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## Biology Curators Group

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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

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### 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.