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## **NSCG Newsletter**

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selection of smaller groups. A bigger and better run group is potentially more attractive and so becomes yet bigger and more influential. United we stand, divided we fall.

There are potential drawbacks, as various people have pointed out. The key issue is a perceived loss of identity of individual groups and their aims and a reduction in their voice and influence. None of the aims and purposes of the individual groups are in anyway incompatible with those of the single larger group. It is proposed that the aims, committee and constitution of any new group would be established in such a way that all of these aims would be explicitly included, promoted and mutually supported. Smaller groups can gain the support of a much larger membership. It was felt that other issues raised, such as affiliations to other groups and charitable status, are practical issues, to which there are satisfactory practical solutions. With the right people on committee, there need not be a reduction in any groups' voice or influence!

The question of which groups would be involved was addressed. There are three sister groups in the UK, the Biology Curator's Group, the Natural Sciences Conservation Group and the Geological Curators' Group. This proposal was raised, and is being discussed, by the first two of these groups. However, if the above potential benefits are actually realised by the merger of these two groups then it should be apparent that merging all three groups would be even more effective and beneficial to all concerned. There appears to be a feeling within GCG that they do not wish to be involved at the present time but they are invited to become involved to whatever extent they feel appropriate. Should they still decide not to be involved, this should not stand in the way of the continued co-operation, collaboration and mutual support currently enjoyed by the three groups.



## A few potential drawbacks to merging.

The paper below is based on part on the discussion document produced by Paul Brown for the joint working group between NSCG and BCG. This meeting was held at the Natural History Museum on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2001 and was chaired by Rob Huxley. This paper includes contributions from Kate Andrew, Bob Entwistle and Vicky Purewal, together with some additional points made by Bob Entwistle, those parts in inverted commas are direct quotations.

### 1. Loss of identity for NSCG and for Natural Science Conservators and Conservation.

The BCG membership is much larger than ours. Will we be swamped? We parted from UKIC to gain a stronger voice and now have a greater influence through NCCR!

Would NSCG's healthy, monetary state be swallowed up by BCG?— NSCG's assets can only be passed on to another charity with similar objects, but NSCG could extend it's objects.

Some (especially the professional full time Conservators) would rather be members of 'THE' Natural Science Conservation Group, than a member of a smaller sub-group again. Jerry Weber of the Society of Archivists (which is a similar mix of archivists and conservators) said "if we were to go along this route, we may have to learn how to shout loudly to make our voice heard". Conservators within SPNHC don't seem to have this problem.

Within the NSCG membership, there is a dichotomy in views between those who consider themselves Professional and Accredited Conservators and those who are Natural Sciences Collections carers who are interested in Conservation and/or do the job of conservator part time. Most (but not all) Accredited Conservators want to remain independent and most (but not all) hybrid natural science museum workers want to merge.

The forty members attending the AGM in Oxford may have been principally those who are also BCG members, since it was a joint meeting. How

much of an overlap with BCG and GCG is their in our membership? Do those members not at the AGM share their pro-merger views?

Establishing the discipline of conservation within the Natural Sciences has been hard work; NSCG is now known as the point of contact for both mainstream conservators and collection managers and curators seeking information. Would a merged group still maintain such a profile?

"NSCG is not concerned with systematics, biodiversity, field work, surveys, biological monitoring, recording and curation. This is the concern of the BCG. NSCG is a group for natural science conservators and for biologists interested in learning about natural science conservation. There is an overlap as fortunately curators wish to use conservation materials and techniques, but they should be learning this from a specific source and that is experienced Natural Science Conservators. NSCG is unique in what it is trying to achieve and has started to raise its profile quite considerably. Natural science conservation is extremely important in its own right and should be able to continue to do its good work without its being encompassed by a stronger, richer body".

## **2. Two-way merge is not desirable as compared to a three-way merge.**

One view stated is that "a merger is only sensible if it brings together BCG, GCG and NSCG. There would be no benefit for a two-way merge - this could be misinterpreted as group 'x' being weak and having to join up with group 'y' to become financially viable, or to increase membership or to increase influence. A three-way merge with specialist meetings plus a joint AGM would be a much better vision and would not suffer from the above negative spin". Many who wish to see a merger would prefer all three groups to be involved to be like the SPNHC model.

**The 'straw poll' voting slip is enclosed with this edition of The Newsletter along with an SAE. Please use it to represent your views and return it to Amanda Sutherland a.s.a.p.**

## **Pyrite Decay Seminar**

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The NSCG ran a very successful one-day seminar on Pyrite Decay on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 2001. The seminar, co-ordinated by Adrian Doyle, was held at the Natural History Museum, London and was very well received, with approximately 25 people attending. The day was divided into the morning session of six talks by guest speakers and after lunch a visit to the Palaeontology Conservation Unit to see demonstrations of different treatments for pyrite decay. The last hour of the day was set aside for refreshments and informal discussion.

### **Paul Davis – A curators requirement for pyretic specimens**

The first speaker was Paul Davis, a curator of Palaeo-Botony specimens at the Natural History Museum. He discussed the relationship between curators and conservators within collections management and the potential conflicts that may arise. The role of these two clearly overlap in the caring of objects although there are some subtle differences. Curators wish to handle and extract information from the specimens, whereas conservators are primarily concerned with the preservation of the specimens. This conflict is duplicated in the primary function of the museum, to hold the collections as a permanent resource to be held in trust for future generations and it's mission to maintain and develop its collections and use them to promote discovery, understanding, responsible use and enjoyment of the natural world. Paul Davis discussed the importance for the conservator and curator to communicate with each other and to identify common aims, needs and priorities with particular emphasis on specimens that had evidence or the potential to suffer pyrite decay.

### **David Gray – A case study: *Liopleurodon***

David is a conservator in the Palaeontology Department of the Natural History Museum, London. The specimen of *Liopleurodon ferox*, a pliosaur from the Oxford clay was found near Peterborough, about 60 years ago. David discussed the conservation and storage of the upper and lower jaw