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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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ASC has been asked to organize a workshop on training and job opportunities for systematists/curators worldwide, at the 1990 meeting of the International Congress on Systematics and Evolutionary Biology to be held July 1-7, 1990, at the University of Maryland. For a circular describing the meeting, contact Cheryl Blackman, Room 1123, Microbiology Building, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742, USA.

ASC has recently published two new books which will be of interest to BCG members. A GUIDE TO MUSEUM PEST CONTROL, edited by Zycherman and Schrock, is available for \$36.00 (plus \$9.00 for overseas airmail postage) and SYSTEMATICS: RELEVANCE, RESOURCES, SERVICES, AND MANAGEMENT: A BIBLIOGRAPHY, by Knutson and Murphy is available for \$9.00 plus \$3.60 for overseas airmail postage.

Sincerely,

Dr K. Elaine Hoagland  
Executive Director  
Association of Systematics Collections

Dear Sir,

MGC Annual Report 1987-88

In your recent newsletter (Vol 5, No 1) Derek Whiteley drew attention to the small amount of money spent by the MGC on biological projects in 1987-88. It is only fair to point out however, that grant-aided projects listed in our annual reports (eg capital grants to provide new stores) tend to be described in general terms and can benefit natural history collections together with a range of other types of collections. In addition, it should not be forgotten that we fund the English Area Museum Councils which provide grants towards biological projects, undertake subsidised conservation work and support surveys of natural history collections (although these are not listed in our annual reports). The Conservation Unit has also been active in supporting conferences concerned with the conservation of natural history collections. Notwithstanding these points, there IS a lack of money spent on biological projects and the reason for this is chiefly a paucity of applications (good or bad!).

The recent publication of BIOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS UK has highlighted the desperate plight of many natural history collections. The MGC intends to react positively to this report and we are convening a meeting of interested parties to discuss the best way forward. We shall of course be inviting representatives of the BCG to this meeting.

Yours sincerely,

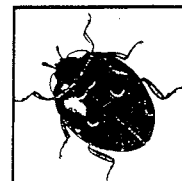
Chris Newbery  
Deputy Secretary  
Museums and Galleries Commission  
7 St James's Square  
LONDON SW17 4JU

# DERBY FINAL *Evening Telegraph* **Beetle off to see the things that bug you**

**T**he nationally-based Biology Curators' group is launching a campaign this week entitled, *Beetle Down...* to your local museum.

Museums throughout Britain are organising special exhibitions and events to make people aware of the varied work that goes on in natural history museums.

At Derby City Museum the National History staff-keeper Bill Grange and assistant keeper Mick Moyes — have prepared a special exhibit. It focuses on the



identification of household pests, which form a high proportion of inquiries from the public.

The display features a mock-up of a corner of a kitchen complete with a selection of realistically nosed insects and other

small bugs — some of them harmful pests, others harmless intruders.

Cockroaches munch through biscuits, clothes moths devour a sock, a spider crawls up the wall — and the blowflies on a dish of cat food are particularly revolting!

Another exhibit shows how specimens and habitat models are prepared for displays, featuring freeze-drying and other modern techniques, and which are hoped to be used in the proposed Derby Nature Museum of Allestree Hall.

The museum is open 10 — 5 Tuesday — Saturday, admission free.

## BETTER-DOWN AT DERBY CITY MUSEUM

Beetle-down came at an opportune time for us. Nick Moyes (Assistant Keeper) and myself in the Natural History Section here were in something of a despondant mood as it looked (and still does) that a project to create a new 'Derby Nature Museum' at Allestree Hall, just north of the City, was to be 'axed'. We had been working enthusiastically for the last two and a half years on some far-reaching and exciting plans; but in May the Conservatives took over from Labour in the local elections.

No official decision has come to us at the time of writing, but murmurings in the press and other reported remarks lead us to fear the worst. In addition a top councillor who visited the Museum recently was heard to mutter, as he swept through the Natural History Gallery, "I don't see the point of putting stuffed birds on show". Admittedly, the quality of displays in the existing gallery are not terribly inspiring - what we had planned for the new project was light-years away in concept.

Beetle-down gave us the opportunity to present what we are all about to the public. We immediately thought of an exhibition. Instead of a temporary affair, we decided to mount a small 'permanent' display within one of the existing cases in the natural history gallery of the main museum, as part of a general upgrading of a rather unexciting and obsolete room.

We rejected a straight systematic account of our work and decided to 'focus down' on a particular aspect. 'Beetle-down' sparked off the idea of dealing with the identification of household pests. Enquiries in this field make up a significant proportion of those coming from the general public, and many are passed on via the Environmental Health Department. It was a good subject to cover, we thought, as it highlights our close relationship with the local community, dispelling any 'ivory tower' image.

The exhibit, although housed in a case measuring only 9ft x 3.5ft x 2.5ft, packs much into a small space. The introductory section comprises a mock-up of a corner of a 'typical' kitchen, though rather liberally populated with a selection of common pests and other intruders - all dead, but carefully posed in life-like attitudes. For example, a house spider creeps up the wall, cockroaches nibble at a biscuit which has fallen to the floor and blowflies swarm over a dish of (simulated) cat food. Above this arresting spectacle a caption reads 'Is your house bugged? .....If so Beetle-down to Derby Museum'. The second half of this caption forms part of the central section of the display, complete with enlarged ladybird logo and captions summarising all of the work carried out in our Department.

Below a photograph of Nick, peering intently down a microscope, is arranged a series of mounted household pests, together with enlarged colour illustrations of each species and short captions describing any damage they may do, or if they are merely harmless intruders from the garden.

