

D. M. H. H.



NEWSLETTER

September 1993

Vol 6 No. 2

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - as given at the Inverness AGM.

The last two years have been difficult ones for the BCG and its membership. The museums' profession has suffered through budget cuts, re-organisation and the general effects of the recession.

At the same time the museums profession has seen rapid change in all its aspects. There are new techniques, new technology, new legal requirements and totally new approaches to museums' organisation and management. This has put greater demands onto individual curators and on to the BCG committee. It has resulted in less being achieved at a time when more is needed than ever before.

We have discussed the problems at BCG Committee and are proposing a number of changes. The fundamental change will be to broaden the committee and to involve more people in its work. Very few members have time to attend committees or to take on officer's posts. However, everyone has some time to devote to BCG, albeit only a small amount.

We are dividing up the work of committee into sensible units called cells. Each unit will be the responsibility of a cell of members. The cell will include one key person, a committee member, and a small number of other members, not on committee. The key person will represent the cell on committee and will be responsible for organising the cell's work. One cell might, for

example, cover the Newsletter. The editor would be the key cell member, whereas other members may take on specific elements of the Newsletter or may step in if the editor has problems to ensure that there is no disruption to production. This is just one example of how the new structure would work.

Details of proposed cells will be circulated to members for comment. Please give the committee some feedback. These changes will require alterations to the Constitution, and this will be proposed at the 1994 AGM on 11th and 12th April in Oxford. However, we will be setting up cells before then through necessity, to further BCG's work and we would welcome approaches from anyone who would like to help - even in a very small way.

Additionally we will be reducing committee meetings from 6 to 3 per year. This reduces the burden on committee members and may mean that BCG can help with travel expenses for some committee members.

This brings me on to the final change. We have discussed our finances at length at committee meetings and are concerned that the combined cost of the Newsletter and Journal is quite high - indeed it uses nearly 85% of our income. This restricts funds for other work severely. We are therefore reviewing the future form of the Newsletter and Journal and are seriously considering a new approach with just one magazine catering for all types of articles, produced three times a year.

I would welcome any questions on the proposals that I have mentioned but please give us some feedback when you receive our written proposals. The underlying philosophy of all of the changes is to concentrate on the practical aspects of curation. Finally, I would like to record my thanks to everyone who has been on committee during my six and a half years as Chairman. I have put a lot into BCG but got just as much out of it. I first became involved as Editor in 1981 and am looking forward to holding a non-officer post after 12 years. I think the only thing left to say is good luck to my successor and please make a special effort to support BCG over the next year.

Steve Garland

Please note that the Secretary's report, as given at the Inverness AGM, has not been included here but copies are available from the editor on receipt of a SAE.

Committee Changes

Thanks go to the retiring members of your committee who finished their three year term at Inverness - Steve Hewitt, Steve Judd and Ray Barnett, and of course to Steve Garland for the huge amount of effort he has put into BCG over the years. Your new Chairman is Mike Graham (Towneley Hall Museum, Burnley, BB11 3RQ) and Steve Thomson has donned the mantle of Secretary and can be reached at Scunthorpe Museum, Oswald Road, Scunthorpe DN15 7BD. We also welcome Jane Mee (Ludlow) and Jane Pickering (Oxford) to the committee. A full list of committee members will appear in the next issue.

Editor's note

Hands up those who spotted the deliberate mistake in the last issue? The issue should have been numbered Vol 6 Part 1 not as vol 10 part 1. This inexcusable lapse must have been brought on by a severe fever suffered by your editor during the proof reading of the issue. Please ensure that your cataloguing data are now correct.

On a personal note many thanks to all colleagues who contacted us following the inundation of January - your good wishes and offers of help were all greatly appreciated. It was interesting to hear of the session at the SPNHC conference on the practical methods used to deal with the flooded vertebrate collections at the University of

Texas. Perhaps someone who heard it could precis the main points for the Newsletter? My spirits were greatly augmented in more ways than one at the Inverness conference which was greatly enjoyed by all present. Many thanks to Steve Moran for this excellent meeting. Getting to close quarters with the dolphins of the Moray Firth on a pitching boat after the hospitality of the night before was a truly moving experience for at least one member!

Finally you may have noticed that MDA have issued a booklet and disk on *MODES for Natural Science Collections*. The topic of standards in natural science computerisation projects is something that has received little attention in the newsletter and I would like to include some information of general interest to computer users and MODES users in particular in a future issue. Please make contact with the editor if you have any points to raise or pass on.

