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Thornton has set the Night-blowing Cereus (called *Cactus grandiflorus* by Thornton), a native of Jamaica and Cuba, in a very English moonlit background which makes a dramatic but rather incongruous picture. In his efforts to make this 'the most magnificent botanical publication ever produced', Thornton enlisted eminent painters and engravers to execute his original and unique conception. Sadly, this gorgeous book ruined Thornton financially. Although modern critics treat Thornton almost as a figure of fun because of his rather flowery and overblown prose, it must be remembered that it was popular at that time.

John Sibthorp (1758-96) and James Edward Smith (1759-1828)

Ferdinand Bauer (1760-1826)

In A.D.512, the classical Greek scholar, Dioscorides who was a doctor in the Roman army, wrote the most influential herbal for fifteen centuries called *De Materia Medica*. As a result of his interest in the plants recorded by Dioscorides, John Sibthorp, Sherardian Professor at Oxford arrived in Vienna in 1784 to study the manuscript in the National Library. There he met Ferdinand Bauer, a remarkable botanical illustrator, and persuaded him to join in his botanical tour of discovery round Greece. *Flora Graeca* (1806-40) is the result of this labour. It consists of 10 large folio volumes, comprising 966 plates after drawings by Bauer. In 1811, Thomas Martyn, Cambridge Professor of Botany, spoke of the *Flora Graeca* by saying "In short, the whole execution of the work is deserving of the highest praise"

Sir J.E. Smith (1759-1828), an eminent doctor of medicine and also the man responsible for bringing the collections and library of Carl Linnaeus to England in 1784, edited some of the volumes of *Flora Graeca* before his death in 1828.

William Roxburgh (1751-1815)

Plants of the coast of Coromandel (1795-1819) is another of the botanical books produced as a result of the scientific investigation of foreign lands. It is an important work relating to Indian botany which Roxburgh studied on several voyages to India and during his appointment as assistant surgeon on the East India Company's Madras establishment. To quote Professor Stearn, "Wm. Roxburgh spent more than thirty years of his life in India, an eminent botanist and a meticulous if rather arid artist his *Plants of the coast of Coromandel*, must rank among the most impressive publications of the age, though his plates, which were engraved from some of his large collection of drawings by native Indian artists, are often rather marred by a heavy and wiry outline." We have copies of eleven of these illustrations.

It has to be said that the collection has been fairly stable for the last 57 years and in our efforts to care for and conserve it, we may cause damage by handling and moving the drawings. In order to avoid over-handling, we have instigated a rolling programme with the Photography Department to supply us with slides and photos of the original work. The collection has been entered into the computerised Collections Management System (C.M.S.) to

make data easily available. The preparation for a major exhibition in October 1997, mean even more disruption with mounting, framing and exposure to light but it is time our exquisite and illuminating collection was brought back to life: we must take care our kiss is not the kiss of death.

Accreditation for Local Record Centres

Bill Butcher

Somerset Environmental Record Centre, July 1997

Comments on Steve Garland's (Bolton Museum & Art Gallery) suggestions for LRC accreditation, as published in The Biology Curator, 6, July 1996 and NW Recorder User Group Newsletter 1996.

General Comments

The emphasis of a successful Local Records Centre must be on providing a high standard of service to users, rather than collecting information for its own sake. This means that the centre's policies should be "user-led" rather than "provider-led". My main concern is that the suggestions that Steve Garland makes for accreditation appear to be rather "provider-led".

It is imperative to avoid over-burdening ourselves with resource-intensive administrative systems that could tie LRCs up in unnecessary bureaucracy and make it impossible to provide a fast, up-to-date and reliable service for users. The danger is that, while each suggestion may seem to be harmless and desirable in itself, taken together the requirements may be impossible within realistic available resources.

There are many aspects of accreditation that are omitted from SG's paper. In my view accreditation should also cover subjects such as management structure (for example, a commitment to local partnership working; statutory agencies, NGOs and local authorities should all be represented) and priorities for data collection, processing and provision (e.g. a commitment to using methods that will contribute to surveillance and monitoring of local and national biodiversity action targets). It may be necessary for management of key datasets to be obligatory. The words "habitat" and "site" do not appear in the paper.

Part of the problem with SG's paper is that some of the terms are used ambiguously. For example, is "collecting" in item 1 referring to information collecting or specimen collecting? (both phrases are used later).

