



# NEWSLETTER



January 1990

Vol 5 No 4

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## Programme for 1990

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### NATURAL HISTORY FOR NON-SPECIALISTS

Joint BCG and Museums Association Seminar to be held on 7 February 1990 at Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove.

Programme for the day

Chairman: Steve Garland

**Peter Davis, Hancock Museum, Newcastle-upon-Tyne**

All collections have their uses (display, reference, history, science, environmental studies) as well as problems (ethics, defining collecting and disposal policies, etc). How do zoologists and botanists cope with collections often numbering hundreds of thousands of objects?

**Geoffrey Hancock, Glasgow Museum and Art Gallery**

Different collections have different storage requirements. Study facilities have to be carefully planned. How should birds' eggs, butterflies or fungi be handled for examination, display or transport?

**Eric Greenwood, Liverpool Museum**

Recent developments in using natural history collections depart from the use of traditional cased displays. What can we learn from the popularity of hands-on visitor facilities about the future use for collections and the way in which the visitors perceive curator's work?

**David Mellor, Paisley Museum**

The environmental aspects of museum work include species recording at local and national levels and site surveys. The services linked to ecological work by biologists in museums are increasingly in demand from the local community as well as planners and developers.

**Gordon Reid, Horniman Museum, London**

Enquiries, loans and research uses of natural history collections cover a wide range of customers. Who are they and how are they best served?

**Derek Whitely, Sheffield City Museum**

Apart from devising new ways to get the collections to the people, recent activities on the part of biology curators have been aimed at raising the profile of natural history in the museum world.

The cost is £30 for members of the MA, £50 for non-members. Booking form etc is available from: Museums Association Seminars, 852 Melton Road, Thurmaston, Leicester LE4 8BN. Some free places are available, contact: Rachel Bullock on 01 404 4767 for further details.





### BIRDS' EGG COLLECTIONS

This BCG one-day seminar will be held at **TRING MUSEUM** on Thursday 15 **FEBRUARY** 1990. Subjects to be covered include:

What is an egg collection?  
Some brief case histories of egg thefts.  
A summary of some laws relating to egg collections.  
Curation of egg collections.  
Uses of egg collections.

Representatives from the Department of the Environment and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds have agreed to speak at the meeting.

Time has been allocated for a general discussion on all aspects of egg collections and the meeting will end with a tour of Tring's egg collections and the opportunity to see some rare volumes from the library.

Space is limited, so if you wish to attend an early booking will be required. For more details contact Kathie Way, Zoology Dept, British Museum (Natural History) (01-938-8892) or Richard Sutcliffe, Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove, Glasgow (041-357-3929).

### NATURAL SCIENCES CURATORIAL COURSE

Joint BCG and GCG course organised in conjunction with the University of Sheffield Division of Continuing Education, to be held at Earnshaw Hall, Sheffield from 18 to 23 March 1990.

Resident course tutor: Peter Davis (Hancock Museum); course director: Bob Toynton (University of Sheffield).

This is a residential course and the cost of £175 includes overnight accommodation (in single study bedrooms) with full board in Earnshaw Hall from evening meal on Sunday 18 March to lunch on Friday 23 March. Most morning sessions will be in the Hall with afternoons largely out of doors or in museums. The costs include tuition by tutors with curatorial experience and all transport during the course.

The course is aimed at anyone with an interest, professional or otherwise, in the preservation, storage,

documentation and uses of biological and geological specimens and records. There will be an emphasis on the practical side of curation with a chance to try out many techniques rather than just to be told about them.

Subjects covered on the course (although some only as options) will include: history, functions, organisation and current trends; collection and acquisition; documentation; enquiry services; information resources; field techniques; conservation; preparation techniques; identification; computerisation of records; MODES; education; outdoor interpretation; storage; display; historic collections and their problems.

The course should be of particular interest to:

- Museums Association Diploma (Natural Sciences) students
- new curators
- mid-term curators requiring a 'refresher' course
- non-specialist curators with responsibility for natural science collections
- staff from non-museum institutions with collections.

Booking forms from, and enquiries answered by: Bob Toynton, Division of Continuing Education, 85 Wilkinson Street, Sheffield S10 2GJ.  
Tel 0742 768555 ext 4932

### PETERBOROUGH MUSEUM

Joint BCG/GCG meeting, 22 March 1990

#### Programme

- 10.00-10.30 - Arrival and coffee
- 10.30-10.45 - Greeting by Leisure and Amenities Chairman/Officer
- 10.45-11.00 - Greeting by Martin Howe, Museum Services Curator
- 11.00-11.45 - 'From draft brief to opening ceremony: the Geology and Wildlife Gallery at Peterborough Museum'
- 11.45-12.00 - Discussion
- 12.00-2.00 - Lunch and chance to view gallery
- 2.00-2.45 - Our Decaying Natural Heritage. BCG Slide Pack
- 2.45-3.00 - Discussion
- 3.00-4.00 - either a) visit to AMSSEE taxidermy studio or b) chance to examine reserve natural science collections of Peterborough Museum
- 4.00 - Meeting closed

Local organiser is Gordon Chancellor. For further information contact Gordon on 0733 43329 or write to the museum.

