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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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'Exhibition Fauna - from Spectacle to Habitat Group'. She covers the eighteenth century entrepreneurial shows by Lever and Bullock, later links with romantic painting and sculpture, the 'tasteful' decorative displays popular with Victorians, trophies, the use of specimens in early photography, the growth of commercial taxidermy and its links with museums, and the development of the 'group method' of arranging specimens. The second part of the paper deals with the evolution of the 'habitat group' method of display, mainly in North America, and how these groups formed a focus for the popularization of natural history and the various 'back to nature' movements in the early twentieth century.

For those who like to theorise on the upsurge in popularity of conservation and natural history and how the average person can 'experience' wildlife as a leisure activity there is an interesting paper in **Biological Conservation** (53:3) by D A Duffus and P Dearden called 'Non-Consumptive Wildlife-Orientated Recreation: A Conceptual Framework'. It is concerned with the change in attitudes in North America from killing wildlife in a regulated way (hunting) and the management values this requires to what the authors' call the non-consumptive use of wildlife (photographing; 'experiencing wildlife' at first hand) and the differences in management philosophy and practice this more enlightened approach requires.

It may seem odd to try to rationalise a recreational activity in this way, but when mega-bucks are involved (in 1981, 3.6 millions Canadian spent 2.1 billion dollars on non-consumptive wildlife-orientated trips; in 1988 whale-watchers generated expenditure estimated at 4.2 million dollars on Vancouver Island) the providers such as national park managers, reserve wardens and conservationists in general need a way of assessing customer satisfaction at 'wildlife encounters'; counting the corpses in the bag doesn't work any more! It makes an interesting read once you penetrate the transatlantic jargon.

'Evaluating Interpretation' is the theme of the July 1990 issue of **Interpretation**, the Bulletin of the Centre for Environmental Interpretation. The whole issue is concerned with how we judge visitor response to interpretative exhibitions through the use of techniques like interviewing visitors in structured or unstructured ways, in groups or singly;

questionnaires; observation of visitor behaviour and using live interpreters who can answer visitors' questions directly. The techniques are summarised on the centre pages with a useful discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each and an evaluation of what each is likely to cost.

**BSBI News** (55) has a paper by A O Chater on the financing and publication of local floras which is relevant to all museum curators with hopes of publishing works on any aspect of local natural history. It draws on the returns (52) from questionnaires sent to the organisers of 58 local floras published within the past 20 years. Of particular interest are sections on total sales, print runs, pre-publication offers, costs, sources of funding and procedure. There is also a formula for calculating the selling price of a flora. The paper has a lot of practical information drawn from the real experiences of people who have actually done the job and is all the more valuable for that. But one fact is clear - with careful planning and costing, publishing a local flora need not cost you an arm and a leg; but it won't make you a fortune either.

All those members who attended the AGM on the Isle of Man this year will be interested in the following note from **Habitat** (26:8). 'A plan by the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) to help maintain and increase the small breeding population of Choughs on the Isle of Man, has been awarded £40,000 by Manx Airlines over the next ten years. The project will develop work already carried out by NCC on the Hebridean Islands of Islay and Colonsay - the only other Chough stronghold in Britain. The grant will go towards the costs of maintaining traditional buildings associated with long-established agriculture based on stock rearing and make permanent their otherwise temporary use as chough nest sites.'

**The Conservator** (14) has a paper by Haupt, Dyer and Hanlan which may be of interest to biological conservators who like to use traditional materials when renovating old biological preparations - 'An Investigation into Three Animal Glues'. The glues in question are rabbit skin glue, gelatin and isinglass and the test procedures included pH, surface tension, viscosity, film characteristics and mechanical characteristics (elongation) at various relative humidities. There is no 'best' choice between these;

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.

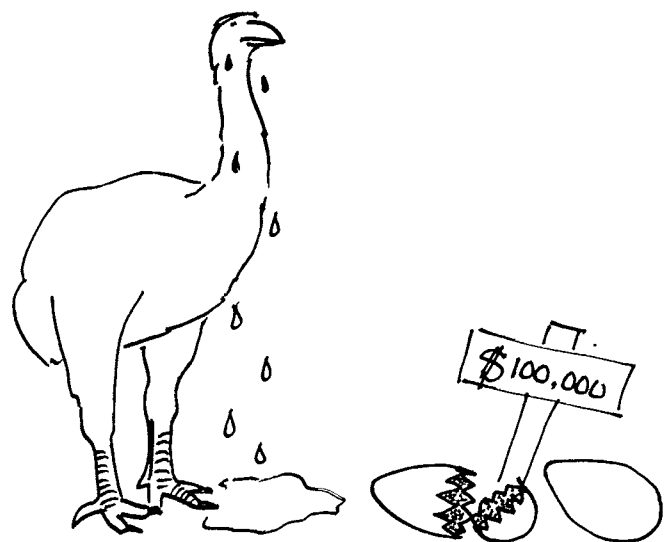
The last remaining intact moa egg is under careful guard in Wanganui Museum.

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!



ONE DOWN AND ONE TO GO!