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R. D. Penhallurick, Royal Institution of Cornwall, County Museum
and Art Gallery, River Street, Truro.

E. G. Hancock
Bolton Museum

DECOMPOSITION OF THE NEW ECOLOGY GALLERY OF THE
BRITISH MUSEUM (NATURAL HISTORY) or (REAL LIVE ANIMALS
IN THE NEW BRITISH MUSEUM DISPLAYS)

On a recent visit (4. 4. 1979) to this new gallery, with which I generally
approve, I was interested to see that the small section devoted to
decomposers was very appropriately itself decomposing!

The unprotected "Letraset" labels were not unexpectedly being erased
by one type of animal Homo sapiens L. (larval form). However, much
more exciting was the end module of this section showing a dead rabbit
being currently decomposed by the Clothes Moth Tinea biselliella L.
(larval form). To be honest I was first struck by the skill of the
model maker at constructing such amazingly realistic insect droppings
and the wonderful lifelike setting of the adult moth when a wriggling
in the pile of frass gave the game away (or has the silicon chip struck
here as well as in the last interactive unit of the gallery).

Incidentally I thought that the role of detritus as a foodsource e.g.
for filter-feeders or as a primary energy source for some food chains
would have been made at other places in the gallery as well. Perhaps
its just a personal bias but after collecting marine life in the Mersey
Estuary one does tend to be impressed by the importance of detrital
particles - one way or another.

Ian Wallace
Merseyside County Museums