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# AGM 90



isle of man

4 - 7 MAY 1990

The Isle of Man is easier to get to than you think! Car ferry services run from Liverpool, Heysham, Stranraer, Dublin and Belfast. Manx Airlines offer good rates, from the mainland.

Accommodation on the Island is good value for money at this time of year.

### Provisional Programme

- Friday 4 May The Uses of Biological Collections plus contributions from the Isle of Man, Ulster, and the Republic of Ireland museums. 2pm Annual General Meeting. Officers' Reports and Review of the Year
- Saturday 5 May The Uses of Biological Collections/Field trips
- Sunday 6 May Field trips and study visits (optional)
- Monday 7 May (Bank Holiday) - stay an extra day if you wish.

By kind permission of the Manx Museum we have free use of the exciting 'New Extension to the Manx Museum' - well worth seeing. We are hoping that the meeting will be free. You book your own accommodation and transport. You may attend all, or part of the meeting. Make a date in your diary now!

- \* A pack including details of accommodation, ferry services and detailed programme will be available in March 1990 from: Derek Whiteley, BCG Secretary, City Museum, Sheffield S10 2TP.
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### MYRIAPODS

In May 1990 we have the opportunity to boost the biological records for the Isle of Man by putting our collective skills together and surveying the island while we are out 'enjoying ourselves' at the AGM meeting. Can I just appeal for you not to overlook the centipedes and millipedes while you are there. The British Myriapod Group are compiling a list for the island at present and would be grateful for any recent records. Thank you.

Paul Richards  
Sheffield City Museum

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# Techniques

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### PEST CONTROL: MAKING THE BEST OF A BAD JOB!

After sitting through some fascinating talks at the BCG AGM in 1988 concerning pest control in museum natural history collections we decided to try to improve our arrangements in Bolton Museum.

Our main problem in Bolton is chronic lack of space in the stores. We also have the regular problems of varied and largely poor storage units and lack of effective environmental control. We are slowly working on the problem of storage units (as money permits) and have managed to improve environmental control in our largest store by erecting a floor-to-ceiling partition wall. This has been sealed as well as possible so that environmental conditions are buffered from the corridors and lift shaft adjacent to the store. However, we still have over 25% of our collections housed in open areas with very poor environmental control and security.

The overcrowding problem has a number of effects on pest control. Firstly, the stores are difficult to clean; this is exacerbated by irregular, old, badly-designed cabinets with numerous dust-traps. Secondly, pesticides are not feasible for continuous use as many areas are needed for work areas and many cannot be isolated from offices. Finally, in a crowded working environment it is easy to use various stores as temporary places to stack wood, carpet, or to place returned loans or new acquisitions prior to fumigation.

We decided to improve our working practices, at least for stores which have some degree of isolation.

Monitoring is important so that improvements or deterioration of storage conditions can be seen. Regular temperature and humidity readings are taken (weekly) and are providing us with a clearer picture of the environment in each store. Spot checks are performed with a whirling hygrometer and thermohygrographs are circulated around different stores. (We don't have money for one in each store yet). For monitoring pests we instigated the use of sticky traps. These are placed throughout the Museum in offices, stores and even corridors and are checked every month. All traps with anything stuck on are removed and their captures identified. Records of all catches are kept for each separate

room or area. This will, we hope, build up a good picture of our pest problems. It is very important to date traps when set and to mark which areas they were set in otherwise it is extremely easy to mix them up later.

Each storage area is being carefully cleaned by staff. This means emptying each cabinet in turn, wiping off dust and grime and vacuuming up fluff etc. from behind, under or on cabinets. Once a store has been cleaned thoroughly we use Dichlorvos to fumigate. A piece is placed in each drawer and left for two weeks before removal. This work is performed while wearing thin rubber gloves and rubber face-mask with screw-in canister filter of a suitable type. However, despite these precautions the high levels of chemicals has caused some eye irritation which was especially pronounced for two members of staff who were wearing contact lenses! Next time we shall be obtaining fresh air full-head hoods (see details below) before handling the chemical. We hope to obtain funding for these from central Health and Safety money.

We shall not be able to fumigate collections in corridors or in office areas, but we are trying to rearrange storage so that these areas are used for collections that are less 'pest sensitive' such as rocks and skeletal collections. How is it going? Well, before we used sticky-traps we had only had one pest occurrence - a single museum-beetle larva on a cockroach that had been used for loan. However, we now have records of Australian Spider Beetle, Silverfish, Psocids, Museum Beetle and two Clothes Moths (Tineola biselliella and Endrosis sarcitrella). None were infesting collections but it shows that potential trouble is ever-present! The only concentration of pests was of Museum Beetle which was in an office area and was tracked down to rolls of fluff behind bookcases!

