APRIL 1977

# the Biology Curators Group

SPECIAL NEWSLETTER

**BIOLOGY** 

U

& THE NATIONAL PLAN

A QUESTIONNAIRE

PLUS CONFERENCE NEWS

AND FULL MEMBERSHIP LIST

## Biology Curators' Group

## Committee 1977

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#### BIOLOGY CURATORS GROUP

#### SPECIAL NEWSLETTER APRIL 1977

#### TOWARDS A NATIONAL PLAN FOR NATURAL HISTORY

## EDITORS NOTE

This may seem a rather extravagant way of circulating yet another questionnaire but the B.C.G. Committee felt that the importance of this survey was such that the expense was justified and that an explanation was needed.

Essentially this exercise stems from the discovery that the Working Party on the National Plan for Museums, set up by the Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries, was having some difficulty with Natural History because of the lack of published data in some fields, and was still able to accept further "evidence". Peter Morgan, B.C.G. Honorary Secretary, consulted with the Chairman and devised the idea of a survey of collections; extracts of the resulting letter to the Standing Commission are included below.

The B.C.G. Committee met on 5th April and agreed to the production of this special Newsletter to accompany the questionnaire. Some notes on the background to the National Plan are included, and notes on the questionnaire format. We have also taken this opportunity to include the full programme of the B.C.G. Conference in September - particularly appropriate in view of its theme.

A current list of members is also included, and I have been asked to point out that, in view of Conference expenses, it is "non-u" to be "U".

In spite of the unseemly rush to send out this Newsletter, and the need for a quick return of the completed Questionnaire, members should bear in mind that the body of data we should assemble, and the use we put it to, is very much at the root of what this Curators Group is all about.

#### A NATIONAL PLAN FOR MUSEUMS

The Standing Commission, in consultation with the Museums' Association, set up a Working Party in 1975 to study means of implementing the recommendations of the Department of Education and Science's Report on Provincial Museums, HMSO 1973 (the Wright Report) in regard to the establishment of Centres of Excellence. The Working Party envisages this as the preparation of a national plan for museums based on the designation of such provincial centres.

The Wright Report recognised that there were already a number of actual or potential Centres of Excellence in the country on which to build and, as a first step, panels of advisers were consulted about the location of the most important collections in the main museum disciplines. (The lists of selected centres, together with appropriate comments from special Area Council Panels, should be available from the Museums Director or the Area Museums Service.)

The preparation of this plan is being undertaken by the Working Party on two assumptions. The first is that the functions and responsibilities of the Centres to be designated will be those set out in the Wright Report, and second, that the kind of government assistance there envisaged will be available particularly for museums undertaking services on behalf of their neighbours.

The designation of a centre will depend on the institution in question being able effectively to meet the <u>basic aims of museums\*</u> or having the potential so to do and, in so far as services to other museums are concerned, on the willingness of the governing authorities of a museum to seek recognition as a provincial centre and to undertake to meet their share of the costs and endorse the relationship with the provincial services (Wright Report Ch.12.7).

In view of the fact that the Working Party were both willing and able to receive further information the B.C.G. Secretary wrote to the Secretary of the Standing Commission:

4th March, 1977

Dear Mr Wakefield,

The Biology Curators Group was pleased to hear that some time, albeit short, is still available for the submission of evidence on the National Plan. We intend to prepare a special publication of the B.C.G. Newsletter inviting comments from members on some aspects of the study, which will include a questionnaire. This evidence will then be collated and submitted to you in early June.

We will do our utmost to achieve everything by the latter date, although all the evidence may not be completely collated by then,

(\*See Wright Report Ch4.7)

the basic data will still give you enough information. recent telephone conversation you mentioned one major difficulty, that of defining regions and areas in relation to the location of collections. This we will look into carefully and if presented in map form should not prove difficult. A plot of the collections, subdivided into Zoology and Botany, will give an immediate idea of location, distance between the various centres and the area of the regions being covered. If necessary an overlay of population density can be superimposed. This will allow some assessment in terms of Ch.4.9 of the Wright Report. I assume that the N.C.C. and I.T.E. evidence is mainly concerned with record centres linked possibly to the N.E.R.C. Taxonomy Research Group findings; if this is the case we will concentrate upon three dimensional collections where evidence is more scattered and scanty. Centres are being considered by several groups at the moment and although we will include them our major deliberations would probably follow those outlined elsewhere.

