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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Title: Birds' Eggs: 1954-1981

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1988 - six months later she has just completed the first phase of the project. Ms Drysdale has visited all the Scottish Universities and collected the data which will form the basis of the Unit's culminating report in 1990. The collections surveyed include objects ranging from extinct birds from New Zealand to the death masks of Burke and Hare.

The Project Officer believes that University Principals, Courts and Senates are not fully aware of the importance of collections for which they have ultimate responsibility. She said, 'This research has a wider than local significance - the collections constitute an important part of the national heritage.'

Professor Frank Willett, Director of the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, is Chairman of the project's management committee. He said, 'It is very exciting that this Research Unit is the first of its type in Scotland and is a pilot study for what is intended to be a thorough study of university collections in Britain.'

The total cost of the project is £30,500. It is being funded by Principals of the Scottish Universities, the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland, the Museums and Galleries Commission, the MacRobert Trusts and the Scottish Museums Council.

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#### BIRDS' EGGS: 1954 - 1981

We have recently made an interesting discovery concerning the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and the protection afforded to birds' eggs.

There was a recent prosecution in Burnley of an egg collector. The usual low fines were imposed but one thing caught our eye in all of the newspaper reports. All stated that the offender was allowed to keep all of his eggs collected prior to 1981! We thought that this was probably due to confused journalists and thought no more about it.

Shortly afterwards, Bolton Museum received a call from a local man who had been an egg collector and now wished to give his collection to the Museum. When we saw the collection it

contained eggs collected in the 1966 to 1978 period, clearly illegal! Much of the material was of local interest and nearly all had excellent full data.

We contacted the DoE to sort out what we should do. Would there be a prosecution? Would the eggs be destroyed? Imagine our surprise when a phone call informed us that no licence was necessary and we could keep them because they were collected before 1981!!

We would be interested to hear of any other members' experiences in this field. It does seem very odd; a quick look at the 1981 Act clearly shows that the 1954 and 1967 Bird Protection laws still apply.

I am hoping to find out whether this is a DoE policy decision or a court decision but in the meantime it seems that all eggs illegally collected before 1981 have now been legalised.

Steve Garland and Kath Berry  
Bolton Museum

#### Editor's note

Kath wrote to the DoE in Bristol requesting confirmation of the telephone conversation, and the following paragraph is quoted from it (ref WLF 4922/9):

'Under the terms of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 the possession of eggs taken prior to the Act is not illegal and a licence is not required to be in possession, or to give away an egg collection. The Museum are [sic] therefore able to accept the collection without further reserve.'

A further paragraph deals with the question of Schedule 1 eggs in the collection which have no data, and the obligation on the museum to prove that these eggs were collected before 1981 or held legally if collected after 1981.

These waters are definitely muddy, and the BCG committee has decided to hold a Seminar in the winter of 1989-90 to try to sort out some of these difficulties.

John Mathias  
Editor

#### REMINDER

Many members have not yet paid this year's sub. It's the same as last year and includes the Journal, so it must be good value at £6.00 for personal members, £10.00 for institutional and overseas members. Cheques, postal orders, cash, money cowries, wampum, elephant tusks and rhino horns to Adam Wright, Coventry Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry CV1 5RW.