#### THE FUTURE

After a store area has been thoroughly cleaned and every drawer fumigated we plan to fumigate once every twelve months by placing quantities of Dichlorvos in the stores, not in every drawer, and sealing them for two weeks. If our sticky traps suggest a rise in pest numbers then we shall fumigate earlier.

In the enclosed store areas we are installing cheap domestic dehumidifiers of a model recently recommended as a 'best buy' in Which Magazine! These are set to switch on if relative humidity rises above about 50%. Obviously in more open areas we cannot control relative humidity in this way. As most of our storage area is in a basement we find

that our problem is always high humidity, never low humidity. It is not a big problem so we hope that a domestic machine will suffice.

**Sticky traps:** Chekkitt insect traps. Available from Layson Ltd., (Environmental Services), 27 Tatton Court, Kingsland Grange, Warrington, Cheshire WA1 4RR. Cost £14 per 50 (as of 1988). NB These traps come with lures for cockroaches - we don't use the lures; they smell of curry! (PS we have no cockroaches.)

**Dehumidifier:** Matsui DH125. Available only from branches of Currys Ltd. Price £149.99 (as of 1989).

**Full face masks - fresh air type:** available through your local safety equipment supplier. Equipment made by Martindale Protection Ltd., Neasden Lane, London NW10 1RN. Price c. £350 for pump, airlines and two hoods.

Other equipment used was Dichlorvos (Vapona) masking tape and polythene sheet for sealing rooms, mastic for sealing cracks in store partition walls and warning notices to stop people from entering.

The sticky traps last for several months or more. If the atmosphere is very dusty or if infestations are high (you have to change the traps as you can't remember which insects are new and which are old!) or if the traps get wet they will need changing more often. One useful note, always inform your cleaning staff about them; they lose their effectiveness when they've been wrapped around a vacuum cleaner brush, or so we found!

All items that are loaned out or new acquisitions are treated in a deep-freeze at -18°C for one week. 48 hours is the recommended 'dose' but we go 'over the top' to be safe, especially with the larger items. A cheap digital thermometer with remote thermocouple probe is a useful item. It can be attached to the object to take readings with the freezer closed. We use a normal domestic chest freezer with as large a compartment as we could afford/accommodate.

The pest control strategy we have implemented is far from ideal. However we do now feel that we have a better monitoring system than before and no-one is suffering from high pesticide fume levels. There are still some high risk collections (some insects, pyritized fossils and plants) in high risk areas but we have plans to move or enclose many of these in the next year or two. We must remain especially vigilant in these areas until then. In the enclosed stores we are now

monitoring pest levels and environmental conditions so that we should quickly notice any worrying changes. This also means that all of our store areas are visited on a regular basis by staff; a strict timetable is vital. Accurate record-keeping is also vital.

One day Bolton Museum may have the facilities to care for its natural history collections adequately but until then we feel that we have arrived at a reasonable strategy involving sensible amounts of staff time, section money, health and safety and minimal risk to collections.

Note:

Since writing this article the new Control of Substances Hazardous to Health regulations have come into force (as of 1 October 1989). These are generally known as COSHH. We will now have to rethink our policy as concerns the use of Dichlorvos and it remains to be seen whether or not it is possible to achieve a viable pest control strategy in existing store areas.

Steve Garland  
Senior Keeper, Natural History  
Bolton Museum and Art Gallery

PS

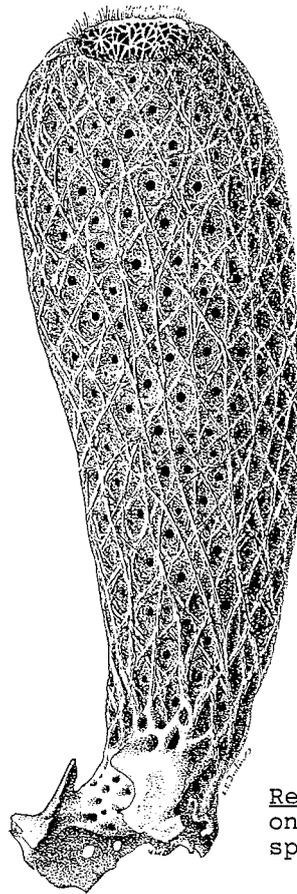
If you haven't heard of COSHH I suggest you contact your council safety officer, local environment health department or nearest Health and Safety Executive for urgent advice. It will mean an end to curators working in offices and stores containing fumigants.

## THE SPONGE BATH

The glassy skeletons of sponges, especially the Venus Flowerbasket type appear to gather dust and dirt in direct proportion to their fragility, presenting the curator with a depressing sight or a seemingly formidable task of cleaning. Cheer up! The answer is rapid, simple, cheap and safe and requires no fancy equipment or training.

