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29th and 30th September 1988

Society for the History of Natural History meeting at the Department of Geology, University of Bristol
The History of Geology
Contact: Peter Crowther, City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Queen's Road, Bristol BS8 1RL

12th to 16th December 1988

Systematics Association
Databases in Systematics (training course) at Southampton University
Contact: Dr S Hollis, Department of Biology, Building 44, The University, Southampton SO9 5NH

CONSERVATION OF NATURAL HISTORY SPECIMENS

A one day course on Thursday 12th May 1988 in the Williamson Building, Oxford Road, Manchester.

Natural history collections have suffered considerable damage over the past few decades. Much has been destroyed, by neglect and by deliberate action. Only recently have concerted measures of care for these collections been attempted - but what should one do? There is little basic knowledge available about the deterioration and conservation of these specimens.

The course aims to fill some of the gaps about the treatment of vertebrate material, skin and bone, by drawing together present knowledge and practice. The lectures are aimed at those who must undertake the physical care of historic vertebrate material, particularly zoologists and conservators, but also others who have responsibility for this care in the absence of anyone better. In this field, where much of the experience has not been committed to paper, course members will both learn and contribute to the knowledge.

Participants will receive texts of the lectures (and so avoid taking notes), and bibliographies. A video recording of the demonstrations will be available for purchase. A sandwich lunch, coffee and tea will be provided.

The course is run jointly by the Department of Environmental Biology and The Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester.

Fee is £25; reduced fee (£12) for voluntary, low paid staff and students. If you wish to reserve a place, send details of your name, address, position and daytime telephone number to Dr G. Murphy, Department of Environmental Biology, The University, Manchester M13 9PL.

Cheques should be made payable to the 'University of Manchester' and sent by 15th April to Dr G. Murphy (address above). If an invoice is required, please state to whom it should be sent.

THE MANCHESTER MUSEUM

PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME

9.30 Coffee and Registration

10.00 - 10.15 Welcome by the Director of Manchester Museum*

10.15 - 11.15 Structure and properties of skin and bone. Dr J.H. Kennaugh⁺, Senior lecturer in Parasitology and Histology

11.15 - 12.00 Preparation of bird study skins (demonstration). Ms L.A. Lace⁺, MSc, Researcher

12.00 - 12.30 Methods of bone preparation. Dr M.V. Hounsome*, Keeper of Zoology

12.30 - 1.30 Buffet Lunch

1.30 - 2.15 Damage to skin and bones. Mr C.V. Horie*, Keeper of Conservation and Assistant Co-ordinator of the Natural History working group of ICOM Conservation Committee

2.15 - 2.45 Pests, pesticides and specimens. Dr R.R. Askew⁺, Reader in Entomology

2.45 - 3.15 Treatments for deteriorated specimens. Mr C.V. Horie*

3.15 - 4.15 Cleaning fur (Demonstration) Mr R. Garner*, Conservation technician

4.15 - 4.45 Display and curation of specimens. Ms S. Cross, Natural Sciences curator/interpreter

4.45 - 5.00 Treatment of specimens for present and future use. Dr M.V. Hounsome*

5.30 Close

+ From the Department of Environmental Biology, University of Manchester

* From the Manchester Museum, University of Manchester.

In the Press

A short paper in WATSONIA by D.E. Allen (Vol 16 part 4) gives a review of British plant material represented in the United States National Herbarium (at the Smithsonian). Particularly noted are 10,000 specimens in the S.T. Jermyn collection mainly from vice counties 18 and 19; also Rubus specimens via J.G. Baker from vc's 9, 11, 40, 55, 18, 38, 57, not all of which are identified; smaller accumulations are listed from vc's 65, 66, 6 and 34. Collectors names are given in more detail, for these refer to the article.

CURATOR volume 29 part 4 has a paper by Sara Kerr on an exhibition called 'Animal Senses' which relies very heavily on visitor participation in getting across its three objectives: increasing understanding of sensory physics; learning how specific animals might perceive the world; learning that there are more than five senses. The planning behind the exhibit, the experience of the exhibit itself, and the evaluation of its effectiveness in achieving its objectives are all discussed in detail. It contains some innovative display techniques - such as a wall of liquid crystals where visitors make heat pictures of their hands to give an impression of how a rattlesnake 'sees' infra-red radiation. The whole emphasis is on participation so the visitor can 'become' an animal to experience a particular form of sensory perception. The article is called 'Effective Interactions in a Natural Science Exhibit'; the exhibition is at the Witte Museum, San Antonio, Texas.

Another useful paper in CURATOR, volume 30 part 3, is concerned with distinguishing formalin from alcohol solutions. It describes the development of an inexpensive paper test strip based on the sodium sulphite quantitative analysis method for formaldehyde solutions. The test strip will distinguish between formalin-based fixative solutions and alcohol solutions containing traces of residual formalin; it is fast-acting and there is the possibility of developing it into a semiquantitative test. The paper is 'A Spot Test to Distinguish Formalin from Alcohol Solutions' by D.E. McAllister and R. Waller.

The GETTY CONSERVATION INSTITUTE NEWSLETTER for Winter 1988 (Volume 3 no 1) has an interesting article on the potential of Vikane (Sulphuryl fluoride) as a fumigant for general museum use. The effect of the fumigant on a range of materials is being examined. Initial results show that there is a reaction between fumigant and substrate but it may prove to fall within acceptable limits; relative humidity seems to be an influencing factor. Further tests will examine the highest concentrations of Vikane tolerable for museum objects, and the lowest concentrations of fumigant needed to eliminate adults, larvae and eggs of beetle (unspecified) pests. Vikane is marketed by Dow Chemical; the testing on beetles is being done at the University of Florida.

