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Biology Curators Group

Title: Surveys of Museum Collections

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Source: Hancock, E. G. (1981). Surveys of Museum Collections. *Biology Curators Group, Vol 2 No 10*, 461 - 462.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/1624>

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ANNALS of CARNEGIE MUSEUM

CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

4400 FORBES AVENUE • PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA 15213

VOLUME 50

14 APRIL 1981

ARTICLE 3

COLLECTIONS OF RECENT MAMMALS OF THE WORLD, EXCLUSIVE OF CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

A survey of the Recent mammal collections outside of Canada and the United States revealed the existence of 321 collections with more than 50 specimens. These collections are located in 76 countries and hold 2,358,356 specimens. Fifty collections holding more than 10,000 specimens were located. These 50 collections hold 81.3% of the specimens of Recent mammals in collections outside of Canada and the United States.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, Choate and Genoways (1975) completed the fourth survey of the collections of Recent mammals in North America (Howell, 1923; Douthett et al., 1945; Anderson et al., 1963). These surveys have proven to be useful in locating specimen-based research resources and have documented the development of these resources. Because no survey has ever been made on a worldwide basis, we believed that it would be useful to attempt such a survey. Our main concern was to learn what and where are the specimen-based systematic resources of mammalogy around the world. Because of the very recent survey for Canada and the United States, we did not feel that it was necessary for us to include them in our work.

In order to assess the location and holdings of collections of mammals, we prepared the following questionnaire:

1. What is the formal name (if any), address, and standard abbreviation (if any) of your private or institutional collection?
2. What is the name and address of the person directly responsible for the collection?
3. Approximately how many specimens of Recent (not fossil) mammals were in the collection as of 1 January 1978?
4. How many holotypes are in the collection? Has a catalogue or list of those types been published? If so, please give citation.
5. What geographic areas are best represented in the collection?
6. What systematic groups are best represented in the collection?
7. Does the collection include specimens formerly included in other major private or institutional collections which have been merged with your collection? If so, please indicate the name of these collections.

Copies of the questionnaire were mailed to curators or directors of all known or suspected collections based upon our own experience and listings in such books as *Directory of the Natural Sciences Museums of the World* (Muzeeloor, 1971) and *Museums of the World* (1975). A total of 740 questionnaires was mailed and second questionnaires were sent when no reply was received within six months. We received 413 replies, indicating the existence of 321 collections of 50 or more mammals and 26 of fewer than 50 mammals

Surveys of museum collections seem to be the in-thing at the moment. The B.C.G. Report No. 1 (1980) like the above was based on questionnaire. The nature of questionnaires and the percentage of returns is an interesting subject in its own right. It is easy to pin-point the basic areas where the method falls down. Firstly, the questionnaire can never be sent to all the respondents who have information of relevance and, secondly, there is always a number of people who do not fill in the forms for various reasons. Possibly a socio-psychologist type of person may have studied the problem. What with this and the vagaries of postal systems and the normal lack of follow-up to check or verify the facts provided, the end results of surveys by questionnaire alone are often disappointing. As one of the editors of the BCG Report I am probably more conscious of this than most. The approach of the Collection Research Units as adopted in this country, that is based on personal visits by experts to all institutions, is obviously preferable and has been proved to be successful, but can only be achieved on a small geographical scale which is ideal for the subdivisions of the British Isles.

Here we have an admirable attempt to catalogue the collections of recent mammals in institutions outside North America.

On such a scale the questionnaire is probably the only method. Not being able to comment on other countries, I can only look at the British Isles to assess how valuable this list might be to the outside worker. There are some very noticeable gaps. Outside London the national museums are represented by Ulster and the Royal Scottish but not Cardiff. The provincials with significant collections which are unrepresented are Merseyside (who have type specimens also), Manchester, Exeter, Glasgow, Nottingham, Norwich, Colchester, etc. The University Museums of Oxford and Cambridge are conspicuous by their absence. There are more museums listed in the Republic of South Africa section than for England but can this be taken as a reflection of the true state of affairs? Did these places receive questionnaires but decide not to be bothered about filling them in and returning them to Pittsburg? Does it mean that this survey is of little value to the researcher? To answer the last question, probably not, as long as the user realises it is not exclusive. Those that responded to the survey obtained a free copy of the report, others may be able to obtain one from the Carnegie Museum but there is no indication of price or availability.

E. G. Hancock 1981

Handwriting

There has been justified criticism of the quality of reproduction of the examples given in the last issue (pp.426-7) and the editor is equally disappointed, not with the printing as such, but obviously the technique has not proved adequate. For those examples, the originals were xeroxed and merely pasted up for the Newsletter, which is produced by a multilith copying machine. It would seem that photographs of the originals reproduced by a different method and then perhaps have that page as an insert would be more satisfactory. This is being investigated, especially in light of the fact that it will be slightly more costly.

There is nothing that an improved method can do for poor originals, though, and many labels are in faded ink and light or coloured pencil. Please send in your views and opinions on this. The Museum Documentation Association are interested in being involved in recording handwriting examples for a central register but I am not sure how they would approach the problem.