A few comments and an expansion of our intentions may help you to understand our line of thinking at this stage; more detailed comments will follow after our committee meeting.

- 1. The B.C.G. concurs with the evidence submitted to you on 25th May, 1976 by M. Jones of the Geological Curators Group. There are minor differences but the need for the separation of Geology from the Biological sciences is paramount.
- For many of the reasons outlined in the paper by the G.C.G.
  it is further necessary to divide the biological sciences
  into Zoology and Botany.

These two disciplines are covered by different Codes of Nomenclature, institional responsibilities and laws regarding import, export etc., The location of collections here is fundamental and in Botany Universities often hold important collections, as they do in Geology. This is not so prevalent in Zoology however, the main university collections being attached to museums as at Oxford, Manchester, Cambridge and Newcastle. This division has obvioulsy been accepted in principle with the Botanic Institutions of Kew and Edinburgh being included as proposed Centres of Excellence.

Once the basic data on these collections is obtained an overall picture can be knitted together. One of the major difficulties previously has been the very broad coverage of 'Natural History' which leads to generalities possibly missing many important aspects. Any appraisal of coverage of material, involving the matching of collections from different disciplines within Natural History in an area or region, must involve data collections at the most basic level. The three major components for this are Geology, Zoology and Botany with further subdivisions for data collections.

In order to analyse fully the present situation the B.C.G. will further subdivide the questionnaire. Zoology will be split into

Invertebrate and Vertebrate Zoology. Hopefully one will obtain an idea of the distribution of all groups of material, data from which can be combined where required for your analysis. This type of approach will also allow an assessment of the academic and research importance of each centre's collection which could be combined to give areas or regions coverage. It should then be possible to show the major shortcomings, in those areas with major gaps in their collections. Alternatively when compared with staff and their specialist knowledge shortcomings regarding Ch.4.7. of the Wright Report can be identified with a view to correction in any final scheme.

This type of approach and analysis we feel sure would also allow a more meaningful comparison between the four major fields as outlined in the Wright Report.

- The disparities between regions are already apparent in the 3. published list of recommended centres. By taking such a broad spectrum as Natural History this, we feel, was inevitable. question of coverage of material by museums in different areas raises several points especially with regard to any comparison that might be made from the current document. One example serves to emphasise the problem. In the North West the major collections of Merseyside and Manchester tend to overshadow other museums such as Bolton, but if this were placed geographically anywhere else in Britain it would, on current criteria, automatically become a centre of excellence. How to solve or deal with this inbalance is an extremely difficult one which, as you stated, is giving you tremendous problems. When all the data is collected it may be possible to obtain a true comparison of holdings and how each satisfies the requirements laid down. This, taken first nationally and then broken down, may give a more accurate picture than the artificial one imposed by the taking of Area Museum Service boundaries.
  - 4. One final point must be made with regard to the Area Services. The majority of biologists employed there are conservationsits/technicians/taxidermists whose main duty is the preparation and production of displays. On the whole they do not have the special st personnel to assess collections in terms of their scientific importance or research value, especially with regard to the historical aspects. It is hoped that the B.C.G. which is national in operation with members from provincial and national museums (including London) can aid in this analysis.

We would be grateful if you could let us know of any specific points you wish covered and at a later date we would be grateful if it were possible to see the returns from the Area Services on the recommendations for the Natural History Centres of Excellence.

Yours sincerely,

Peter J. Morgan, Hon. Secretary, Biology Curators Group. Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries. Working Party on a National Plan.

I believe that although the Editor has outlined some aspects of this study a few comments on the history of the B.C.G. involvement will serve to underline the importance of work being undertaken and will let members know the history of our involvement and why the committee have taken the actions they have,

1. A committee meeting of the B.C.G. met in November to discuss evidence for the working party but at that time the deadline for submission had effectively passed. As a consequence no action was taken. Subsequent discussions with Hugh Wakefield, Secretary of the Working Party showed that problems were being encountered with the natural history section and that their analysis was behind schedule. As a result they welcomed any attempt the B.C.G. could make which would help them. In particular they wished to know the pattern of collections geographically and whether within each collection there was a comprehensive range of material. The latter question had been asked in the Working Party Questionnaire to Area Services but no guidance was given as to what constituted a comprehensive range.

