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example) pad the bottom of the jar with a small amount of plastic sheeting, or polythene foam (eg Plastazote) making sure that the padding stays at the bottom when the water is added.

PROCEDURE

Step 1. Ensure that the washtank to be used is clean, and that the sponge will fit inside easily and will be submerged when the water is added. Remove the sponge. Fill the jar with room temperature clean water, preferably distilled or deionised, to which a few drops of non-ionic detergent have been added. Make sure the detergent is well mixed in.

Step 2. Lower the sponge slowly into the washwater until it rests on the bottom. Bubbles of air will often remain trapped in the lattice of the sponge. Most of these can be removed by raising and lowering the sponge gently once or twice, or by gently moving the water with a stirrer, taking care not to come close to the sponge. Leave the sponge for 5-10 minutes depending on the degree of dirt. Do not leave the sponge unattended and do not be tempted to increase the soaking time in an attempt to remove further dirt, unless the sponge is under continual careful observation. It is possible that some degraded or weakened specimens might be damaged by prolonged soaking.

Step 3. Remove the sponge slowly from the bath and lay it gently on a clean surface to drain. Never bring it in contact with cotton wool or terry towelling, two materials guaranteed to catch on the spicules. Empty the washwater, rinse the jar with clean water and fill with distilled or deionised water to rinse. Gently lower the sponge into the rinse water and leave for a minute or two. Remove the sponge, empty the jar, fill with fresh rinsewater and repeat.

Step 4. Remove the sponge from the final rinse water and lay it on a clean surface to drain. The sponge can be replaced in a clean, dry specimen jar to dry, or in any well ventilated place. If possible, cover the container in which the sponge is drying with paper or cloth to prevent dust settling on the clean surface.

CAUTION

Before washing any specimen, check for signs of damage or repair which might have been carried out with water soluble glues or coatings. If in any doubt, test a small area with water for any sign of change.

If others use the same area, leave plenty of warning signs around. A sink with a few sponges drying in the bottom may look empty at first glance.

Don't try to use ordinary household detergent or soap solutions. Non-ionic detergent is the simplest, the safest and the best.

Don't skimp on the rinses. Any hardwater deposits drying on the sponges will leave unsightly marks which will be very difficult to remove later.

Don't be tempted to leave the sponges in water for longer than a few minutes. Pure water can etch or dissolve glasses and the specimens may become more susceptible with age.

Don't hurry. Careful handling and slow movements are safest when dealing with items this fragile.

Finally, if you do encounter problems, particularly stubborn stains, or unusual reactions, please let us know.

Richard and Helena Jaeschke,
Conservators, 3 Park Gardens, Lynton,
Devon EX35 6DF.

Committee News

A DAY OF MOURNING FOR BIOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS

Wednesday 28 February 1990 has been declared an official 'Day of Mourning' for our neglected and decaying natural heritage. BCG members and other natural history curators are being asked to reveal examples of badly curated, neglected or decaying natural history specimens to the press and

public. Better still, find a scientifically valuable collection or group of specimens which are in bad shape owing to lack of cash, and would benefit from additional funds.

Please complete and post the enclosed Press Release to your local press/radio station, and have a supply of Sunflower campaign leaflets handy on the day. BCG will contact the national press. This is the next phase in the 'Decaying Natural Heritage' campaign, which has already attracted much attention and some funding. The rest is up to you. Black armbands, coffins, wakes, and dirges, and similar stunts for the media are all possibilities. Note that 28 February 1990 is Ash Wednesday.