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Wallace, A. R. 1876. *The Geographical Distribution of Animals with a study of the relationships of living and extinct faunas as elucidating the past chances of the earth's surface.* MacMillan & Co., London, 1:xvi + 503 pp., 18 maps and illustrations; 2:[x] + 607 pp., 9 maps and illustrations.

Wallace, A. R. 1880. *Island Life: or the phenomena and causes of insular faunas and floras including a revision and attempted solution of the problem of ecological climates.* MacMillan & Co., London, xvii + 526 pp., 26 maps and illustrations.

Woodford, C. M. 1890. *A Naturalist among the Head-Hunters, being an account of three visits to the Solomon Islands in the years 1886, 1887 and 1888.* George Philip & Son, London, xii + 249 pp., frontispiece + 15 pls, 3 maps.

Hands-on = Destruction?

The "fate" of the natural history collections at SEARCH

Some readers may already be familiar with SEARCH, Hampshire County Council Museums Service's hands-on centre for history and natural history, based in a former Grammar school building in Gosport. We opened officially in December 1995. After a development period of about three years, it is very pleasing to have all our hard work recognised. In our first year, we are joint winners of the Museum of the Year 1996 "Best Museum Education Initiative" and we have also been highly commended in the Gulbenkian Awards for Museums and Galleries' "Most Imaginative Education Work".

SEARCH for Science offers a hands-on experience through staff-led activity sessions with real (and a few replica) natural history specimens, and with scientific equipment such as video-microscopes. At present, our main audience is school children (aged 5-11), including special needs groups, though we have also hosted open days and very popular family hands-on days to link with National Science Week.

The primary worry of anyone who cares for the well-being of collections in museums, especially curators or keepers, is the potential damage caused by allowing the general public (especially children) to handle specimens directly. In almost three years of hands-on activities with children using a range of specimens in SEARCH for Science, this worry has turned out to be broadly unfounded. We predicted some damage, but in practice, it has been much less than expected.

In SEARCH for Science, virtually all of the 300 or so specimens used for handling are accessioned, either as part of our main collections or acquired and accessioned as "education" collections. Obviously all items have an intrinsic value as representative examples of natural science material. However, we feel that there is no reason why more important or delicate specimens cannot be used in SEARCH, we are just especially careful about how they are handled or displayed (see below). We consistently implement damage-limitation strategies in high risk areas. From our low damage incidence rate and zero "disappearance" rate (so far), we assume that these have been successful. I hope that these

notes may give some hints or encouragement to those of you out there who are tempted to try out some real hands-on activities in your venue!

Communication

- Tell people how important the collections are but make it clear they are trusted to handle things carefully. People (including children) respond to being treated with respect, and generally parents do keep an eye on what their children are doing.
- Instruct visitors on the correct way to handle the collections (eg two hands, one thing at a time) - this gives them the confidence to do it correctly. Address your remarks about handling to the parents or teachers as much as the children. Adults often know as little about care of objects as the children and value being given a few basic rules.
- Be vigilant - you can usually spot a potential ear-pull or feather-ruffle before it arises. The visitor in most cases doesn't damage specimens in a malicious way and will respond to a few reasoned words from a member of staff.

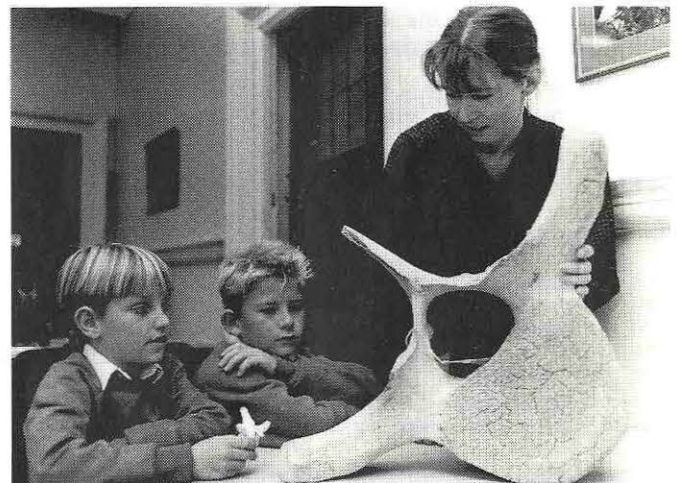
Presentation

- Ask visitors to wash or wipe their hands before handling - simple, but conveys the value of what they will be handling.
- Use specimens in very good condition - visitors will be less careful with items which are already damaged. Remove specimens as soon as you notice any damage, however small.
- Limit the numbers or circulation of visitors - if people feel crowded or rushed, they tend to handle more roughly.
- Provide equipment like video-microscopes or lenses to give some direction to observation and handling. When people know what they are doing and why, less damage occurs.

