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The Harrison Zoological Museum

The Harrison Zoological Museum at Sevenoaks, Kent, was founded by James Maurice Harrison. He was born in 1892 and devoted his life to medicine and ornithology. His interest in ornithology began in his youth at Hastings, where he came to know George Bristow, the taxidermist, whose good name he was to defend so valiantly many years later. He began to amass the remarkable collection of systematic bird skins, later augmented by the efforts of his elder son, Jeffery Graham Harrison.

Jeffery took on early his father's interest in ornithology and also became a family doctor. He was a most distinguished ornithologist, specialising in wildfowl and conservation.

Jeffery, born in 1922, died suddenly and prematurely in 1978, aged 56, only seven years after his father, who had died in his eightieth year in December, 1971.

The present Director of the Museum, David Lakin Harrison, is James' second son, likewise a family doctor and devoted, since his youth, to systematic mammalogy, specialising in Arabian mammals and also in small mammals generally such as bats and rodents.

In April 1971 the Museum became a Trust and following Certification of its collections as being of National and International Scientific and Historical Importance, it was accorded Charitable status. The collections are now estimated to contain at least 30,000 bird specimens and more than 12,000 mammals. It is certainly one of the largest collections of its kind in this country and the mammal collection is currently listed amongst the fifteen largest in Europe. Recently a palaeontological collection has been added to the Museums mammal department.

The mounted bird collection contains many unique treasures including an extinct Passenger Pigeon and also many of the historical Kent and Sussex rarities, which formed the subject of the "Bristow Affair". It includes probably one of the most comprehensive collections of wildfowl and waders.

The Libraries contain many important reference books including Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae* and most of the important regional works on mammals and birds, as well as a very large reprint collection.

The purpose of the Museum is twofold. Firstly research; providing a service to the international scientific community, who are welcome to study the collections in furtherance of their own researches. Secondly, it is concerned with education, both with the training and encouragement of young scientists similarly interested in systematic zoology and in the wider sense of providing information on Natural History to the general public.

Our Assistant Curator, Paul Bates, who originally came to us from Tonbridge School Natural History Society, is now

undertaking a PhD thesis on the Zoogeography of Arabian and African mammals in pursuit of his own special interest.

During his lifetime Dr. Jeffery Harrison established a Wildfowl Reserve at Sevenoaks, which is an S.S.S.I., the history of which is reviewed separately here. It is now planned by the Trustees of the Harrison Zoological Museum and the Trustees of the Jeffery Harrison Memorial Trust to construct a Museum building on the Reserve, to display the mounted bird collections of the Museum. This will allow a greater public access to the collections than is at present possible and will form a unique educational facility for visitors interested in the bird life of the Reserve. It will also provide more desperately needed space at Bowerwood House for the rapidly expanding scientific collection and libraries. These treasures of interest only to specialists are now planned to remain permanently at Bowerwood House, situated so conveniently near Sevenoaks Station and the Main London Road.

Both the Museum and the Reserve have been honoured by visits from H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh.

David Harrison acts as Consultant Mammalogist to the Oman Government and the Museum has been visited recently by H.H. Prince Faisal bin Ali al Said, Minister of Culture and National Heritage in Oman. The Museum has been much concerned in recent years in the conservation of Oman's larger mammals especially the unique Arabian Tahr. The Oman Flora and Fauna Survey Expeditions to the Jebel Akhdar and Dhofar, undertaken for the Oman Government are an important example of the part a Natural History Museum can play in the fields of conservation, education and research.

We have always had a long and friendly association with the British Museum (Natural History) which is reflected in our own Board of Trustees. This association is one with which we are both proud and grateful and much of our research work would have been impossible without it. Our Type specimens of mammals have all been presented to the National Collection.

David L. Harrison