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biological degree.

Scientific methods and practical skills

Effective use of collections can play an important role in allowing students to expand their scientific methodology and practical skills within a biological context. Any structured active learning experience will allow students time to evaluate knowledge and put that knowledge into context. By applying them to specimens, the understanding of concepts can be tested. With the right direction and support specimens can be used to promote discussion and arouse curiosity, and help students develop skills in asking so-called 'why, what and how' questions; the development of an enquiring mind is a fundamental part of science education. In addition transferable, practical skills can be acquired and promoted. Skills such as observation, data acquisition, accuracy and communication are useful not just within a scientific context but for life in general.

An underlying factor in the role of collections for undergraduate teaching is their 'effective' use. Whilst discussing the uses of particular specimens is beyond the scope of this article, it is worth noting a few important requirements that need to be in place for effective teaching to take place. Firstly, suitable facilities must be available. Obviously access to a collection is necessary, but in addition, that collection needs to be accessible not just in the manner in which the general public views collections, but specimens need to be taken out from behind glass and placed into the immediate environment of the student. It follows that space in which this can take place needs to be provided. Secondly, teaching staff need to be willing to put in the time required to use collections. Preparation time for the structured and effective use of collections can be extensive. Questions and activities need to be carefully formulated for students to benefit from the experience; appropriate lines of tutorial support need to be in place. In addition, the circumnavigation of constraints imposed by space, class size and class time may require much ingenuity on behalf of the museum and teaching staff. Thirdly, a collection needs someone to manage and maintain it. Ideally, this would be

a dedicated museum curator. However, members of academic staff can take on this role given suitable training and with a realistic amount of time designated for the purpose.

Whatever the needs, however, it is hoped that the above paragraphs illustrate some of the important parts that biological collections play in tertiary-level education. Understanding this role is the first step towards reinstating the value of collections as a teaching resource within universities. When used in the right way collections provide a structured learning experience, promoting effective, active learning as well as enjoyable learning. They also produce enthusiastic, enquiring, communicative minds, which at the end of the day is what a university education is all about.

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Book Review



The Aurelian Legacy, by Michael A. Salmon (2000). Harley Books, Colchester. 432pp, 162 figs, 41 col. pls. Price: £30.00. ISBN 0-946589-40-2.

Butterfly collecting has been one of the most popular pursuits of naturalists for generations and few natural history collections lack at least a few specimens, albeit often in poor condition or with little data. This indispensable book provides a fascinating insight into the lives of the collectors, their methods of collecting and the places where they collected, thereby providing curators with an essential background to the collections that they care for.

The first chapter 'A short history of butterfly collecting in Britain', provides a useful overview of collectors and their collections and describes the origins of the Aurelian Societies in the coffee houses of London. In some ways this is almost a social history of entomology, describing changing attitudes towards the study of insects as natural history societies

sprang up in the nineteenth century. The author describes such Victorian lepidopterists as Henry Stainton as evangelists and this does not seem an overstatement when one reads the detailed accounts of their dedication in promoting the study of butterflies.

The following chapter describes the paraphernalia of butterfly collecting from the sixteenth century onwards, although there is an even earlier illustration of butterfly hunting from a mid fourteenth century Flemish manuscript. The latter part of this chapter deals with collections and cabinets and concludes with a delightful section entitled 'A day in the country', full of entertaining anecdotes about collecting trips and expeditions. The accounts really capture the joy of butterfly collecting as it must have been a hundred years ago when the wealding of a net was unlikely to provoke the disapproval of passers by.

One of the longest chapters deals with the biographies of 101 butterfly collectors, spanning more than three centuries and including artists, scientists, writers, rich and poor, with wonderful names such as Eleazar Albin, Moses Harris, Joseph Grimaldi (the famous clown), Lactitia Jermyn (the Fair Aurelian), Abel Inghen and John Obadiah Westwood. These biographies are arranged in chronological order but this is no dull catalogue as every entry is quite different in character and the entire chapter is packed with interesting and amusing facts, stories and observations. It is difficult to single out an example among so many but the story of Lady Eleanor Glanville (c.1654-1709) is particularly worth mention. After the breakdown of her second marriage to Richard Glanville, who had threatened to shoot her dead, she developed an interest in entomology - a contemporary described how 'she and her two apprentice girls would carry a sheet out under the hedges and bushes and with a long pole beat the said hedges and catch'd a parcel of wormes'. This behaviour, coupled with her unconventional 'gypsy' dress when out collecting, were used as evidence of madness when her family successfully contested her will - 'no one not deprived of their senses should go in pursuit of butterflies'. She is remembered today by the butterfly named after her - the Glanville Fritillary.

The other major section, more than 100 pages long, is entitled 'Some species of historical interest', a rather uninspiring title for yet another fascinating chapter, this time dealing with accounts of how our butterfly fauna was discovered and recorded, with particular emphasis on the rare and unusual, including species such as the Large Blue, Large Copper and Black-veined White which are sadly now extinct in Britain. The superb illustrations are a particular feature of this chapter, including photographs of specimens and superb reproductions of illustrations from rare and early entomological works. In fact the entire book is superbly illustrated with an amazing collection of photographs, portraits and reproductions of published works, which is a tribute to the author's excellent research.

A final, brief but thought-provoking chapter deals with the issues of conservation and collecting. Changing attitudes to collecting are chronicled at some length and one senses the author's sadness at current trends towards a society that demonises collectors. They are frequently blamed for the demise of butterfly populations although there is little evidence that their activities have had any significant effect in this respect. It is becoming increasingly evident that the recent decline in butterfly numbers is largely due to habitat change and destruction. Were it not for the activities of those enthusiastic aurelians of the past and their more recent successors, we would lack the knowledge of the biology and ecology of our butterfly fauna that is now so vital if we are to take the right measures to conserve it.

This book is produced to a high standard, with good design and superb colour work, and is extremely reasonably priced. I thoroughly recommend it to all naturalists and biology curators.

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