Limited access

Recognise that some items cannot be handled directly and think about alternatives:

- keep them out of reach but easily viewed
- present them in an accessible way, in transparent or glass-topped portable boxes



- use specimens embedded in clear acrylic blocks
- if the real thing either doesn't look real or it's difficult to use or get hold of (eg human skeleton), use good quality models, but tell the visitors

We have found that the key to the success of genuine hands-on in SEARCH is communication, and though simple, easy to change labels are useful, this is mostly through people. Unfortunately, this is also expensive. We made the decision at a very early stage to use staff as the main interpretative medium, with the cost of this passed on to school groups through charging.

We have invested a lot of time, effort and money into finding, and training, the right people to work in SEARCH.

This has culminated in the recent publication of our training manual, "Going Interactive" which describes a training course in basic communication skills for the kind of people who work in SEARCH. This manual is available for sale from SEARCH by mail order.

If anyone would like to discuss any of the above issues further, please contact me at SEARCH.

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BIRDS WANTED

In collaboration with several Museums of Natural History and a number of experts in hawk pluckings, a large scientific feather collection has been assembled over the past 12 years, which is used among other purposes for the realisation of an identification book for feathers ("Bestimmungsbuch für Rupfungen und Mauserfedern"). The collection consists mainly of road kills, oil pest victims, pluckings of raptors as well as sorted out museum skins. It is kept at the Zoological Museum of Hamburg.

For some species there is a considerable deficit of material. Since our work requires to have the feathers in their full length for description, ordinary museum skins are not very useful.

Therefore, I would like to ask if it would be possible to obtain some damaged or undated material of the species listed in the table (especially *Larus glaucooides immat.*, *Circus pygargus* adult male, *Loxia scottica* and *Stercorarius longicaudus*), which could be used to take the single feathers apart. Even skins that have been seriously damaged by insects are still useful for this purpose. I know that these species are fairly rare and you may not have most of them,

but it may happen that you decide to separate some old specimen or that you receive some new material which is not suitable for preparing skins or only needed for its skeletons.

Please let me know what possible service I may provide in exchange. Thank you very much in advance for your help.

Private address : (for letters) :

Gabriel Hartmann, Station 24
NL-6-63NP Vlodrop
The Netherlands

Official address :

Gabriel Hartmann
c/o Dr H Hoerschelmann
Department of Ornithology
Zoologisches Institut und Museum
Martin-Luther-King-Platz 13
20146 Hamburg, Germany

Requested Species

First Priority : (missing completely)

1. *Gavia adamsii*
2. *Pelicanus crispus*
3. *Anser erythropus*
4. *Marmaronetta angustirostris*
5. *Polysticta stelleri* (especially tail)
6. *Aquila clanga* (especially juv.)
7. *Aquila heliaca*
8. *Haliaeetus albicilla* ad. & juv.
9. *Circus pygargus* (esp. o¹ adult)
10. *alco concolor*
11. *Fulica cristata* (esp. tail)
12. *Numenius tenuirostris*
13. *Limicola falcinella*
14. *Larus audouinii* (esp. juv/immat.)
15. *Larus glaucooides* (tail of juv/immat)
16. *Pagophila eburnea*
17. *Xema (Larus sabinii)*
18. *Rohdostethia rosea*
19. *Melanocorypha leucoptera*
20. *Chersophilus duponti*
21. *Hippolais olivetorum*
22. *Sylvia sarda*
23. *Sitta whiteheadi*
24. *Loxia pytyopsittacus* (esp. tail)

Second Priority :

- Gavia immer*
Podiceps auritus
(*Hydrobates pelagicus*)
Cygnus columbianus (juv)
Anser brachyrhynchus
Branta canadensis
Tadorna ferruginea
Somateria spectabilis
Histrionicus histrionicus
Oxyura leucocephala
Mergus albellus (adult male)
Gypaetus barbatus (tail of immat., even single moult feathers)
Aquila pomarina
Hieraaetus pennatus
Buteo lagopus
Pandion haliaetus
Accipiter brevipes
(*Falco columbarius* - ad. male)
Lagopus spec. (juvenile)
Tetrao tetrix (tail of ad. male)
Tetrao urogallus (juv. & female)
Vanellus gregarius
Gallinago media
Charadrius leschenaultii
(*Eudromias morinellus*)
- Numenius phaeopus*
Calidris maritima
Calidris ferruginea
Phalaropus fulicarius
(*Phalaropus lobatus*)
Stercorarius longicaudus (esp. ad)
(*Stercorarius pomarina* - adult)
Sterna dougallii (juv)
Pterocles atchata
Columba livia (wild only)
Picoides leucotos
- Anthus gustavi*
Anthus hodgsoni
Locustella luscinioides
Acrocephalus paludicola
Acrocephalus dumetorum
Sylvia melanothorax
Phylloscopus borealis
Tarsiger cyanurus
Oenanthe cyprica
Parus lugubris
Parus cinctus
Emberiza caesia
Emberiza cineracea
Loxia scottica
(*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*)