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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Coming Events

Life After Death The Practical Conservation of Natural History Collections

A one day UKIC Conference to be held at the Ipswich Museums, and Ipswich School, Suffolk, on 27th February 1992

A note from the prospectus:

'In April 1990, Ipswich Museum opened its fully restored "Victorian Natural History Gallery". For this to be possible the conservation section had to conserve nearly 400 specimens, most of them dating to the 19th or early 20th century. The exhibits included mammals, reptiles, fish, crustaceans, shells and birds. There are many local museums with huge natural history collections which will at some time need conserving and yet there are hardly any specialist natural history conservators. Often it is conservators with other specialisms that have to cope. It is hoped that the conference will concentrate on the practical rather than the theoretical, and will appeal to general conservators and specialist natural history conservators alike.'

Call for papers

If you wish to present a paper at this conference, or if you want more information, contact:

Bob Entwistle, Ipswich Museum, High Street, Ipswich, Suffolk. Tel 0473 - 213761 or UKIC 071 - 603 - 5643.

The History of Ornithology Joint Meeting of the British Ornithologists' Union, The Society for the History of Natural History and the Biology Curators' Group

Thursday 17th - Sunday 20th September 1992
University of Liverpool, South Liverpool
Conference Centre

Programme:

Thursday 17th September

Visits to two libraries not normally open to the public:

The Oak Room, Liverpool City Libraries. Original drawings (eg by Edward Lear), copy of Audubon and other fine books.

Knowsley Library, Knowsley Hall, Prescot, East Liverpool.

We have special permission from the XVIII Earl of Derby to view his priceless collection of original drawings and fine bird books at this private library. The XIIIth Earl of Derby was at the centre of the bird world in the early 19th century; friend and sponsor to such important characters as John Gould, Edward Lear and John MacGillivray. The Earl's collection of birds was bequeathed to the City of Liverpool and founded the institution now known as the Liverpool Museum, part of the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside. His books, original drawings and manuscripts remain at Knowsley.

There will also be a linked exhibition at the Liverpool Museum, re-uniting some of the specimens with their original drawings and fine published plates. This will be open for three months around the time of the conference and may be viewed at any time during normal museum opening times. We are hoping, however, to arrange a reception at the museum on one of the evenings (probably Thursday) during the conference, during which this exhibition can be viewed. This will also give delegates a chance to see the Natural History Gallery and the award-winning Natural History Centre, where many specimens from the reserve collections are now being made accessible to the public by demonstrator staff.

The bird collections at the Liverpool Museums are the second largest in number in the country and of extreme taxonomic and historical importance; they include many types and specimens from such luminaries as Cook, Gould and Hodgson. We suggest anyone wishing to take the opportunity to look at the collections should come a day earlier; we are setting aside Wednesday 16th September for this purpose - although visitors are of course welcome at any time. Please let us know if you would like to book early for this purpose.

Friday, 18th - Saturday 19th September

Two days of talks on ornithological history. We are still open to offers of papers but already have a substantial programme.

International History

Bill Deiss (Archives Department, Smithsonian Institution, Washington). The History of Oology in America.

Alan Tye (British Ornithologists' Union) and Adam Jones (Ethnologist). Birds in 17th century West Africa.

The Birds themselves

Wayne Longmore (Queensland Museum). History of the Australian Night Parrot and its recent re-discovery after many years of presumed extinction (with, it is hoped, a personal appearance by the bird skin itself). Ian Wallace (Liverpool Museum). The history of the Liver Bird, Liverpool's famous emblem (complete with a distinguished specimen which for many years was in Liverpool's Town Hall).

The Liver Bird also adorns several important buildings in Liverpool, and a trail incorporating these works of art will be devised - with the added benefit of a self-guided tour of the city centre. Time permitting, a group tour will be fitted in on Sunday afternoon

Hunting and Collecting

Mike Stammers (Maritime Museum, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside). The history and use of Duck Punts.

Janet Kear (Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust). Duck decoys.

Pat Morris (Royal Bedford College, London). The history of bird taxidermy.

Ornithologists

Mike Thomas (Perth Museum). Drummond-Hay, First President of the British Ornithologists' Union.

Bob Ralph (University of Aberdeen). John MacGillivray, ship's naturalist and collector.

Peter Bircham (University of Cambridge). John Legg 1755-1802, an advanced ornithologist.

The history of Bird art

This section is being overseen by one of Britain's most distinguished bird artists, Robert Gillmore, who will give an introductory talk on bird art. We are also hoping to arrange a small exhibition of bird art for sale at the conference.

Other talks will include:

Peter Davis (Hancock Museum, Newcastle-on-Tyne) on Thomas Bewick, wood-engraver.

Professor Bill Hale (Liverpool Polytechnic). Fine bird books.

We are trying to obtain sponsorship for a special edition of **Archives of Natural History** for the papers from this conference. We would also like to be able to support some of the foreign speakers' travelling expenses, and delegates who may not otherwise be able to attend. We would welcome suggestions or offers of sources of funding.

The facilities at the conference will also include room

for poster papers and a comprehensive book stall run by Natural History Book Service of Totnes, Devon. There will also be a sales stall run by the British Ornithologists' Union, at which their publications will be available.

Sunday, 20th September

Particularly to complement Dr Kear's paper, we will be visiting Hale Duck Decoy, on the banks of the Mersey in south Liverpool. This is an SSSI and an Ancient Monument, and has one renovated pipe of the several formerly used for trapping duck. It is now a nature reserve run jointly by the Cheshire and Lancashire Trusts for Nature Conservation.

We hope that Sunday afternoon will also give us enough time for a guided tour of Liverpool's Liver Birds and interesting buildings, including the majestic tea-room of The Adelphi Hotel.

The cost of the whole conference will be in the region of £135 for the four days, including transport to Knowsley Hall, Liverpool City Library, Liverpool Museum and Hale Duck Decoy and packed lunches on those days. The conference centre is set in landscaped grounds about five miles south of the city centre and is self contained; bedrooms, lecture halls, dining room and bar are all within minutes walk.

Full booking forms will be sent out in 1992. If you wish to be included on the mailing list, send your name, address and telephone number to: Clem Fisher, Liverpool Museum, William Brown Street, Liverpool L3 8EN. Please indicate if you would like to offer a paper or poster presentation, and if you would be a residential or non-residential delegate.

Stop Press

An attempt to steal eggs from the first floor stores at the Booth Museum in Brighton was recently foiled by super sleuth (and geologist) John Cooper. The following report from the Brighton Evening Argus says it all.

Butcher snatched rare museum eggs

A wildlife enthusiast was caught by staff stealing rare birds' eggs from a natural history museum.