Comments on specific numbered points

My principal concerns are these:

8. Security. As written this would close every LRC down. There are several aspects of confidentiality to be considered — wildlife abuse risk, landowner sensitivities, data provider sensitivities and intellectual property rights. LRCs cannot

operate by referring back to data providers before allowing access to records, so data provider sensitivities must be kept to a minimum, although of course respected. Data providers must trust the LRC to operate within the constraints of an agreed confidentiality policy. The most valid reason for keeping a (very small) proportion of records confidential, in most circumstances, is not data provider sensitivity but risk of wildlife abuse (rare bird nesting sites etc).

9. Voucher specimens. I have few problems with this as written, although it requires very careful thought. Any strengthening of this aspect (e.g. requiring LRCs to hold collections of their own, or requiring voucher specimens to be collected in certain types of project) would be strongly resisted. The proposed policy does rather beg the question as to whether museums and recognised research institutes have the desire and resources to receive voucher specimens. Furthermore, where should the onus of validation lie?

12. Archives. I have not seen BS-5454 so can't comment fully. I would be concerned that the standard might not be directly relevant to biological records and might generate unreasonable administrative burdens on the LRC.

13. Staff. I don't understand the wording of this. If it is saying that an LRC could operate with a geologist and a part-time administrator, I beg to differ. The minimum staff requirements of LRCs are those required to deliver a full service to local partner organisations and the public, and to meet the requirement of the National Biodiversity Network. In my view (and that of the CCBR report — *Biological Recording in the UK 1995*) this minimum requirement is 3 full-time staff.

Other comments of lesser concern are:

5. Access to Records. Allowing visitors to access any data held on disk would be extremely difficult to operate in practice and raise serious concerns among providers of data to the LRC.

6. National Recording Schemes. Forwarding of data to national species recording schemes is certainly desirable but must be accompanied by systems for the national BRC to supply data to LRCs. The periodicity may need to be more frequent than annual.

14. Legality of data collection. We must be extremely careful with words on this subject. I am not sure whether there is an accepted definition of "illegal". We should avoid the thorny issue of the receipt of data collected by third parties from public rights of way or by technical trespass. LRC policies should specify protocols only for data collection by in-house staff and commissioned surveys.

16. Data Recording Facilities. I don't know what is meant by "data recording facilities". I agree with the principle that an LRC should cover all taxonomic groups (and all habitats, and all sites across the full geographical range that the LRC covers, including the marine environment, where relevant, for that matter).

The National Biodiversity Network

Since my last report, things have been progressing. Three Pilot Projects have been chosen. These are funded by the Wildlife Trust Partnership's Esme Fairburn Trust grant. They are in Cheshire, Powys & the Brecon Beacons National Park and North East Scotland. Small groups in each of the three countries met to examine all of the bids and produced shortlists for the Local Advisory Group to consider. These shortlists included a preferred option in each case. These preferred options were those chosen and endorsed by the LAG. The four posts have been advertised (a Project Manager and three Support Officers) with a closing date of 13 November. The Manager will be based in Lincoln whereas the three Support Officers will be based at the respective project sites.

As part of the project a study has been commissioned to run from November to February to develop Operational Standards and Good Practice Guidelines. This will review existing information, including all the information submitted as part of past national surveys. It will then focus on a small number of existing LRCs to see how they operate. The information will then be available for further discussion. As a BCG representative I want to ensure that effective use is made of existing biological recording expertise. We have been running records centres for over twenty years, so the accumulated experience is considerable.

The end products of this will be

- an assessment of the scale of involvement and the range of people involved within individual LRCs
- an evaluation of existing procedures and services provided
- examples of case studies for use by pilot LRCs
- a database of existing LRCs and organisations carrying out similar functions at a local level
- evaluation of value of existing work and recommendations to LAG on the next steps.

The results will feed into the pilot project development plan process and be a foundation for the development of Accreditation Standards.

The Lottery Bid

A bid has been put together for consideration by the Heritage Lottery Fund for a National Biodiversity Network, roughly along the lines of the original Millennium Bid. Bolton, Ipswich, Leicestershire, Bristol and Nottingham Museums financed the cost of Dave Mellor being involved on the group authoring the bid. This enabled BCG to be involved, which was previously impossible due to the time commitments of all other BCG members who are involved. This must be an important consideration when thinking about the Association mentioned below.

Association of Local Records Centres

A proposal has been developed to form an Association of Local Records Centres. This is a part of the NBN proposals, but it is hoped to create this body sooner rather than later! You should be contacted during the next few weeks if you