The actual terms of reference are quoted in Chapter 4.9 of the Wright report:

In any area the population should have access to important museum collections which, taken together, should cover as fas as possible the four major fields Fine and Applied Art, Archaeology, Natural Sciences, Industry and Technology.

Archaeology and Ethnography were often split on a provenance base and it is suspected that more basic information is available here than in Natural History, although the returns from the area services to the Working Party have not been seen.

Other aspects on staffing display etc. were dealt with in their questionnaire and it was decided to concentrate upon an analysis of collections with the axiom that anymore information could only improve on that at present available.

Time has been extremely short and a special meeting of the committee was held. Although reservations were expressed about the production of a questionnaire and the problems of completion and return within a month it was decided to go ahead. The returns will give useful information anyway but if returned later will provide material for the newsletter and subsequent work, fulfilling one of the most basic aims of the B.C.G. The committee fully realises the problems however, and is under no illusions as to the problems it presents to every curator, we only hope that the ideals and enthusiasm which formed the springboard for the establishment of the B.C.G. will be manifested in the work needed to fill the questionnaire.

- 2. Reinforcement of the need for B.C.G. involvement came after close consultation with the Geological Curators Group. They had been in contact with the Working Party and had received an assurance, after evidence, Geology would be considered separately. This meant that the botanical and zoological sides were not being dealt with whilst Geology was. Information from their questionnaire is available and they have established a panel of assessors to summarise results and conclusions. Close liaison with the G.C.G. is being maintained and it is hoped that within the original broad spectrum of Natural Sciences that data will be available separately for Geology, Botany and Geology.
- 3. The majority of written and oral evidence from other bodies on natural history and 'centres of excellence' has concentrated upon recording schemes and record centres. Some of this has been detailed recently in "Biological Surveillance" which includes a list of museums acting as record centres. It is felt therefore that this information can easily be combined later with the collection information.

4. The Committee felt it was necessary to subdivide Botany and Zoology.

The ratio of distribution of botanical collections in museums and universities is different to that in Zoology, some information on herbaria and botanic gardens (living material) being already available thus necessitating a separate analysis.

Living collections of animals in Zoos tend not to be associated with universities and museums and as a consequence have been conveniently, left out, not falling within the terms of reference of the Working Party.

- 5. After comilation of the newsletter and questionnaire the following approach will be adopted.
- a. A copy of the newsletter containing the history, instructions and questionnaire will be circulated to every B.C.G. member, so everybody knows exactly what is happening. To the 61 institutions represented by B.C.G. members will be sent a separate questionnaire. In the interst of time and expertise needed to complete the questionnaire they will be sent direct to members for completion.

It is realised that in some cases members will have to consult Directors etc. before completion and in the event of problems please contact the Secretary.

- b. Copies of the newsletter will be circulated to the Area Services and we hope to obtain their co-operation where we have no members but where natural history material is held.
- c. Letters, questionnaires and newsletters will be sent to all museums housing biological material.
- d. Universities will be circulated as far as possible to obtain comparative data.
- e. Liaison with other surveys, i.e. Ron Cleevely's index will be maintained and in late May the situation can be reviewed as to progress or lack of it. In any situation the B.C.G. still has to give evidence.

The final approach may have to be determined at a special meeting but it would be extremely useful to have comments on the whole situation from members, constructive or otherwise or even complaints. Once again it must be stressed that the committee felt there was a void which needed to be filled, that the B.C.G. was established to fill the void and should be available to help. Any information obtained would serve the long term interests of museums in general and the basic data could be referred to by biologists interested in collections.

Finally do not forget that committee members have to fill in the questionnaire as well: Any returns marked confidential will not be used in any analysis published in the newsletter.

P.J. Morgan. Hon. Secretary.

### Biology Curators Group.

#### Instructions for Questionnaire.

#### 1. Zoology.

The questionnaire has been produced in an attempt to ascertain the location and comprehensiveness of biological collections in Great Britain. The survey will cover collections in museums, universities and natural history societies. The results should give the Working Party on a National Plan of the Standing Commission for Museums and Galleries more data to consult than a present available.

