



NatSCA

Natural Sciences Collections Association

<http://www.natsca.org>

Biology Curators Group Newsletter

Title: Letters

Author(s): Owen, M.

Source: Owen, M. (1991). Letters. *Biology Curators Group Newsletter*, Vol 5 No 7, 80.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/988>

NatSCA supports open access publication as part of its mission is to promote and support natural science collections. NatSCA uses the Creative Commons Attribution License (CCAL) <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/> for all works we publish. Under CCAL authors retain ownership of the copyright for their article, but authors allow anyone to download, reuse, reprint, modify, distribute, and/or copy articles in NatSCA publications, so long as the original authors and source are cited.

sequence DNA from museum specimens. The example he quoted involved 43 study skins of Kangaroo Rat held at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California, collected between 1911 and 1937. The genotypes of these were compared with genotypes of 63 modern rats from the same sites, and the same subspecific differences observed today were present over half a century ago. The point of this is that the DNA of the museum specimens had not altered with time, and DNA can be extracted 'not only from dried leaves and dried skin but also from hair, feathers and eggshells'. Thus 'old' specimens constitute a vast, irreplaceable source of material for directly determining historical changes in gene frequencies, which are among the most important data in evolutionary biology museums with large, well-run collections of specimen series large enough for statistical analysis will be at the forefront of research in molecular evolution'.

In *New Scientist* (no 1759) of 9 March, there is a beautiful description of the Museum für Naturkunde in what used to be East Berlin but what is now Germany. When Berlin was divided in 1960, the East got most of the museums. The big, famous ones like the Pergamon have the usual late twentieth century trappings, and are on the tourists' routes, but the natural history museum has remained in its 'natural' state, uncorrupted by post war influences and exhibition fashion. Two quotes: 'Where the Museum für Naturkunde really gleams, though, is in its collection of stuffed animals. This is the pure, original museum. The air is quieter here than the outside. Visitors move silently around beeswaxed wooden cabinets that display the best taxidermy I've seen. Occasionally a child's delighted exclamation echoes from the next room.' 'This museum does not teach; it can, at least for the right people, inspire.'

The article continues with a comparison of this museum or 'proper' museum as the author Mike Holderness calls it, with the Natural History Museum in London. The article is called 'Down among the display cabinets' and Mike Holderness is described as a freelance science writer and 'collector of museum tearooms'.

Letters

Dear Dr Mathias

Leucistic Barnacle Geese

I have recently carried out an analysis of the occurrence and performance of white Barnacle Geese in the population wintering in the Solway Firth. These white forms seem to have become more common in recent years (there are five in the current population).

I am very interested to have information on their occurrence in the past. I am told by Alan Knox that you edit the Biological Curators' Group Newsletter and I wonder whether you would be willing to put in a notice about this. What I am interested in is information about the location of skins or mounted specimens of white (or very pale) Barnacle Geese, and knowledge of the accompanying documentation.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Myrfyn Owen
Director of Research
The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust
Slimbridge
Gloucester GL2 7BT

Editor: will members please reply direct to Dr Owen at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.