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Author(s): Garland, S.

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Best Value — What's it all about?

A number of museums will already be only too aware of the implications of Best Value, but all of us will be involved, whether we like it or not! Legislation will be in place by April 2000 to make it compulsory for all tax-raising Local Authorities, but most Local Authorities are already developing it. Its fundamental purpose is to make it a duty of Local Authorities to provide economic, efficient and effective services.

The Government has said that "there will be no place for the mediocre, no excuse for inefficiency and zero tolerance of waste". It will be a statutory requirement to produce Local Performance Plans which encompass corporate objectives, sustainable development and agreed targets for service improvement. Local Authority Museums will all be included.

Government officials have said that Best Value is all about driving up standards and driving down costs; continuous improvement and encouraging partnerships. The Government has also made it clear that the Arts will only be taken seriously if they market themselves as part of the local economy of an area.

These developments can be seen as a real opportunity as well as threat. However, it is worth bearing in mind that there may be sanctions for under-performing Authorities. The Government may intervene to bring in external assistance, to enforce competition or even to transfer service provision to a third party! Whichever way you see them, it will undoubtedly require considerable resources to establish Best Value procedures.

If you want to know more, then I suggest that you track down your Best Value Support Officer. They will probably be found in the department that currently deals with Compulsory Competitive Tendering issues. If you find that you do not have one, or get the reply 'What's Best Value?' then it might be a good time to consider a career move!

Steve Garland

Bolton Museum, Art Gallery & Aquarium

Book Review

Surrey Invertebrate Atlas Project

The series of atlases consists of four books to date covering Butterflies, Dragonflies, Moths and Hoverflies. Each book follows the same format consisting of a number of informative clear distribution maps. They all have very good introductions on the Surrey area giving its geology and relating it to the study organisms. The series is an invaluable conservation tool and forms an excellent baseline for all future work.

Butterflies of Surrey-Graham A. Collins

This is the first in the series and is well illustrated. It has a useful section on collecting and the law. It gives an

interesting insight into the dynamics of Surrey's butterfly populations, giving reasons for the decline of some species and the increase of others. Distribution maps for all the species occurring in Surrey are given together with habitat notes. All the species resident in Surrey are illustrated with delightful photographs. The only downside of the book is that it is aimed at the butterfly community, it is not very useful if you do not already know your butterflies. I felt it would have been beneficial to include species descriptions, so that the amateur naturalist or interested local people could identify local populations.

Dragon flies of Surrey-Peter Follet

This was a very interesting book and provided a good insight into Dragonflies. It left you feeling that you know what a dragonfly is, what their different habitats are and how to identify them. In the introduction it has a useful breakdown on what species occur in each habitat type and the conservation issues surrounding the sites. As with all books in the series it had excellent illustrations. It gave illustrations of both male and female for all species occurring in the Surrey region. It also gave a very interesting section on fossil dragonflies. Distribution maps and habitats for all species were given.

Larger moths of Surrey-Graham A. Coolins

In the introduction an interesting section on the different moth habitats of Surrey was provided illustrating the vastness of moth diversity in the area, 540 resident moths. It gives the conservation problems in the area and a useful section on how to collect moths. It is unfortunate that not more moths could be illustrated, as it would help local enthusiasts come to terms with the vastness of diversity in their area. Again species descriptions would be invaluable for the casual reader. The plates are arranged in habitat type, which is useful, and larval stages are illustrated for each family.

Hoverflies of Surrey — Roger K. A. Morris

This gives a really useful section on the biology and form of the hoverfly, with clear diagrams to the different parts of the hoverfly anatomy. It explains the specialised habitat requirements of the hoverfly and how they can be used as indicator species. It gives concise descriptions of the different habitat types associated species. It also has a wonderful highlighted section on some of the more interesting sites in the Surrey area to allow the newcomer to hoverfly recording a few interesting days out. There is an encouraging section on recording techniques and biological observations aimed at encouraging more people to take part in the monitoring process. It could have benefited from species descriptions so that people enthused by this brilliant introduction to the hoverfly could fully participate in the monitoring process. It arranges its plates in habitat types and again could benefit from more of these 209 species being illustrated.

Geraldine Reid

Department Botany, The Natural History Museum,
London