks, Shilton, Lineker, Mendel? Talking of Filberts, it seems Pat Boylan ('Bozza') is vacating the director's box up there. We'll watch that one with interest.

I'd love to tell you about the Kirklees situation but the facts are few. It seems that a very short-lived transfer occurred at the close of last season only to be left with the same vacant position at the kick off of the new. Please enlighten us.

Just a reminder that the training camp (south Yorkshire division) run this year is repeated again in '91 for those looking to tighten up their passing skills on and off the field. Yours truly may make a personal appearance if only to rake up the dirt to fill this column! And, of course, don't forget the highlight of this year - the Paris trip - not just a bargain but an opportunity for a guided tour round the world's finest sewers! I for one can't wait.

Da boch chi
from your deranged mutant ninja rodent
Razza

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