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Sentence for youth who took museum rare eggs

A STUDENT who took a collection of rare birds' eggs worth "tens of thousands of pounds" from a Tyneside museum to start his own collection, was given six months' youth custody at Newcastle Crown Court today.

The court heard how Zafar Iqbal Mohammed, 17, of Condercum Road, Newcastle, took the eggs after a number of visits to the Hancock Museum in the city.

The court also heard that 16 osprey eggs had been broken.

Research

Mohammed pleaded guilty to removing articles from a place open to the public, and that on a day between August 8 and August 14 he removed 441 birds' eggs from a collection at the Hancock Museum.

Mr. Glen Gatland, prosecution, said the maximum sentence for his offence was five years' imprisonment. The difficulty in trying to value the eggs from the museum was that there was no legitimate market for the, he explained.

Valuation was difficult to determine because the eggs were of little intrinsic value, but the birds from which they came were either extinct or very rare.

The osprey eggs, he said were from a bird now protected, and 16 were taken. Had they been sold by a professional dealer they would have been worth tens of thousands of pounds.

They were often used for research pur-

Student took rare eggs

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poses at the Newcastle University, Mr. Gatland added

People came from all over the world to study the collection, at the Hancock Museum, and any person could go to the museum and ask to view them under supervision.

On June 20 Mohammed visited the museum and expressed interest in a red kite skin which was about to be stuffed and mounted.

Jammed

Mohammed then asked to view the osprey eggs, signed the visitors' book with a false name and address, and asked if he could return to photograph the eggs.

He visited the museum on three occasions before he took the eggs, Mr. Gatland said.

On that occasion, he had viewed the eggs under the supervision of a part-time porter who was called away to deal with a jammed vending machine.

Mr. Gatland said the prosecution could not say whether this distraction was the work of

an accomplice or whether it was fortuitous, but Mohammed took the eggs and left.

When the porter returned, 441 eggs had been taken from the cabinets, some of which had been locked.

Most of the eggs were recovered but none of the osprey eggs. They had been damaged.

Passion

Mohammed admitted forcing the lock on one cabinet and told police he took the eggs because he did not want to take them from nests and he wanted the best collection.

Mr. William Hannah, for Mohammed, said he was a young man of "impeccable background" and had never been in trouble before.

He had developed a passion for collecting birds' eggs and had been overcome by temptation and took the eggs to form a collection of his own.

Judge Oliver Wrightson told Mohammed he had committed a deliberate offence and that there had to be a custodial sentence.

Newcastle Evening Chronicle

9 December 1985.