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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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products, nature gardens, 'eco' products, energy conservation, hardwoods, archival material.

Saturday 6th 'Local museum involvement in conservation issues' and 'International conservation issues', followed by the AGM and Annual Dinner.

Sunday 7th Access to Liverpool Museum collections, tour of Natural history Centre and/or local field trip.

Costs are likely to be in the region of £75 for accommodation, food and conference fees Thursday night to Sunday morning.

Please complete the enclosed booking form if you would like to attend this meeting and return to: Clem Fisher, Dept of Zoology, Liverpool Museum, William Brown Street, Liverpool L3 8EN. **It is very important that we know the likely numbers attending the meeting.**

International Symposium on the Preservation and Conservation of Natural History Collections Madrid, May 10-15, 1992 Preliminary announcement

Hosting Institution:
Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales
Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas
Ministerio de Educacion y Ciencia (Spain)

The Symposium will focus on the concerns of the natural history community for the status and future of anthropological, biological and geological collections in a world that is changing technologically, politically and environmentally. Issues such as education and training, methodologies, research, resource utilization for collection care, and cooperative programs, will provide an attractive agenda for most individuals associated with these collections.

**For further information, please contact
Programme Coordinators:**

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AGM 90

Secretary's Report 1989/90

BCG Committee met five times during the year at London (UCL), Halsannery Field Centre Devon, Sheffield Museum, Leicestershire Museum and yesterday here at the Manx Museum. Once again we would like to thank the governing bodies of the above institutions for providing free and comfortable facilities.

A record number of general meetings was held during the year. Last year's AGM at Dundee was linked to a one-day symposium on conservation of biological specimens. It was well-organised by Jo Sage and colleagues, well-attended with a strong Scottish contingency. The meeting was also notable for the BCG launch of the Sunflower Campaign and the alternative Beetle-down Campaign.

In October BCG visited the south-west for an excellent study weekend on 'Marine and Microscopical Collections' based at Halsannery Field Centre, North Devon. Jerry Lee organised a very stimulating four days of lectures, study visits, field trips and tours, including BCG's unforgettable first trip across the water to Lundy Island. (Our second trip across to the Isle of Man yesterday was equally memorable.)

In February a full-house packed the meeting room at Tring Museum for a one-day seminar on Birds Egg Collections. Again, this meeting was superb, very useful and well-organised by Kathie Way, Richard Sutcliffe and colleagues. In March, a joint meeting with Geology Curators Group at Peterborough Museum was successful and well-attended, although the BCG contingency was rather low. Rosina Down stepped in at the last minute to keep our flag flying (my apologies!).

Somewhere in between we co-organised a six-day curatorial course with GCG and Sheffield University, based in Sheffield. Paul Richards did most of the organisational donkey work on our behalf and many members contributed to the teaching programme. Once again Peter Davis was an admirable resident course tutor.

Last September a BCG 'Hit-Squad' found a different audience at the Museums Association Centenary Conference in York. Steve Garland, Peter Davis and

myself took the opportunity to put the propaganda machine into action delivering illustrated lectures relating to our two big campaigns. Conference delegates were also lobbied and leafleted, and we came away feeling that we had made our presence felt. The highlight of the day was actually a reference to our Sunflower Campaign in the Centenary Presidential Address.

On the negative side, the proposed joint seminar with the MA in Glasgow was undersubscribed and cancelled by the MA despite widespread publicity.

For me, it has been a busy year dominated by our two campaigns. Our Neglected Natural Heritage - the Sunflower Campaign has so far proved to be very successful. Coverage in the national press and national radio and support from the MA and other museum bodies, has helped to publicise our plight, leading to a promise of some extra funding. The 'Beetle-down ...' campaign has had a second successful year, including a reprint of 38,000 leaflets, merchandise and another successful Beetle-down ... week of events across the country. The resulting official file is itself proving to be useful ammunition in the fight to save natural history services.

We now operate two 'watchdog' schemes, on 'collections at risk' and 'biology posts lost and created'. Direct lobbying of those in authority has helped to save posts (note - posts not individual jobs - we do not have the role of a trade union) and helped to create new posts - Oldham being the outstanding example. We maintain useful contacts with the Museums Association, MGC, the Conservation Unit, MTI and NFBR.

My personal aim is to continue providing a service to the membership and to curatorial biology by leaflets, lobbying and direct action sanctioned by committee.

It has been a very, very active year for BCG; possibly the busiest yet. Next year is looking just as good and I take this opportunity to thank all Committee members for their hard work.

Derek Whiteley
BCG Secretary

[Report condensed from an illustrated report delivered to the 1990 AGM, Isle of Man]

Book Reviews

A Guide to the Postcranial Bones of East African Animals

by Rikki Walker

Published by Hylochoerus Press, Norwich. 1985.
ISBN 0 9511105 1 9 (PB). xi+285 pp. Appendices.
Index. Illustrated. £13.95.

There is an apocryphal story concerning an up-and-coming South African archaeozoologist who offered colleagues (all experts in bone identification) a kind of Kim's Game or Witch Doctor's bag-of-bones as a test of their ability and consistency in identifying fossil material from his excavations. Needless to say, of the dozen or so experts consulted, each gave an entirely different set of identifications, causing a great deal of amusement. What the community lacked of course was a set of standards to go by; not all departments had the same quality or quantity of modern or fossil comparative material, and each operated to its own rules.

That kind of operation is on its way out, and not in the least due to the type of publication reviewed here. While not the last word in making fossil or sub-fossil material easy to identify, Mrs Walker's Bone Book sets out in a constant style, illustrations of all the most frequently preserved bones of most of the animals (mammal + reptile + bird) found in eastern Africa. It is essentially a practical book, to be used as a constant companion in the laboratory alongside the material being worked on. It has copious notes and procedural guides to help track a bone through to its final identity, which with a little experience, will bring most up to the level of expert in a decently short time.

A most useful innovation is a set of seven plates showing the mid-shaft profiles of the long bones of everything from an elephant to a Suni antelope. However, I would have thought that they would have been better incorporated in the main text, as in the way they are presented they will become very tatty very quickly. Perhaps an inspired afterthought?

For anyone working in the field of identifying African animal bone, this is a must. It might be worth buying even if your interests lie outside Africa, but involve looking at eg interglacial exotic mammals. And at the price, who can lose?
Arthur Cruickshank, c/o Leicestershire Museums