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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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SHORT NOTES

A Taxonomy Course by the Open University

Following recent investigations by the Natural Sciences Board of Studies of the Museums Association of possible ways in which Open University courses might be harnessed to the needs of Diploma students, an idea was advanced for seeking help from the University in establishing a course on Biological Taxonomy.

Some members of the Board of Studies explored the availability of any courses dealing with Taxonomy, since it has long been apparent that this is an area of training now almost totally excluded from the first degree courses of biological faculties in British Universities. At postgraduate level there is only one course providing taxonomic training and this is at the University of Reading and is heavily weighted on the botanical side.

Anxiety concerning this lack of training for an area of science, which is still an essential component in research, has been expressed in an enquiry to museums from the Advisory Board of the Natural Environmental Research Council. The Museums Association and some individual museums, sent reports to the Board.

Meanwhile, it is hoped to discuss with the Open University the principle of their developing such a course. To meet the Open University's requirement of justifying a course in terms of numbers of students opting to incorporate it in their studies, it will be suggested that the same course might be used not only at undergraduate level, but also as a post-experience refresher or training course for staff in museums and universities, where taxonomic studies are being taken.

J. A. Bateman
National Museum of Wales.

Techniques - The following note has been received from Reg Harris concerning the stockists of 'Dowicil' mentioned on page 5 of his article in Newsletter 2:

I have contacted the Dow Chemical Company and they tell me of a recent move by Greef to a new address as follows -

K & K Greef Chemical Group Limited,
Suffolk House, George Street, Croydon.

Another point is that 'Seraquin' may be re-produced in the 8-hydroxy quinoline sulphate base if the firm can be sure that the possible corrosion problems can be overcome by suitable buffering. All this is simple and represents the usual changes made in the production of new reagents and I can help if anyone has any snags or points to iron out.

Reg Harris
British Museum (Natural
History).

FAUNAL REMAINS PROJECT

The Faunal Remains Project consists of two archaeozoologists; Jennie Coy (Research Fellow) and Niall Griffith (Junior Research Fellow). The project is financed by the Department of the Environment and is based at the Department of Archaeology in the University of Southampton. We started work here in January 1975 and collections and facilities are now housed opposite the University Bookshop at 63 University Road.

The aim is to study archaeological animal remains - mostly bones - from D.o.E.-aided excavations in Wessex. We are working with Jennifer Bourdillon who is studying the bones from Saxon Southampton (Hamwih) at the Southampton Archaeological Research Committee; and advising Gina Adams and Pauline Sheppard who are working on animal bones for the Winchester Research Unit (in addition studying all the Winchester Bird bones). We have also started work on a number of smaller sites (all M3 rescue material, Iron Age material from Barksbury, Owslesbury, Andover; Saxon material from Ramsbury).

We think that we have sent details of our project to all museums, archaeological societies and field officers in the area but if you have not received information and feel that you should be involved, please contact us at once.

In addition to our study of bones and shells, and in order to achieve this and provide some impetus to faunal studies in Wessex, we are also:

1. Building comparative collections of modern vertebrate skeletons, (British Mammals, Birds, Reptiles, Marine Fishes, Amphibians). We have now adequate facilities for preparation and shall continue with this. (We use a knackers yard for big animals as this would need a purpose-built laboratory). We are also making a collection of marine mollusc shells, initially in connection with an examination of the Saxon oysters from Southampton.
2. Gathering a comparative collection of identified archaeological material.
3. Maintaining edge-punched indices of
 - i. Methods and general archaeozoological literature.
 - ii. Archaeozoological information relevant to Wessex with copies of the most important papers to hand so that they are available for study by interested bone workers and archaeologists.
4. Building up a reference collection of 35mm transparencies of bones.

J. Coy
Southampton
University.