The first part of the questionnaire for the Invertebrates is a taxonomic list taken from "The Invertebrata" by Borradaile, Eastham, Potts and Saunders revised by G.A. Kerkut published by Cambridge University Press 1963, the vertebrate Zoology section is taken from "The Vertebrate Body" by A.S. Romer published by W.B. Saunders Co. 1964. The lists have been selectively reduced leaving the major groupings found in museums and universities. The major 19 groups listed vary in rank but will serve to show the range of material held in varying institutions. Several points may help to clarify data required.

- a. For each major group numbered 1 19 the numbers of specimens held are needed. Where this is impossible, ie. Protozoa and small invertebrates number of tubes or slides should be entered.
- b. For each subdivision within the major groups numbers if possible but otherwise a presence or absence 0 note to show coverage of material.
- c. The first five subdivisions of the Insecta are known to be held in large numbers by museums and these have therefore been separated out, please give numbers.
- d. Provenance: Three categories County, British and Foreign are present. Numbers should be given where possible. The County column should be used when the majority of a collection comes from one area or region. If material is from many areas leave blank and fill in under Britain, add extra information in the narrative.
- e. Mark in number of Voucher, Figured or Type material.
- f. Any additional information on the importance or provenance of material can be given in narrative form.
- g. Do not include any fossil material as this is being covered by the G.C.G.'s panel of assessors.
- h. The questionnaire is for three dimensional material only do not include data records, this is being dealt with separately.

#### 2. Botany.

As for Zoology but the number of sheets or packets is required.

Please return completed questionnaire to:-

Peter Morgan
Hon.Secretary,
Biological Curators Group,
C/O. Dept. of Vertebrate Zoology,
Merseyside County Museums,
William Brown Street,
Liverpool.
L3 8EN.

# BIOLOGY CURATORS GROUP.

Survey of Zoological and Botanical holdings for the Working Party of a National Plan. (Standing

Commission on Museums and Galleries.)

Institution:

Area Museum Service Area.

Compiler/s.

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Please add any information relevant to size, provenance and importance.

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Please add any information relevant to size, provenance and importance

Compiler.

Date.

## Meetings and Conferences.

### Museums Association Annual Conference. Bradford.

The B.C.G. is organising the specialist session to be held on Friday 15th July at 9.15 am. Two major speakers have been invited and will discuss some aspects facing biological curators dealing with collections and environmental data.

John A. Burton, Assistant Secretary of the Fauna Preservation Society and Chairman of the I.U.C.N. specialist group on animal trade will speak on Museums and their role in Biological Conservation. This will involve an analysis of legislation, British and International, which affects museums.

The second speaker will be Ian Evans, Assistant Director (Natural Sciences), Leicestershire Museums. He will be speaking about the varying roles a curator has to adopt in dealing with environmental data. On wearing three hats - naturalist, conservationist and curator. The problems and advantages of the various positions we feel sure will be fully investigated and should provide for a lively discussion.

After the two speakers there will be forty five minutes to an hour for discussion and contributions from the floor. The papers will be published by the Museums Association but will also be included in a B.C.G. Newsletter as fifty percent of the members do not receive the Museums Journal.

#### B.C.G. September Conference.

A copy of the full programme is included with this newsletter.

#### Record Centres.

Members may have seen the brief report in the April 'Museums Bulletin' on the establishment of another M.A. Working Party, to deal with Record Centres.

The Biological Records Centre are organising a meeting for Local Record Centre organisers at Monks Wood on the 1st and 2nd of December. This means that the next Newsletter will have rather less on Record Centres, although there will be some news of B.C.G. involvement in the production of a guidebook for Record Centres.

#### A.G.M.

It has been suggested that the  $A_{\bullet}G_{\bullet}M_{\bullet}$  should be on Saturday, 3rd December following the meeting at Monks !! ood on the 1st and 2nd  $\bullet$ 

The venue will probably be somewhere in London. Any comments from members upon this proposal would be welcomed.

#### Biology Curators Group: Membership List at 1st April. 1977.

This membership list contains all members, including those unpaid for 1977 = U and new members since December, 1976 = N to whom we extend a warm welcome. All unpaid members are asked to pay £1 as soon as possible. A membership list of members by institution will be available soon and members are asked to recruit from those museums, universities and polytechnics with biological material but no members on a personal or institutional basis. The group will obviously obtain more members by their activities but the main increase is by personal contact, please push hard for more members and money.

