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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

Title: Slender-Billed Curlew (*Numenius tenuirostris*)

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who dislikes the concept of thematic displays and is concerned that the creation of such exhibitions "precludes the visitors option to view selectively and his freedom to interpret facts for himself..." But few specimens have the magical property of radiating information unaided. Curators have a fundamental obligations to interpret their collections, and the selection of themes, the choice of specimens and the organization of information, are the techniques we use to fulfill this duty.

The fundamental question to be asked of the Hall of Human Biology is how effectively has it enhanced knowledge of human biology amongst its visitors? Many museum curators ask instead whether it should be there at all, whether displays should be didactic, whether the absence of bits of human body ('real specimens') lessens its value and so on. Even worse, one critic, P. S. Doughty, stooped to gratuitous rudeness when, in his review on "Britain Before Man" a display in a neighbouring national museum (Museums Journal 78.2) he made passing reference to the Hall of Human Biology as "a kind of lewd offal-shop nightmare".

The quality of much criticism ranged against this Exhibition has therefore been unhelpful at best. My own impressions have up to now been based on a rather brief visit, but they were gained in the company of my wife and two young children. It is their reaction, rather than Dr. Seddon's or Mr. Doughty's, that make me believe that the Hall of Human Biology deserves far more intelligent criticism from museum curators than it has received so far.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Locke
Director
Royal Albert Memorial Museum,
Exeter.

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SLENDER-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius tenuirostris*)

An attempt is being made to gather together all records of Slender-billed Curlew with the aims of assessing the apparently very small present population size, changes in status and the migration pattern. The information will be reported to the International Waterfowl Research Bureau and ICBP. In order to provide background information on past status and migration patterns we would like to include data

derived from museum collections.

Details required are date, place, sex and age (only if certainly correct). For example even 'Undated, Italy' would be helpful.

Please send any records to British Trust for Ornithology, Beech Grove, Tring, Herts.

A. J. Prater,
Dr. D. Scott

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DURHAM FLORA PROJECT

The production of a Durham Flora is the aim of this project which has now been in operation for 10 years, under the guidance of the B.S.B.I. County Recorder for Durham (V.C.66), Rev. Gordon Graham, and Sunderland Museum. The recording of species distribution on a tetrad basis is now virtually complete, and data are stored both manually and on computer, the latter enabling rapid searches to be made, and the production of distribution maps without error. A start is now being made on writing the Flora, but information would still be welcomed from anyone with Durham specimens in their herbarium. The historical component to the Flora will be of particular interest, and I would be pleased to have details of individual specimens (particularly where these have been examined by a recognised expert), or hear of the existence of major Durham collections - please do not assume that they are known to us. If the preparation of a list of specimens is impossible, a note of the existence of them would still prove useful.

Peter Davis
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FIELD STUDY COURSES ON REPTILES AT POOLE AQUARIUM

Courses formerly run by the Reptile Institute of Great Britain are now being organised by Poole Aquarium. Two weekend courses are planned for September, and three captive husbandry courses on reptiles for November. Anyone interested in attending these should