## EQUIPMENT

- 1 A supply of distilled or deionised water sufficient to allow for one wash basin and two or three rinses of each sponge. If the tapwater available is very pure, the distilled or deionised water may be used for just the two final rinses.
- 2 A small amount of non-ionic detergent, Synperonic N for example. This is obtainable from many laboratory suppliers or from Archival Aids, PO Box 5, Spondon,



Regadrella phoenix,  
one of the glass  
sponges.

Derby DE2 7BP. Only a few drops per pint of water are needed, sufficient to provide a small head of foam.

- 3 Clean waterproof tanks in which to wash the sponges. Glass specimen jars are ideal, also beakers, bowls and plastic wash tubs. Ensure that the sponge will slide easily in and out of the jar, that there is no lip on which it might catch, and that when it is in the jar you can manoeuvre it without difficulty, maintaining your grip until the sponge is resting on the bottom.
- 4 A sink or drain, for disposing of the water.

If you have jars of the right size and shape, so that you can hold the sponge and gently lower it to the bottom, no further equipment is necessary. If you have particularly large or awkward specimens, which you wish to wash in situ in their own jars, or if you have only long, narrow jars available, you will need a small amount of flexible tubing to syphon the water in and out, making sure that there is room in the jar for both specimen and tube. If you do not wish to hold the sponges by hand, place them in a 'chip basket' of clean wire or plastic mesh before lowering them into the container. If you are afraid of damage when the sponge rests on the bottom of the jar (if it has a broken or fragile end, for

example) pad the bottom of the jar with a small amount of plastic sheeting, or polythene foam (eg Plastazote) making sure that the padding stays at the bottom when the water is added.

#### PROCEDURE

Step 1. Ensure that the washtank to be used is clean, and that the sponge will fit inside easily and will be submerged when the water is added. Remove the sponge. Fill the jar with room temperature clean water, preferably distilled or deionised, to which a few drops of non-ionic detergent have been added. Make sure the detergent is well mixed in.

Step 2. Lower the sponge slowly into the washwater until it rests on the bottom. Bubbles of air will often remain trapped in the lattice of the sponge. Most of these can be removed by raising and lowering the sponge gently once or twice, or by gently moving the water with a stirrer, taking care not to come close to the sponge. Leave the sponge for 5-10 minutes depending on the degree of dirt. Do not leave the sponge unattended and do not be tempted to increase the soaking time in an attempt to remove further dirt, unless the sponge is under continual careful observation. It is possible that some degraded or weakened specimens might be damaged by prolonged soaking.

Step 3. Remove the sponge slowly from the bath and lay it gently on a clean surface to drain. Never bring it in contact with cotton wool or terry towelling, two materials guaranteed to catch on the spicules. Empty the washwater, rinse the jar with clean water and fill with distilled or deionised water to rinse. Gently lower the sponge into the rinse water and leave for a minute or two. Remove the sponge, empty the jar, fill with fresh rinsewater and repeat.

Step 4. Remove the sponge from the final rinse water and lay it on a clean surface to drain. The sponge can be replaced in a clean, dry specimen jar to dry, or in any well ventilated place. If possible, cover the container in which the sponge is drying with paper or cloth to prevent dust settling on the clean surface.

#### CAUTION

Before washing any specimen, check for signs of damage or repair which might have been carried out with water soluble glues or coatings. If in any doubt, test a small area with water for any sign of change.

If others use the same area, leave plenty of warning signs around. A sink with a few sponges drying in the bottom may look empty at first glance.

Don't try to use ordinary household detergent or soap solutions. Non-ionic detergent is the simplest, the safest and the best.

Don't skimp on the rinses. Any hardwater deposits drying on the sponges will leave unsightly marks which will be very difficult to remove later.

Don't be tempted to leave the sponges in water for longer than a few minutes. Pure water can etch or dissolve glasses and the specimens may become more susceptible with age.

Don't hurry. Careful handling and slow movements are safest when dealing with items this fragile.

Finally, if you do encounter problems, particularly stubborn stains, or unusual reactions, please let us know.

Richard and Helena Jaeschke,  
Conservators, 3 Park Gardens, Lynton,  
Devon EX35 6DF.

## Committee News

#### A DAY OF MOURNING FOR BIOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS

Wednesday 28 February 1990 has been declared an official 'Day of Mourning' for our neglected and decaying natural heritage. BCG members and other natural history curators are being asked to reveal examples of badly curated, neglected or decaying natural history specimens to the press and

public. Better still, find a scientifically valuable collection or group of specimens which are in bad shape owing to lack of cash, and would benefit from additional funds.

Please complete and post the enclosed Press Release to your local press/radio station, and have a supply of Sunflower campaign leaflets handy on the day. BCG will contact the national press. This is the next phase in the 'Decaying Natural Heritage' campaign, which has already attracted much attention and some funding. The rest is up to you. Black armbands, coffins, wakes, and dirges, and similar stunts for the media are all possibilities. Note that 28 February 1990 is Ash Wednesday.

