



NEWSLETTER

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MTI - its no joke!

Mike Hounsome's personal view of the MTI Research Standards

The following article is adapted from the text of an invited address given to the University Museums Group at the Courtauld Institute on 25th October 1991, in the presence of Simon Roodhouse and David Wears of the MTI. As you may imagine, it stimulated a vigorous debate on the relationship between university museums and the MTI.

I first heard about MTI (Museum Training Institute) more than a year ago, when I received a copy of MTI NEWS. As far as I can remember, it was not April 1st, but I seriously thought that it was a spoof, and I wondered who of my colleagues had the wit and the time to produce such a hilarious take-off of the meaningless management-speak with which managers try to hide their inadequacy. To have produced half a dozen sides of incomprehensible rubbish with the appearance of seriousness was evidence of a considerable talent. So I read it, laughed - and threw it in the bin.

The months passed; then I received a telephone call from the chairman of the MTI Research Functional Group, in which he observed that the seven or eight members of the group did not include a scientist, and how would I like to be the Token Scientist. To be fair, he didn't put it quite like that, and he was seriously concerned about the situation and genuinely wanted to redress the balance.

I agreed to serve on this group, after the chairman had convinced me that it was not a joke, because I thought it vital that there was at least some scientific input. I then discovered the gravity of the situation. It appeared that some people, whom I had never heard of, appointed by people I had never heard of, had appointed more people (whom presumably they had heard of) who were to produce standards for people

who work in museums, to which we - the people doing the work - had to conform. I could discover no point in this chain at which the curators had been consulted. As far as I am aware, neither BCG nor GCG were even asked to nominate members of the various groups and committees. As usual, of course, 'the profession' had been consulted - that is, the elevated MA clique who, for the most part, have no knowledge of biology curatorship. The set-up would have been laughable were it not for the fact that it had governmental backing (possibly even instigation), and would be imposed on museums whether they agreed or not.

Some people have seen the whole thing as a part of a Thatcherite plan to break the professions as she has broken the unions. According to this supposed plan, no profession should be self-regulating, as this produces cosy closed-shops. Law and Medicine are the big targets here, and the museum so-called profession is just a 'starter'. This theory seems far-fetched, and is impossible to prove or refute, but the fact is that MTI's plans would take training out of the MA's hands (and who can defend the MA's record on this?) and make it part of the quasi-governmental National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ). A degree in biology would no longer qualify one to carry out biological research in a museum - one would have to have the appropriate NCVQ.

Now, I expect that few of us would claim that a biology degree fully equipped one to be a museum curator. Until now, museums operated a kind of apprenticeship scheme. After graduating, one obtained a junior appointment and learned 'on the job' until one felt able to apply for a more senior post. Many also undertook training under the MA, and some attended post-graduate courses. It may well be that these methods of learning the museum aspects of biology were haphazard and inadequate, and that some new, structured, approach was required. The very successful BCG courses are a recognition of the inadequacy of current training, and of the demand for better.

So, one might argue for better **avocational** (rather than **professional**¹) training in museum curatorship. The vital questions to ask are: who sets the curriculum and standards; who does the training; who assesses the trainees; and who pays for it all? The answer to the last three questions appears to be 'the museums themselves', and that has enormous implications for budgets and manpower; but what concerns me here is the answer to the first question, which seems to be - the MTI, using the (paid) services of training consultants (PTS) in consultation with self-appointed (unpaid) museum people, of which I am one. Even after twenty-eight years in museums I'm not sure I have the ability, arrogance or the time to tell other professionals how to carry out their research. Nevertheless, I thought it my duty to make some kind of contribution to the Research Functional Group.

The group has deliberated long and hard over the last year, and some of the more privileged of you may have seen the resulting Draft Standards documents (I certainly did not get a copy) and you may even have been asked to comment on them - within a month of receiving them. Incidentally, it would be interesting to know how the privileged people who received copies of the draft standards were chosen, if serving on one of the functional groups was not a qualification. At the meeting of the University Museums Group only one (Manchester's director) had received a copy, and he had to ask for it. As the only biologist in the group I should make some comments about this document to members of BCG.

¹A vocation is what one feels called to do (eg. zoology); a **profession** is what one is qualified to do (eg Chartered Biologist, bound by the conditions of the Institute of Biology's Royal Charter), and an **avocation** is the job one actually does (eg Keeper of Zoology in a university museum).

