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## The Biology Curator

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often people fail to understand this important role of such collections, so that while a government grant of a million pounds to purchase a famous painting may be seen as a public benefit, the use of ten thousand pounds to conserve and document a major natural science collection is likely to be regarded as a drain on the public purse.

This paper will seek to demonstrate the great value society should place upon research collections by presenting evidence of the wide-ranging ways in which these irreplaceable storehouses of information are used to support such aspects of the structure of society as education, law enforcement, medicine and health, commerce, agriculture and fisheries, and historical studies, as well as the way they have influenced fine and decorative art.

### THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF UNIVERSITY NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS

*Ms Jane Pickering, University Museum, Parkes Road, Oxford OX1 3PW*

University natural history collections form some of the oldest and largest such collections in the U.K. The changes in university funding mean that central facilities such as museums are coming under increasing scrutiny. Coupled with this the traditional use of natural history collections for teaching has declined dramatically, particularly in the life sciences. Museums must emphasise their educational value which does not mean redefining past objectives in the light of the prevailing ethos but recognising their true value to the whole community.

The Government's recent White Paper on Science and Technology has said that all users of public money must consider the public understanding of science. Museums as a whole have a responsibility in this area, which is made easier by the public interest in natural history collections, but what about university collections? They provide a direct link between the public and the research scientists in the universities. Also the collections have been developed for teaching which gives them a broad coverage and global perspective. This complements the facilities in local natural history museums and means they provide a regional resource where otherwise the public would rely on the national museums.

The recognition of university museums' value to the whole community has led to recommendations that these museums should be funded directly through the DNH.

### THE NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL COLLECTION OF ZOOLOGICAL INSTITUTE, RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.

*Professor Roald Potapov & Professor Vadim Zaitzev, 199034, Zoological Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences, Universitetsyaya nab.1, St. Petersburg, Russia.*

The Zoological Museum was established in 1832 and from this time until now it was the centre of the zoological investigations of Russian scientists not only in Russia and adjacent countries but all over the world. Due to the efforts of several generations of zoologists in the Museum numerous collections of all groups of animals were

assembled, and the total amount now is nearly 15 million specimens. The collections of animals from Polar and Pacific oceans, North-West North America, Central Asia, Siberia and Eurasian Tundras are most complete and rich. Now no serious research on Palaearctic faunas can be complete without a study of this collection. The Institute (the Museum was transferred to the Institute in 1930) constantly expends serious efforts, including financial, to support the collections and to increase its value.

### MUSEUMS AND THE MINERAL SPECIMEN MARKET

*Ms Monica T. Price, Assistant Curator, Mineral Collections, Oxford University Museum, Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3PW.*

Mineral specimens are widely collected for their beauty and rarity and a thriving worldwide market revolves around these natural works of art. It is influenced as much by politics and economics on a national or local scale as by the chance find of a pocket of fine crystals or the break-up and sale of an old collection.

An up-to-date knowledge of the mineral market is part of the connoisseurship which enables a curator to make judicious decisions about how an existing collection is used or expanded. Mineral shows in Britain and overseas provide curators with excellent opportunities to evaluate the ever-changing specimen market and, in turn, to establish the value of the collections in their own care. Museum authorities should encourage and enable their curatorial staff to attend shows as much for professional development as for any purchasing of specimens.

### PAPER GIVING A LOSS ADJUSTERS VIEW OF THE VALUATION OF COLLECTIONS.

*Mr Stephen Rollo-Smith, Robins, Davies House, 1-3 Sun Street, London EC2A 2BJ*

[Abstract awaited]

### THE EFFECT OF HIGH MARKET PRICES ON THE VALUE AND VALUATION OF VERTEBRATE FOSSILS.

*Ms Sally Y. Shelton, Collections Conservation, San Diego Natural History Museum, San Diego, California 92112, USA*

In the past few years, vertebrate fossils have become highly sought-after items, and their catalogue prices have climbed. These prices and the availability of buyers at those prices have had serious adverse effects on the conservation of fossils and fossil sites worldwide. Can museum staff working with vertebrate fossils fairly assess the value of these specimens for administrators, insurers, and the public, without basing their values on runaway market prices? Does the purchase of top-price vertebrate fossils by museums encourage activities which work against the conservation of those fossils and their sites? Does a market value or an appraised monetary value make an assessment of scientific and scholarly value more difficult? Are these values