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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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FENSCORE

FENSCORE Update

At their last meeting, on 17th November, 1988, the Committee of the Federation for Natural Sciences Collection Research (FENSCORE) set up a working party with the aim of examining the feasibility of the Museum Documentation Association (MDA) taking over from the Manchester Museum the maintenance of, and search service from the FENSCORE national database; the working party are to report back their proposals to the full FENSCORE committee when they meet at the Museums and Galleries Commission offices on 8th June, 1989.

The working party met on 10th February, 1989, and drew up the draft proposals set out below. They are reproduced here for the information of all interested curators, particularly those who have provided input to the database.

AGREED: the following POLICY PROPOSALS be submitted to FENSCORE.

1. The MDA will establish a National Database to agreed standards (see B below), working within its current financial/manpower resources up to April 1990.
 - 2.1 The Manchester Museum will hold a back-up copy of the National Database.
 - 2.2 The feasibility of also transferring copies of the National Database to other CRUs with access to suitable mainframes will be investigated.
 - 2.3 Back-up copies of the National Database will NOT be altered locally by the holders.
3. The responsibility for editing and adding new records to their own regional database will reside with each CRU.
 - 4.1 The MDA will offer an up-date service, inserting the latest version of a regional database into the National Database in place of the previous version.
 - 4.2 The MDA will be responsible for contacting each CRU once a year, and programming them into the updating process.
- 5.1 There will be a commitment by all parties involved to make the data transfer between the CRUs and the MDA as easy as possible.
- 5.2 The details of data transfer protocols and media will be worked out on a one-to-one basis between the MDA and each CRU.
- 6.1 A search service, initially off-line, will be offered by MDA, free to non-commercial UK and Eire users.
- 6.2 MDA will have discretion to charge overseas non-commercial users.
- 6.3 FENSCORE and the MDA will have to agree guidelines for the provision of, and charging for, information from the National Database to commercial users.
- 7.1 Copyright on all print-out remains with each CRU for their data.
- 7.2 All listings will carry a copyright statement, eg 'The copyright resides with the originators of the information. Enquiries in the first instance to the MDA'.
- 8.1 MDA will allocate four person weeks in the year to work on standardization and a one-off 'clean-up' of the existing National Database.
- 8.2 A programme for the major standardization work will be established, for the fields which are to be concorded.
- 8.3 To prevent the existing data being altered at two sites at the same time, the 'master' copy of a regional database may switch back-and-forth between the MDA and the CRU, according to an agreed timetable.
- 8.4 While the 'master' is with the MDA, new entries could continue to be entered and edited at the CRU, but as a separate 'file', to be added to the 'master' when it returns to the CRU.

Uses of biological specimens (3)



Intriguing use of Diomedea exulans study skin on long sea voyage; described in detail by S T Coleridge:

Ah! well-a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung.

From the 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner'.

8.5 The NW and YH CRUs are suggested as possible candidates to pilot the spring-clean operation, as data transfer protocols have already been established.

The detailed data standards were then discussed field-by-field. Mostly the existing FENSCORE approach will be continued, with all fields free text except those containing: Collection Name; Associated Names; Holding Institution; and Name of Recorder. The Subject and Geographical Source fields will continue to have sort-search codes added in separate fields, and a new code field is being created for the Period field. The opportunity is being taken to make some minor improvements to the detailed FENSCORE instructions and Code Lists, and these will be circulated after they have been approved by the full FENSCORE Committee.

If you wish to comment on the proposals please contact your local CRU representative, or, if you prefer, one of the following working party members: John Burnett (Royal Scottish Museum), Margaret Hartley (Cliffe Castle Museum); Richard Light (MDA); Charles Pettit (Manchester Museum).

Federation for Natural Sciences Collections Research

List of Representatives as at January 1989

A Collection Research Units (two voting members each)

CRU Chairman; other representatives

CRNAM Graham Walley; Geoff Halfpenny
CRNNE Peter Davis; Chris Brewer
CRNNW Charles Pettitt; Steve Garland
CRNSE Gordon Read; Rosina Down/Paul Hyam
CRNST Mike Taylor; Geoff Hancock/
David Heppell
CRNSW Charles Copp; nomination vacant
CRNYH Bill Ely; Margaret Hartley

B National Museums and Manchester Museum (one voting member each)

Institution: nominated representative

British Geological Survey: A W Medd
British Museum (Natural History):
Neil Thompson
Manchester Museum: C W Pettitt
National Museum of Wales: Peter Morgan
Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh:
James Cullen
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew: G L L Lucas
Royal Scottish Museum: John Burnett
Ulster Museum: Philip Doughty

C Institutions invited to send Observers

Institution: nominated observer

Biology Curators' Group: Steve Garland
Biological Records Centre: Paul Harding
Geological Curators' Group: D I Steward
National Museum of Ireland:
Nigel Monaghan

National Museums of Merseyside:
Eric Greenwood
Museums and Galleries Commission:
Rosemary Ewles
Museums Association: nomination vacant
Museum Documentation Association:
Andrew Roberts
Soc Bibl Nat Hist: nomination vacant
Systematics Association: Dr G P Larwood

The Scottish, Welsh and the seven English Museum Area Services are all invited to send observers to FENSCORE meetings.

D Institutions and people receiving FENSCORE documents 'for information'

American Museum Computer Group (Editor SPECTRA); Association of Systematic Collections, USA (Stephen R Edwards); Dr Howard Brunton; Canadian National Museum (Natural History) (C C Eades); Dr P F Lingwood; Director, Manchester Museum.

Charles Pettitt
Manchester Museum

Letters

Dear Dr Mathias,

I would like to bring your members up to date on some activities of the Association of Systematics Collections. We recently completed a report on Systematics Collections Resources for the 1990s that reviews a survey of systematics collections in the US and Canada, and presents the results of a workshop held in Washington, DC, in October of 1988. The report has been presented to the National Science Foundation and its governing body, the National Science Board. We hope that as a result of the report, the National Science Foundation will provide new programs for the support of computerization and networking, graduate training in systematics, and curation of specimens resulting from efforts to inventory and preserve biological diversity worldwide. Other programs are also recommended. [NB see separate note on this item - Editor.]

The US Congress is considering legislation to provide funding for a National Center for Biological Diversity. The Center would review and make available existing databases on biological diversity, organize efforts toward a national biological survey, and identify critical areas in need of study and/or preservation. Its activities would not be limited to the United States - it would also be concerned with the loss of biological diversity worldwide. We have been advising Congress on the legislation. It is possible that the Center would be located within the Smithsonian Institution, but would be able to give funding to other institutions and organizations through contracts. Those interested in summaries of the legislation should write to ASC.