Scottish Natural History - Report of conference

Held in Glasgow on 30 April - 1 May 1993, this meeting was a combination of the Easter conference of the Society of the History of Natural History and a celebration of William and John Hunter, born on a farm in nearby East Kilbride. Although an excuse was hardly necessary, this year is the bicentenary of death of John, the younger of the two brothers. It is possibly a source of initial confusion to some that there are two Hunterian collections, both founding museums. The one at the Royal College of Surgeons in London is that of John the comparative anatomist of great renown. The other is William's magnificently diverse bequest to Glasgow University forming the core of their museums and art gallery. The delegates heard of these two eighteenth century scientists, collectors and physicians/surgeons through accounts of both their contemporary significance and assessments by present day curators through the existing collections. The other half of the programme was devoted to accounts of a more general Scottish natural history flavour.

The support given to this event by the Friends of Glasgow University Library and the University itself meant that there was no conference fee. This ensured a good turn out of those locally interested in the diverse proceedings, swelling the

numbers considerably. Amongst the curatorial delegates there were at least eight members of BCG of whom six were speaking to one or other of the themes. The highlight for me was the quietly polished but passionate account by a Professor of Anatomy at Glasgow, of William Hunter's work. As Hunter published little outside his work on the human gravid uterus, it was maintained that an analysis of his collections in combination with the archives would show him to have been a forerunner in many fields of medicine, but little recognised to date. No doubt others will have their favourite(s) and those who were not there will have to console themselves with the odd paper which may be published subsequently. It is not currently the policy of SHNH to attempt to print complete proceedings as matter of course.

E. G. Hancock

Conservation and the Herbarium - Conference Report

A one-day conference organised by the Institute for Paper Conservation in collaboration with the National Museums & Galleries on Merseyside (NMGM) and the National Museum of Wales (NMW) was held on 14 May, 1993 at Liverpool Museum and was attended by 40 delegates. Speakers included Dr Angus Gunn, Sally Ann Yates and Tracey Seddon (NMGM), Bob Child and Vicky Purewal (NMW), Dr Rob Huxley (Natural History Museum) and Kate Edmondson (Kew). The sessions were chaired by Dr John Edmondson (NMGM) and Steve Garland (Bolton Museum), and the meeting concluded with a tour of the herbarium, and a demonstration of the conservation project on the Roylean herbarium by Donna Hughes (NMGM).

Conservation is currently achieving a high profile in Liverpool, with the creation of a new Conservation Division of the NMGM. Conservation staff who currently occupy sections of the various museum buildings will soon be housed together in a large city-centre listed building which is currently being converted and refurbished. The additional resources becoming available for conservation are now beginning to have an impact on many of the NMGM's collections, including those of the Botany Department which comprise more than 330,000 specimens.

The conference provided an opportunity to hear of some of the latest developments in materials and techniques used in the conservation of herbarium specimens and other botanical materials, and to learn of procedures adopted in various other large institutions. The publication in 1992 of the second edition of "The Herbarium Handbook" by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and the Museums & Galleries Commission's "Standards in the Museum care of Biological Collections", have helped to draw attention to the complex issues relating to the exceptionally demanding range of compositions and structures found in botanical collections.

The use of an ultrasonic humidifier for separating dried specimens which had been adhered to their backing sheets was one of the techniques described by Sally Ann Yates, who was standing in for her colleague Nicola Walker. Angus Gunn provided an overview of past and current practice in herbaria, while Bob Child covered the topics of environmental standards and pest control. Vicky Purewal described a recent conservation survey of the botany collections at the National Museum of Wales, while Rob Huxley spoke of the recent organisational changes at the Natural History Museum and the opportunities for closer monitoring of specimen handling by visitors and for loans. Kate Edmondson presented an illustrated account of the project to conserve botanical prints and drawings at Kew, where until very recently there had been no professional involvement by in-house paper conservators. Tracey Seddon's talk focused on the conservation of mixed-media botanical models, such as those made by R. Brendel of Berlin at the turn of the century. A new method of storage and transport was shown, and detailed techniques for the conservation of damaged models were described.

There was a lively discussion at the conclusion of the paper-reading session, where issues such as the conflict between safe storage and the scientific uses of plant collections were further aired. Five trade stands were also provided, allowing some of the latest materials and equipment to be demonstrated during the meal - and tea-breaks.

This was a very successful conference, not least because it brought together people from two rather different cultures - paper conservators and botanical curators - and provided a valuable

opportunity to exchange ideas and learn about new approaches to the problems of conserving botanical material. The theme highlighted by the first speaker, Dr Angus Gunn, that a dialogue between conservators and curators was an essential part of solving these problems, was taken up by subsequent speakers, and everyone enjoyed an excellent lunch provided by Sue Flackett's team of caterers.

John Edmondson

Diary Dates

The care of spirit-preserved material is the subject of a one day BCG meeting planned for the 25th October at the Natural History Museum, London. The provisional programme covers topics such as containers, labels, rehydration techniques, storage etc. BCG members will have had a mailing about this meeting but further details can be got from Kathie Way at the NHM.

27 October is the start of National Dormouse Week and the launch of a national dormouse survey of England and Wales. Survey packs and further information from English Nature (NDW), Northminster House, Peterborough, PE1 1UA.