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N
                                     Hunterian Museum, Royal College of Surgeons, London.
      Miss Elizabeth Allen,
U
      Miss J.A. Bardsley,
                                     Booth Nuseum, Brighton.
      Mr. J.A. Bateman,
                                     National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.
U
      Mr. P.C. Bates,
                                     Museum of Pathology, Royal Free Hospital, London.
      Miss. K.M. Berry.
                                     Bolton Museum and Art Gallery, Bolton.
U
      Mr.C.R. Betteridge,
                                     Dept. of Museum Studies, Leicester.
                                     Dept. of Entom. Brit. Mus. (Nat. Hist.), London.
N
      Mr. M.J.D. Brendell,
      Mr.R.K.Brinklow,
                                     Dundee Museums and Art Galleries, Dundee.
U
      Dr. D.L. Burkel,
                                     Glasgow Art Gallery and Museums, Glasgow.
U
      Mr. B.A. Campbell,
                                     Newport Museum and Art Gallery, Gwent.
U
                                     Dept. of Museum Services, Woodstock, Oxford.
      Mr. J.M. Campbell,
U
      Mrs. J.E. Chamberlain.
                                     City Museum and Art Gallery, Portsmouth.
U
      Miss. S.D. Chapman,
                                     Palaeo, Dept. Brit. Mus. (Nat.Hist.), London.
U
      Mr. D.J. Clarke,
                                     Museum and Art Gallery, Carlisle.
N
      Mr. D. Claugher,
                                     Electron Micro.Unit. Brit. Mus. (Nat. Hist.), London.
U
      Mr. T.M. Clegg,
                                     Yorkshire Museum, York.
      Mr. R.J. Cleevely,
                                     Palaeo. Dept. Brit. Mus. (nat.Hist.), London.
N
      Mr.D.W.Cooper.
                                     Brit. Mus. (Nat. Hist.), London.
      Mr.C.J. Copp.
                                     City Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol.
      Mrs. P.J.E. Copson,
                                     Warwickshire Museum Service, Warwick.
                                     City Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol.
      Dr. M.D. Crane,
      Mr. D.A. Curry,
                                     City Museum, Plymouth.
                                     Sunderland Museum, Tyne and Wear. M.S. Sunderland.
      Mr. P.S. Davis,
                                     Gordon Museum, Guy's Hospital, London.
      Mr.J.J.Daws,
      Miss. J.A. Dawson,
                                     Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester.
      Dr. J.E. Dony,
                                     Museum and Art Gallery, Luton.
                                     University College, London.
      Mrs. R.M. Down,
      Mr. W.A. Ely,
                                     Clifton Park Museum, Rotherham.
      Mr. D.G. Erwin,
                                     Ulster Museum, Belfast.
U
      Mr. I.M. Evans,
                                     Leicestershire Museums Service, Leicester.
      Miss. V. Field,
                                     Newbury Museum, Newbury.
      Miss.C.T. Fisher,
                                     Merseyside County Museums, Liverpool.
      Mr. S.W. Flood,
                                     City Museums, St. Albans.
      Mr. R.C. Garner,
                                     Manchester Museum, Manchester.
                                     National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.
      Mr. K. Ghani,
      Mr. W.M. Grange.
                                     Dorset County Museum, Dorchester.
                                     Museum and Art Gallery, Bolton.
      Dr. J.R.A. Gray,
                                     Merseyside County Museums, Liverpool.
      Mrs. B.D. Greenwood,
      Mr. E.F. Greenwood,
                                     Merseyside County Museums, Liverpool.
      Mr. J.G. Greenwood,
                                     Merseyside County Museums, Liverpool.
                                     Merseyside County Museums, Liverpool.
      Mr. C. Grist,
      Mr. G. Halfpenny,
                                     City Museums and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent.
      Mr. E.G. Hancock,
                                     Museum and Art Gallery, Bolton.
      Mr. S.J. Harrison,
                                     Merseyside County Museums, Liverpool.
      Mr. R.H. Harris,
                                     Zool. Dept. Brit. Mus.(Nat. Hist.), London.
      Mr. J.I. Harris,
                                     Merseyside County Museums, Liverpool.
      Miss. M.M. Hartley,
                                     Clift Castle, Keighley, Bradford Arts and Museums.
      Mr. A.P. Harvey,
                                     Palaeo. Library, Brit. Mus. (Nat. Hist.), London.
      Miss. R.A. Hayman,
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