The exhibition is completed by a section showing how specimens are prepared for display including the use of our freeze-drier, and how environmental elements such as trees and rocks are cast and modelled. A reconstructed cross-section of a Derbyshire moorland stream forms the centrepiece of this last part of the exhibit.

A press-release on the exhibition and the Beetle-down campaign was circulated before the promotional week in July. Our principal local

paper, the Derby Evening Telegraph carried an eye-catching little piece, complete with ladybird logo - a pity that 'natural history' became, inevitably, 'national history'.

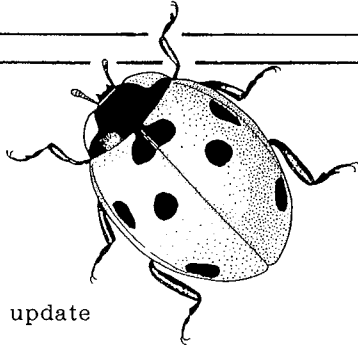
BBC Radio Derby actually did two interviews - one concentrating on the pest element, the other, conducted by the excellent Graham Knight (who has made his name nationally), on the general work of our department. The question of the uncertainty of the new Derby Nature Museum project was also covered and gave me the opportunity to stress what a wonderful facility will be lost to Derby's citizens if the politicians knock it on the head!

During the launch-week of Beetle-down, our Education Officer showed groups of children (many from deprived inner-city areas of Derby) behind the scenes to see something of the work of the natural history department. I also organised a practical session on creating miniature wildlife habitat models as part of the Museum's annual Family Day during the same week. This proved to be immensely popular, so much so that supplies of leaf litter, seashore shingle and shells, etc, almost ran out.

All in all Beetle-down was a great success with us and provided something of a 'shot in the arm' (if one can safely say that nowadays) during a frustrating time at Derby.

Bill Grange  
Keeper of Natural History  
Derby City Museums





#### Beetle-down .... update

- \* 59 museums took part in the 1988 campaign by ordering packs of leaflets and stickers
- \* 34,000 leaflets were distributed in 1988
- \* 38,000 amended leaflets have just been printed by CEGB for 1989
- \* WATCH distributed leaflets to all WATCH leaders
- \* 99 museums are listed in the leaflet
- \* 83 museums have 'stars' ie a resident curator of biology
- \* At least 24 museums organised special events for Beetle-down .... week in July/August 1988
- \* Several museums presented the campaign to their governing bodies and distributed leaflets to local politicians
- \* The campaign and events received masses of local press and radio coverage, but the national response was poor. The 1989 campaign will initially concentrate on national media coverage.
- \* Some specialist groups (eg Diptera recorders) have been directly mailed. We need contacts for others.
- \* Some museums have appointed additional staff or unfrozen posts following direct action by BCG. The threat of 'removal' from the Beetle-down .... accredited list has been used on several occasions.
- \* The campaign continues. Wherever possible we are linking Beetle-down .... to Museums Year '89 to gain extra publicity.
- \* This summer we are concentrating on publicising the services outlined in the leaflet. The message is: NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS ARE GOOD VALUE FOR MONEY.

- \* 30 JUNE will be B D-Day! Each museum will be asked to contact the local press to publicise the campaign and leaflets. Leaflets will be made available to the public; each museum will be urged to present copies of the leaflets to all members of their governing bodies. (If anyone has difficulty here, contact BCG in advance and we will contact the relevant chairperson directly.) The general idea is that all those in positions of influence should be made aware of what goes on in natural history museums.
- \* BEETLE-DOWN .... WEEK this year has been planned to coincide with autumn half term in schools (October - early November). Plenty of time to plan your special events.
- \* Beetle-down .... merchandise has been reprinted  
Car stickers 30p (15p - 10 or more)  
Window stickers £1 (75p - 3 or more)  
T-Shirts £4 (M or XL) post free

#### How to obtain Beetle-down .... leaflets

- 1 Collect from Sheffield Museum - FREE.
- 2 By post from Sheffield Museum - you pay for post and packing only; £4 per batch.
- 3 At BCG meetings. Dundee in May and North Devon in October (and possibly MA Conference in York in September).

NOTE There is a £5 subscription fee to Beetle-down .... only for museums which did not subscribe in 1988. This includes your window sticker and car sticker, and a 'starter' batch of leaflets.

Extra car stickers, window stickers and T-shirts are available. All payments to 'Biology Curators Group'.

Derek Whiteley  
BCG Secretary  
Sheffield Museum

#### PAUL BELLONI DU CHAILLU (1831-1903)

Paul Belloni Du Chaillu (1831-1903), a self-trained naturalist and explorer born in Paris and raised in Gabon, was one of the most flamboyant and controversial figures of nineteenth century science. A naturalized US citizen, Du Chaillu made two major collecting expeditions in West Africa (1855-1859 and 1863-1865). These served as the basis for a series of popular lectures and books for adults and young readers, including: EXPLORATIONS AND ADVENTURES IN EQUATORIAL AFRICA (1861), A JOURNEY TO ASHANGO-LAND (1867) and THE WORLD OF THE GREAT FOREST (1900).

Many of the specimens collected on Du Chaillu's first trip are in the care of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (which helped to finance the expedition), but there are no field notes and

very little surviving manuscript material relating to Du Chaillu or his relationship with the Academy or other scientific institutions of his day.

For a comprehensive biography of Du Chaillu, Robert M Peck is requesting any information concerning the whereabouts of: letters to, from, or about Du Chaillu; contemporary press accounts of his travels or lectures; specimens; manuscripts; photographs; or memorabilia of any kind.

All letters will be gratefully acknowledged by:

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Philadelphia, PA. 19103  
USA  
(Phone: 215-299-1138)