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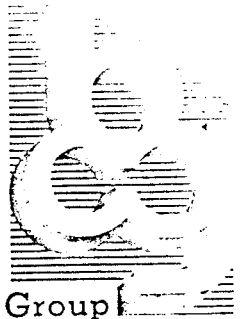
Author(s): Hancock, E. G.

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Bolton Museum and Art Gallery
Le Mans Crescent
Bolton BL1 1SA
England
Tel 0204 22311



Biology Curators' Group

The Editor,
Biology Curators' Group,
Sheffield City Museum,
Weston Park,
Sheffield.
S10 2TP

12 April 1983

Dear Sir,

Although at first I too was not sure if a serious answer was required to the question ("where is the type specimen of Homo sapiens Linn. 1758?") I suppose it deserves an answer. The problem divides into two parts.

Firstly, when Linnaeus described Homo sapiens the "Type Method" was not in existence. Whereas he is responsible for the binomial nomenclatural system it was another 150 years before a "Code" was established. Even then the type concept as we now know it was ill-defined. Before then taxonomy was dominated by the Aristotelian concept of types. Apart from the fact that "obvious" and "well-known" species did not have type specimens as such, the taxonomists considered that "typical" specimens were sufficient. This meant in turn that any examples conforming to the taxonomist's opinion of that species were types and they were frequently changed in collections for "better specimens" when they became available.

Secondly, given that there was never a "Type" (ie. holotype) for Homo sapiens what should be done about it? Here, the answer is an unequivocal nothing! The modern method when erecting species demands a type to go with the name. However, the Code is clear in stating that the manufacturing of neotypes simply for the sake of having a type for every species name is forbidden. Most of the older species of birds have no types, either. Only in the interest of stability of nomenclature need any action be taken, and in the case of ourselves this is clearly unnecessary.

Although it is now slightly dated I have always found Ernst Mayr's Principles of Systematic Zoology (1969) a useful source of information on general questions of nomenclature and procedure. Most useful is the section which translates into vernacular the legal language of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (1961). This latter has now been updated. In a future issue of BCG Newsletter it is hoped to publish a comprehensive article on the Type Method in Zoology by Robert Nash (Ulster) which will bring the story up-to-date by including the provisions of the new code.

Yours faithfully,

E. G. Hancock,
(Production Editor,
Bolton Museum).