Biology Curators Group Newsletter

Title: Clumsy museum left with rare egg on face

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it is more a case of fitting a glue's physical characteristics to the supposed requirements of the substrate. However, the results do allow the conservator to predict how a glue will behave under a range of conditions, and this is useful when deciding which glue to use.

ASC Newsletter (18:3) contains all the usual news from natural history museums and systematics scientists in the United States, but this issue concentrates on natural history archives, their use, organisation and development from the viewpoint of the curator, the professional archivist and the systematic scientist. There is a report on a survey of natural history archival holdings in US institutions, with special reference to museums, and shorter pieces on the integration of archive and specimen data and the necessity to formulate a strategy for maintaining an effective archive storage and retrieval system in parallel with, or integrated into, specimen storage and retrieval systems. The value of effective links between specimens and archival collection data is forcefully made.

In the same issue is a discussion of the restrictions on the international movement of plants for scientific research (eg. herbarium sheets): 'Research Botanists and Plant Import Restrictions' by D W Stevenson. Although written from the American viewpoint, with US import regulations discussed, it covers CITES regulations in some depth and is relevant to any museum curator who collects abroad and wants to return with herbarium material or living plants. The US permit system is explained which again will be of value to botanists travelling to the USA.

Reprinted from the Daily Telegraph of 1st August 1990

Clumsy museum left with rare egg on face

by Geoffrey Lee Martin in Sydney

One of only two eggs left in existence from the extinct moa bird has been broken by a bungling worker at Christchurch Museum in New Zealand.

The 600-year-old egg, valued at more than £100,000, was shattered during an attempt to make a copy to sell to Tokyo's Abiko Museum.

Ignorant that museum staff were supposed to use existing copies of the egg to make such casts, the worker took the real one from its locked exhibition case.

The egg was shattered while the worker, whose identity is being kept secret by the museum, was coating it with a plastic mould. This apparently shrank slightly, applying sufficient pressure to break the egg into several pieces.

Museum staff are now painstakingly reassembling the shattered eggshell, which will eventually be put back on display with its value considerably diminished.

The last remaining intact moa egg is under careful guard in Wanganui Museum.

Moas, huge flightless birds up to 10 ft tall, were wiped out more than 500 years ago soon after the Maoris arrived in New Zealand from the Cook Islands.

They were a good source of protein for Maoris in a land that had virtually no land mammals other than the original inhabitants, the Morioris, who are now also extinct.

Several New Zealand museums have been supplementing their dwindling public funding by selling copies of rare indigenous exhibits - including moa skeletons and eggs - to Japanese museums.

No comment!