11-12 April 1994 are the dates of a joint BCG/GEM conference in Oxford. The BCG AGM will be on Tuesday 12th. More details to follow.

Exhibitions

Primates - a new permanent exhibition at the NHM opened in July and explains the lifestyle and behaviour of the group while drawing parallels between humans and other primates.

Megabugs - also at the NHM, this temporary exhibition of giant robotic insects including a 5 metre-long locust and a 6 metre-long stick insect is already pulling in the crowds. Until October.

On Wenlock Edge - is a new exhibition at Much Wenlock Museum on the wildlife of Wenlock Edge from prehistory to the present day. Open Mon-Sat 10.30-1.00 and 2.30-5.00. Further details from Much Wenlock, Museum, High Street, Much Wenlock, Shropshire TF13 6AE. Tel 0952 727773.

People

Professor Robert May FRS will succeed Sir Walter Bodmer FRS as Chairman of the Trustees of The Natural History Museum in January 1994. Prof. May is Royal Society Research Professor, Dept. of Zoology, Oxford University and Imperial College and President of the British Ecological Society.

Dr Neil Chalmers has been confirmed as Director of The Natural History Museum for a further five years.

Steve Thomson has not only taken over the BCG Secretaryship but has obtained the post of Keeper of Natural Sciences at Scunthorpe Museum. He moved from Clitheroe in April.

Registration Proposals from FENSCORE to the Museums and Galleries Commission.

PREAMBLE.

In past decades UK natural science collections demonstrably have suffered disproportionate damage and loss when compared to all other types of museum objects. It is a sad fact that because they are erroneously perceived to have a higher 'value' the most mundane social history or decorative art object almost invariably receives far more cossetting than any natural history specimen housed in the same institution, despite the growing importance of the latter material to society. Although through the efforts of Biology Curators Group, Geological Curators Group, and the Collection Research Units, this situation is steadily improving, a large part of the nation's heritage represented by natural science collections is still at risk. Natural history collections require curatorial and conservation care that is different in kind from that needed by collections of human artefacts. Because of this FENSCORE makes the following recommendations to the Museums and Galleries Commission, with a request they be incorporated into the Registration Guidelines as appropriate.

RECOMMENDATIONS for the REGISTRATION GUIDELINES.

1. Because of the special curatorial needs of natural science collections there should be a

strong presumption that institutions without a permanent qualified natural science curator post should in future not acquire natural science collections, unless the collection has strong local associations.

2. Again, because of the special curatorial needs of natural science collections, MGC are asked to extend the scope of Registration Guidelines 26 (a) and (b) so that all registered institutions with existing or newly-acquired natural science collections, but without a permanent qualified natural science curator post, are expected to make formal arrangements for these collections to receive appropriate on-going curatorial care from a natural science professional in the appropriate discipline(s).

3. If the above recommendations are accepted, then because of the increased needs of other museums, those institutions with permanent natural science professional curatorial posts should be encouraged, within the resources available, to:-

- i) give speedy and sympathetic consideration to requests from other institutions for the provision (by loan, gift or purchase) of natural science specimens suitable for non-scientific purposes such as display and teaching.
- ii) give speedy and sympathetic consideration to requests from other institutions, preferably *via* the regional Collections Research Unit or the natural science panel, for assistance in the professional curation of their natural science collections, and, where charged, to provide such assistance at reasonable cost.
- iii) assist other institutions in dealing with natural science enquiries, including giving advice on suitable 'first line' identification guides, and possibly by helping the institution to assemble small reference collections to assist the non-naturalist staff to identify local and/or common natural science material brought in by the general public.

Your views are sought on the above proposals. Please contact Charles Pettitt, Manchester Museum, University of Manchester, M13 9PL [061-275 2666; FAX 2676] with any comments. While criticism and suggestions for improvement

will be welcome, if you just approve the document as it is please let Charles know as well, for a record of such support will strengthen our case.

Improving the Care of Natural Science Collections - A Discussion Document from FENSCORE

In past decades UK natural science collections demonstrably have suffered disproportionate damage and loss when compared to all other types of museum objects. It is a sad fact that because they are erroneously perceived to have a higher 'value' the most mundane social history or decorative art object almost invariably receives far more cossetting than any natural history specimen housed in the same institution, despite the growing importance of the latter material to society.

Natural history collections require curatorial and conservation care that is different in kind from that needed by collections of human artefacts. Sadly a large part of the nation's heritage represented by natural science collections is still at risk.

In most Area Museum Service/Council [AMS/C] areas the natural science collections research units [CRUs] are already active, and comprise a group of active curators who represent the whole range of natural science expertise. FENSCORE requests that the Museum and Galleries Commission encourage the AMS/C to investigate ways in which these largely informal units could provide more formal assistance to the functioning of the museum service.

