



<http://www.natsca.org>

The Biology Curator

Title: Depreciation, Appreciation and Inflation: The Economics of Botanical collections

Author(s): Mann, D. G.

Source: Mann, D. G. (1995). Depreciation, Appreciation and Inflation: The Economics of Botanical collections. *The Biology Curator*, Issue 3, 12.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/537>

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.

proposes a process by which individual museums may analyze and account for such costs. This study was published in September 1989 by HMSO Books in the United Kingdom. The presentation will focus on the major findings of the study, especially those concerning natural history and systematic collections.

DEPRECIATION, APPRECIATION AND INFLATION: THE ECONOMICS OF BOTANICAL COLLECTIONS.

Dr David G. Mann, Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh EH3 5LR,

It is relatively easy to work out how much it costs to collect a plant specimen and maintain it in good condition and such costs should always be minimized. They equate with value only in the sense that they indicate *past* commitments and priorities; they also give some idea of what would be needed to replace lost or damaged specimens, although with the loss of biodiversity world-wide, replacement will sometimes be impossible. With more difficulty, one can estimate how much other collectors and institutions might be prepared to pay for specimens, were they to be offered for sale. This indicates value in the same way that, for paintings or sculpture, the current price of similar art works at auction can be used as a valuation for insurance purposes (or to impress visitors). The analogy with art works is in some ways appropriate for preserved plants, since each specimen is usually unique (and so, strictly speaking, cannot be replaced), unlike books or coins. Well-preserved specimens of rarely collected species, with good information about their provenance and ecology, would probably command much higher prices on the open market than poorly documented, incomplete specimens of common species - just as the few remaining Leonardo paintings have a value far in excess of what one would pay for one of the myriad landscapes painted by the pupils of Victorian drawing masters. Living specimens require separate consideration since they are potentially self-renewing and can be used for many different purposes, including commercial horticulture, screening for drugs or other plant products, etc.

However, plant specimens have an extra dimension not possessed by works of art, since they are intended principally to serve as raw material for scientific research. Some specimens (types) have a special status as 'biological standards': they define the units of biodiversity (genera, species, varieties, etc) in much the same way as the standard metre defines a particular unit of length. These aspects too could be assigned a financial value. For instance, the presence of many types at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, will attract visiting scientists to Edinburgh and thus provide income to the city. But a number of paradoxes arise from simple attempts at valuation. Intuitively, one feels that a specimen that has been studied thoroughly and documented well by a distinguished scientist should become more valuable as a result of the work done upon it. From an economic standpoint, however, the specimen would seem to be less valuable after the study is completed than it was before, since there is less potential for further work; most valuable of all, then, would be specimens that had not been studied at all. Perversely too, a specimen would appear to lose value more slowly through slipshod work than through

careful, accurate studies, since the errors would prompt new work. These assessments are clearly flawed.

Perhaps the mistake lies in trying to value the collections themselves, rather than what is done with them and what depends upon them. Plant collections are an essential basis for plant taxonomy; plant taxonomy is an essential basis for all other plant science, and this in turn supports conservation, plant breeding, genetic manipulation and other activities underlying wealth creation and improvement in the quality of life. This, surely, is the message that needs to be emphasized if the importance of natural science collections is to be appreciated by those who fund them.

INSURANCE IMPLICATIONS OF DISPLAY OF COLLECTIONS MADE UP OF UNIQUE ITEMS WITH LITTLE OR NO COMMERCIAL MARKET VALUE.

Colin McBride, Willis, Faber & Dumas Ltd (Insurance Brokers), 10 Trinity Square, London EC3P 3AX

[Abstract awaited]

THE ITALIAN ASSOCIATION OF SCIENCE MUSEUMS AND ITS GOALS IN REGARD TO SCIENTIFIC COLLECTIONS

Prof. Guido Moggi, Associazione Nazionale Musei Scientifici, clo Museo Botanico, Via La Pira 4, I-50121 Firenze, Italy.

The Italian Association of Science Museums (A.N.M.S. = Associazione Nazionale dei Musei Scientifici) was created in 1972 with the aim to re-evaluate national scientific culture through a knowledge of museum collections and to promote the most appropriate use thereof.

Among its goals we can mention: to protect the national wealth of science museums, promoting campaigns and programs aimed at preventing the loss and deterioration of those assets and to help update and protect them; to protect the moral, legal and economic conditions under which the institutions' activities are carried out; to maintain public interest in those institutions, strengthening their educational and cultural roles, etc.

The Association includes at present 407 members, of which 128 are "institutional" (museums) and 279 "individual". Since 1984 a periodical concerning scientific museology ("Museologia Scientifica") is published twice per year. In the first 10 volumes 368 articles have been published concerning the following topics: descriptions of museums and collections (39%); research, concepts and historical aspects (17%); methods and techniques for collection preparation, conservation and cataloguing (15%); teaching, exhibitions, legal matters, etc. (29%).

21 symposia and 9 national congresses have been organized during the last 22 years.