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## The Biology Curator

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Title: Museums Association Associateship - the new draft proposals: A Joint BCG/GCG Response

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review of lepidoptera in Bedfordshire is trying to locate the following entomological works by the Rev. Charles Abbot (1761-1817): 1- *Entomologica Selecta* - a volume of notes in manuscript of over 300 pages referring to the lepidoptera of the district. This was sold in London in 1906 as one lot with a copy of Abbot's *Flora Bedfordiensis* (1798) and the description is extracted from the sale catalogue. 2- *Linnaei Insecta Anglica Lepidoptera* - an original MS "being an account of the English lepidoptera according to Linnaeus, with descriptions of their food plants, localities etc., also further notes on localities by J.C. Dale, the later owner". Listed in Wheldon and Whesley's catalogue of 1928 as "together with a copy of *Flora Bedfordiensis*, 1798 bound in two vols, 8vo, calf". It is not clear whether this is the same MS appearing for sale twice under different descriptions. 3- *A short Life history of insects* (1798). This was sold at auction in London in 1936.

Any information on the above to Rosemary Brind, Bedford Museum, Castle Lane, Bedford MK40 3XD. Tel 01234 353323.

Jan Ruzicka is working on a revision of the *Choleva agilis* species group (Coleoptera: Leiodidae: Cholevinae; commonly treated also as Catopidae) and would be pleased to hear from museums with holdings of this group with a view to arranging the loan of specimens for study. Jan can be reached at the Department of Ecology, Faculty of Forestry, Czech Agricultural University, CZ-165 21 Praha 6- Suchbátka, Czech Republic.

The National Museums of Scotland have recently been given the catalogue (with full data) for the egg collection of J.J. Dalgleish. This important collection was dispersed among a number of museum collections. If you would like to obtain the data for your J.J. Dalgleish eggs, contact Andrew Kitchener or Bob McGowan, NMS.

NMS are also seeking a male Right Whale, *Balaena glacialis*, skull originally acquired in 1912 by Sir William Turner of the Anatomy Department, Edinburgh University. The whale was caught on June 29 1912, 20 miles NE of St Kilda by the whaler *Samuel Scott*. It was 51 ft long and 32 ft in girth. The bulk of the Turner collection was transferred to the Royal Museum of Scotland in 1956 but this skull was not and its current

location is unknown. Any information on the missing skull to Andrew Kitchener, National Museums of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1JF. Tel 0131 225 7534.

The Horticultural Taxonomy Group (HORTAX) is an autonomous, internationally recognised forum of horticultural taxonomists and horticulturalists within the British Isles dealing with matters of nomenclature and the taxonomy of cultivated plants. Founded in 1988, it has the support of the Botanic gardens at Kew, Edinburgh, Glasnevin and the Royal Horticultural Society amongst others. HORTAX has been carrying out a survey to gather information on any herbarium collections of cultivated plants existing in the British Isles. In 1993 a questionnaire was despatched to all the relevant herbaria listed in *Index Herbariorum* followed by a request in *BSBI News*. If any member of BCG has any knowledge of such collections will they please contact Susyn Andrews, Chairman of HORTAX, c/o Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 3AB.

#### **Museums Association Associateship - the new draft proposals: A Joint BCG / GCG Response.**

The following was submitted to the Museums Association:

Having circulated the draft proposals document to the committee members of both groups, and after consultation, it was decided that a joint response on behalf of both groups would be formulated. This is given below. The views are a summary of all those expressed by the various members, and also take into account reactions from the current student members of our group.

Overall, the committees feel that this scheme is to be welcomed. We feel, however, that insufficient attention has been given to the details of the scheme, and that the document is not yet ready to be approved by the Council. Our reservations are set out below.

Definition: the document states or implies what the AMA is not, but remains vague about what it is. The MA seems very keen to avoid the AMA being a qualification, though it is not clear to us that there is any overriding reason why this should not be so. This is the situation in other professions. However it is acknowledged that it would be much more difficult and expensive to run the

scheme in this way. Furthermore it would remove the MA's control over the award after it has been made, as a qualification cannot be taken away after it has been given.

CPD and S/NVQ's: These have raised the biggest concerns. It is agreed that Continuous Professional Development is appropriate for a profession in which career progression and the setting of professional standards is generally open-ended and very wide ranging, but there is no indication of how they will be put into practice. In particular, the quantity and timescales seem to be entirely arbitrary, there is no acknowledgement of the fact that CPD will apply in very different ways depending on the individual, and it seems to be suggested that CPD should only be required up to the point of the award, in which case it is not CPD at all. If, however, it is to continue throughout the individual's career, then this implies that the individual's AMA status will be regularly reviewed. Before the method can be formally adopted it will be necessary to establish what training is available, and whether it will be of the nature and quantity to make this method tenable. S/NVQ's are as yet untested, and it is not clear that they will be an appropriate route to a professional award. The MTI itself has a decidedly poor reputation within the museum community (whether or not this is still deserved) and so has still to show that it is fit to be the profession's training lead authority. The whole question of assessment and validation remains open. The award's credibility rests at least in part in confidence in the system and the people running it. These issues will be crucial to the success of the scheme and will need to be fully assessed before the scheme can be approved.

