



<http://www.natsca.org>

The Biology Curator

Title: Book Review: Catalogue of the Brambles of Britain and Ireland in the collections of the Liverpool Museum (LIV)

Author(s): Francis, P.

Source: Francis, P. (1995). Book Review: Catalogue of the Brambles of Britain and Ireland in the collections of the Liverpool Museum (LIV). *The Biology Curator, Issue 2*, 4 - 5.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/571>

NatSCA supports open access publication as part of its mission is to promote and support natural science collections. NatSCA uses the Creative Commons Attribution License (CCAL) <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/> for all works we publish. Under CCAL authors retain ownership of the copyright for their article, but authors allow anyone to download, reuse, reprint, modify, distribute, and/or copy articles in NatSCA publications, so long as the original authors and source are cited.

etc), and encouraging some of the well established members of our community to sit on it. It would have the aims of developing strategy, generating support, especially financially, and initiating action. To this end a report will be presented to MGC, who will hopefully be able to provide direct support for the working party. I hope to be able to bring further news before long.

Steve Thompson, Scunthorpe Museum

REVIEWS

CONSERVATION AND THE HERBARIUM - CONFERENCE REPORT.

"If an extreme caricature were to be painted between the attitudes of botanist and conservator, the conservator might be seen by the botanist as a come-lately to the field, ignorant of the 400 year tradition of botanical curation. The conservator might paint an equally black picture of the botanist as thoughtlessly following out-of-date practices without any understanding of conservation principles and modern methods." Angus Gunn, Conservation and the Herbarium Conference Report.

The Institute of Paper Conservation's conference took place at Liverpool Museum on 14th May 1993 (see BCG Newsletter, Vol. 6, No. 2.). Its aim was to bring together botanists (i.e. curators/researchers) and conservators, both in terms of speakers and delegates, to air their views and experiences on a topic of common interest and so dispel any hint of the above stereotypes. Angus Gunn concluded his paper with a request for more dialogue and that is exactly what this report represents. 41 pages of curatorial points-of-view and conservational experiences introduced and edited by Bob Child (Head of Conservation, N.M.W.).

The order of papers in the report is at variance with that of the day and so, in keeping with this, this review pays attention to neither. There are two papers from Cardiff. Firstly, Bob Child's "Environmental and Pest Control in Herbaria" provides a marvellously comprehensive and yet succinct account of exactly what the title suggests while Vicky Purewal (conservation officer, N.M.W.) details how a wide range of conservational parameters and a variety of specimen material were combined to carry out a

"Collections' Condition Survey of Herbarium and Non-herbarium Material in the National Museum of Wales Botany Storerooms".

Curatorial perspectives are put forward by Angus Gunn (curator of the Extra-European Herbarium, N.M.G.M.) and Rob Huxley (Head of Curation Division, Department of Botany, N.H.M.). In "Past and Current Practices: The Botanist's View" Angus Gunn provides a brief history of herbarium methods and weighs up the need for information retrieval from the specimen versus their preservation, stating a museum fundamental - "herbarium specimens are collected to be used". Rob Huxley continues this theme in "Aspects of herbarium Conservation and Management at the Natural History Museum", identifying conflicts between use and conservation and describing his departments attempts to minimise these. Brief mention is also given here to a means of indicating the state of collections and identifying priorities for conservation by formatting data on specimen and label condition into a matrix.

The remaining three papers constitute case studies of ongoing conservation projects. Kate Edmondson (senior paper conservator, Kew) describes "The Conservation of Botanical Prints and Drawings at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew" through the establishment of the Preservation Unit, its consequent preservation programme to stabilise the collections and the particular hands-on conservation techniques employed. Returning to Liverpool, N.M.G.M.'s under-construction Conservation Centre heavily underlines its interest in developing conservational expertise. Two papers relating to current project serve to illustrate this. Firstly the conservation of one of Liverpool Museum's most important collections, the 10,500 strong Royle Herbarium, is described in detail (complete with photographs) by conservator Donna Hughes and senior paper conservator Nicola Walker. This exemplifies a joint project between the Paper Conservation and Botany Departments with the collection being simultaneously conserved and re-curated. Secondly, organics conservator, Tracey Seddon catalogues the range of equipment and materials (including saliva!) experimented with and ultimately used in the conservation of Liverpool Museum's mixed-media anatomical plant model collection. Two means of

transporting such large, and yet delicate, specimens are outlined.

Having read the report two things have stayed with me. Firstly, the balance, conciseness and readability of the papers and secondly, the amount of conservational equipment and material referred to, complete with lists of supplier addresses. My only question mark was to why the abstracts appeared at the end, and not at the beginning, of the papers.

The report (ISBN 0 9507 268 6 9) is available from The Institute of Paper Conservation, Leigh Lodge, Worcestershire, WR6 5LB priced £10.00 Members, £15.00 Non-members.

Mike Palmer, Natural History Centre, Liverpool Museum, NMGM.

CATALOGUE OF THE BRAMBLES OF BRITAIN AND IRELAND in the collections of the Liverpool Museum (LIV), by Michael Palmer, edited by John Edmondson. Published by the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside as Liverpool Museum Occasional Paper no.8 on 3 Nov.1994. Price £12.00 net (ISBN 0-906267-70-0). Copies available from NMGM Enterprises Ltd, PO Box 33, 127 Dale Street, Liverpool L69 3LA.

This publication is taken from a much more extensive computerised database of the *Rubus* collections at Liverpool Museum. However it is not merely a list of data extracted from specimens as it also includes additional information provided by a great many people.