All documents like this must start somewhere - committees must have some initial document to discuss. The first draft by PTS was just what you would expect from people whose (quote) "nearest previous experience of museum research was the drawing up of the standards for Garage Mechanics and Dry-Cleaning Operatives". They had clearly done their best, and were, they said, quite prepared to be shot down and to start again. This is just what the group recommended. We had many suggestions to make, and our chairman sent PTS details of the required changes. This pattern was repeated at each subsequent meeting, but each time the document came back it had incorporated only a few of our recommendations. The final document does contain most of our recommendations, but the general **feel** of the thing is still, in my opinion, wrong. If BCG members have objections to this document I beg them to consider what it was like before we got to work on it!

There were, of course, disagreements between members of the group, and this must have been difficult for PTS to accommodate. But I was surprised at how few, and how trivial, were most of these differences. Most of all, I was surprised at how little difference there was between me (the Token Scientist) and the representatives of the humanities. The basic principles of research seem to be universal; it is only the particulars that vary. The largest difference was between the 'museologists' and the rest of us. Research into museums themselves and their collections seems to run along somewhat different lines from mainstream research, and uses a different vocabulary. Nevertheless, this is a perfectly respectable line of research and had to be accommodated into the general scheme. This may explain some of the more unfamiliar terms and concepts in the Draft Standards. But most of the puzzlement induced in biology curators will be due to the peculiar management-speak that PTS insisted we had to use. It is not only the 'functions', 'units', 'elements of competence', and the 'performance criteria' that are difficult to come to terms with (particularly in research), but the general approach.

This, to my mind, is what is essentially wrong with the Draft Standards as presented. The whole thing is shot through with management ways of thinking rather than research ways of thinking, and it is strongly institutionally oriented. It offers precious little advice on how one carries out research, but is full of words such as *policy*, *monitor*, *priority*, *budget*, *deficient performance*, *targets*, *publicity* - all of which may have their place in museum management but are not what we normally think of

when we consider undertaking research. Only six of the thirty-three performance criteria actually refer to doing the research. The planning and communication of the research is important, but not four or five times as important, as indicated by their appearance in the Draft Standards.

The document goes wrong right from the start, where the Key Purpose relates all museum functions to 'people and the environment'. As any biologist could have told them, there is no such thing as 'the environment' - it has to be qualified by a possessive pronoun, eg 'a bird's environment', with a possible extension to 'the world environment'. What is clearly implied in the Key Purpose is 'people and **their** environment'; in other words this was thought up by people who consider the natural world only in so far as it affects human interests. This is perfectly acceptable in the study of the humanities, but it is not the way biologist think.

Furthermore, the function of research is defined as: to 'extend and disseminate knowledge and understanding of the material evidence held by the institution or relating to the material evidence held by the institution'. What's all this about 'material evidence'? What has research to do with 'the institution'. Both these concepts are the province of the institution itself. If your institution wants to confine your research in this way, then it may be perfectly at liberty to do so (but BCG members would be the first to argue against any such restriction), but it is not the function of MTI to require it to do so. The first clause alone is sufficient to define research: to 'extend and disseminate knowledge and understanding'.

I hope that this article has given you some idea of the background to the Draft Standards for Research. I have had no involvement in any of the other Functional Groups so I cannot comment on their results, but casting my eye over some of them demonstrates that some of my conclusions are generally applicable. And do you think the 'master plan' at the beginning of each booklet includes **all** the functions of a museum? I cannot find any reference to identifications for the public or statutory organisations, and this is a major part of biology curator's work. It may well be that the NCVQ approach is the correct one for, say, receptionists, administrators, shop workers or porters; but is it right for curators or researchers?

Most of the anxiety about MTI has been concerned with the receipt of training, but there is, of course, another side to training - its provision. At the

University Museums Group meeting in October, MTI were anxious to point out to the audience that they were possibly in the best position to **supply** training. They, after all, existed in an educational environment, and they certainly had considerable expertise in research. This echoed the concern about who was going to sell the training, and who was going to pay for it. Simon Roodhouse was not slow in pointing out that the university museums could, if they choose, be financial beneficiaries of these moves to impose a training structure on museums.

It looks as though we have no choice but to go along with MTI, so it is up to us to make sure they don't get away with steam-rolling through unsatisfactory standards. Get hold of copies of the draft standards and write to MTI with your comments. Like all these organisations, they know where they are going, and they don't want to be deflected by so-called consultation. Yes, they have held over a hundred workshops, but I wonder how many BCG members have attended them; and if the answer to that question is 'not many', then is it our fault or MTI's? If we don't comment, then they will be able to say that the profession approves of what they have done. We might well approve, but we must let them know one way of the other.

