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BCG Committee Report

Although the group has been organising meetings very successfully over the last couple of years, other things have not been running as well as we would have liked. In particular, the production of the journal has not been what was promised, and the cells have not been operating as they should. The last committee meeting gives me hope that these problems are well on the way to being sorted out. A full agenda was nevertheless dealt with comfortably within the afternoon. The appointment of Helen Burchmore to the role of minutes secretary resulted in considerably more comprehensive minutes than I am usually able to take. (I am not able to take minutes and speak to the meeting at the same time, and, as is well known, my brain seizes up if my gob is not operating). The result was the longest list of action points produced in the last three years. While this might not be such good news for those that have to deal with them, it does at least indicate that we are getting on with things.

The principle focus of the meeting was to direct some of the cells into specific tasks. Collections at Risk is to produce an action pack / plan for institutions or curators who feel that their collections may be endangered. We are hoping to present the results or at least bring this work to the attention of the wider community at the MA conference this year. Nick Goff has produced a series of activities which he will undertake for the documentation cell this year, and the editorial team will be seeking to get *The Biology Curator* off to a fresh start, and over the next few issues, evolve it into the journal we have always hoped for. The future of the conservation cell is waiting to see how the new Natural Sciences Conservation Group develops, but the cell leader, Nick Gordon, being on their committee, is in a good position to respond in the most appropriate way. The orphan collections project, which was given a days airing at the 1994 MA conference, has not died but has been progressed behind the scenes over the last few months, and members of both BCG and GCG committees will be getting together in June to take this forward.

In accordance with the principle that we should be helping the less well supported members of our group to be able to get to the most important meetings, we have been able to give substantial subsidies to five people to go to the Cambridge SPNHC meeting, as proposed in the last issue of TBC. Another half dozen or so issues were discussed under the heading of cell activities, including several opportunities to work more closely with related groups, so as to improve communication within the natural sciences community, and makes its activities more effective.

Another important part of all our committee meetings is, of course, the meetings programme. This included another European trip this November, a somewhat lower budget trip, (Cambridge could make this year expensive), re-visiting the museums in Paris to see what changes have taken place as a result of the exciting plans of five years ago. The Cambridge meeting should, of course, be in everybody's diaries. The next beginners specialist meeting, following on in the tradition of the spirit collections, bones and botany meetings, will be on entomology, possibly in Bristol at the beginning of next year. Next year's AGM is to be held in Cardiff in

April, jointly with NSCG. We are also intending to have a slot at both the 1996 and 1997 MA conferences. Finally we are hoping to set up a number of what we have chosen to call Stage 2 meetings, which could be viewed as follow ups to the beginners meetings, for a small number of people at a more specialised level to take place during the summer when it is difficult to organise larger meetings. Watch TBC for further details.

The any other business heading brought up relatively little material, for a change, though the issue of BCG's involvement in the Leicester museum studies course was included. There does appear still to be a need and a desire for BCG to have some form of direct input into the Natural History section of this course, and we are intending to offer an evening session this year as we did last year.

As you can hopefully see, we are busy bunch of bods, and more signs of this activity should become visible over the next year. One interesting comment from a new committee member was that they hadn't realised how much went on behind the scenes, as it were. Which is nice to hear, but perhaps not the best reflection on our communication with the group as a whole.

We always want communication in the other direction as well though. If you have any bright ideas, requests, criticisms or even compliments, please get in touch with myself or one of the other committee members, and better still contribute your thoughts as an item or a paper to TBC. The editors are always after more material. They are also keen to have photographs to put in the journal. (That's for those of us who can't really follow those funny little squiggles that come between the pictures). Anything from comic asides to deep and meaningful academic papers are welcome, (especially the former). We are also looking for feedback on the activities of the committee. We don't have any monopoly on ideas and need to hear yours. In particular, bear in mind the collections at risk activities, orphan collections, ideas for forthcoming meetings, offers of venues, help with cells and ideas for next year's MA conference. We await the flood of replies.

All the best,

Steve the sec.

EDITORS REPORT

Due to the personal circumstances of the Coordinating Editor, BCG members received two issues of the *Biology Curator*, a total of 56 A4 pages of closely printed text plus an index. This is no small achievement for a group that has no full time officers and I would wish particularly to thank those members (and non-members) who sent in their news and contributions as well as those members of committee who chased up those promised contributions that had not appeared as the deadlines approached.

