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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Author(s): Whiteley, D.

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made with PVA or glycerine jelly, on the other hand, cannot be successfully demounted. Personally, I plan to check my collections every 50 years or so to see if any specimens require remounting.

Vernon E. Thatcher  
INPA, Manaus, AM, Brazil

Many thanks to Prof. Dr. H. Kurt Schminke of Oldenburg University in West Germany, editor of MONOCULUS, for permission to reproduce these articles, and to Peter Davis for suggesting we reprint them.

#### Pest control

[Martin Linnie (Dept of Zoology, Trinity College, Dublin) has sent us a copy of his paper Pest Control, A Survey of Natural History Museums in Great Britain and Ireland (INT J OF MUSEUM MANAGEMENT AND CURATORSHIP (1987), 6, 277-290)

One hundred and eight natural history museums took part in the survey, and this paper looks carefully at the results. Types of pests, damage, source of infestation, pest control strategies, effects of pesticides on specimens and health and safety aspects are discussed. A summary of Martyn's major findings are listed below:

- 1 The majority of museums surveyed have uncontrolled temperature and relative humidity levels, particularly in storage and display areas.
- 2 Virtually all museums (96 per cent) have experienced some form of pest infestation.
- 3 Members of the Coleoptera and Lepidoptera were the most frequently recorded pests, while the Dermestidae (hide, bacon and carpet beetles) caused the most damage and posed the greatest threat to collections.
- 4 Integration of material into established collections was the most frequent source of pest entry recorded, and accounted for 38 per cent of reported infestations; yet only 17 per cent of respondents routinely fumigate or treat incoming material before integration.
- 5 Pesticides are used to control or deter pests in 96 per cent of the museums surveyed, and naphthalene, PDB and 'vaponal' are the most widely used substances.
- 6 Some form of adverse effect on specimens or museum materials related to pesticide usage was noted by 29 per cent of respondents.
- 7 A range of medical ailments occurring at work were linked with the use of chemical substances used for pest control by 32 per cent of those surveyed, and were most frequently associated with exposure to naphthalene, p-dichlorobenzene and 'vaponal'-type products.
- 8 Comparisons with the survey of American museums and related institutions (Bell and Stanley, 1980) show similar trends despite obvious differences in geographical and climatic conditions.

Both surveys show the Dermestidae to be the most serious pest in natural history museums, and the integration of material as the main cause of infestations. However, while the top three substances used to protect collections are the same in each survey, naphthalene, the most widely used substance in the British Isles (62 per cent), is used by only 27 per cent of respondents to the United States survey. Just over half of the American institutions routinely fumigate or treat incoming material, compared to only 17 per cent in the British Isles, while adverse effects noticed on materials and specimens were similar in both surveys.

If anyone has difficulty obtaining a copy, please send 50p in stamps to:

BCG Secretary  
Derek Whiteley  
City Museum  
Sheffield S10 2TP

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## Exhibitions

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First Impressions - whose impressions?

First Impressions: The British Discovery of Australia is hailed as a centrepiece of the bicentennial celebrations. The exhibition contains many fine drawings and paintings from the explorers and naturalists who visited Australia 200 years ago. It also recounts the history of the times using a variety of maps, portraits and videos.

Although excellently and interestingly produced this exhibition is disappointing in one major respect: it is too pretty. The chosen title means there is no need to discuss the Aborigine question. As the defaced posters on the Underground remind us, this year is no celebration for them. Perhaps more sadly, given the exhibition title, is the lack of information on the convicts. Museums have often been criticised for presenting a non-controversial and rose-coloured view of the past, a situation which is thankfully changing. However this exhibition includes only the work of the 'great men' and artists and ignores the experiences of the ordinary people. If naturalists want to encourage interdisciplinary work, like First Impressions, we must strive to present an honest picture. If not, historians are surely justified in assuming such exhibitions are best left to them.

First Impressions: The British Discovery of Australia is a temporary exhibition at the British Museum (Natural History) until 20th March. It then travels to Australia to tour for 16 months.

Jane Pickering (student)  
Department of Museum Studies  
University of Leicester