Issue no 56 of NATUROPA deals with the vexed issue of farming and wildlife and will be of interest to members concerned with the nature conservation movement. Several pieces contain facts and figures relating to habitat destruction by farming since the war; a useful reference for exhibition texts.

PALAEONTOLOGY for February 1988 (Vol 31 part 1) contains a brief article by Peter Bengtson on 'Open Nomenclature'. I suspect this concept is much more widely used in geological than biological taxonomic research, but the paper suggests the standardisation of the syntax used to denote the affinity of one undescribed taxon to another named one, provisional identification and the lack of any identification at all. Thus the abbreviations aff., cf., sp. (or spp.), n.sp. (or n.ssp.) are given standard definitions. This is meant to be a discussion paper and members may wish to comment to the author (see the journal for details).

Floater's have troubled me for some years. These are the grey, almost translucent blobs which float across my field of vision when I look down a microscope. I must confess they give me odd moments of anxiety when I notice them and imagine I have got detached retinas or something similar, so I was relieved to see a note by R Winsby in the BRITISH ARACHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER no 50 (November 1987) explaining their origins. Called 'muscae volitantes' they are the last remains of the blood vessels which feed blood to the front part of the eye in the developing embryo. The vessels atrophy naturally and at birth the few remaining remnants fall to the bottom of the eye where they remain in the vitreous humour. Tilting the head to peer down a microscope stirs the bits up and, especially against a white field of view, they become momentarily visible as slowly moving blurs. But it's all normal so there's no need to worry!

AES BULLETIN for February 1988 (no 358) has a short note from Ian Mascall 'Sad State of Local Museum' which is highly critical of the entomological displays in a local museum (Cleveland area). This follows an earlier critical piece 'Concerning Museums and Collections' from the February 1986 issue. Adam Wright and myself replied to the first article on behalf of BCG and opened up the discussion somewhat to include many aspects of curatorial work other than display, and to describe the work of BCG and the local Collections Research Units. However, it becomes increasingly difficult to respond to specific criticisms which, judging from the description in the note, appear quite justified. It is a pity that committed naturalists feel the need to complain about museum displays and services - after all these are the people we should be working with and for whom we provide our services. Perhaps the curator involved could reply personally this time!

The MEMOIRS OF THE QUEENSLAND MUSEUM (Vol 25 part 1) for October 1987 contains a list of the bird type specimens held in the Queensland Museum. 122 taxa are included, most resulting from the work of Charles Walter de Vis who described 107 new forms between 1880 and 1905. Most were collected in Queensland by Kendall Broadbent or in British New Guinea on behalf of Sir William MacGregor. The paper is 'Asian Type Specimens in the Queensland Museum' by Glen J Ingram.

CHEMICALS IN CONSERVATION: A GUIDE TO POSSIBLE HAZARDS AND SAFE USE

by Amanda Clydesdale (published by the Scottish Society for Conservation and Restoration) is now available in a Second Edition.

This has an additional 95 entries; 126 of the original entries have additional information; the introduction and glossary have been expanded and the bibliography enlarged and updated. Nearly 300 chemicals and commercial products are now listed with details of their properties, fire hazards, toxicity, safe methods of use and first aid instructions. The cost is £19.00 complete with ring binder (or £15 if you already have the binder) from Fiona Butterfield, 100 Holeburn Road, Newlands, Glasgow G43 2XN.

A note from Geoff Stansfield:

COMMUNICATING SCIENCE TO THE PUBLIC, Ciba Foundation Conference, 1987 (John Wiley and Sons) has chapters by R S Miles on 'Museums and the communication of science'; by S Duensing on 'Science centres and exploratories: a look at active participation'; and by B Serrell on 'Science education through graphics at zoos'. BCG members may find these of interest.

The following new books are now in the Leicester University Library:

Zucher, B F CHILDREN'S MUSEUMS, ZOOS, AND DISCOVERY ROOMS. Greenwood Press, Westport Connecticut, USA 1987. Contains 235 institutional profiles of children's museums, children's zoos and discovery rooms from Australia to Zimbabwe. Extensive bibliography.

Howie, F., SAFETY IN MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES. Butterworths, 1987.

REPORT OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM (NATURAL HISTORY) 1984-1986. British Museum (Natural History), London, 1987.

Local Authorities and Nature Conservation

In early 1986 the British Association of Nature Conservationists issued a report about the ways in which Local Authorities can further conservation. Now, in conjunction with the Working Panel of Local Authority Ecologists, it has set up a project entitled 'Local Authorities and Nature Conservation'. Important new initiatives include a Newsletter; developing an interest in nature conservation amongst elected councillors; preparation for the launch of the new Department of Environment circular on Nature Conservation; and an award scheme for Local Authorities.

Many museum-based naturalists are involved with the provision of ecological information to councillors and other Local Authority Departments through the activities of the local Biological Records Centres, so this new initiative seems worth further investigation. Contact: Richard Knightbridge, telephone (daytime) 0543 258868.

Thanks to 'Habitat' (vol 23 no 8) for this report.

Subscription rates are £6.00 for individual membership and £10.00 for institutional membership. Contact Adam Wright, Herbert Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry, for application forms.

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