The 223 species of bramble in the catalogue, whose collection dates span over 160 years, are arranged in alphabetical order and are brought up to date using classification from Edees & Newton (*Brambles of the British Isles*, Ray Society, 1988) and Kent (*List of Vascular Plants...*, BSBI, 1992). In advance of publication, confirmation and redetermination of specimens were made, notably by Edees and Newton who during preparation for their own publication, examined *Rubus* specimens in many herbaria, including Liverpool.

Geographical accuracy is also brought up to date with the addition of a National Grid Reference on each entry. These were all checked with the vice-county recorders of the Botanical Society of the British Isles, enabling about 40% of the specimens to be given grid references to an accuracy of 1km.

Watsonian vice-county numbers are given for each specimen in addition to a modern county name, so satisfying both camps. Other expected categories in the catalogue are collector, date and accession number. The catalogue is clearly produced and easy to read. However, there seems to be an error on page 23 where two specimens of *R. chrysoxylon* (syn. *R. mercicus* var. *chrysoxylon*) are misplaced under *R. mercicus* in the alphabetic list. This has been taken into account in the index and both pages are referred to but, in addition, a cross-reference at both catalogue entries would have been useful.

The analysis of the dates of collection of *Rubus* specimens at Liverpool Museum will reflect that found in herbaria across the country, the study of this group of flowering plants peaking in the late Victorian era. For many herbaria this publication will be useful for comparison of specimen data with those at Liverpool. However, unless the nomenclature of the collection to be compared has been updated then direct comparison will be impossible. Access would be needed to other publications, such as those already mentioned, to cope with the many synonyms and nomenclature changes found in this group of plants. It could be interesting, if not already done, to find out if the species are still extant where their original locations still exist.

Museums need to communicate information on the collections in their care both to fellow workers and the general public. This can be done successfully by exhibitions but natural history reference collections present special problems. Specimens often occur in great quantity and are physically fragile. Published catalogues can adequately fulfil this communication role and offer the advantage of greater permanence over exhibitions but their appearance is rare. This is why Liverpool Museum is to be congratulated on the production of a complete catalogue of the over 2,000 bramble specimens in their care.

Patricia Francis, Bolton Museum and Art Gallery

LEICESTERSHIRE DRAGONFLIES. Steve Grover and Helen Ikin. 1994. 64pp. Paperbound. ISBN 0850223598. £6.50. Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service.

In recent years dragonflies have become relatively popular insects and this increasing interest in the group has

led to the publication of accounts of the dragonflies of several counties. Leicestershire, the latest county to receive such treatment, has twenty-two certainly recorded dragonfly species (about half the number on the British list) together with the largest current county membership of the British Dragonfly Society. The aim of the book is to further stimulate interest in the dragonflies of the county, primarily by facilitating their identification (adults only) and showing from where within Leicestershire they have been recorded. The text is 'user friendly' with technical terminology fully explained and employed sparingly.

Short introductory sections outline the life histories of dragonflies, include a chart showing the period in the year when the commoner species may be seen on the wing, and briefly discuss conservation and the recording of Odonata. The major part of the book deals with the sixteen species known to breed in the county. Each of these is given a two-page spread that includes a distribution map of 1km squares in which the species has been recorded (the number of 1km squares is used to calculate a 'rarity score'), the total number of records, habitats depicted symbolically in order of frequency, a verbal account of status and distribution, identification features and flight period. Identification is aided by the provision of annotated colour illustrations which, although lacking artistic refinement, are admirably clear and emphasise the characteristics of each species. Interesting features include graphs showing the increase in recent years of the numbers of records of the Emperor and Migrant Hawker dragonflies, and a pie diagram of the numbers of five species visiting gardens. The six Leicestershire species for which breeding has not been confirmed are treated in less detail but two pages of ink drawings should ensure their identification. A simple but adequate identification key is provided to all twenty-two species.

There is much information in this book, but the scant reference to particular Leicestershire localities is disappointing. More details about the richer sites, with species lists, would have been informative and given a lead to novice observers on where to look. Admittedly, this information could be extracted from the distribution maps, but only after laboriously matching dots with places on the ground.

An erratum sheet inserted by the publishers lists thirteen errors. Unfortunately, there are several others, principally inconsistencies in type-setting which give the book a rather untidy appearance. Also, throughout the book, all species' authorities appear in parentheses irrespective of whether or not the species remains in its original genus. These shortcomings, however, hardly detract from the usability of the book, and it should certainly achieve the authors' aim of encouraging others to take a closer look at the Odonata of Leicestershire.

R.A. Askew

***Insect Collection News* - a review of some articles.**

For those of you who do not know about this Newsletter, it is edited by Ron McGinley at the Department of Entomology at the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.20560, USA. He can also be contacted on e-mail: mnhen011@sivm.si.edu

1 - New Technology And Museums

One excellent article was originally published in the *Bulletin of Entomological Research* (83: 471-474, 1993) by Scott E Miller. It discusses the role of new information technology in entomology, but is of relevant interest to anyone involved in managing databases of collections, research or biological recording data. It is a fact that there are now one and a half million computers connected to the international network system called INTERNET. This is estimated to include about fifteen million users in over fifty countries. User levels have been doubling annually.

The article discusses many issues that are already being mentioned in the UK. I have recently been involved in several discussions concerning the availability of biological recording data. These discussions have often revolved around charging for data access and copyright of data. This article takes a very different view. I will quote a few interesting passages.

"The vast amount of information becoming available at low cost on the Internet is also changing the economics and politics of information management. It is no longer viable to hoard information and try to sell it, because most or all of the information is available somewhere else at no charge. In recent years, some institutions have