As for the Draft Standards for Research - it's not as bad as it could have been, but one is left wondering about the whole idea of training in museum research. Is it desirable? Is it possible? Is this the way to do it? Is the whole scheme daft, and does nobody have the courage to point out that the emperor has no clothes?

Mike Hounsome

Keeper of Zoology, Manchester University Museum

Response to Mike Hounsome's article from Simon Roodhouse, Director of the Museum Training Institute

It is interesting to read the account of Mike Hounsome's involvement in the qualifications development programme principally because it does demonstrate very clearly how difficult it is to be 'on the inside' when major and fundamental changes are taking place within a profession.

The programme of work to which MTI is committed has its roots, as the article suggests, not only in recent government initiatives but also in the Museum and Galleries Commission report, 'Museum Professional

Training and Career structure, 1987 (The Hale Report)'. The latter is of course about the needs of the museum world, whereas the former initiatives are concerned with more general but still highly significant changes occurring in education and training throughout the UK. These changes are immense and the museum world is at the forefront of developments. This brings with it advantages and yes, as Mike Hounsome indicates, some difficulties too!

What of the advantages? The museum world has in MTI an organisation that is recognised nationally as both an Industry Lead Body and an Industry Training Organisation. In practical terms this means the Museum Training Institute is working on behalf of museums, to devise and implement a new qualifications framework. In doing this MTI is not alone and there are similar organisations in most professional areas, each engaged on similar projects.

National Vocational Certificates will not therefore be limited to 'receptionists, administrators, shop workers or porters' but will eventually embrace most if not all of the professions. The UK qualification framework being devised by NCVQ is intended to be comprehensive.

NCVQ are charged with introducing this national qualifications framework and consequently it is important that there is a degree of consistency in how the qualifications are developed. All Industry Lead Bodies are using a standard model to devise and develop their respective qualifications. The use of this model and the associated terminology has unfortunately been for some difficult to come to terms with. MTI has always understood these difficulties in coping with the jargon and has attempted to overcome it in a number of ways ranging from newsletters to seminars.

The active involvement of museum professionals in the qualification development programme has been a key feature of our work. This involvement of museum professionals extends from membership of the MTI Board of Directors through to attending practical standards development workshops. On a wider front the 'so-called consultation' programme involved over 12,000 sets of draft standards being circulated nationwide for comment! All of the responses have been recorded and will be evaluated before the standards are redrafted.

A further key element of the consultation programme will be when the standards are field tested in 40 museums. This is not being undertaken for the sake of saying we have consulted with the sector - rather it is a vital and critical part of the qualifications development programme. Each of these 40 museums will be asked to use the standards of competence in assessment situations and again these comments will be listened to. In some instances standards will even be redrafted and field tested again!

One of the more beneficial outcomes from the qualifications development programme is that there has been a resurgence in the level of debate about museum education and training. MTI welcomes this debate and because of its approach actually encourages it.

There are, and will continue to be many opportunities for involvement in the work which MTI is leading on your behalf. Your comments are always welcomed and, where constructive and detailed we can actually incorporate the suggestions into the standards themselves.

Simon Roodhouse, Director, MTI

Newcastle University pursues Tyne and Wear option for Hancock Museum

On January 29th the University of Newcastle issued a press release stating 'Hancock Museum Saved', and proudly claimed the successful negotiation of a tripartite agreement between the Tyne and Wear Museums Service, the Natural History Society of Northumbria and The University. Under this new arrangement, Tyne and Wear would run the Hancock Museum as a Service Level Agreement, as it runs museums for the constituent District Council. Unfortunately, neither Tyne and Wear, nor the

Natural History Society (who own the museum and its collections) knew that a press release was imminent - indeed the Natural History Society had never been consulted about the intended arrangement.

A few days later, all Hancock Museum staff received a letter from the University's Personnel Officer intimating that if the agreement was ratified by the University Senate and Council, all staff would effectively be redundant from the end of June 1992.

It was stressed that efforts would be made to redeploy staff where possible, and that some posts might become available under the Tyne and Wear regime. However, there are no guarantees.

As yet the full details of the new staffing arrangements are not known, leading to concerns about the levels of curatorial care, the lack of continuity of care, a reduction in technical expertise and a loss of the computerised documentation systems.