Such assistance could include:

- i) a referral service for advice and assistance in the provision of professional natural science curatorial expertise to institutions in the area who require it. This could be supported by maintaining a register of natural science expertise in the area; such a register could include details of specialists in colleges and universities who are prepared to assist museums when required.
- ii) advice on, and concordance of, a regional approach to natural science collection policies.
- iii) liaison with FENSCORE to maintain a collection-level record of the location and the

general condition of all natural science material in their area.

iv) help in drawing up, implementing, and monitoring a regional collection maintenance plan, particularly for those natural science collections identified as 'at risk'. As a minimum such a plan would ensure that all collections not in the care of a natural science professional would be visited and checked at least every two years. The experience of the North West CRU is that non-natural science curators welcome such visits, and usually act on the advice given.

v) provide peer group review of all grant applications affecting natural science material, to help the AMS/C distribute the available resources in the way most appropriate to the curatorial needs and priorities of the natural science collections involved. The final decision on grant distribution should, of course, always remain with the AMS/C, who can take account of the wider perspective.

All these functions are already being discharged by one or more CRUs, and this request is aimed at creating a more uniform approach to the needs of natural science collections in the UK.

Directing resources to collections at risk

In most areas there are a few unregistered institutions which hold scientifically important natural science collections; these are usually government funded research institutes or museums run by private societies. Examples are Bacup Nat. Hist. Society, Whitby Museum, the Freshwater Biological Association, and the Institute of Oceanographic Sciences.

In the case of government funded institutions holding important collections, such as the Freshwater Biological Association, the Museums and Galleries Commission is asked to arrange high-level talks with the Government Departments responsible, to make sure they are fully aware of their responsibilities towards these collections which form such an important part of the national heritage. The FENSCORE committee would be willing to provide a list of such institutions that have been identified by the collection survey work around the UK.

In the case of unregistered institutions where the local CRU consider the collections in urgent need of conservation and curation, AMS/C should be

encouraged to allow grants up to 100% for such urgent work to be done by suitably qualified professionals. Such grants could be administered by a local registered museum, and should be made subject to the proviso that the collections would then be made available for inspection by *bona fide* research workers.

The CRU work has made many institutions, both registered and unregistered, become more aware of the importance of the natural science material they hold, and also of the cost of adequately housing and maintaining such collections. As often these collection now found to be peripheral to the present aims of the institution (eg. the important collection of mounted birds at Manchester Grammar School, and the natural science collections at Salford Mining Museum) the institutions involved are looking to transfer the material to more appropriate homes. However there are costs associated with such transfers: sometimes preliminary curation and packing is necessary, transport costs when vans etc. need to be hired, provision of storage at the receiving museum, and accessioning costs. In some cases the holding institution will also expect to receive some payment for the material transferred, especially when this has clear market value (eg. mineral collections). The Museum and Galleries Commission is asked to indicate to the AMS/C that such costs should be grant aidable, and where possible given a high priority, for often if the material is not 'rescued' when offered it may be destroyed or given to an inappropriate recipient.

The above document was presented to representatives of the Area Museum Services/ Councils at a meeting at the Museum and Galleries Commission on 28 July 1993. Your views are still sought on the points raised in the documents. Please send any comments to Charles Pettitt, Manchester Museum, University of Manchester, M13 9PL [061-275 2666; FAX 2676]. Again, while criticism and suggestions for improvement are welcome, if you approve this document as it is then please let Charles know; the strength of support out there will be an important factor in the reception the Directors of the AMS/ Cs give it.

Review

Paine, C (Ed.) 1992 *Standards in the Museum Care of Biological Collections*. Museums and Galleries Commission, London. 55pp. ISBN 0.948630.18.3

This work consists of two main parts, preceded by a Forward by the Earl of Cranbrook, and an Introduction, and finished with three Tables of environmental data.

Part One on 'Managing Collections' contains nine sections covering standards for: collecting; disposal of specimens; curation and conservation; access; loans out; documentation; research; care of living collections; biological records.

Part Two on 'Protecting Collections' contains a further nine sections covering standards for protection against: theft; fire; flood; physical damage; damage caused by poor construction or maintenance of buildings, furnishings and fittings; poor environmental conditions [RH, Temp., Light]; together with standards for protecting primary records and protecting people from specimens. The last section covers disaster planning.

The Tables give information on recommended levels of relative humidity and temperature for the display and storage of biological specimens, and for biological records, together with the recommended maximum levels of illuminance and ultra-violet radiation for biological materials.

Some of the areas where BCG members could find this book useful include:

1. Helping to persuade governing bodies to make more resources available for the care of natural science collections.
2. Help in drawing up sensible performance indicators and objectives for the care of collections, when these are requested by the funding bodies.
3. Help external auditors assess how an authority is looking after its collections.
4. Even if you do not agree with every standard, most will be helpful in drawing up a collection management policy; often all that will be needed is 'will follow the appropriate standard(s) in the *'Standards...'*

These standards will certainly change as techniques and expert opinions change.