The change to the *Biology Curator* continues to be a great success judging by the comments received by the editor although I would like to stress that filling a minimum of 20 pages per issue is a high target and will depend very much on members willingness to contribute articles. What about the shortcomings? Well, more photographs and drawings

should be included if at all possible but again, this depends on members sending them in.

Finally, I have enjoyed the last four year's (and it don't seem a day too much!) editorial duties very much thanks to those of you who helped to make the editors life easy (comparatively!). Particular thanks must go to Bill Pettitt who has edited the more academic papers on behalf of the Group since the days of the *Journal of Biological Curation* and Kathie Way who completed the often thankless but essential task of producing an index to the last volumes of *BCG Newsletter*. Northern Whig, our printers in Belfast, have also greatly contributed to easing the production of each issue with an efficient and, above all, friendly service - thanks George.

So, the very best of luck to the new editorial team at Bolton and to all of you real workers out there so long and thanks for all the fish!

Mike Taylor, Perth Museum and Art Gallery, Scotland

DOCUMENTATION CELL REPORT

I am pleased to be taking on the role of "nucleus" of the Documentation Cell. Documentation is something that all curators, regardless of their subject speciality, have to be aware of; some even do it. Many aspects are universal, but some are unique to the life sciences. There are a number of initiatives underway that are looking at the specific documentation needs of different types of collections. My aim is to ensure that BCG, and therefore its membership, can contribute to and benefit from these initiatives, and take on other projects of value to natural science curators.

Over the next year the Documentation Cell will look at three projects:

- defining the core information that is needed to describe and manage natural sciences collections
- clarification of conditions on entry forms specific to natural science material, particularly in respect of existing legislation
- developing guidelines on the documentation of natural sciences collections for MGC Registration.

It is important that the end results are relevant and usable. So it is essential that as many people as possible contribute to the process. All volunteers to help with the Documentation Cell are welcome. The work will not be arduous: it may involve as little as a few phone calls. Please contact me, if you would like to help.

The results of the cell's work will be published in *The Biology Curator*, when there is something to say, and reported at next year's AGM.

Thank you.
Nick Goff

A Natural Sciences Touring Exhibitions Network:

A discussion document.

This proposal began as an idea based on a number of factors. A number of institutions already design exhibitions for touring, but they tend to suffer from the problem that they are too big and/or too expensive for places such as Scunthorpe Museum, with the severely limited budgets and temporary exhibition space. Our need is for exhibitions that have immediate appeal (and should therefore be quite glossily presented), cost only a few hundred pounds at most, and take up no more than 100 square metres. These requirements would seem to be mutually contradictory, and it must be remembered that many small museums are able to take only exhibitions that are effectively free and occupy only a few square metres.

Although there is a touring exhibitions group, I see no reason why a network dedicated to natural history should not be feasible, indeed desirable, given that there is a conspicuous lack of small travelling natural history exhibitions. It may be easier to run such a group independently rather than as part of a wider touring exhibitions group.

The suggestion is that a group of around a dozen museums, from all over the country, preferably at least one from each region would contribute both a representative and money, say between £100 and £500, to such a network, generating several thousand pounds for the project. This could then be used to generate further funding. The groups purpose would be solely to generate one travelling exhibition each year, on a topic to be decided by the committee, to tour five or six museums per year for two to three years, or as seems most appropriate. Features of design would include immediate and marketable appeal, ease of transport and ability to scale the exhibition up or down to fit venues of varying sizes. Two useful suggestions have been made in the course of informal discussions about this idea. Firstly, after design, the 2-D parts of the exhibition be produced by the group, with the 3-D material, such as mounted specimens, be taken from the host museums collections or borrowed from a nearby service. This would make it much easier to transport, as well as promoting the use of more collections and cooperation among neighbouring services. The second idea is that both a small and a larger version of the exhibitions be produced, allowing it to travel more quickly and be more adaptable to different display areas.

It is suggested that the museums within the network take it in turns to act as the coordinating centre for the design, production an use of an exhibition. This will spread the workload, and also the benefits, both locally and nationally, of being seen to be an active participant in the scheme.

Another suggestion is that to keep costs down, the group could consider the use of college design departments in creating exhibitions, something recently done successfully at Scunthorpe. Such departments would jump at the chance of significant projects such as this for post-A level students, whose output is regularly of an very high standard. Furthermore, contacts with such institutions can be very