



NatSCA

Natural Sciences Collections Association

<http://www.natsca.org>

The Biology Curator

Title: From Grave to Cradle, the Changing Fortunes of the Giant Irish Deer

Author(s): Monaghan, N.

Source: Monaghan, N. (1995). From Grave to Cradle, the Changing Fortunes of the Giant Irish Deer. *The Biology Curator*, Issue 3, 13.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/540>

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.

FROM GRAVE TO CRADLE, THE CHANGING FORTUNES OF THE GIANT IRISH DEER.

Nigel Monaghan, Geological Section, National Museum of Ireland, 7-9 Merrion Row, Dublin 2, Republic of Ireland.

Giant deer were known from Ireland long before scientists publicised their significance at the end of the eighteenth century. They posed a number of early questions one of which led to their confusion with North American moose and led to their title *The Irish Elk*. They are found beneath peat bogs in lake deposits which are distributed widely in Ireland and which form the graves of these magnificent fossils. Their value arises from a number of factors, all of which have led to their being treasured possessions cradled by museums and private owners throughout the world.

Novelty value as the owners of the largest antlers known from the fossil record led to their initial worth as trophies. They were given as gifts of importance as is documented from that of the Irish Chancellor to his English counterpart during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

Value as trophies increased with the international growth of museums in the 19th century. The theory of evolution also cast the spotlight on these animals as they were used to support arguments on either side of the debate.

These changing attitudes over the centuries have merely changed the reasons why people sought specimens of these fossils. Regardless of why they were sought there has always been a market for full racks of antlers. The availability to the commercial market has changed drastically over the last two centuries and complete antler sets or skeletons are now quite rarely seen in auction rooms. This has been matched by an unpredictable pattern of sales prices. Recent purchase records at auction have reached £20,000 for a full rack of antlers and £27,500 for a complete skeleton.

The scientific value of these animals has also undergone a recent increase due to several independent research projects. These have investigated giant deer extinction, antler design and function, diet, locomotion and taxonomy. New heritage legislation will provide protection for such fossils under law in the Republic of Ireland.

THE EDUCATION AND ETHICAL ROLE OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY IN THE SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTE.

Professor Mohamed Mouna, Scientific Institute, P.B. 703, Rabat-Agdal, Morocco.

The National Museum of Natural History was created in 1920. Its collections which refer to the branches of natural science branches have been continually completed, safely housed, preserved and kept accessible.

The exhibited part of these collections presents an educational and ethical approach towards the increasing understanding of nature and resolving environmental issues, besides illustrating natural science courses for pupils and students.

Thus we receive public, pupils, students and some educational institutions' staff in the Museum. During these assisted educational visits we present the fauna's role in its ecosystems and the necessity to preserve it. For the same

goal, more than ten educational programmes on television and radio broadcasting were produced as well as some published articles.

The collections constitute a data bank and an inestimable scientific heritage preserved for future generation's education because the fauna is threatened in its environment.

ARCHIVES OF NATURE IN NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS.

Dumitru Murariu, "Grigore Antipa" Museum of Natural History, 505 Kisselef No.1, Secturol 1, 79744 Bucharest 2, Roumania.

All institutions which possess collections of natural history have a special educational and scientific importance. Due to these collections a series of natural phenomena are explained and, afterwards, understood. Among them, the evolutionary process is the most obvious.

According to any kind of synthesis, no matter how general it is, on the collections of natural history those preserved in the developed countries are the richest. Within the areas with a rich biodiversity, such collections are recent or they are still to be organized. Taking into consideration the strong bond between the development degree of the economy and the information on the collections of natural history, developing countries have to make a financial effort in order to enrich them. In this respect specialists for preserving, keeping and estimating them from an educational and scientific point of view are very necessary.

The specimens of such collections give important information on soil, water and air chemistry and on pollution degree at one time. They are real documents of nature concerning the valuable characteristics of the flora and fauna to which they belonged. There are cases when such specimens remain the only proofs of some extinct species. Other specimens are representatives of type categories and others are used as examples in demonstrating the necessity of environmental protection in order to inform on rare or threatened species. The main principles of plants and animals, known by popular medicine and homeopathy, were discovered by the help of such "documents" from the archives of nature, the collections of natural history.

The enriching, preserving, keeping and researching of these collections give a special responsibility to the specialists which are implied in their management and governmental resolutions of financial support.

VALUATION AND TITLE IN LAW.

Professor Norman Palmer, Faculty of Law, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT

[Abstract awaited]

THE CULTURAL IMPACT OF NATURAL SCIENCE COLLECTIONS.

Charles Pettitt, Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester, Manchester, M13 9PL

Natural science collections have many and varied impacts upon different aspects of the culture of society. Too