Individuals and institutions may disagree with specific statements, or may feel that the work could be improved upon, but the standards do contain a consensus of current professional opinion of best practice to which every museum might aspire. The 'Expert Group' who largely drafted the standards consisted of 21 active curators and conservators (mostly BCG members) and a further 52 museum professional were consulted on some or all of the draft. The Museums and Galleries Commission intends to publish an updated edition of this book every few years, so anyone who feels strongly about anything contained in the *Standards* should make their views known to Steven Douglas at the Commission.

The work is presented as an A4 spiral bound book in glossy card covers; the rear cover is extended to provide a fold-out finding guide to the various sections, and also forms a handy bookmark. The *Standards* are available from the Museums and Galleries Commission, 16 St Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AA at £7.00 postpaid. I recommend this book as a useful reference work that should be on every member's desk.

Charles Pettitt

Wanted

Historic, prehistoric, wild and domestic cat samples from Britain and worldwide are requested by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to establish the identity of the Scottish wildcat. SNH's research is testing the hypothesis that no genetically or morphologically distinct wild living cat populations remain in Scotland. DNA analysis is being carried out on prehistoric, historic and contemporary cat samples. To date, carcasses and a live trapping programme have produced 325 samples while a further 120 historic samples have come from specimens in six Scottish museums. SNH are keen to maximise the number of samples and wish to collaborate with any museums with wild, hybrid or domestic cat material **from any time period** and **from anywhere in the world**. If you can help or require further information please contact: Mike Daniels or Dave Balharry, Scottish Natural Heritage, 2 Anderson Place, Edinburgh, EH6 5NP. Tel 031 554 9797 or Fax 031 446 2405.

Disposed bird specimens are wanted by Simon Moore, Hampshire Museums, Chilcomb House, Chilcomb Lane, Winchester, Hants SO10 8RD. Simon needs feathers from any disposed birds to use in the conservation of other specimens. He also has available a small stock of such feathers for others to try their hand with.

The Mammal Society is organising a National Owl Pellet Survey to provide ecological data on the small mammal population. Volunteers are required to collect and analyse pellets on a monthly basis and further details are obtainable from the project coordinator, R.A.Love, 4 Laurel Way, Totteridge, London N20 8HP. Tel 081 445 8989.

Publications

UKIC Natural Sciences Section *Conservation News 51 (July 1993)* carries the first detailed reports from the new section including a note from our own Steve Garland on precautions relating to radioactive minerals at Bolton Museum, information on ongoing studies of resistance to freeze drying and problems in maintaining fluid preserved specimens. This two page section is going to be interesting reading.

Free Books!

Yorkshire Museum is making available free of charge two new publications containing details of important aspects of their entomological collections and two of their collectors. "*Ground Beetles in the Yorkshire Museum*" is prefaced by a life of H.W. Ellis while "*Flies in the Yorkshire Museum*" contains information on Percy Grimshaw. Both works also contain detailed accounts of the relevant collection and can be obtained free from the Yorkshire Museum, Museum Gardens, York YO1 2DR upon receipt of an A4 stamped addressed envelope (postage 70p within the British Isles or 300 gram International Prepaid Coupon if abroad). This laudable gesture deserves recognition and may yet set a trend.

A Catalogue of the Herbarium of the British Flora collected by Margaret Stovin (1756-1846) is the title of a catalogue of the 1900 specimens held at the Dorman Museum, Middlesbrough as 20 bound volumes. The publication is intended as an introduction to Margaret Stovin who started her

collection in 1796 and who soon built up a wide circle of botanical correspondents, including Sir James Edward Smith, Nathaniel Winch, Sir William Hooker and the Rev John Stevens Henslow with whom she exchanged specimens. The compilation of the catalogue was undertaken by Mark Simmons the then Peripatetic Biology Curator at the North of England Museums Service, made possible by a grant from the Pilgrim Trust and the support of MGC and the Leisure Services Dept of Middlesbrough Borough Council. The publication is bound to raise the profile of this poorly known collection and is available from the Dorman Museum, Linthorpe Road, Middlesbrough, Cleveland TS5 6LA, price £9.95 plus p&p.

Discovering Green Treasure: The findings of and work of the NEMS Peripatetic Biology Curator is also by Mark Simmons and summarises his three years work in north east England. 66pp. Available from NEMS, House of Recovery, Bath Lane, Newcastle upon Tyne NE4 5SQ. This fascinating report is available free but please send £2.95 to cover p&p.

Handbooks for the Identification of British Insects, Vol 5(3), Adults and larvae of Hide, Larder and Carpet Beetles and their relatives (Coleoptera: Dermestidae) and of Derodontid Beetles (Coleoptera: Derodontidae) by E.R. Peacock. Price £20.

