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WHAT JOURNAL? II: BOTANY

by John Edmondson

Unlike the previous article on this topic, my comments on botanical journals can be neither objective nor unbiased. As a taxonomic botanist, I'm aware that many 'local' journals have difficulty in attracting the type of article which advances our knowledge of a group. This is odd, because many similar journals published in continental Europe have a much less parochial attitude to taxonomic articles. For a curator working in Britain, however, some of our journals are essential reading, and it is these which I will dwell upon.

There are a few journals whose subscriptions put them outside the reach of the average impoverished natural history department, but which may be found in a public library. Of these, only the extremely wealthy library is likely to be able to afford KEW RECORD (annually) and its sister publication INDEX KEWENSIS (five-yearly) which are the definitive source of literature references to articles in which new species or new combinations are published. Index Kewensis has only recently started to include information on infraspecific taxa, and covers seed-bearing plants only: conifers are included, ferns are not. A cheaper and more cheerful way of keeping up to date is to subscribe to the KEW CURRENT AWARENESS BULLETIN (monthly) which is a cyclostyled update of references extracted for the Kew Record.

Although pricey, TAXON is well worth an institutional subscription, as it confers membership of the International Association of Plant Taxonomists with a 50% discount on their publications (small ones free). As these include Stafleu & Cowan's Taxonomic Literature, handbooks such as Index Herbariorum, the quarterly Taxon is a welcome bonus. The News & Notes section, and the book reviews, are topical and amusing, and while the heavyweight sections are often a little too Numerical and/or Hennigian for my taste, the remaining parts keep one in touch with herbarium developments and even mention the occasional job.

Many relevant botanical journals are published by societies and are free to members, so it pays to join the body rather than to subscribe to the journal. The Botanical Society of the British Isles, membership of which ought to be compulsory for all museums with herbaria, publish WATSONIA approximately twice a year, as well as an interesting NEWSLETTER and a rather less compelling set of ABSTRACTS yearly. The newsletter, known as BSBI NEWS, appears roughly three times a year and is essential reading for alien-lovers. Watsonia contains the major scientific articles; some, regrettably, adopt a species concept which is so narrow as to make Linnaeus turn in his grave. Note that his Species Plantarum contains but ten species of Rubus - but then what is a species? Watsonia also gives a summary of new vice-county records, over which a controversy has recently re-erupted with some botanists arguing that the vice-county system is obsolete in these days of computerised square-bashing. Finally, the book reviews are essential reading for those of us who are striving to build up a comprehensive collection of local Floras.

No botanical curator can ever neglect the cryptogams without suffering periodic bouts of anxiety (usually coinciding with the arrival of a lichen or toadstool at the desk). In descending order of primitiveness, we have the FERN GAZETTE, published annually by the British Pteridological Society; the BRYOLOGICAL JOURNAL, from the British Bryological Society; the JOURNAL OF PHYCOLOGY (algology to the uninitiated), and TRANSACTIONS OF THE BRITISH MYCOLOGICAL SOCIETY, together with the LICHENOLOGIST which is published annually by the British Lichen Society. Which to take depends on one's interest, as well as the strengths of the collection one curates - it's hard to justify taking every one. My personal preference is for the Journal of Bryology, which comes with the BULLETIN of the B.B.S. (twice a year). Any curator with a consuming interest in lichens will find articles of interest

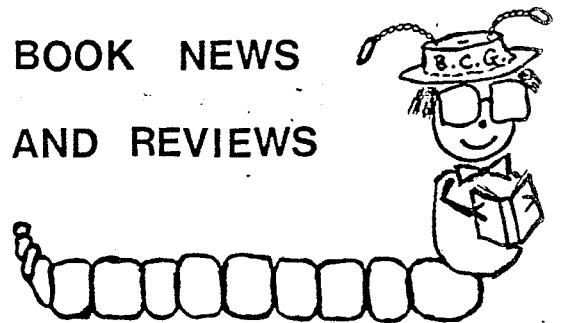
in The Lichenologist, while a subscription to SEaweEDS OF THE BRITISH ISLES (not strictly a journal, but published in parts at irregular intervals by the B.M.N.H.) will assist in the curation of a collection of marine algae.

Thankfully, seaweeds have escaped the clutches of the vice-county system. I wonder sometimes what the term 'vice-county' conveys to a non-biologist - misunderstandings might arise, as in the case of a book incautiously entitled "The Hookers of Kew" which attracted a number of orders from Adult bookshops in the United States.

Turning to journals with a regional bias, one finds that most cover natural history as a whole rather than just botany, and thus fall outside the scope of this article. The TRANSACTIONS OF THE BOTANICAL SOCIETY OF EDINBURGH, however, is strictly botanical though by no means confined to the region of Edinburgh. Its editors are fortunate, perhaps, that Scotland provides nearly half the land area of Great Britain and well above half its most interesting habitats; the Transactions are very broad-minded when publishing ecological or pollen-historical papers. Also worth looking out for is GLASRA, appearing annually from the National Botanic Garden at Glasnevin, Dublin, which is available on exchange and carries articles of interest to curators with significant Irish collections. (See also the IRISH NATURALISTS JOURNAL, and NATURE IN WALES.) Readers will be far more familiar than I on the characteristics of their local natural history or botany journal, so I propose to omit any further reference to these.

Lastly, we turn to the dregs. Chief among these is the X.X.X. N.....r (I dare not mention its name in full !) whose chief value is in lulling the reader to sleep. There are, it is alleged, still a few adherents to a W... F..... Society who as botanical "twitchers" pursue obscure Norse Mythological targets such as Valhalla. If I might end on a serious note, we are fortunate to have a wealth of botanical journals in Britain whose future increasingly depends on sustaining a viable print run. As curators, we can assist their survival by collectively ensuring that our institution's subscriptions are maintained.

BOOK NEWS AND REVIEWS



Geology in Museums: a bibliography and index
by Tom Sharpe
1983

National Museum of Wales, Cardiff; 128pp. Price £2.50 (£3.70 by post)

Over one thousand references relating to geology in museums have been listed by computer with the assistance of the Museums Documentation Association. A keyword index has also been produced which includes cross references to institutions, techniques and museological references. The characteristics associated with machine processing are evident. For example the "anon" papers appear between Messrs. Annenkova and Aprodov rather than at the front as is more traditional. This method has reduced costs to a very reasonable level but without loss of quality in production. The type face is clear and the whole is stitched in eight sections so should withstand average use. It would be worthwhile getting this book bound to last longer. It clearly has a place in every museum library and at its exceptionally reasonable price should be popular with individual curators, trainees and students of natural history in general.