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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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N.B. Other specimens will follow when full cataloguing has allowed us to assess the collections more fully. These will include:

British Macro Lepidoptera: data specimens from amalgamated reference series; most data specimens from A.H. Thompson; in store boxes.

British beetles: exceptionally interesting specimens only.

British Micro Lepidoptera: all data specimens.

British 'other insects': all data specimens.

Foreign hawk moths: small number of data specimens.

Insecta: Foreign, 40 drawers of assorted non-data foreign insects in a cabinet loaned to the Horniman Museum, Department of Natural History. Specimens to be used for display, educational work etc. and a small collection to be returned in presentable condition for use by our Educational Services.

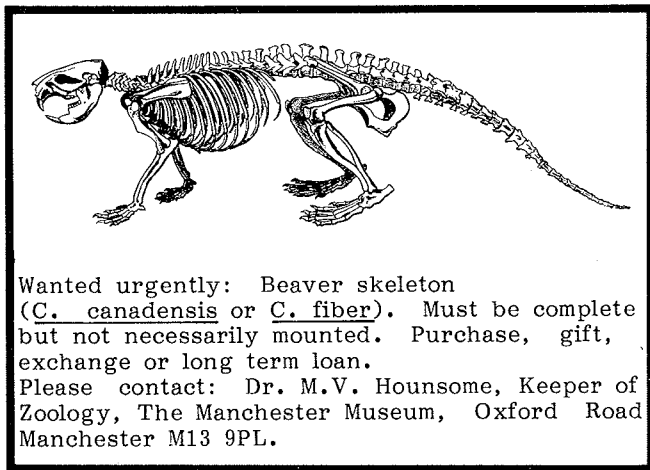
Mollusca: all data specimens (approximately 200), listed by Mrs N. MacMillan. 15 year loan to National Museums on Merseyside, Department of Invertebrate Zoology.

#### Vertebrates

Bird egg collections: all contained in five cabinets and several boxes. Main collectors: Webster, P.W., Elppick, G.B., Strefford, R., Broome, L., Dobie, W.H., Coward, T., Worthington. 15 year loan to Manchester Museum, Department of Zoology.

Mammal bones (cave material): 37 boxes from Cefn Caves, Prestatyn, North Wales. 15 year loan to National Museum of Wales, Department of Zoology.

F.J. Mackenzie  
Natural History Assistant  
Grosvenor Museum, Chester  
October 1986



Wanted urgently: Beaver skeleton (*C. canadensis* or *C. fiber*). Must be complete but not necessarily mounted. Purchase, gift, exchange or long term loan. Please contact: Dr. M.V. Hounsome, Keeper of Zoology, The Manchester Museum, Oxford Road Manchester M13 9PL.

## Letters

Further to the debate on the use of stuffed birds in displays, the following letter, sent by Richard Porter of the RSPB to Geoff Halfpenny at Stoke Museum, states the RSPB's position very clearly. The letter is reproduced with Mr. Porter's permission.

Dear Mr. Halfpenny,

As far as the RSPB's attitude towards the use of stuffed birds in exhibitions is concerned, I feel it would be helpful if I explained our current policy.

The RSPB has always given support to the ICBP recommendation that stuffed and mounted birds should not be used in any exhibition. This was unanimously adopted in 1968 at the ninth conference of the European Continental Section which stated:

"Recognising that the increased collecting of, and trading of, eggs and stuffed specimens for use in schools have now reached such proportions that they now constitute a menace to many species... recommends to Ministers of Education of European Countries that such teaching material should be discontinued and replaced by photographs, colour slides, films, tape recordings and other audio-visual aids presenting the birds in their natural setting, which corresponds more appropriately to modern educational methods".

In addition RSPB staff and anyone acting in the name of the Society, may not exhibit or show mounted (stuffed), specimens or eggs in any talk, exhibition or display. Furthermore, the use of preserved birds, study skins and parts of birds (eg. wings, feet, skeletons, feathers) and old nests may be permitted for use in talks and displays with discretion. Full consideration, however, should always be given to the use of alternatives, such as paper or polystyrene models. In any such exhibit, the specimens or parts must have been legally acquired and a note displayed stating their origin.

You will note that this policy applies to RSPB staff and those acting in the name of the RSPB. It does not, of course, apply to other organisations.