Storkia - is the title of a new journal dealing with all aspects of systematic, biogeographical and evolutionary biology and produced by the Museum, Stadhouderslan 41, 2517 HV Den Haag, The Netherlands.

Larger Moths of the London Area by Colin Plant. A4 hardback, 300pp, published by the London Natural History Society. Special introductory offer £14.95 incl p&p until 31 Dec 1993 then £19.95.

Catalogue of the Palearctic Heteroptera. Edited by Berend Aukma and Christian Rieger will be published between 1993 and 1998 in five separate volumes, each containing a bibliography and index. More than 7000 species are included in about 2000 pages. The subscription is Hfl 500 to be paid in parts upon receipt of the separate

volumes. Details from Plant Protection Service, PO Box 9102, NL-6700 HC Wageningen, Netherlands.

Newcastle Course commences

The new Museum Studies course at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne takes its first students in October for either a Diploma or MA qualification. Peter Davis has been joined by Andrew Newman to provide a course which should have a strong natural sciences bias and which is expected to appeal to graduates wanting to enter the museum profession and to those who are already working in it who can choose to take individual course modules or pursue a 'fast track' option to the MA. Contact Andrew Newman on 091 222 7419 or Tony Rylance on 091 222 6067 for further information.

MUSEUM PEST CONTROL SUBSTANCES APPROVED

Some substances normally used as pesticides by museums have been approved for use. The approval - given by Ministers following recommendations by the Independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides - is made under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986.

The approval includes the following substances:

- white spirit
- tetrachloroethylene
- formaldehyde * (for the control of flying and crawling insects and fungi)
- ethanol (includes IMS) * (for the control of flying and crawling insects and fungi)
- ethyl acetate *(for the control of flying and crawling insects and fungi)
- isopropanol (propan-2-ol) *(for the control of fungi on specimens)
- thymol
- 4-chloro-m-cresol *(for the control of fungi on insect specimens)
- camphor *(for the control of fungi on insect specimens)

* = nominated by BCG

These substances can be used for the treatment of specimens in museums and related buildings.

Full details of the conditions of use and authorised areas of use of the newly approved substances were published in the March issue of the Pesticides Register published jointly by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) and the Ministry of

Agriculture, Fisheries & Food (MAFF), and available from HMSO and booksellers.

The use for fumigation of Carbon Dioxide has also received approval in respect of public hygiene and wood preservation use.

Mark Simmons

NEWS FROM BOLTON MUSEUM - a brief summary

What has been happening at Bolton? 1992 was a busy year. We are currently entering the final year of a three year old Urban Programme funded project to produce a gallery display on local wildlife. New displays are underway with a significant part of the budget devoted to educational materials and an activity centre for use by our visitors. Construction work has all been in-house (we have an excellent museum joiner) and it should be open in the summer of 1994! We have attempted to maintain the highest affordable standards throughout. After much deliberation we decided to use fibre-optic lighting. This is relatively expensive but has several advantages. One 150 watt power unit costs about £400, one 9-tail bundle of fibres about 2 metres long costs about £200 and replacement bulbs cost £45! This set-up will light two or three cases (depending on their size). The power units sit on top of the case and the cooling fan is very quiet. Bulbs can be changed without entering cases (oh bliss!) and if a unit breaks down it is replaced with a spare and sent away for repair. The only breakdown we have had was due to a thermal cut-out fuse blowing because the fan's dust filter became clogged - cost negligible. The light is cold, virtually UV-free and by moving the tails it can be positioned anywhere at any time! You can even fit colour filters, diffusers and mini spot-light lenses if necessary. By varying the number of tails used you can easily achieve 50 lux, 100 lux or whatever. We are very pleased with the system. It is also environmentally friendly because we now use less Watts of power for the gallery than before!

We have also used a 'Touch and Tell' touch-sensitive tape loop with a blackbird song recording on it. This was an experiment but is always the first thing that children run to use in the gallery! When we have installed the videos,

video cameras and computer it will be even better - we'll see how fund-raising goes.

1991/92 saw our staff involved in collections survey work, firstly at other museums and then on our own collections. A revised NW Collections publication is planned and the North West Natural History Collections Research Unit is also involved in producing a regional report on natural history collection needs for the future for the NW Museums Service.

This period also saw the significant acquisition of natural history collections from Salford Museums Service. They have transferred all of their natural history to either Bolton or Manchester (neither of us could take it all!). Sadly, natural history museums are now extinct in Salford.

Documentation of all our collections is on MODES and we have so far processed only about 20,000 of the 300,000 items. We recently acquired MODES PLUS, but are still evaluating it.

On the negative side we have had to convert an area of our displays into storage space. Work is being grant-aided by the Area Museums Service and should be completed by early summer 1993. This should enable us to achieve adequate environmental conditions for all of our collections, something that seemed a joke five years ago!