The rationale behind the proposed change results from a projected deficit in the University's accounts of £1m. The £215,000 the Hancock Museum costs to run each year is deemed to be excessive, and a substantial saving needs to be made. In addition, the Hancock, despite its renowned collections and scholarly connections, is regarded by the University as having no relevance to teaching or academic research. An alternative scheme for the Hancock's future, which relied on a major fund-raising exercise to raise capital for expansion, (and hence reduce running costs) was shelved on receipt of the Tyne and Wear option. The Council of the University asked that the budget for the Hancock be reduced to c. £70,000 per annum (a saving of £145K), an unrealistic figure for the smallest of museums! The projected saving under the Tyne and Wear option falls far short of that demanded by Council - a saving in the region of £60,000 is rumoured. So the Hancock Museum has been 'saved' - or has it? - and at what price?

Letters

Dear John

I recently received a request from Liz Hill, of the BBC Wildlife Magazine for a listing of 'Beetle-down ...' events. She is responsible for compiling the 'Whats-on' section of the magazine. I explained that there is no national 'Beetle-down ...' events listing available as each museum does its own thing.

If anyone wishes therefore to advertise an event in BBC Wildlife they should notify Liz direct at the address below. She stresses that she cannot guarantee a mention for all 'Beetle-down ...' events but will be happy to do so where space permits.

Liz Hill, BBC Wildlife Magazine, Broadcasting House, White Lady's Road, Bristol BS8 2LR

Best wishes
Paul Richards
Sheffield City Museum

Book Reviews

The Herbarium Handbook

edited by Leonard Forman and Diane Bridson

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, 1989, pp 214.

ISBN 0 947643 20 6

This modestly priced handbook, paperback and vinyl-bound, is obviously intended for bench use. The foreword explains its origins as course documents provided by numerous Kew staff for their 'International Diploma Course in Herbarium Techniques'. It intends to deal with only the technical side of herbarium work and excepts the 'science of taxonomy itself'.

The book is neatly organised into an introduction followed by 39 numbered chapters in five sections - The Herbarium Building, Collections and Materials, Herbarium Techniques and Management, Additional Techniques, Collecting, and the Herbarium in a Wider Context. A five-page index and about 100 bibliographic references are also given. I appreciated the itemised, almost checklist style of each chapter, facilitating quick reference, together with many line drawings.

Generally speaking, the longer chapters are the best, those on herbarium techniques and management being the most comprehensive. Here, many line drawings are given showing the right and wrong ways of mounting and labelling, administering loans, visitors, etc. We are, however, still urged to place labels on the bottom right of a sheet, where fire and water damage will exert their first effects.

While the book attempts to be fully comprehensive quite often the chapters are very short, sometimes of only one page, and may convey little beyond the title. For example, computers are pretty well dismissed in chapter 28 an 'Introduction to computers' which is two pages long, and spends 40% of this space spelling out the disadvantages of using them! The single page on photographic copying of herbarium

sheets lists four methods but doesn't mention Xerox! The chapter entitled 'Checklists' is not what you would think; it tells you how to construct one, not which ones to use. Actually, nowhere in the book are we recommended checklists. 'Essential Herbarium Literature' in two and a half pages, contains just the briefest of lists, but over one page tells us how to read Roman numerals. Most chapters end with few or even only a single reference.

The book seems to assume that the herbarium contains two types of staff, and frequently makes the distinction between 'technical staff' and 'trained botanists'. However, the choice of chapters rather confuses this. For example, we have chapters of a very introductory nature such as 'What is Taxonomy' and 'The Types of Herbaria', followed by chapters which I consider rather esoteric, such as 'Dissection of Floral Organs' and 'Collectors, Itineraries, Maps and Gazetteers'. I am not sure who the otherwise excellent 21-page chapter on 'collecting' is intended for especially as there is no companion chapter on literature for identification. Are herbarium technicians normally expected to collect material for others, presumably the 'trained botanists', to identify? In practice, I expect that most users of this book will be active botanists who happen to maintain a herbarium. However, this section is actually very comprehensive and valuable, though it lacks reference to algae.

The attempt to be exhaustive results in many curious but just about relevant statements. For example, the section 'The Herbarium Building' tells us what kind of building we should choose and particularly to 'avoid areas liable to flooding or adjacent to flammable building or vegetation'. Throughout the book there is a tendency to state a problem but not supply its remedy. We are told that temperature control, humidity, ventilation, decontamination, etc., are necessary but not why we need them, how to implement them or where to get advice. However, Kew's own freezing method for decontamination is extensively dealt with on page 17-19. In fact, the chapters on pests and treatments are especially good, even giving drawings of insects, though they are not listed in the index. Similarly good are the chapters on materials and what not to use, though I could use more details on papers, their weights and finishes, acid-free treatments, etc. Glues are given very cursory treatment, only 'Evostick' is mentioned by name, despite the numerous other adhesives available, some modern PVA formulations being acid-free. In fact, there is no information given anywhere to answer my commonest herbarium enquiry 'what should I use and where can I buy it?' My copy arrived with a page of errata for inclusion from the editors.

