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## NatSCA News

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Title: Society for the Protection of Natural History Collections Annual Conference: 'Modern Museums: Balancing Tradition and Technology'

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Source: Lewis, S. & Brown, P. (2004). Society for the Protection of Natural History Collections Annual Conference: 'Modern Museums: Balancing Tradition and Technology'. *NatSCA News, Issue 2*, 14 - 16.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/323>

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**Society for the Protection of Natural History Collections Annual Conference**  
**‘Modern Museums: Balancing Tradition and Technology’**  
**Lubbock, Texas. June 15th-19th 2003**

*Sue Lewis & Paul Brown*

This year's (18<sup>th</sup>) SPNHC meeting, themed on ‘Modern Museums: Balancing Tradition and Technology’, was held in the high plains city of Lubbock, Texas, and hosted jointly with the Museum of Natural History, Texas Tech University. In total, 110 delegates attended, including a Dutch man (Dries van Dam, ICOM's Natural History Collections Working Group chair), a Dane and four Brits. (Simon Owens from Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew and Rob Huxley, Sue Lewis & Paul Brown from the Natural History Museum, London), the rest consisting of 11 Canadians and 92 Americans (with 3 expat Brits including Chris Norris) and a lone New Zealander.

**Sunday 15th.** The first official SPNHC activities of the week for non-committee members consisted of a field trip. Waiting for the ‘coach’ we saw a number of Desert Cottontail *Sylvilagus audubonii* and Black Tailed Jackrabbits *Lepus californicus* around the museum. No coach arrived but the longest stretched Excursion SUV limousine we had ever seen, took 11 of us to the Pan Handle Plains Museum at Canyon, Randall County, see the comprehensive displays on natural history and human life of the southern high plains.



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The Palaeontology display of local Triassic and Cenozoic fossils was particularly good with a full range of different sized Bison species. We then carefully entered and descended into Palo Duro Canyon, the second largest Canyon in the USA (120 x 20 miles and 800 feet deep) and studied the late Triassic red sandstone and gypsum strata where lurked a large black widow spider female with eggs. Heavy recent rain had caused there to be much standing water and the arid plain to bloom with flowers. In the evening, one of the members declined attendance of the outdoor musical extravaganza ‘Texas’ and was rewarded with views of coyotes, mule deer, golden-fronted and red-headed woodpeckers and painted buntings.

The technical sessions started on **Monday 16<sup>th</sup>** and included Keynote speaker Terry Yates (Vice Provost for Research, University of New Mexico). His excellent talk discussed networking with other institutions and raising the profile of the importance of our collections to broaden our horizons in the search for new, less obvious and larger funding opportunities. Just because we enjoy what we do does not mean it is not important so we should be more vocal and demonstrate our importance. We all wished that we had a ‘Terry’ working for our museum!

*Texas Tech University Museum tours*

Dr Marylin Houck and Henry Crawford presented the Invertebrate Collections. The col-

lection is rich in insects (520000 specimens, 325000 ant specimens) from Texas and South-eastern USA and Mexico, insects associated with *Prosopis* (Mesquite Trees) from Argentina to the USA and in vertebrate endo- and ecto-parasites from the USA (60000 specimens). 71000 specimens are out on loan to 18 research institutions in the USA and Brazil. Environmental conditions vary between 68-74°F and 45-50% R.H. After the discontinuation of the use of naphthalene and PDB, all incoming material is frozen to -80°C for at least three days. In the wet collections, they use BioQuip Resistall paper and Lexmark Z54 inkjet printer (#70 black ink) and dry labels are printed on BioQuip acid free 36-pound white 100% rag paper with a laser printer. All fluid collections are double sealed, inner vials with cotton or polyethylene cap within glass jars with polypropylene lids / polyethylene liners. All microscope slides are stored horizontally to avoid slip by gravity. There followed an ice-breaker reception in the Museum's Sculpture Court where Richard Monk's four gifted young children gave an excellent and extended string quartet recital.

