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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Title: Select Committee on Science and Technology to investigate Systematic Research in the UK

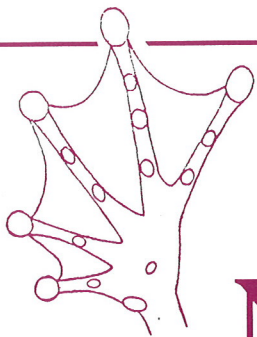
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# NEWSLETTER



May 1991

Vol 5 No 7

## Select Committee on Science and Technology to investigate Systematic Research in the UK

The House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology has appointed a Sub-Committee, under the chairmanship of Lord Dainton, with the terms of reference 'to consider systematic biology research in the United Kingdom'.

BCG has been invited to give oral evidence to the Sub-Committee and to submit written evidence on any matters relevant to their terms of reference. The following issues have been listed in the initial communication, not all of which are strictly pertinent to the role and interests of BCG.

- 1 What is the utility of systematic biology research?
- 2 Does the need to specify particular organisms in connection with eg intellectual property rights, regulatory provisions etc, impinge upon your work?
- 3 Is the level for UK research appropriate. If so, how does one determine an appropriate volume? How does it rank with competing biological and other disciplines?
- 4 Is UK research in the right areas? Are there guiding principles which could help a 'national policy' within which the existing facilities would operate eg importance in ecological/economic terms of groups of organisms; existing spread of expertise within the country; quality of resources available?
- 5 What is the extent of our need for reference collections including foreign material (type collections, living culture collections, etc) as a base for systematic research? Is provision for their storage and their curation adequate? Do we have particular responsibilities to the world scientific community as a consequence of the historic circumstances of our holdings?
- 6 What new methods are there and how will this affect future UK research? Is the availability of information technology (computerised databases) to systematic research being adequately exploited? Is UK research taking cognizance of the full range of new developments in this field?
- 7 Is the current 'institutionalised' base of much of the research appropriate? Is their funding base secure? Should OAL or DES be responsible for the NHM?
- 8 If research is to be continued who pays?
  - (i) Should burdens of expense be shared with other countries - eg a UN programme? Can ESF help to rationalise activities?
  - (ii) Within UK, how much more should Government pay for and how best can budgets be protected?
  - (iii) What role can industry play?
- 9 Is teaching adequate?
- 10 What can we learn from abroad, especially the USA?

Clearly, BCG will be commenting primarily on points 4 and 5, which appear to arise directly from the 'Biological Collection UK' report and the Cardiff conference which highlighted the need for it. As is usually the case with these investigations there is a rigorous timescale for presentation of evidence (by 10th April 1991) so BCG committee cannot canvas

the opinion of the whole membership. However, the chairman will take into account the views of a cross section of the membership in formulating the evidence to be presented, and it will be published in a future edition of the Newsletter.

The deliberations and final report of the Sub-Committee are of great concern to BCG members, so the committee will try to keep everyone informed as to progress and results through the pages of the Newsletter.



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## News

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### North East gets first Travelling Biology Curator

'The region's first Travelling Biology Curator has joined the North of England Museums Service.

Mark Simmons, 27, aims to make the region greener by putting a halt to the damage which has been caused to north east biology collections from years of underfunding and lack of expertise. £10,000 will also be spent by the North of England Museums Service on improving the conditions of the collections. The project is joint funded by the North of England Museums Service and the Museums and Galleries Commission.

The new two year post and the £10,000 is welcomed by the region's museums and others who have campaigned for this injection of expertise and cash into the region's biology collections. Still seeking funds for this project, Sue Underwood, Director of NEMS says: "this, like all aspects of our work aims to improve both museums and the quality of life for people living in the north east".

Editor's comment. The above is quoted from the press release issued by NEMS. The creation of this post is the direct result of the 'Biological Collections UK' report and the Sunflower Campaign, both key elements of BCG's work over the past few years.

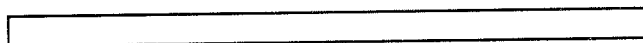


### Ecology - a new gallery at the Natural History Museum

The British Petroleum sponsored Ecology gallery at the Natural History Museum was opened by HRH The Princess of Wales on 11th March. This is the first of a series of permanent exhibitions to be constructed as a direct result of the success of the Natural History Museum Development Trust Appeal which was launched in October 1989 and has already reached its £5 million target. It is claimed to be the first permanent exhibition on global ecology in the world.

The editor has not yet visited this exhibition, so here is a quote from the press release:  
'Housed within a towering 'greenhouse', this massive exhibition steers away from doom and gloom environmental stories, and concentrates instead on building visitors' understanding of the delicate balance that exists in nature. Presented with a true picture of the underlying principles of ecology, they can make up their own minds about what should be done to conserve our fragile planet'.

This is clearly a major development and the editor would be pleased to receive any comments from members who have seen the exhibition.



### Derbyshire County Council Expelled from Museums Association.

The Museums Association has expelled Derbyshire County Council from membership - the first time an institutional member has been expelled in the Association's 100 year history.

The expulsion follows Derbyshire County Council's decision to sell off part of its museums' collection to help contribute to the Council's funds rather than specifically to the museums.

The Museums Association noted that Derbyshire had failed to follow accepted procedures for disposal of museum items and refuses to use funds raised for the purchase of additions to the collection. These actions are contrary to the Museums Association Code of Practice for Museum Authorities.