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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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The Association attempted to obtain from Derbyshire a written assurance that the items would only be sold in accordance with the Code of Practice. This they have failed to do.

Developments at Sheffield Museum

Tim Riley has accepted early retirement from his post as Principal Keeper of Natural Sciences at Sheffield City Museum and he left the museum on 1st February 1991. Derek Whiteley has taken over as Principal Keeper and his old post of Assistant Keeper (Zoology) is now frozen. Derek is, of course, Secretary of BCG, so he will need to take a sabbatical from these duties until he has settled in to his new job. The arrangements for this will be discussed at the AGM and reported on in the next Newsletter.

BCG takes Steps to Safeguard Uncurated Collections

Stickers are now available to help safeguard uncurated collections and individual specimens. Self-adhesive for glass, cardboard boxes, wood etc., these labels are available at £1 (stamps, cheque, P.O.) for 200 (including postage) from:
Biology Curators' Group
Derek Whiteley
City Museum
Sheffield S10 2TP

This is a prototype. If there is a demand we will produce other designs and other adhesives. Hopefully these labels may prevent future authorities 'burning their Dodos', 'doing a Barnsley' or assigning scientific collections to the skip. So if you visit a museum with no natural history curator, take some stickers with you to mark collections you think are of value and which could come under threat.

THIS COLLECTION/SPECIMEN
HAS SCIENTIFIC VALUE
DO NOT DESTROY/DISPOSE
WITHOUT CONSULTING AN
EXPERIENCED CURATOR
BIOLOGY CURATORS GROUP

In the Press

Conservation News (44, March 1991) has an interesting short review by Chris Nicholson of the production, properties and composition of Shellac. This is an insect product (species *Laccifer lacca*); some 75,000 individuals are involved in producing the raw material which goes into one kilogram of the finished material. It has traditional uses in taxidermy and as a bottle or jar sealant, but the main interest of the article is in the processing of the 'lac' and the farming of the insects.

The Systematics Association, in conjunction with the Linnean Society and CAB International, have produced an attractive and informative leaflet: **Systematics - the Study of Biological Diversity**. It covers the role of systematics, the contribution of systematics to science, the relevance of systematics and the need for more resources. The leaflet is probably not suitable as general museum give away, but it is useful for handing out to specific enquirers or to those who say 'what's it all for' - and this includes many councillors. Copies are available from: The Systematics Association, c/o International Mycological Institute, Ferry Lane, Kew, Surrey TW9 3AF.

Controversy on the use and value of herbarium specimens raged for a time in *Nature* last year. In *Nature* of 16 August, it was suggested by Clifford, Rogers and Dettman that taxonomists might usefully dispense with existing large herbarium collections, instead relying on type specimens and published descriptions of species. The response was massive and a read through the reply letters published in *Nature* of 20 September provides an overwhelming array of arguments, with examples, of why we should retain our herbaria in perpetuity. They cannot be repeated here, but these arguments form the bricks and mortar of the defences we are called on more and more frequently to construct in the face of uninformed criticism from 'busy administrators and politicians seeking quick remedies to immediate ills' (to quote from one reply).

Another defence of museum natural history collections came in *Nature* of 27 September with Jared Diamond reporting on current research using the polymerase chain reaction to extract, amplify and