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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

Title: Book Review: The Insect and Spider Collections of the World by R H Arnett and G A Samuelson

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given with the maps, which makes appraisal of distribution difficult in a country with such a rapidly changing environment as ours. However this is more than compensated for by the text, which gives details of biology and ecology for each species. Information on medical importance and morphological characteristics are included where appropriate. Comprehensive lists of recorded hosts are appended for all species.

To a non specialist such as myself the variations shown by different species in their ecologies are surprising and the whole book makes interesting and informative reading. Ticks are animals which have their niche in the public consciousness and yet they are little known amongst general biologists. This publication, apart from being a distribution atlas, is a hand reference guide to this fascinating group.

Derek Lott

COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT FOR MUSEUMS

by D Andrew Roberts (Editor)

Published by Museums Documentation Association, 1988, pp 237. Price £30. ISBN 0-905963-61-X

For those who were unable to attend the INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT FOR MUSEUMS (the title given to the first Annual Conference of the Museums Documentation Association) held in Cambridge from 26-29 September 1987, this compilation of papers, expertly compiled and edited by Andrew Roberts, has to be the next best thing. A well finished, hardback volume, it is divided into sections devoted to Surveys of Collection Management Systems and Practice, System Design, Role of Professional Groups, Procedural and Policy Developments in Individual Museums, Training and Advisory Developments, Consultancy Support for Museums and Collections Management Systems. The thirty-six papers have an inevitable bias towards the experience of staff in museums and related institutions in Britain and North America, but it is pleasing to read contributions from colleagues in Australia, Denmark and the Netherlands.

To review each and every contribution is impossible here, but the highlights for me included Jane Sledge's SURVEY OF NORTH AMERICAN COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS AND PRACTICE, (Chapter 3) written with humour and obvious understanding of the museum condition. Her paper ('about the search for the Holy Grail of collections management, the ensuing misconceptions and expectations ...') is thought-

provoking and yet somehow reassuring in reminding us that even in North America the need for standards and compatibility has yet to be realised ('If you believe this, there is a very interesting bridge in Brooklyn that's for sale').

The antipodean papers were also refreshing, and I especially enjoyed John Hodge's COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT IN RELATION TO MUSEUM STUDIES TRAINING IN AUSTRALIA (Chapter 29) which highlighted the separateness of institutions and the dichotomy of Art Galleries and Museums in that country as factors posing particular problems for training in collections management. Training for collections management is perceived as an important need - it crops up throughout the volume and not just in the Training and Advisory Developments section. Joanne Neri's personal experience of training at the Center for Museum Studies of John F Kennedy University (Chapter 30) helps to put many student needs in focus. In her words 'Efforts to open channels of communication between students and professionals of museology have ... never been more dynamic, however, (they) have also never been more urgent'.

Reading about museum documentation is, understandably, not always entertaining. However, this volume always makes interesting reading, and provides a valuable 'state of the art' reference work, as well as a record of what must have been an excellent conference. I must try not to miss the next one.

Peter Davis

THE INSECT AND SPIDER COLLECTIONS OF THE WORLD

by R H Arnett and G A Samuelson

Published by E J Brill (Leiden) and Flora and Fauna Publications (Florida) 1986; pp220, spiral bound, thin card covers. Price Gld 41 (£14 approx). ISBN 90-04-08192-5

The bulk of this directory consists of two lists of public and private insect and spider collections arranged alphabetically by country and owner respectively. The first list is interesting because it lists all the countries of the world whether or not they have collections (even Antarctica which is not a country in this sense) and therefore includes useful negative information. In this respect it also lists those known collections but from which no return was received to the questionnaire. Obviously North

America is most comprehensively covered. The ubiquitous problem of relying on this means of gathering information, that of the lack of interest in many people (who claim to be too busy as an excuse), must be as frustrating to the compilers as it is to the user. The curator who does not make an effort to respond to these projects is committing a form of slow suicide as the collections will not get used or become regarded as worth adding to.

This situation is particularly well illustrated in the British section. Twenty-one institutions are listed of which nine did not return their questionnaires. There are some odd mistranscriptions here of places such as Brambler for Bramber (which as the so-called National Butterfly Museum no longer exists) and Werneth Park appearing in Nottingham rather than Oldham (which also suffered a demise of sorts, explaining the lack of return) while Peterborough is listed under Priestgate, the name of the street on which the museum is found. The work of the Collection Research Units makes this kind of effort redundant but does not as yet reach such a world wide audience. Do the entomologists out there really think that there are so few places to consult in this country or indeed that there are only five in the whole of France?

One of the interesting points found in this guide is the use of codens, a term preferred to acronyms, for each institution. This has been developing now since the same authors used letter

codes in a survey of beetle collections in 1969. It has become more refined following a paper by Heppner and Lamas ACRONYMS FOR WORLD MUSEUM COLLECTIONS OF INSECTS, ETC; (Bull Ent Soc America, 28; 305-316) so that now it rivals the scheme used to identify herbaria. If you have not got one of these four letter codes then you should have filled in the questionnaire! Alphabetical lists of codens and curators are given at the end as well as the collectors represented in the museums as listed in the returns. This last is a useful addition to the growing number of lists of named collections for the seeker after lost type specimens or historical trifles as well as research material in the main sense.

The list of private collections is admittedly only scraping the surface of the numbers that must exist and is also primarily concerned with the United States. An interesting aspect to this list is that the problem of the transience of such collections is overcome by requiring each private collection entry to be registered with a public institution. The chances of finding them in fifteen years time is thereby considerably increased.

Altogether, this compilation has much to commend it and extends the knowledge and utility of collections in several directions. If the authors were to consider updating it perhaps a series of local editors, one for each country, would be useful.

Geoff Hancock

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