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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

Title: Techniques: Kless, J. (1986): "Ein neues Verfahren zum Aufweichen unpräparierter Käfer"

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Source: Lott, D. (1989). Techniques: Kless, J. (1986): "Ein neues Verfahren zum Aufweichen unpräparierter Käfer". *Biology Curators Group Newsletter, Vol 5 No 1, 8.*

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/869>

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Scientific and Industrial Research, Auckland, New Zealand. BCG has not yet received a review copy but should do shortly.

DIPTERISTS DIGEST - A NEW JOURNAL ABOUT FLIES

DD is a new journal for diptera enthusiasts with interests in the recording, ecology, distribution and natural history of British and N W European flies. It will be of particular interest to museum biologists as new taxonomic keys, county and regional accounts, national distribution maps, new techniques and nomenclature changes will be regular features.

For example, the first issue includes an extensive review of French and N W European hoverflies with special reference and keys to those likely to occur in Britain (M C D Speight) plus a number of regional articles - examples are Buckinghamshire, Coventry and Merseyside. It has 48 pages and is A5 in size.

Future editions will include new and updated national distribution maps and reviews of museum collections.

Dipterists Digest is an independently produced journal.

Issue No 1 costs £3.
Advanced subscription to No 2 £2.50
(£3 Institutions)
Advanced subscription to Nos 2 and 3 £5
(£6 Institutions)

Note: Individual members of BCG can sample Issue No 1 for £2.50 post free.

Cheques payable to D Whiteley please.

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Techniques

Kless, J. (1986): "Ein neues Verfahren zum Aufweichen unpräparierter Käfer" in Ent. Blätter, 82, pp 120-121 (kleine Mitteilung 2051)

A method is described for relaxing unsoftened beetles, either completely dry or from formalin, in cases where the normal relaxation techniques prove ineffective. The specimen is placed in a solution of pepsin (1g per 100ml water) activated with 1ml concentrated hydrochloric acid, which destroys the muscular protein without damaging the chitinous exoskeleton.

Small species become relaxed after three or four days submersion, whilst large species can take up to 14 days. No deterioration in colours is reported and soft bodied species have been successfully treated. Even submersion for 10 months does not harm specimens. An added bonus is that specimens emerge from the solution thoroughly cleaned. No mention is made of the effect on pubescence.

Derek Lott

CONSERVATION INFORMATION NETWORK

The Conservation Information Network is a new international service offering conservation information. It is a database containing: abstracts of virtually all conservation literature published (with well over 100,000 citations); information on materials used in conservation including adhesives, consolidants, coatings and pesticides; information on suppliers and manufacturers of conservation materials and equipment.

Access to the system can be direct by subscription or indirect via The Conservation Unit and MGC. Subscription is not very expensive: £30 covers registration and operating manuals and £10 buys the communications software; thereafter access time costs about £30 an hour but communication is fairly rapid. Subscribers need a computer - IBM, IBM compatible or Apple Macintosh or ASCII terminal and a modem link to the telephone network. Alternatively, search requests can be directed to The Conservation Unit and the charge will be for Network usage time only. For subscribers a Support Service is available run by The Conservation Unit and MDA.

Another benefit of the service is an electronic mailing system - ENVOY 100. Messages can be sent instantaneously to any other subscriber anywhere in the world (the Network is based in Canada).

So much for the blurb. The Leicestershire Museums Service subscribes to the Network so (with considerable technical help) I tried to estimate the extent of the biological information in the bibliographic databank. The database is interrogated through a series of keywords; the on-screen display can be tailored to those parts of the (very comprehensive) record you wish to see. Getting the hang of the keywords takes a little time but is not difficult. Thus the stem BIOL* was recorded in 277 documents; TAXIDERM* in 25; HERBARI* in 2; FUMIGATION in 292. Using combinations of keywords cuts down the size of the data set to be displayed. Thus SPECIMEN appears in 204 documents, NATURAL in 1188, HISTORY in 9426, PREPARATION on 67; combining these sets gives PREPARATION and NATURAL and HISTORY and SPECIMEN appearing in 43 documents. These could be displayed or downloaded onto disc in about 10-15 minutes. One of the standard formats would give for each item: literature