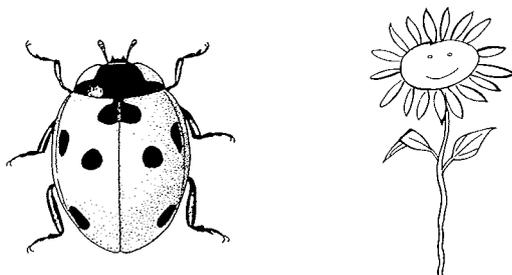
## BEETLE-DOWN ..... CAMPAIGN

The Campaign is going well. Many museums organised events last autumn, and requests are being received for another co-ordinated week in 1990.

**Urgent.** The official BCG file is now being circulated widely. Derek Whiteley requires more photos, handbills, posters, press cuttings and slides of Beetle-Down .... events. Do it now please! An illustrated progress report will be given at the Manx AGM.

**Additional leafletes** are available. Please send £4 in postage stamps, to save BCG mney. The leaflets are free.

T-shirts are still available in adult M size at £3.50. If there is a known demand we will consider reprinting sweat-shirts (cost about £7) and T-shirts in children's sizes for resale.



## SUNFLOWER CAMPAIGN: GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS

The National launch went very well, and the timing was perfect - a few days before the prestigious Museums Association Centenary Conference in York in September.

- \* THE TIMES ran a good length article by Simon Tait
- \* The new MUSEUMS JOURNAL ran a news feature 'Biologists Bite Back' in the September (Conference) issue
- \* Jean Rooke interviewed Derek Whiteley on Radio 2
- \* A BCG flying squad presented both our campaigns to the MA Conference in York
- \* Delegates at York were heavily lobbied and leafleted
- \* A leaflet has been formally sent to the Rt Hon Richard Luce MP, Minister for the Arts

Perhaps one of the most encouraging signs of recognition was the mention of our campaign in the Museums Association Centenary Presidential Address by Patrick Boylan.

The Campaign is going well too! The sunflower leaflet is proving to be a lifeline for some museums. Leaflets are much in demand, natural history societies are asking for batches, many directors and councillors have been lobbied; and the feedback so far is good.

We must keep the pressure on! The next few months are crucial.

Have you sent a leaflet to the Chair of your governing committee, using the BCG cover note?

## HOW TO OBTAIN COPIES OF THE SUNFLOWER CAMPAIGN LEAFLET

- 1 Call at Sheffield Museum. The leaflets are FREE. 5000 have been printed.
- 2 Send a suitable SAE for an appropriate weight to: BCG Secretary. Derek Whiteley, City Museum, Sheffield S10 2TP.
- 3 Photocopy the leaflet as many times as you wish.

## WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

- \* Contact your local press/media. Tell them about the campaign, Sunflower Day, and your own problems (BCG will contact the National Press)
- \* Ask your local society/individual naturalists/users of museum collections/national societies to write to MGC supporting the campaign, and expressing concern over the future and well-being of collections
- \* Presuming that some money and/or staff will be forthcoming, prepare a list of small-scale and large-scale requirements

Derek Whiteley  
BCG Secretary  
Sheffield City Museum

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### THE USE, CURATION AND GROWTH OF INSECT COLLECTIONS IN PROVINCIAL MUSEUMS

Sheffield City Museum, 16 October 1990  
BCG/Royal Entomological Society of London joint meeting

Speakers are invited to give short talks or papers on relevant subjects. Museum curators and users of collections are equally welcome. Ethics, collecting policies and 'disposal' of collections will also be covered.

### USES OF BIOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS

One of the sessions at the forthcoming Isle of Man AGM on 4-5 May 1990 will cover the vital issues involving all uses of biological collections - a topic which needs a good airing and full discussion, if the Group is to justify its campaign for additional resources.

A special invitation goes out to members and friends in Ulster and the Republic of Ireland, who we hope will meet us half-way. The Committee would particularly welcome speakers, visitors and news from both areas.

Please contact BCG Secretary with offers and suggestions for both of these meetings:

Derek Whiteley  
Sheffield Museum, S10 2TP

#### NEW TREASURER

Adam Wright has resigned as BCG Treasurer in mid-term owing to pressure of work at Coventry Museum. On behalf of BCG, Committee moved a vote of thanks to Adam for his hard work over many years. We are pleased that he wishes to remain on Committee.

Kathie Way (address on the back page) is Acting Treasurer and all subscriptions and payments should now be forwarded to her.

#### BCG WATCHDOG



#### BIOLOGY POSTS LOST AND CREATED

These are the losses and gains which have come to the attention of the Committee during the past two years.

