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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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EXTINCT, RARE, OR THREATENED BRITISH FRESHWATER FISHES IN MUSEUM COLLECTIONS.

The relationship of museums to the conservation of endangered species, or populations, is a potentially controversial topic and one liable to lead to misunderstanding amongst naturalists. Few conservationists (or museum workers) can look upon the series of eggs and skins of some nearly extinct bird without a distinct qualm of conscience concerning the role of museums in conservation. It is true, however, that even in the past, museum collecting policies have had little effect on the continued survival of any species. However, one positive role for museums is important. If conservation measures fail to preserve a species or population from extinction, museum specimens may then be the only material available for study. For this reason curators have a responsibility to the conservation and scientific communities for the care and safe preservation of extant material of such taxa.

Many threatened species are listed in the Red Data Book and are often well known, but endangered local populations are less likely to be noted. Our interest lies in collections of certain species of freshwater fishes from the British Isles which all fall into the category of extinct or endangered local populations and we propose to compile a list of museum holdings of such taxa, so that curators are aware of the value of their material and the amount of material available for research is known.

We appeal to curators to check their collections of fishes for any of the following species collected from localities in the British Isles, and to inform us of their holdings.

CHARR Salvelinus alpinus

(Synonyms include : Salvelinus (or Salmo) willughbii, S. lonsdalii, S. maxillaris, S. perisii, S. mallochii, S. killinensis, S. inframundus, S. struanensis, S. gracillinus, S. colii, S. grayii, S. travelyani, S. fimbriatus, S. scharffi, S. obtusus ; char).

WHITEFISHES Coregonus albula

(Synonyms include : Coregonus vandesius, C. gracilior, C. pollan, C. p. altior, C. p. elegans ; vendace or pollan).

Coregonus lavaretus

(Synonyms include : Coregonus clupeoides, C. c. stigmaticus, C. c. pennantii; powan, schelly, skelly, gwyniad).

Coregonus oxyrinchus

(Synonyms include : Coregonus oxyrhynchus ; houting).

ALLIS SHAD Alosa alosa

BURBOT. Lota lota

(Synonyms include : Gadus lota, Lota vulgaris).

STURGEON Acipenser sturio from any British Isles locality, marine and freshwater.

In addition to the above listed species, we also require information on museum holdings of representatives of the following local populations.

SMELT Osmerus eperlanus from Rostherne Mere, Cheshire.

TWAITE SHAD Alosa fallax from Lake Killarney (Lough Leane).

(Synonyms include: Alosa finta, Clupea finta, C. fallax ; goureen, lake herring.

The Killarney lakes population has been recognised as a sub-species and named

A. fallax killarnensis).

We wish to hear from curators with any of these fish in their collections, so that details of their specimens may be incorporated into the proposed register of museum holdings of rare, extinct or threatened fish species.

The following information is required : -

Species name

date of collection or incorporation

locality

number of specimens

method of preservation (e.g. wet, dry, skeletal preparation etc.) .

Information of a more general nature about the fish collections of British museums is also required e.g.

Approximate total number of fish specimens in collection.

What proportion of the collection is of British or North Atlantic material.

Details of any known type specimens.

Reply, please, to :

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or to : Geoffrey N. Swinney,

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