This year we will be improving our recording system for treatment and movement of collections. We have the pest beetle *Anthrenus sarnicus* - a new animal which we think came in with a touring national exhibition. The larvae were discovered when it was dismantled - they were feeding on the felt case linings! We now have a problem, but have so far kept it under control by freezing and some fumigation with Vapona. Freezing definitely does work if performed correctly; see the latest paper by Tom Strang in Collection Forum (SPNHC). One lesson learnt in Madrid will be applied this year when we begin to put as many as possible of our storage units on legs to eliminate breeding areas for pests in detritus beneath them. Six inch legs make cleaning easy and make it more difficult for larvae to get into the cases. They also reduce flooding risks as most floods are less than 3" deep unless you live in Perth! We are also evaluating paint-on contact

insecticide that we may be able to use underneath cases in 'out of reach' areas. One thing has been highlighted - when you start treating large numbers of drawers or specimens, accurate record-keeping is essential. A storage unit numbering system is vital - 'I think that those are the drawers we had them in last time', is not adequate! More on this in future. (Has anyone got a system that runs well? Please let me know).

Now for the smut (unless you're a mycologist). This winter saw us achieve a long held aim - an elephant erection (so to speak). It could not have been achieved without outside help but has drawn the crowds! Eric (the head of an African elephant) had languished in an external store for nearly 30 years. He had suffered damage and required urgent conservation. 1992 saw funds become available and work proceeded at NWMS to prepare Eric for exhibition. His erection was achieved by employing scaffolders to winch him into place. The special frame was what is known as 'overdesigned for safety' in the trade and involved new wall ties to strengthen the building. He now hangs proudly from the end of the gallery, accompanied by an Indian elephant skull and a fossil mastodon skull cast (our stores are relieved!). Eric had a mystery past, now solved due to peak time exposure on Granada TV - he even made it into the Daily Express. His TV appearance resulted in extraordinary scenes in the Museum the following day as over a thousand people came for a look.

Conservation facilities have improved due to a 'windfall' enabling us to purchase a new Heto freeze drier with a 1 metre long, 60cm diameter chamber. If you require work done, please enquire.

Biological Recording has taken a leap forward with the acquisition of the Recorder package. We have paid the Lancashire Wildlife Trust to enter Bolton's Phase I survey data and have a couple of volunteers poised to enter our huge backlog of information. The database currently holds only 700 sites and 8,000 records.

The Aquarium was threatened with closure in 1992, but a concerted effort by staff, external organisations and individuals has guaranteed continued free access for its annual 90,000 visitors. We aim to enlarge some tanks this year

to enable us to keep our four large red-tailed catfish in one tank - a display which is unique in the UK! (recently featured in a national aquarists' magazine). We are also looking into other developments and possible sponsorship schemes.

The next twelve months look exciting as we should complete the new store, open the new gallery and make great progress in biological recording, collection documentation, preventative conservation etc. - all in line with the Business Plan! The only negative side is that we still have no geologist. The post is still there, 'not dead - just resting', and is a high priority for development in the future.

Steve Garland

STILL MADRID

Yes, a Madrid story that surfaced (so to speak) after the Great Flood of Perth and which is presented here, despite being hopelessly after the fact, as a sad memorial to all those who still can't stop talking about it:

By now, those of you who didn't get to Madrid will have heard about it from those who did. Those who did go will now be sick of being ignored at tea-breaks and shunned at parties. Facts will have become irrelevant detail; rumours will have become libel actions and unsubstantiated stories will have become legends. So wherein lies the truth? What were the **really** important sessions and events? Where was the chicken's beak? Who is Elvis O'Horne? The truth can now be told.

Madrid in May is a tremendous place to be, 33° and never a cloud in the sky. The nights are warm and lively and San Isidro kicks off her shoes and celebrates her birthday (what!?). Tremendous that is (violins maestro) unless you are attending an international symposium for 6 days. The statistics speak for themselves - 64 hours indoors working backed up with 30 hours sleep (the remaining 50 hours I leave to your imagination). There's little wonder that we came back so pale! Rest assured that those returning with tans must have been skiving ("What? - Davis you're fired! - oh yes, you already are")

Obviously in such an intensive week the delegates must have learned a great deal. We certainly did. The ability to say "excuse me, the black ball

seems to be stuck" in Spanish can prove invaluable - in a variety of circumstances. As can knowledge of the complete works of Lennon & McCartney, as Simon Moore admirably proved. Are you sure they wrote the Marseillaise?

An ongoing study of chicken anatomy throughout the week proved particularly rewarding. Not least when on the final day of the Symposium, awards were given by the King's nephew for 'the most complete chicken'. Those of us who had been collecting various parts during our stay gleaned much pleasure, not only from the search for limbs, but from the final construction on Thursday evening. How we all cheered when Chris Collins located the missing beak behind our interpreter's ear! The thrill of seeing the final wing sticking out of the paella! the excitement of finding the crushed synsacrum at the conference lunch! And who could forget the plate of chicken bottoms served so beautifully on the first night? It was this kind of attention to detail by the organisers which really made it a pleasure to be there!