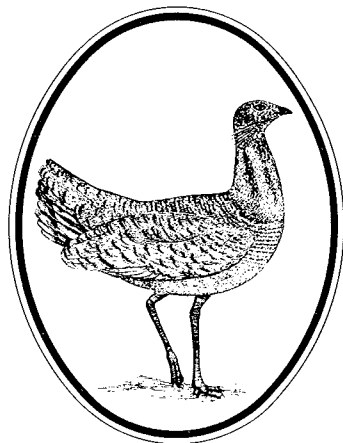
Clearly, the use of stuffed birds in exhibitions is a matter for individuals and others to decide upon for themselves. If anyone contacts us, we will inform them of our policy, but it would be presumptuous of us to insist, or even persuade them, to follow it. In addition we ensure they are informed of the laws governing the keeping and trading in stuffed birds; also that displays of stuffed birds can spark off an interest in the viewer which in turn might lead to an increase in demand for such specimens. This of course is impossible to quantify but a demand there

certainly is judging by the numbers of trading taxidermists. Most of these of course abide by the law but not all as demonstrated by the fact that in the last three or four years we have taken several prosecutions for taxidermy related offences.

Having said that, I fully accept that stuffed specimens clearly have an educational value and hence, of course, the reason the RSPB does not feel it can impose its own policies on others.

If you feel it would be helpful, then feel free to publish the relevant parts of this letter in one of your future newsletters, and of course if I have not made anything clear, please do not hesitate to come back to me.

Yours sincerely,  
Richard Porter  
Head of Species Protection  
RSPB



Wanted - historical information on Bustards (Otididae).

Dear Sir,  
The Great Bustard Trust was founded in 1970 with the aim of re-introducing these beautiful large game birds back into the British countryside after an absence of over one hundred and fifty years. Birds imported from Portugal and Hungary have been reared in an attempt to establish a breeding nucleus on Salisbury Plain, the project and immediate environment being protected within the confines of the Defence Establishment boundaries.

While the long-term scheme continues on a practical level, various aspects of the birds' history are being researched, especially the period prior to and during their decline and eventual extinction in Britain (around 1830). The Trust would, therefore, be very interested to learn of any data regarding Bustard specimens (skins, mounts, eggs, skeletons, etc..) of both indigenous and overseas species held in British museums. Also, to enable the historical record to be substantiated, it may be possible to tie in specimens with accounts in the county avifaunas, so references from these would also be of interest.

Information about the last Great Bustards (*Otis tarda*) in Britain is to be used to compile a record of the overall distribution and decline of the species; the data will be scanned for any patterns which may emerge. Information would also be welcomed regarding the other species which are known as sporadic migrants in Britain, namely, the Little Bustard (*Tetrax tetrax*) and the Houbara Bustard (*Chlamydotis undulata*). Again, avifaunas may hold references to sightings and 'shootings' in the 19th and 20th centuries.

All information will be greeted with great interest, and it is hoped that resulting data will contribute towards a display which the Trust intends to use to help generate interest in the species and its kin throughout the world, and to promote their conservation. Of the 23 species of Bustard, most are now considered 'endangered' on a world basis.

Expenses such as postage and photocopying will be refunded as necessary.

Yours sincerely,  
Mark Newman-Wren  
(Hon. Sec. Great Bustard Trust Ltd.)  
'Remap'  
Pentridge  
Nr. Salisbury  
Wilts. SP5 5QX

Dear John,

May I publicly thank all those who replied to my last query about sealing museum jars, which is now happily solved. I now have another problem to put to the combined wisdom of Biology Curators, so successful was this means of enquiry.

We wish to remount spirit specimens for display, putting them in phenoxytol with a view to preserving what colour remains, and even regaining some which has been lost in the past. Past preserving media include both ethanol and formalin. The problem is that we wish to include a display label inside the jar on the mounting board. In the past we have used tissue stuck with gelatin, but now are experimenting with both Letraset and letters produced on a Graphix machine (which cuts out letters to order from plastic sheet). For the mounting board, we prefer to use either Perspex or a newer, cheaper substance called Foamex rather than glass, simply because they are easier and safer to drill holes in for mounting the specimen. Unfortunately, in phenoxytol on Perspex or Foamex neither Letraset, nor Graphix letters nor tissue will stick for long using its regular adhesive. It now also appears that even in previous media, tissue and gelatin are not permanently fixed if the mounting board is Perspex or Foamex.

Do we have to go back to alcohol, tissue/gelatin and glass, or has anyone else got a better method of producing clear, reasonably