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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Report of the first General Meeting of the Biology Curators
Group held at the British Museum (Natural History) on 10th December,
1975

There was an attendance of approximately 40 at the meeting, 25 of whom had become members of the Group.

Report of Hon. Secretary/Treasurer Mr Stansfield reported that the membership of the Group stood at 50. There was a balance of £34.93 after the production of the first Newsletter. Information about the Group had been sent to all who had expressed interest. A note had been placed in the Museums Bulletin and similar notes had been sent to a number of Biological Societies and other organisations.

Speakers

1. John Robinson, Assistant Keeper, Fund for the Preservation of Technological and Scientific Material, Science Museum drew attention to the availability of grants for the acquisition of specimens in the natural sciences. Grants could cover up to 50% of the cost which could include purchase, transport and taxidermy charges. Grants had also been given for the production of models.

2. Reg Harris, Senior Scientific Officer, British Museum (Natural History) gave a comprehensive talk about preserving methods under the headings of Fluid methods, Embalming methods and Dry methods. Mr Harris had arranged an exhibition of specimens in the Conversazione Room to illustrate his talk. (See article elsewhere).

3. Stephen Flood, City Museum, St. Albans presented a short report on the present position concerning Biological Records Centres. A report on the Oxford Symposium was included in the first issue of the Newsletter. Mr Flood suggested that the establishment and operation of the B.R.C.s should be included in the syllabus for the Museums Association Diploma. Discussions were taking place with a number of organisations concerning the establishment and recognition of Centres. Mr Flood thought that there were a number of topics which the Group should consider Recording boundaries to be covered by B.R.C.'s; A national register of biological collections; Specimens of protected species in museum collections; Site record cards (a meeting had taken place between IRGMA and the GCG) - what were the B.C.G.'s views?; A register of special interests of museum biologists; Correspondents in specialist disciplines; The role of the biology curator in collecting and recording.

Discussion. David Erwin said that the Ulster Museum already had a licence for protected material in the collection. The Ulster Museum proposed to follow the example of the National Museum of Wales by studying underworked areas, the first being Rathlin Island.

Peter Morgan spoke about the need to make the expertise of the British Museum (Natural History) available to provincial museums.

Janet Dawson said that she understood that the N.W. Area Council had provided funds to have collections in the area surveyed.

The question of the Natural History option for the Museums Association Diploma was discussed. Jim Bateman explained the proposals to use

Open University credits to replace the qualifying examination. The need for courses on taxonomy was also discussed.

Open Forum

Bibliographies. It was felt that bibliographies on techniques would be valuable. Dick Hendry suggested that there was a need for exchange on methods in taxidermy. The possibility of a central pool of dead birds should be investigated.

Seminars. It was agreed to look into the possibility of Liverpool as a venue in 1977. Other suggestions included Belfast and Leicester. Jan Dawson felt the need for a seminar on aspects of fumigation and the use of fumigants. Jill Royston expressed a need for practical sessions dealing with preservation techniques.

It was agreed to look into the possibility of a one day meeting in Cardiff in April/May and a three day meeting in December 1976.

At a meeting of the Committee held in Liverpool on Wednesday 4th February 1976 the following topics were discussed.

1. Constitution. Discussion took place on the need for a constitution. Geoff Hancock agreed to produce a paper for the next meeting and to write to the Secretary of the Museums Association to invite M.A. representation on the committee.
2. Charter. The relationship between the B.C.G. and the Institute of Biology was discussed together with the possible implication of the Institute seeking Chartership. It was agreed to invite the secretary of the Institute to speak at a future meeting.
3. B.R.C.'s. Geoff Stansfield reported that he had attended two meetings of the Society of County Museum Directors Ad Hoc Working Party on Environmental Data Centres. Eric Greenwood reported that a paper was being prepared setting out the case for B.R.C.'s being housed in museums. The committee would have the opportunity to consider and make comments on the draft.
4. National Surveys. It was agreed that as a matter of policy the Group should give its support to national documentation schemes concerning biological collections and in particular surveys being organised by Dr. Clevely of the Department of Palaeontology of the British Museum and the Linnean Society on archival material. A note about the surveys should be included in the Newsletter.
5. 1977 meeting. Eric Greenwood agreed to prepare proposals for the 1977 meeting in Liverpool on the theme - National surveys of biological collections.

The possibility of sponsorship was discussed.

Geoff Stansfield reported that the Systematics Association had asked whether the B.C.G. would be interested in a joint meeting with the G.C.G. on the use of natural history collections. Eric Greenwood agreed to pursue the matter.