##### Posts lost

Gilbert White Museum - curator post lost  
Tyne and Wear - two posts deleted (see below)  
Liverpool - one trainee post lost (in Vertebrate Zoology) (see below)  
Middlesbrough - one post apparently not re-appointed  
BM(NH) - Bat specialist lost (ex-Bat News)  
Sheffield - two Ecology Unit posts threatened, then relieved  
Passmore Edwards Museum - Principal Assistant Curator (Natural Sciences) frozen  
Passmore Edwards Museum - Biology Technician post frozen

#### Posts created

Leicestershire - Assistant Keeper (Botany) unfrozen after eight years  
- Assistant County Ecologist  
- Ecological Assistant  
Chester - Natural History Assistant (re-appointed after delay)  
Ipswich - Assistant Curator (Biological Records)  
Liverpool - two 'Curator G' posts  
Kirkleatham - one natural history post  
North Devon - Assistant Curator  
Horniman - Museum Assistant (Natural History) unfrozen  
RMS - New taxidermy post  
Tyne and Wear - Museums Officer (Natural Sciences) re-established  
Buckinghamshire - Environmental Records Assistant  
Dorchester - Biologist has replaced geologist

Compiled by Derek Whiteley from Committee minutes.

#### BEWARE!

A Dr Nicholls has been contacting some museums in the UK offering to buy herbarium sheets from the collections, particularly items or collections of British origin dated before 1920.

Members should be aware that BCG fully endorses the Museums Association code of conduct for the disposal of museum artefacts, and would not normally condone the sale of public material to private collectors. Should the situation arise, BCG will intervene on behalf of any member, collection or museum if pressure is applied from any source for disposal to private collectors.

John Mathias (on behalf of the Committee)

#### NEW SOURCE FOR SKELETAL PREPS AND MUSEUM MOUNTS

Griffin and George are closing down their Biological Production Unit at East Preston in Sussex and will cease to supply real animal (as opposed to plastic) skeletal preps and museum mounts. J R Dunlop, the production manager at Griffin and George who specialises in these items, intends to carry on with that part of the the business himself. He has been involved in this field for 25 years and will be producing top quality specimens.

All enquiries should be addressed to:  
J R Dunlop, 12 Tideway, Littlehampton,  
West Sussex, BN17 6QT. Tel 0903 724983.

# In the Press

GUILD OF TAXIDERMISTS NEWSLETTER  
19 MARCH 1989

In addition to the usual fascinating (and amusing) articles on modern techniques and historic background information the latest guild NEWSLETTER will also be of interest to the curator in general. It contains a useful and concise article by Margaret Reilly on THE CARE OF ZOOLOGICAL SPIRIT COLLECTIONS. In clear, practical terms the paper outlines basic spirit techniques from fixation and preservation to the choice of jars, sealants and labels. A useful list of references and suppliers is also appended.

In addition, the NEWSLETTER also contains a note on where taxidermists stand with regard to the Wildlife and Countryside Act at present. Of late there seems to have been some confusion over the wording of the Act and this article (based on a meeting with the DoE) clarifies the situation nicely. It never hurts for the museum curator occasionally to remind him/herself of these legalities and this article is certainly the simplest summary that I have ever read.

Paul Richards  
Sheffield Museum

STUDIES IN CONSERVATION 34(3), August 1981, has an interesting paper by S Omar, M McCord and V Daniels on freeze-drying techniques: The Conservation of Bog Bodies by Freeze-drying. The work done on two bog bodies, Meenybradan Woman and Lindow Man is discussed in detail. Of particular interest is the technique of freeze-drying after impregnation with polythene glycol 400, and data are presented on shrinkage and temperature fluctuation during the freeze-drying process. The use of clingfilm during the initial freezing period, presumably to maintain the shape of the subject, is interesting; this was removed before freeze-drying began. Completed a year before the paper was written, the technique appears to have been very successful with minimal shrinkage (less than 5%) and good colour retention although some marking from the cling film plasticiser was visible on the surface of the Lindow Man specimen.

BSBI News (No 52, September 1989) reports in glowing terms on the permanent opening of the Liverpool Museum Natural History Centre. Also in that issue is an article by David J McCosh (Secretary of the BSBI Records Committee) on vouchers: what they are; when to take them; what to take; where records should be sent for the national recording scheme; advice on where vouchers should be deposited and on long-term provisions for private herbaria. Local museum herbaria are not mentioned by name but they are by implication.

BRITISH BIRDS (Vol 82 no 9, September 1989) continues to hound the Natural History Museum in its treatment of the Sub-department of Ornithology at Tring, on this occasion in the form of a letter from W R P Bourne of Aberdeen University. He comments on how the staff cuts adversely affected him in a recent attempt to make use of the collections at Tring (a round trip of 500 miles from Aberdeen). His more general comments are also of interest and it is to be hoped the debate on that issue continues - in the ornithological as well as the museological world.

