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The Biology Curator

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BRITISH INSECT STUDIES AT THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, LONDON

The staff of the NHM Entomology Department have shown a long-standing interest in British insects, even though official work on the British fauna has endured varying degrees of encouragement over the past few decades. In view of recent widely expressed views that there is a global need for taxonomic databases, species inventories, identification guides and information on major collections, we now feel that this is the right time to coordinate systematic studies on British insects. Our fauna, of over 20,000 species, is one of the best known in the world, and this is an excellent opportunity to lead the way towards a taxonomic database of world species and associated literature.

The new programme of work in the Entomology Department will cover four main projects:

- to develop and maintain a national taxonomic database of British insects, which will contribute to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. We will seek external funding for this project which will be developed after extensive consultation with many appropriate bodies, and will hopefully cover all the British Isles, not just the UK.
- to stimulate the production of new handbooks and other identification guides, in collaboration with other specialists, both amateur and professional, and to ensure a rapid and efficient method of publication for this literature.
- to further develop our own British collections to full taxonomic representation, including significant voucher material.
- to facilitate the activities of special interest groups (recording schemes, special topic groups etc) to improve the national collections and associated information, by extensive consultations and by setting up workshops.

Clearly much of this work will be in collaboration and consultation with many individuals and groups outside the museum, such as the Royal Entomological Society, JNCC, BRC etc. Even in the 1960s and 70s, when the department had its largest complement of permanent staff, we could not cover all insect groups to the same high level. It is clear that there is a great deal of information about British insects held by various people, and much can be achieved simply by rationalising and coordinating these data. However, the NHM Entomology Department is still the largest group of professional entomologists in Britain, and many of our staff will be involved in this new initiative to some extent, so we are well placed to undertake this central role in British insect studies, which will begin to produce tangible results within 2-3 years.

The Department's efforts are being led and coordinated by Dr Peter Barnard (tel. 0171-938 9457, fax 0171-938 8937, e-mail p.barnard@nhm.ac.uk).

Peter Barnard, The Natural History Museum, London

A Proposed Accreditation Standard for Environmental Records Centres (ERCs)

After discussions with several other curators, I thought that it would be useful to throw into the arena for discussion some proposals relating to Environmental Recording. These are based on practical experience, with a large dose of ideas from the MGC collections care guidelines.

It is very important to include standards on the service side as well as for the data management. Many of these service standards are already being set in publicly funded bodies as a result of customer care policies.

Some of the elements should be considered as mandatory, whereas others may only be aims for which plans and targets must be set to work towards. For example, it will be very easy to forward data to national schemes annually when a RECORDER to BRC linking method has been agreed!

Please respond to this article. It is essential that some form of accreditation is agreed in the near future. The museums who run active records centres have over 20 years of experience and their views are vital.

A final thought. Do we require a set of standards for smaller records centres or for individuals running schemes?

Respond to Steve Garland, Bolton Museum.

FULLY ACCREDITED CENTRES REQUIRE:—

- (1) The ERC's governing body must draw up, adopt and publish a policy containing the following elements. It should be reviewed at least every five years:
 - (i) A collecting policy (containing details of taxonomic and geographical coverage)
 - (ii) The level of service provided (the services provided to enquirers, researchers etc)
 - (iii) Access arrangements, charging policies, copyright and data use policies
 - (iv) Resources (staff, training, premises and finances)
 - (v) A policy for data transfer, security and accessibility if the ERC ceases to function
 - (vi) Adoption of the Code of Conduct
 - (vii) A fieldwork policy
 - (viii) A quality control policy
- (2) Enquiries and requests for information should normally be answered within 15 working days.
- (3) Any bona fide enquirer must, under normal circumstances, be allowed access to the records (see also 8).
- (4) Every effort must be made to harmonise the data collecting policy of an ERC with those of other ERCs collecting locally (and nationally?).
- (5) A suitable study area should be available with access to equipment and facilities to read any data held on disk, fiche, paper etc.
- (6) Data should be forwarded to national species recording schemes on an annual basis.
- (7) Data should be forwarded to local species recording schemes on annual basis.