At lunch-time delegates visited MacKenzie Park to see 'Prairie Dog Town', a large colony of Black Tailed Prairie Dogs *Cynomys ludovicianus* confined behind a low wall with two pairs of Burrowing Owls with chicks occupying vacant prairie dog burrows.



#### **Special interest group meetings:**

*Conservation Group* - chaired by Gretchen Anderson. A rather quiet meeting with reports of local problems. Paul Brown reported on the latest developments in research into the Thermo-Lignum heat treatments.

*Integrated Pest Management Group* - chaired by AMNH. This was the first pests special interest group meeting at a SPNCH conference, which proved in contrast to the previously reported meeting, to be very successful following the inspirational presentation Richard Monk gave in Montreal on using GIS system to monitor pests at Texas Tech. University. Seventeen delegates felt that everyone was doing IPM but all slightly differently and there needs to be some co-ordination. The AMNH and the Smithsonian have been collaborating and developing IPM procedures by implementing a database that can be used by both institutes and using a bar-code system. Suzanne reported on the major progress achieved by the IPM Group at the Natural History Museum, London. She also suggested that we would be interested in collaborating in producing an international standard rather than a North American standard that could be useful to everyone. There is a sense that the smaller museums are looking to the Nationals for guidance and I believe we are in a position to do that with the work that has already been done. [Following this meeting Suzanne invited Chris Norris to talk to the NHM, London IPM Group and the NHM and the AMNH have agreed in principle to collaborate to work towards the development of a useful IPM standard.]

Speakers on **Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup>** included N.B. Frank Walski (Smithsonian Institute) 'Shipping specimens and compliance with dangerous goods regulations'. We were much unsettled to here that USA and international regulations control the shipping of specimens in alcohol, formalin and other preservative chemicals! Sending specimens abroad by air, either by hand or in luggage requires additional requirements as listed in the International

Air Transport Association guidebook. Specimens in alcohol should go by cargo and be fully documented. Regulations dictate how specimens should be packed, in what container, in what quantity (500ml in 30 ml tubes is permissible) and what labels and documents are required. All packers of specimens must undergo special training. At present most specimens are shipped in violation of the US postal regulations. Shipping under the “excepted quantity” and using UN certified containers could reduce the cost of using registered carriers such as ‘FedEx’. How many of us are presently breaking the law those responsible for sending and packing offending parcels will be subject to large fines!

Business on **Thursday 19<sup>th</sup>** included the SPNHC AGM. As part of the ‘New Business’, Paul Brown, gave notice of the 20<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of SPNHC planned to be held from 12<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> in June 2005 and to be hosted by The Natural History Museum, London in association with NatSCA and GCG. The theme is hoped to be setting, maintaining and implementation of standards throughout natural science collections management, curation and conservation. The workshop will be on Risk Assessment. A motion to accept the invitation from the London local SPNHC committee was passed. He also passed on the news to the meeting of the successful merger of NSCG with BCG to form NatSCA. Chris Norris, gave notice of next year’s 19<sup>th</sup> annual SPNHC meeting in New York, 11<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> May 2004 to cover two main themes; 1. Emergency Preparedness, Response and Salvage and 2. Management of Frozen Collections. This to be held jointly with International Society for Biological & Environmental Repositories (ISBER).

The afternoon was spent exploring Lubbock’s retail experience and dodging torrential rainfall. Lubbock is the hometown of Buddy Holly so to recognise this, SPNHC held their annual banquet at the Buddy Holly Center & Museum with a live cover band and the Europeans, as usual, leading the dancing from the front.

**Friday 20<sup>th</sup>** saw the start of the two-day SPNHC workshop was entitled ‘Use of Technology in Museums’ and consisted of a series of lectures with very little in the way of the practical workshop sessions, which we had envisaged. Some of the presentations though long were of interest. Richard Monk (Texas Tech University, Lubbock) welcomed participants and introduced the workshop.

The talks this year were very interesting and to a high standard and much very useful information was taken back to the work place. Many of the presentations will be published in ‘Collections Forum’. We thank Richard Monk and his team for organising the conference and for extending to us the famous West Texan hospitality.