Target Candidates: That the MA should be opening up its professional award to non-curators, has been questioned but it is generally accepted that this is a valid course of action. However this should not result in the dilution of the assessment for each area. Particular concern has been raised over the lack of the practical exam. Given that the context of making the award is the MA's definition of a museum, the ability to care for collections in a practical sense is of paramount importance in the assessment of curatorial candidates. It is suggested that the award may be

made under a range of divisions, each with requirements appropriate to that area of work, eg. AMA (curatorial), etc. Also of concern is the disparity between the holders of the new award and those of the old award. It seems that both groups feel there is the potential for the credibility of the status to be undermined by the other group.

**Mentors:** This, again, is a system that seems appropriate to the nature of the profession and this scheme. However, the demands on a mentor will be much greater than those on a diploma tutor, because of the much broader range of guidance and supervision required, and the potentially longer timescale. Furthermore, the standards of mentorship will need to be more or less uniform. It is to be expected that the mentors will need some level of guidance and possibly training. With regards to referees, there is an opinion among the students that they should not be required to assess their referees competence and knowledge, and it is difficult to see how this could be viewed as a reasonable demand upon the students.

**Timetable:** It is not clear what is the timetable for putting this scheme through, particularly with regard to membership approval. It is not even clear whether such approval, by the logical way of the MA AGM, is to be sought. There is certainly a suggestion that Council is seeking to have it cut and dried by the end of July. We do not believe that all the issues will have been sufficiently explored by then.

**Costs:** It is difficult to see how anything more than a nominal charge could be made, since none of the criteria are to be achieved at the MA's expense. Indeed, one of them, membership of the MA is to the MA's financial benefit, and carries with it the expectation of certain benefit, which includes the status of AMA when all the appropriate criteria have been achieved. Should the fees be substantial, the MA may well be expected to explain where the costs arise.

**Code of Conduct:** This represents the best opinion of a group of people, (MA Council), at a certain point in time, and also represents MA policy. As such, it is a political document, to which signed adherence is not to be recommended. Furthermore such an action would result in it being a set of

rules not a code of conduct, and would presumably also make it a contract, with the consequent legal implications. Membership of the MA implies a general acceptance of the code, and could be removed anyway if the code was unreasonably infringed.

In general, we feel that this is an important issue, with the opportunity to create something of lasting value to the profession, and one which is unlikely to arise again in the near future. In other professions, a formal professional award, often chartership, is the hallmark of quality. It may be instructive to look at the examples of other professions in establishing this for the museums profession. We believe that the present project is moving in the right direction, and are not trying to suggest that the proposed methods and criteria are wrong. We do believe, however, that any final decision should be avoided until the above issues have been fully explored and their validity and practicability have been demonstrated.

Signed on behalf of BCG and GCG committees by

BCG Chairman	GCG Chairman
Mike Graham	Paul Ensom

## REVIEW

*MANUAL OF NATURAL HISTORY CURATORSHIP*. Edited by Geoff Stansfield, John Mathias and Gordon Reid. Published by HMSO, £45. h/b. 1994. 306 pp. ISBN 0 11 290513 7. b/w photographs and drawings.

The first time I saw this book was in the National Museum of Natural History in Leiden on the BCG Holland study trip. Several jaws dropped to the floor as nobody else had seen a published copy, including several of the authors. However, it is now widely available and should (hopefully) be on every curators' book shelf.

The aim of the Manual is to provide a basic reference for all involved with natural history museums or collections at all levels, including curators, administrators, committee members and trustees. The book focuses on zoological and botanical material, omitting geological collections as these have been covered by recently published monographs, eg Knell and Taylor (1989). It also recognises that it cannot cover everything in great detail so has very full reference lists of more specialised publications.

The Manual has fourteen chapters written by eleven natural history curators: Functions and Organisation of Natural History Museums; Acquisition of Collections; The Preparation and Preservation of Collections; Documentation of Collections; Housing and Maintenance of Collections; Using Natural History Collections; Natural History Museums and Biological Recording; Live Animals and Plants in Natural History Museums; Health and Safety in Natural History Museums; Education and Interpretation in Natural History Museums; Natural History Museum Exhibition; Schools and Natural History Museums; Information Services, Publications and Sales; Working with Other Bodies.

On first opening the book I was struck by the amount of text. This is a wordy tome, packing a lot of information between its covers. The chapters vary greatly in style, some general, others going into specific details, eg in depth chemistry for specimen preparation and preservation. However, I was disappointed with the lack of visuals. There are five sample labels and an MDA card, sixteen drawings of practical storage ideas and one b/w photograph of bound herbaria. I would have liked more visual examples to break up the rather heavy pages of text particularly of different methods of storage, preparation and display of both live and preserved collections. I can only assume that such additions would have added too much to the selling price. There are many recommendations for materials and equipment throughout the manual but a main suppliers' list would have been a useful addition.

This is primarily a reference work, pulling together many aspects of natural history practice. Several of the chapters read as nothing more than subject overviews, probably fulfilling their remit. Sadly, however, there is too little real practical advice for my liking. You will find some such advice in the areas of preparation, preservation, documentation, housing, maintenance and live material but you often have to hunt through a lot of haystacks to find the needles.

How useful a book this is can perhaps be measured by how often it is used on a daily working basis. Apart from reading it for this review I have to date only looked at it again twice. That