The GETTY CONSERVATION INSTITUTE NEWSLETTER (Vol IV no 3, Fall 1989) has a short piece on a Survey of Formaldehyde in Museum Environments. It is not clear from the article whether biological storage environments were sampled at all, but the results from general museums are of interest anyway. Anyone who would like to see the full report, or at least see a detailed breakdown of the results, should contact Dr Dusan Stulik, Analytical Section Head, Getty Conservation Institute, 4503 Glencoe Avenue, Marina de Rey, California 90292-6537, USA. Presumably, Dr Stulik can be contacted through the Conservation Information Network.

## SUNFLOWER CAMPAIGN - A MODEST SUCCESS

I haven't been scouring the press for reactions to the Sunflower Campaign - Derek will report on that in a later issue - but one report was sent to me recently from the CHRISTIAN HERALD. It was an accurate and well-written piece and it's good to see that our publicity campaign reached beyond the national dailies to all sections of the press.

JHM

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# Letters

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Dear John,

Along with a number of museums nationally, Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery is attempting to come to grips with its large and diverse insect collections. At present the majority are housed in a variety of entomological cabinets of differing age and quality. In order to improve access to specimens, and to relieve problems of documentation and conservation, all are being transferred into uniform, purpose-built storage. This consists of Stephenson Blake units; Hill-style drawers, but in-house design carcasses.

Recently concern has been expressed within our section over ordering a product which contains a significant percentage of tropical hardwood, notably mahogany. Although the amount of timber is relatively small, we wonder if anyone has investigated whether their own suppliers utilise a renewable source of hardwood or whether possible alternatives such as beech have been tried.

Yours sincerely,

Ray Barnett  
Assistant Curator, Natural History,  
Museum and Art Gallery, Queens Road,  
Bristol BS8 1RL.

Dear Derek,

I am writing to thank you for the support that BCG gave to the Museums Matter campaign last year, and in particular, over the then frozen Museums Officer (Natural Sciences) post.

It is with some delight that I can tell you that we are interviewing candidates for this post on 13th June. I have refrained from writing before as there has been some problem with funding the full complement of posts that was recently advertised - happily for us, the Natural Sciences post seems safe.

I should point out that despite this success, the Service has still lost a number of posts this year through a voluntary severance scheme and non-filling of vacant posts. Nevertheless, at least the Natural Sciences section will return to its complement of three and I honestly feel that this is largely due to the level of support that we received from BCG and other scientific organisations, along with the publication of the Biology Collections UK report (which we were able to use as ammunition throughout).

In conclusion, may I thank you and the BCG Committee once again for your support and indeed, other BCG members who wrote in defence of the Service.

Yours sincerely,

Alec Coles  
NALGO (City of Newcastle Branch)

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## OLDHAM LIVES!

Oldham has a natural history department once again. Simon Hayhow has been appointed Keeper (Natural History) and has been joined by Jane Mee as Exhibitions Officer (Natural History). This follows a gap of nine years since the retirement of Leonard Kidd in 1981. Both are based at the Local Interest Museum, Greaves Street, Oldham (061 678 4649). At present there is a lack of available exhibition space but displays and activities are planned for country park visitors' centres and other local venues from February 1990. For further details of the museum's history and collections see volume 1 of the Journal of Biological Curation.

The new staff would be interested to hear of any specimens with Oldham associations held by other institutions and would also like to thank the BCG for their concern about the collections and support for re-establishing the department.

Simon Hayhow and Jane Mee  
Oldham Museum

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## HARDING'S MICRODISSECTOR

I have recently acquired one of these dissectors, manufactured about 25 years ago by Langear Ltd. I have been told to use fine tungsten wire for the 'scalpels', and that to sharpen it one dips the end into a bath of a molten salt, which burns the end to a very fine point. Unfortunately my informant cannot recall the composition of the salt used in the bath - does anyone out there know? Also does anyone know where to get the fine tungsten wire, or whether the apparatus is still available anywhere?

Charles Pettitt  
Manchester Museum, The University,  
Manchester M13 9PL

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## REMINDER

### 1990 subs now due

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## BOOTH MUSEUM CENTENARY, 1990

The Booth Museum of Natural History, Brighton, is to celebrate the centenary of its opening to the public in 1990 with a special centenary exhibition (24 March to 2 September) and various associated activities. The exhibition will feature many items never previously put on public display and will spotlight the Museum's past and present services to the local community.



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# Book Reviews

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## COLLINS FIELD GUIDE TO THE GRASSHOPPERS AND CRICKETS OF BRITAIN AND NORTHERN EUROPE.

by Heiko Bellman

Published by Collins, London, 1988.  
Price £10.95.

The prospect of travelling across Central and Southern France during August and September had me a little worried. Not by the thought of Derek's driving (!) but by the potential lack of my usual beastly prey (carabids and diplopods). Thinking of what insects might be most conspicuous at that time we plumped for Odonata and Orthoptera spotting to pass the time. The new Collins field guide to the Orthoptera seemed a convenient introduction to this latter order so off I went to buy it; Derek used the Odonata book by Askew, a review of which will shortly appear in the Journal of Biological Curation.

