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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

Title: Collections: Vanishing herds - large mammals in museum collections?

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Source: Norris, A. (1987). Collections: Vanishing herds - large mammals in museum collections?.
Biology Curators Group Newsletter, Vol 4 No 8, 148 - 149.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/1173>

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Collections

Vanishing herds

- large mammals in museum collections?

Many museums over the past decade or so have destroyed their large mammals for various reasons. The problems of storage, past neglect and the costs of cleaning and restoration are often cited as being major factors. The modern museum philosophy of only displaying local material has also added to the toll. Important historic material has been lost, and much more will be lost in the future, if care is not taken to research and document these irreplaceable specimens.

Several years ago I was asked, by the then director of Leeds City Museum, to make out a case for the retention in the collections of several large mammals held in one of our out-stores. The store, part of a large house in a park, was in need of renovation, and a full maintaining lease had been agreed with the tenants who would take over the entire house, as and when the stores could be cleared.

The museum's collection of large animals had been acquired over its 160-odd years of existence. Some specimens, such as the Giant Panda and the magnificent Bengal Tiger, had always been on display to the public, but others such as the Polar Bear, Hippopotamus, Wild Boar and the American Bison had not been on display for many years. The collection had been examined, without my knowledge, and the subsequent report stated that the mammals could no longer be used for display, and therefore should be disposed of, or destroyed. The documentation relating to these large specimens proved almost non-existent. At best, all we had in the way of information was the donor's name, in some cases even this was unavailable without considerable research. Fortunately, I was able to justify the retention of the animals through our involvement with the World Wildlife Fund who regularly borrowed them for promotional displays.

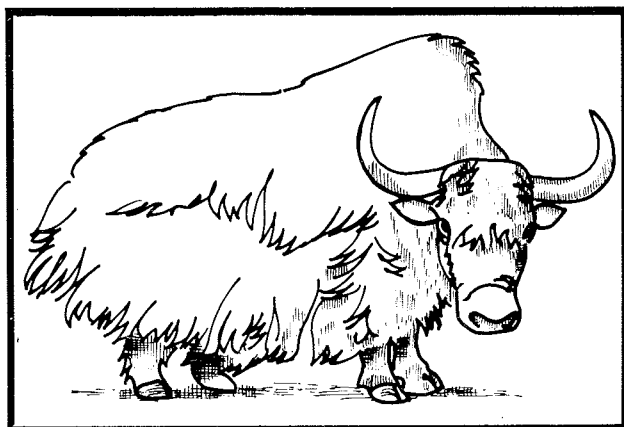
This justification exercise, although unpleasant at the time, did highlight the lack of good documentation. Without the aid of the local branch of the World Wildlife Fund, it would have been very difficult to persuade the Director to retain the animals. Over the last few years, therefore, I have spent a considerable amount of time trying to bring the documentation up to an acceptable standard, so as to avoid this problem in the future. I also realised that I would not be able to justify any expenditure from our limited resources for the much-needed cleaning and repair of the animals without this documentation. Many of the animals, such as the Hippopotamus, Gorilla and Giant Panda proved fairly easy to research with the help of the Zoological Society of London. In some cases, the Tiger for example, my research led to the person who shot the

animal - in this case, Major-General Sir Charles Reid, G.C.B. of H.M. 2nd Goorkhas (Gurkhas), (Sirmoor Rifles), who distinguished himself and his regiment at the siege of Delhi in 1857.

Some animals proved almost impossible to research, however, including a large mounted specimen of a Yak (*Bos grunniens*). The only documentation we had relating to this animal was found in the accession register for 1862/3, 'Capt. Edmund Smyth, Bengal; very fine specimen of the Yak; and male and female Argali, from India', and a file card which read 'Great Indian Yak E. Smyth'. This limited information seemed hardly enough to justify a great deal of expenditure on cleaning and restoration. The long-term future of the Yak, therefore, seemed to be in doubt.

The full information relating to this animal did, however, turn up by sheer chance, over 120 years after its acquisition by the museum. The author Charles Allen was researching a book on early explorers and pioneers in the Himalayas, when he came across a reference in a private diary to a Yak having been shot by Edmund Smyth and Robert Drummond which was subsequently presented to Leeds Museum. His interest in the preservation of the Yak in the Leeds Museum was limited mainly to curiosity, as the presence or absence of the animal made little difference to his book. We were fortunate, therefore, to receive a letter from him asking if the animal was indeed given to the museum. With Charles Allen's help we were thus able fully to document the animal. The following details give a short account of the information we uncovered.

