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Author(s): Moore, S.

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AGM TALKS

Museum Rescue

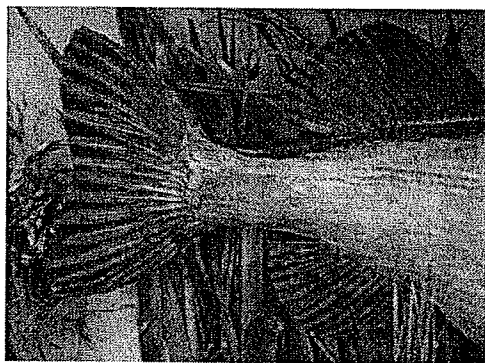
Saving de-accessioned and material for disposal.

Simon Moore, Hampshire County Museums, Chilcomb House, Chilcomb Lane,
Winchester, SO23 8RD

E-mail: simon.moore@hants.gov.uk

Museum curators, as we well know, are masters of the tactical gambit so that when some long-forgotten specimen emerges from an equally long-forgotten glory hole that is now required for storage, they come to the conservator with a line "I think that we ought to bin this" begging the reply "Oh no, I'm sure that I can do something to improve it". This neatly circumnavigates the conservator's outrage at being "far too busy" or "Who allowed it to get into this state?" Another ploy is to circulate other museums that have educational facilities, knowing that they will (usually) accept anything that's going. This also avoids the embarrassing task of contacting the relatives of deceased persons explaining how their once-treasured 'bequest/s' came to be de-accessioned and thrown away.

Many specimens are also just put up for grabs for the simple reason of storage paucity or they don't need quite so many mounted pike specimens to demonstrate species variation. Such an example came from Reading Museum a few years ago and those who came to the Liverpool conference in 1999 may remember this specimen and Patricia Martin who helped to conserve and restore it. Even the

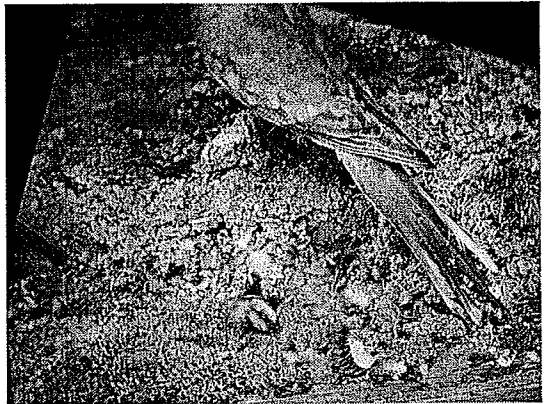


bow-front glass with its gilt border required re-lacquering BEFORE washing (otherwise the gold leaf has a nasty habit of floating away in a multitude of tiny pieces!) As usual *Anthrenus verbasci* larvae had been hard at work resulting in many large holes, especially to the fin rays and some of

the spiky teeth were missing. The fin ray gaps were papered using Japanese *Gampi* tissue with torn edges (not cut) so that they would blend in, glued with neutral pH PVA, which also provides a good fish skin texture when dry. Gluing wooden spikes onto the broken teeth stumps restored the missing teeth. The reed bed was tidied up and the fish was finished with a layer of button polish lacquer that imparts a slightly golden glow (Fig. 1).

Another application for Japanese tissue, this time using a finer grain and very lightweight *Kozo* velin tissue, was tested on the *Anthrenus*-munched wing of a Kingfisher. The paper was attached to the damaged area of each feather using a 50% aqueous solution of PVA and ensuring that the feather acquired its natural curvature during drying. Unfortunately, nearly half of the feathers for this bird's wing had been shredded beyond repair but once the feathers, re-mounted on the *kozo* tissue had been attached to the wing, the whole specimen looked much better.

Finally, a case was rescued from the upper landing of Clandon House, near Guildford, which contains about 60-70 Australian birds, which Lord Onslow had decided to use to brighten up his bathroom! The hugely fluctuating humidity had cause the cotton wadding in the birds' heads to expand forcing glass eyes out of sockets and onto the bottom



of the case! As if this wasn't bad enough he (presumably and) accidentally kicked in a lower panel of the glass front, allowing the ingress of mice. Fortunately, the mice didn't enjoy the taste of the birds and only a few were really badly damaged (Fig.2). However, after some careful re-building of bird crania, wings and other body parts from the sea of feathers that littered the base of the case, together with the eyes that had to be re-inserted into the correct heads, the case was duly returned to the National Trust whose rapturous remarks vindicated the fact that conservation and restoration really can bridge the gap between the dustbin and re-display.