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Introduction

This is the third in our series of pull-out guides to risks facing museum collections. In this issue we look at 'pests'; their monitoring, effects and prevention.

We are very grateful to the authors and the Natural History Museum for providing us with the first eight of our articles. These are post-prints from a meeting held in December.

Our next issue will look at Theft & Vandalism. Articles are invited relating to experiences of dealing with both. Pieces on 'preventative' measures implemented would be very welcomed, as would case studies of repairs and 'remedies' adopted following an incident.

The Insect Pest Problem at The Natural History Museum, London

Over a 2-year period, 1994-1995, a pest survey was undertaken on a consultancy basis of the Natural History Museum's wide-ranging stores and galleries. The final report highlighted primary areas of concern and made eleven specific recommendations. This summary is published with the permission of the NHM.

Insect pests were found to be endemic within the structure of the museum. Due to the age of the South Kensington buildings and subsequent structural modifications and additions, there are countless

ducts, cavities and other dead spaces which harbour organic debris. This debris, which includes dead birds, bird nests and rodents, supports a population of Dermestid beetles. The major pest present is the Guernsey carpet beetle, *Anthrenus sarnicus*. The larvae of this species move freely, becoming established in specimens within the collection. Heaviest concentrations of *Anthrenus sarnicus* were found in mammals and reptiles in Zoology Storeroom 1 and in the Entomology building; this species was also a notable pest on the dried Crustacea, mammal skins and skeletal material. The biscuit beetle, *Stegobium paniceum*, occurred in parts of the Herbarium; the brown carpet beetle, *Attagenus*

smirnovi and the American wasp beetle, *Reesa vespulae* occurred in some of the galleries and the Entomology building. Damage to objects in the galleries was very limited because of widespread use of DDVP (2,2-dichlorovinyl dimethyl phosphate) slow release strips. At the time of the survey many gallery areas were very dirty. This accumulated dirt was supporting populations of *Anthrenus sarnicus*, *Attagenus smirnovi* and the clothes moth *Tineola bisselliella*. The design of many displays did not seem to provide for efficient routine cleaning.

Of the outstations, the Wandsworth store has the facility to maintain temperatures below 16°C and at the time of the survey there was no evidence of active pests. But there is great potential for future problems if temperatures cannot be kept low. At Tring, old parts of the building showed signs of infestation. The use of DDVP slow release strips in the bird cabinets since 1975 has prevented any damage to specimens.

Both South Kensington and Tring have a Dermestarium for cleaning skeletal material. The one at Tring was well managed whereas the other, at the time of the survey, was

disused and acting as a major breeding source of *Anthrenus sarnicus*.

Recommendations for pest prevention and control

The Museum has potentially more material at risk from infestation than many other museums. Staff vigilance and effort has helped to maintain high standards in some areas. This and the use of DDVP strips has prevented serious damage to collections. However, instigation of a museum-wide policy of pest prevention is essential to prevent pests from reservoirs within the museum from spreading into other parts of the collection and causing problems. Such a policy is evolving within the museum and considerable progress has been made since 1994, but to continue this evolution towards a successful strategy, certain key points must continue to be addressed. Although specific to the NHM, these points could form the basis of a strategy in many museums.

1. Continue to increase staff awareness and discipline by education and training in pest management by means of seminars and information exchange. There is also a need to develop this training as part of a museum-wide