The catering was especially organised for the Symposium. The soup provided a real brain-teaser for the botanical taxonomists and the bread amused many a geologist. We were delighted to discover that the custard finally plugged a few gaps in studies on pre-Cambrian life-forms but were devastated by the news that three species in the main course had become extinct before the meal arrived (due to an unexpected diversion caused by roadworks outside Paris). After all of this the final banquet at a castle was eagerly awaited. Unfortunately the reenactment of the loaves and fishes miracle didn't come off! Times were hard; many turned to the evil drink and one Swiss delegate was seen scratching a meagre existence on bat-droppings. It emerged later that the evening's event was a plot to undermine taxonomic research by encouraging starving delegates to throw themselves from the battlements. We were all underwhelmed.

What of the programme?

The facilities were big - and over two miles from the dining hall! The air-conditioning could do an impressive 80 to 0 in under ten seconds. Someone gave us all a personal stereo (for translations) but all the programmes we tuned in to were foreign!

It was also disconcerting to find yourself in a room with hundreds of taxonomists hell-bent on a 'quick and dirty' future! Still, we finally found out what para-taxonomy really is - no longer will we be frustrated by pieces of insects blowing away after jumping out of the plane (think about it! - perhaps not).

Sadly, many questions remain such as : Is Stefan Michalski really a hologram? How many hectares of rainforest were destroyed during the Chairman's introduction? and how many national museum directors do you really need to change a light bulb; perhaps you could answer that one for us Don (Neil, Craig, Alan . . .)

What of the characters taking part? To be honest, there was some confusion about who was who! So many seemed to be using aliases that it was hard to identify who they really were. Neil Charmers (sic - surely not?); Donald (parenthetically speaking) Duckworth; Des Griffin and Velson Horie. Are these people scared of something? Why not admit who you really are?

Getting down to more serious aspects, a particular highlight was the party thrown in honour of Dick Hendry's uptieth birthday. Live band, dancing, fireworks and so many well-wishers that poor Dick didn't know what had hit him. There wasn't a dry throat in the house. So moving

So moving in fact that a party coach was organised the following night to prove we hadn't imagined it. If you can picture 20+ internationally renowned (cough) museum professionals dancing around a 4ft high pile of handbags you begin to get a flavour of the evening. Certain photographic evidence in our possession shows a number of UK delegates dancing with Rosemary (Giz-a-grant) Ewles while Neil Chalmers, thinly disguised as Yassa Arafat (shurely shome mistake, allegedly) looks on. A wide variety of well-known Australians were left in the gutter en route, while the South African contingent made up for decades of sanctions by almost every social means possible! All this and beer served in buckets; what more could we ask for? 'More' was the cry!

Onwards to a nightclub where the peseta to beer exchange rate swung wildly against all market predictions - and hopes. Others flicked through

phrase books to translate 'Senor, you appear to have carelessly spilt my drink!' 'Que!!'

A smaller group split off at this point to show the Rt Hon James Dickinson the way to a notorious pool room and herb garden ('What you mean, you wan' drink from glass gringo?!') Upon arrival at which, he turned and fled. Was it something we said or had he just chased after a passing cardinal? (I beg your pardon?!)

Naturally, all of the above events are merely fabrications from our fevered minds and never did, will or should be allowed to occur in the future, past or present. If you see photographs of delegates and wonder why they are always in bars - its only because photography wasn't allowed in the lectures and workshops (that was what we agreed to say wasn't it - edit this bit out!). A week in Madrid with 450 Natural Historians is hard work. Believe us!

Yours with maniacal laughter

Los tres Amigos

Advertising Rates - relevant advertisements from suppliers etc. are welcome. The current rates (copy supplied) are:

Full page	£40 per issue
Full page (3 Consecutive issues)	£100 (total)
Half page	£25 per issue
Quarter page	£15 per issue
Inserts (350 supplied ready for insertion)	£25 per issue

Contact: The Editor, M A Taylor, Perth Museum, George Street, Perth, PH1 5LB (tel 0738 32488) OR The Treasurer, Ms K Way, Mollusca Section, The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London, SW7 5BD (tel 01 938 8892).

Back Issues - The editor now has the stock of back issues. A full list will appear in the next newsletter. Meanwhile, any enquiries to the editor.

The views expressed in the Newsletter do not represent the views or policy of the Biology Curators Group Committee or membership except where specifically stated.

Subscription rates are £8.00 for individual membership and £15.00 for institutional and overseas membership. Application forms from the Membership Secretary on request.

Published and Printed at Northern Whig Ltd.,
Limestone Road, Belfast, BT15 3AH.
© The Biology Curators Group ISSN 0144 - 588X