Capt. Edmund Smyth (1823-1911) immortalised as Crab Jones in 'Tom Brown's Schooldays', was the first European to go mountaineering in the Himalayas. A pioneer of hunting and mountaineering trips into the Garhwal Himalayas over 20 years, he made many such journeys into that region, as well as into Tibet, and in 1862 he led a party to the sources of the Tsangpo-Brahmaputra. Capt. Smyth was considered to be something of an eccentric who never bothered to publicise any of his activities, and as a result much of his life's work was ignored. The Yak itself is referred to in Maj. Gen. D. MacIntyre's book 'Hindu Koh: Wanderings and



Wild Sports on and beyond the Himalayas', published in 1889. The Yak would seem to be the first wild Yak to have been brought into Europe, and it is now understandable why no details of its place of origin were given. Capt. Smyth was employed by the government as an Education Officer, and his friend and fellow hunter was another government officer, The Hon. Robert Drummond, a younger son of the Eighth Viscount Strathallan. The hunting expeditions undertaken by Smyth and Drummond were in direct defiance of a government ban on entering Tibet. It was particularly important to Robert Drummond that these illicit trips into Tibet were kept a secret as his elder brother happened to be the Lieutenant-Governor of the newly-formed North-Western Province. The Yak which came to Leeds was shot on the shores of the sacred lake of Manasarover in Tibet in 1860, violating not only British and Indian laws but also the Tibetan religion in one of its most sacred shrines. It is little wonder that their activities did not emerge for many years.

This information on Edmund Smyth, and his hunting trips to Tibet, could not have been traced through normal sources as Smyth himself never wrote an account of his activities. Without the chance find of the reference in Drummond's diaries none of this information might ever have come to light.

It proved to me once again that it is never safe to assume that a specimen has no data and, therefore, can be disposed of. It is only safe to dispose of material when it is fully documented, and the documentation is of limited value or the specimen is of no use. The Yak, along with the Tiger, Bison and Giant Panda has now been fully restored and placed on permanent display at the Leeds City Museum.

Adrian Norris, Leeds City Museum

Microcomputer help with library cataloguing

Abstract

A system using a Sirius microcomputer to produce index cards for easier book cataloguing is described. This has proved to be of considerable help in our herbarium library which as a result has become more accessible by our students and staff.

Introduction

Some years ago our herbarium library was presented with a valuable collection of botanical books by the executors of Norman Douglas Simpson (1890-1974), late of Bournemouth. Many of the books were old, rare and of considerable value to systematists, and it was of importance to catalogue the collection professionally (as well as the rest of the fast growing library). Information on pre 1800 books was required for the British Library's Short Title Catalogue. We were extremely fortunate in gaining the part-time services of a highly

skilled cataloguer, Mrs Clare McWilliam, on a voluntary basis. Catalogue cards were made at first by the main University Library Cataloguing Department, using an old mechanical duplicating machine, and a set sent to our herbarium library, as well as one for the main University Library catalogue.

This system failed when the machine broke down and increased pressure on a reduced staff prevented further collaboration, the University library now using its own computer system. Some cards were then typed onto index cards by our own departmental secretary, but this was a particularly tedious and repetitive job, and progress was lamentably slow. It seemed the job was one which could be assisted by the use of a microcomputer and an investigation was carried out into the feasibility of this with the help of Mr G P Ibbett, an undergraduate in the Department of Computer Science. A program was written by him, subsequently modified by one of us (DJF), to produce catalogue cards on our Sirius* microcomputer.

Requirements

Often a book has more than one author, and two, three or even more cards are required for these 'additional authors' for the author catalogue. Often they are produced by duplicating a standard card and typing the additional author's name along the top as a heading. Similarly the title, series, periodical (as appropriate) and subjects can also be added as headings for title, series, periodical and subject catalogues. Our library also uses a second title card for a shelf index, used when checking and ordering the library; other libraries use another first author card. All cards need the same basic information: location in library, author(s), title, imprint, collation, series/periodical and notes (e.g. "Bequest of ...", "p.6-10 missing", "Copy annotated by ...", "Preface by ...", "Illustrations by ...", etc). It is also necessary to add 'tracings' on the back of the shelf card (or another as decided for the library) to indicate the cards used for each book in the catalogue. Should the book be removed from the library all the cards can then be removed from the various drawers in the catalogue.

The herbarium data processing room has a Sirius microcomputer with a daisy-wheel printer, relatively slow, but producing good quality copy, ideal for the implementing of such a system.

It was decided that data would not be stored, so after printing out the memory is automatically cleared. The system required was simply catalogue card production. Our microcomputer has numerous other herbarium jobs to perform (specimen label production, seed allocation and dispatch from our annual Index Seminum, for example) and therefore would not always be available for immediate access to library users for book catalogue use, a requisite of all library catalogues.

*SIRIUS is a trademark of Sirius Systems Technology, Inc.