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The Biology Curator

The Publication of the Biology Curator's Group

ISSUE 7

NOVEMBER 1996

Diary Dates

GCG AGM — Geological Models.

27th November 1996, Manchester Museum.
Contact: John Nudds, Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.

Local Information, Local Collections.

30th January 1997 at Wollaton Hall Natural History Museum.

The value of links between local museum and environmental databanks.

Contact: Graham Whalley (Further details inside).

Insect Pests in Museums.

10th-11th March 1997, Natural History Museum, London.

A two-day course by David Pinniger covering pests and damage, pest identification, pest environments, pest monitoring and control, pest management and other topics.

Contact: Phil Ackery, Dept. of Entomology, Natural History Museum. Tel: 0171 938 9346.

'What's in the Box?' — Collection Access and Care.

16th-17th April 1997 at The National Museums and Galleries of Wales, Cardiff.

Registration of Interest and Call for Papers
Two-day Joint Conference, with AGM's between the BCG and Natural Sciences Conservation Group.

Celebration of Bicentennaries of Charles Lyell and James Hutton.

30th July-3rd August 1997, London and 5th-9th August 1997, Edinburgh.

Contact: Lyell Hutton Conference Office, Geological Society, Burlington House, London, W1V 0JU.

COMMITTEE REPORT

The committee met on the 9th September, and eleven of the thirteen committee members attended. In a full agenda, a wide range of issues were discussed, of which I shall give the key ones below.

The editorial team at Bolton are now in full control of the TBC (as you can see from this issue) but are always open to suggestions, and the format of the journal may yet go through a number of minor changes.

We have been concerned over the future of the collections at a number of institutions, most notably at the Passmore Edwards and Bristol Museum, the latter prompting the initiative over collections at risk, about which more anon. Among other places under discussion were Leicester and Eton College, for which we are keeping a watching brief.

Mike Palmer was thanked for the considerable amount of work he has put in on this cell, especially with regards to the Collections at Risk initiative. There should be a report on this in a future journal, and the BCG session at the MA Conference in Harrogate will have discussed this and the orphan collections initiative. A working party has been set up to take this forward, and will meet early in December. The draft report on orphan collections was also discussed, and the final product will be published here, and in the Geological Curator, as well as other appropriate places, after the MA Conference. We have been receiving good support for this project from all those so far approached, including Val Bott, MGC Deputy Director and Stephen Locke, MA President and Hampshire county Museums Director, who both kindly agreed to take part in the Conference session.

Nick Goff has been gathering in more people into the documentation cell to assist with the work he has been doing on the Spectrum guidelines for natural sciences, and Steve Garland has been similarly recruiting help for the biological recording cell, which is currently looking at the Millennium Fund bid being tendered by the National Federation for Biological Recording. A meeting on these issues is to be held at the beginning of next year.

The touring exhibitions paper published in an earlier edition of TBC met with no response, and is to be shelved as a national project. However, it is possible that a regional

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scheme may be set up in the Yorkshire and Humberside region, which, if fruitful may be expanded at a later date.

The committee have been cooperating with Wiltshire Constabulary over the fate of a major egg collection which they had confiscated, prosecuting the owner. It is expected that a satisfactory conclusion to this business will be reached in the near future.

The next four meetings, from the Paris trip in November to next years proposed Vienna trip, were discussed and are being taken forward. See the events timetable elsewhere in this issue. Ideas for further meetings were also discussed, as were "Stage 2" meetings. These are intended to be small meetings at a higher level of specialism than our normal meetings, but the ideas proposed so far have, for various reasons, failed to come to fruition. Nevertheless, suggestions for these and other meetings, as well as offers of venues, will still be welcomed by committee.

Finally, an eye is being kept on our reserves which are currently decreasing, although this is in part due to the fact that there have been a number of out-of-the-ordinary expenditures this year.

As ever, we are endeavouring to keep the membership up to date as involved as possible in the activities of the group. If there is anything that you would like to suggest or feel should be brought to the attention of the committee, please get in touch with one of the committee members. Thanks.

Steve Thompson

Orphan Collections Report

After much debate and many re-writings, a more or less final draft of this report has now been produced. This runs to four sides of A4, plus associated material, and comprises an introduction, a review of the current situation, possible routes for action, and a summary and recommendations.

An outline of this report and the surrounding issues was presented at the MA Conference at the beginning of October, in a session covering this and the collections at risk initiative. The session was most successful, attracting around forty people, with as many from outside the subject as inside, and including AMC officers and museum directors. There was considerable discussion after the presentations, and the feedback from the audience was entirely positive. Any negative comments were confined to what we had left out, and these issues are in fact ones that we have covered in our investigations. I feel the response was most encouraging, and that we have a mandate for taking the initiatives on.

Some changes will probably need to be made to the report following the feedback at the conference. The final report will be published in this journal and in *The Geological Curator*, as well as in other appropriate places. If anyone would like to see the current draft of the report, please get in touch with me at Scunthorpe Museum, Oswald Road, Scunthorpe, North Lincs, DN15 7BD. (01724 843533). Your comments will be most welcome.

Collections at Risk: Can you help?

As you probably know, the Collections at Risk Cell is currently embroiled in a major overhaul. In a nutshell the aim is to move from the traditional reactive approach of writing letters of concern in response to immediate threats and instead, and where possible, take up a more proactive role by submission of views and comments to museum governing bodies at the consultative stage of any proposals likely to threaten the well being of a collection. This isn't going to happen overnight, however, initiatives towards this are currently being developed. In order to maintain the momentum achieved so far, whilst also continuing to deal with current collections at risk, it is vital that the cell expands beyond its present number, i.e. just me. What is required are people to spend a small amount of time reading through material, either relating to new initiatives or to specific cases and feed comments back to me — two, three or four heads are better than one. A cell comprising individuals spread across the regions would also be useful.

I don't need to sell the importance of the cell's work to you, many of you already have experienced collections at risk, while unfortunately, many more of you will in the near future. So if you feel you'd like to help, don't delay, pick up the phone today.

Mike Palmer
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Liverpool Museum
William Brown Street
Liverpool L3 8EN
Tel: 0151-478-4281/4291

Please can you make a note of Mike Palmers change of telephone number since the last issue of 'The Biology Curator'.

NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY NETWORK - UPDATE

The meeting on 24 September 1996 gave feedback from the regional consultative meetings. There is no room here to go into detail, but the bid will be put forward in early November. Local Records Centres will be able to take part in the project by forming local consortia of organisations. These consortia will have to achieve certain accredited standards and sign-up to agreed terms and conditions. BCG hopes to be involved in developing both accreditation standards and the terms of operation, but it is not certain who will develop these yet!

My main worry concerns the unambitious targets set by the project. By June 2000 it is planned to have only 20 centres "sorted", with another 30 to 35 done by the end of 2000. This will still leave gaps. What happens if over 20 are ready to participate immediately is not clear. I suspect that there will be problems!

My advice to centres in museums is to start talking to partners for possible consortia. Try to prepare yourselves for the project in case the bid is successful next spring. If you are in an area where conflict is more frequent than co-operation, the bid organisers assure me that it will be a