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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

Title: Free copies of Linnean Society Synopses of British Fauna

Author(s): Not Listed.

Source: Not Listed. (1982). Free copies of Linnean Society Synopses of British Fauna. *Biology Curators Group Newsletter*, Vol 3 No 4, 211 - 212.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/1435>

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The Natural History Museum at South Kensington. A history of the British Museum (Natural History) 1753-1980. By William T. Stearn, 1981. Published by Heinemann in association with the British Museum (Natural History), £15.

The Natural History Museum has indeed been fortunate in having the services of Professor Stearn to write this authoritative history in celebration of its centenary in South Kensington. From a wealth of published and unpublished sources, memoranda and memories, he has knitted diverse strands together into a highly readable account of the development of the museum and its collections.

The framework of the book is essentially chronological, beginning with the Bloomsbury years (not apparent from the short title), and documenting the impressive growth in specimens and staff up to the present day.

"the entomological staff....has now risen to over ninety....sixteen persons work on Coleoptera..."

The passage of curators, their achievements and foibles, is detailed throughout in numerous, entwined biographies, which make compulsive and often entertaining reading, much in the manner of Sherborn's Where is the — collection? Stearn writes of J. E. Gray and Oldfield Thomas, "managed to live comfortably on Museum salaries and had money to spare by marrying wealthy women..."

There is much also in this book of relevance to other museums, not least in approaches to administrative practice, where inventive curators have independently found common solutions to common problems. Students of evolutionary convergence please note.

"..he saw bruised and broken specimens being collected in a basket for burial in the Museum garden..."

"..the Trustees gave him an attendant...who had had little education and no experience of mineralogy but he proved nevertheless very intellegent, diligent and quick to learn."

It is tempting to quote at length from this delightful work, which is both a source of reference and a pleasure to read in quiet moments. Better however that you discover them for yourself, and eagerly await, as I, a companion volume for the next one hundred years.

Tim Riley

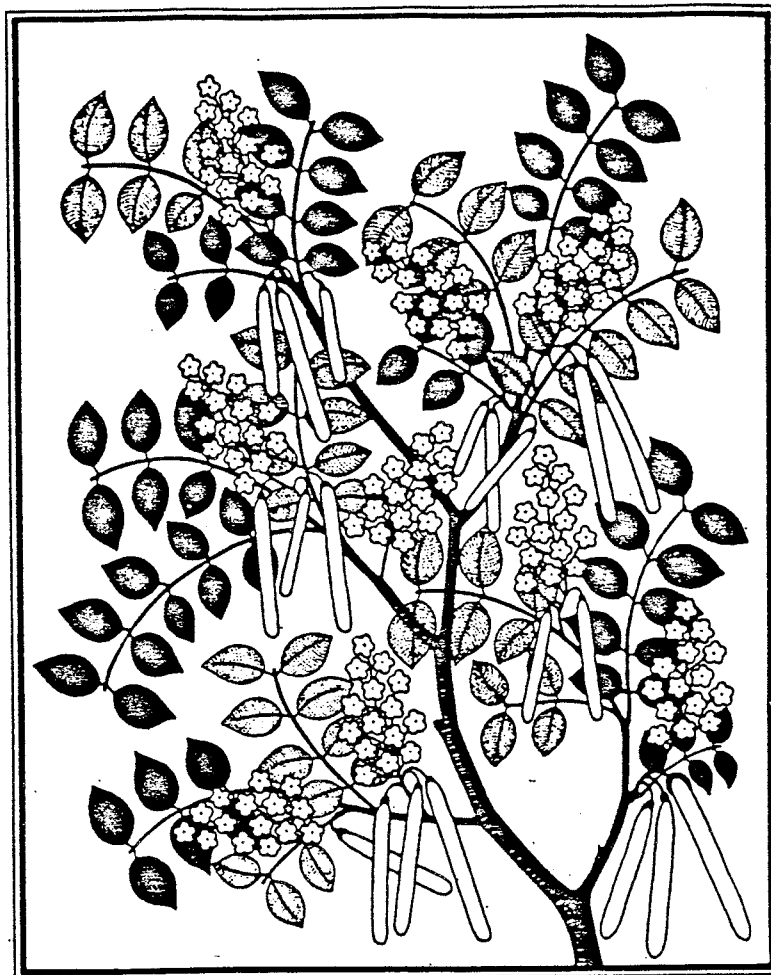
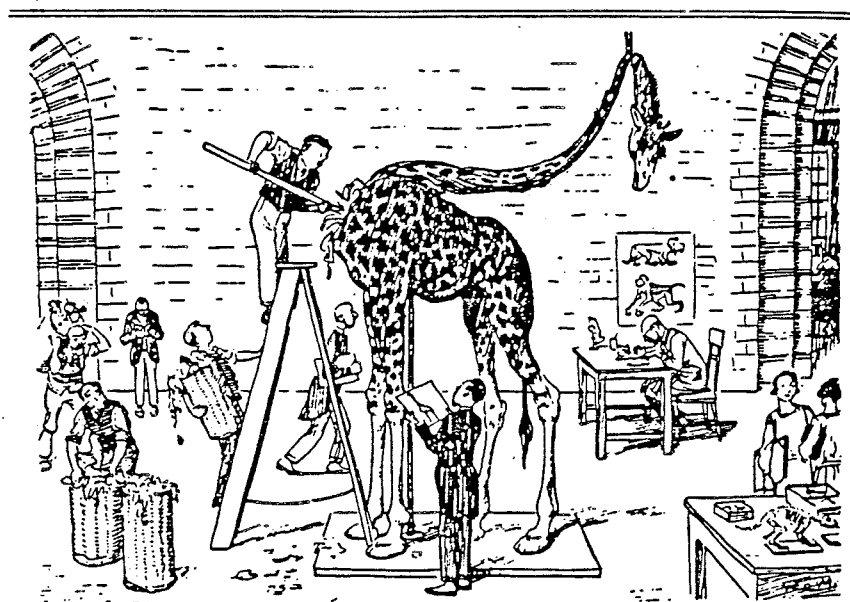


Fig. 28. Indian Laburnum, Golden-shower Senna or Purging Cassia, *Cassia fistula*, a beautiful tree of India, Burma and Sri Lanka, with yellow flowers and long pods with laxative properties, as portrayed on the panelled ceiling of the Museum's main hall.



LESSER-KNOWN SIGHTS OF LONDON.
IN THE GALLERY OF THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM. STUFFING A GIRAFFE.

Fig. 24. Stuffing a giraffe as imagined by a *Punch* artist (from *Punch*, 21 July 1926).