A genuinely pocket-sized book, the Collins guide is ideal for taking into the field and although only available in hardback at present, it is good value at £10.95. Thankfully the original German

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has been translated by Binky Ragge (with technical assistance from husband David) for those of us with only a smattering of 'Liebfraumilch' German.

As a complete beginner to bush crickets in particular I found the book a delight to use. Several options are available for quick and efficient identification. Firstly the photographs are really excellent (full colour of both male and female in most cases) for an instant initial ID. Secondly the key to species is very straightforward and easy to use in the field once you have caught the beast in question. Finally for a welcome confirmation of your suggested identification there is a further key to sounds and songs. Although originally sceptical about the usefulness of these song diagrams I soon found myself able to determine species with my eyes closed (a frequent occurrence!).

The descriptions of the 78 species included in the guide are very succinct, giving sufficient further detail to allow an accurate check on morphology, habitat, song and distribution as a final confirmation.

All in all the book provides a rapid means of identification for all of the species likely to be encountered in Northern Europe (except the unlikely *Mogoplistes squamiger*) and most importantly leaves one with the confidence that the identification is correct! Fairly short opening chapters on form, classification, life history, collecting, photography, etc offer a brief introduction to the Saltatoria, providing a ready background to enable any one to get straight out into the field with a degree of competence.

My only criticism of this very attractively presented field guide is that the photographs have been limited to two (occasionally one) per species when in some cases the different varieties of form can cause some considerable confusion. One or two additional shots of these would help the beginner enormously. Indeed on occasion the photograph is of a rather atypical variety instead of the 'standard' form!

Finally I would recommend this book very strongly to anyone considering any sort of insect hunting in Europe during the summer, though I have yet to try it in Britain. A very informative and easy to use book which turns a passing interest for Orthoptera into a passion. Meet a cricket twitcher!

Paul Richards  
Sheffield City Museum

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# BCG SPORT

## Sir Rat surveys the soccer scene....

### MID SEASON TRANSFER UPDATE

After the tortuous pre-season shuffling between Buxton and Plymouth things are again hotting up on the transfer market. To recap on events to date we have the move of centre forward Mike Bishop to Plymouth with the tactical loss of their Dave Curry to St Albans. Mike's boots at Buxton have been filled by up and coming lad Dot Harding who leaves a gaping hole in defence at Kirklees.

The Curry move was necessitated by St Albans' loss of Phil 'no relation' Collins to captain his own team in the big league. The rumoured move of Derek 'bite yer legs' Whiteley to Plymouth turned out to be a smoke screen to cover the six-figure hush-hush deal for International sweeper Sarah Nash who's been left to her own Devices for a while.

A major revamp of the Plymouth team has put recent signing Simon Hayhow on the market, to be quickly snapped up by up and coming Oldham (who need all the support they can get - good on yer, we're right behind ya!) Other interested parties were Rotherham who settled for new mid 'field' player Andy Godfrey.

North of the border we find Premier Leaguers Perth parting company with Steve Hewitt to Carlisle. A leading goal scorer in the last couple of years, hoping to make the big time in front of his home crowd.

Something strange at non-leaguers Gilbert White seems to have left one part-time goalkeeper and a disinterested management. Talking of managers, we hear that the whole Sheffield team are up for grabs, manager and all with local interest being shown from the City Arts Department - what are they up to?

No news on the Bucks situation at present I'm afraid sports fans, or who's for the Boot at Exeter but rest assured you'll get the score from us here at BCHQ as soon as we get it. One late item reveals that the revamped Bristol Copp end has a new figure in the shape of Ray 'Bugsy' Barnett. Bad news for the Coventry Newts, but Stevie Falk should be 'flying' in soon to put the buzz back in their mid-field.

Great news from Leicester! The blues are back up to strength with Tony Fletcher returning after a long injury and a spell in the American Leagues, Wee Annie Nicol being transferred in from Aberdeen to give some speed on the wings and midfield dynamo Trev Forsythe stepping up from the reserves.

Finally we understand that Kings Lynn are down a man at present where Dick Jones has incurred a serious mid-season injury. We hear that the physio's paying off and wish you well for a triumphant return to form next season.

Errors and omissions brought to you by your man on the penalty spot, Sir Rat Buzzbee.

### Biology Curators' Group

Chairman: Steve Garland. Bolton  
Museum, Le Mans Crescent, Bolton  
BL1 1SE

Secretary: Derek Whiteley. Sheffield  
City Museum, Weston Park, Sheffield  
S10 2TP

Treasurer: Adam Wright. Coventry  
Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry  
CV1 5RW

Editor: John Mathias. Leicestershire  
Museums, 96 New Walk, Leicester  
LE1 6TD

Membership Secretary: Kathie Way.  
Mollusca Section, Natural History  
Museum, Cromwell Road, London  
SW7 5BD

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