So, while the book is certainly a herbarium handbook and at least mentions just about everything relevant, it is very short in essential detail in many areas. Rather uneven, it is, nevertheless, about the only comprehensive book of its kind and should be valuable to all curators, not just botanists.

Dr Anthony Fletcher
Leicestershire Museums Service

Natural History Museums - Directions for Growth

edited by Paisley, S. Cato and Clyde Jones.

Texas Tech University Press, Lubbock, Texas, 1991.
256 pp. Price \$25.00. ISBN 0-89672-240-6.

This monograph is made up of 18 of the 22 papers presented at a symposium 'New Directions and professional standards for natural history museums' organised for the joint meeting of the Mountain-Plains Museums Association and the Midwest Museums Conference in Kansas City in 1988.

The arrival of a review copy of this monograph when the reviewer was in the process of editing the 'Manual of Natural History Curatorship' was a cause for some alarm. Had someone beaten us to it? Was the Manual no longer needed?

It was with some relief that the monograph was found to be focussed almost exclusively on American practice and experience and that most of the papers are descriptive rather than philosophical and do not attempt an international approach.

The papers are grouped into four sections - roles and functions (3); collections (6); exhibits and education (5) and the future (4).

In the section 'roles and functions' the papers serve to emphasise that the museum world in the United States is very different from that in other countries. Humphrey looks at the problems facing university natural history museums and questions why so few scholar-curators in university museums are members of the American Association of Museums. Laerm and Edwards survey the 23 State Museums of Natural History, 13 of which are administered by state agencies, nine are within universities and one is private. An appendix provides details of the stated mission; relative importance of roles; organizational structure and funding for each of the institutions.

Shropshire and Shropshire describe the creation of the Mississippi Museum of Natural History to serve the needs of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks.

Included in the 'collections' section are papers by Rose who addresses the problems associated with the preservation of collections and in maintaining the integrity of research specimens, emphasising the need for better documentation and more research into preservation methods. Silvey and Cato look at collections care in a small natural history museum (Brazos Valley) and describe how by preparing written policies and carrying out an assessment of the state of collections care it was possible to develop a long range plan. Simmons looks at the problems of fluid-preserved collections. This paper was written before the publication of the papers from the Manchester seminar on the Conservation of Natural History Collections. It raises similar issues but has few solutions apart from the need for more research, better documentation and a more rigorous approach. Cato and Schmidly look at policies for the management of ancillary vertebrate collections (photographs, slides, stomach contents, tissue and blood samples, sound recordings, hair samples and frozen preparations). These issues are seldom addressed and this is a useful short paper as is the appended Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collection Policy. Shelton looks at changes which have taken place in the management of vertebrate palaeontology collections. She suggests that greater awareness of the problems is leading to improved support and management. Bohnert and Surovik-Bohnert highlight the need (and make some suggestions) for guidelines in the destructive analysis of archaeological collections, a subject which most European natural history curators will be surprised to find in a volume with this title. It nevertheless raises the issue of whether the separation of biological and geological collections from anthropological collections is logical or desirable.

In the 'exhibits and education' section, De Mars traces the evolution of exhibitions in a natural history museum based mainly on his own experience at Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History. He discusses the impact which new technology in production methods, the growing interest in learning theory, concern about conservation, and the evaluation of audience responses have had on exhibitions and concludes that they have led to a more professional approach. Deisler-Seno and Reader describe the development of curriculum-orientated programs at Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History. Few details are given of the state mandated curriculum but

the solutions adopted make an interesting paper on the subject on which little has been published. In the same way, Patton's paper which discusses natural history loan materials for the classroom is a useful addition to the literature. Tirell describes the use of travelling exhibits to raise the profile of a university-state museum (Oklahoma Museum of Natural History), and Gottfried, Smith and Dacus discuss the role of natural history museums in improving science education in rural schools (New Mexico Rural Science Education Project).

The last section devoted to 'the future' includes papers by Choate on sources of funding for natural science museums including a description of the work of the Foundation Center. Denton considers the American phenomenon in which physical anthropology has traditionally been included in the remit of the natural history museum and questions whether natural history museums have a role in anthropology in the future. Porter considers the nature of natural history in the 20th century, and presents a short historical survey of the evolution of natural history and its impact on museums. The final paper by Lintz asks whether we are going in circles and find evidence for a cyclical approach to museum exhibition.

It is important to recognise that this monograph is based on the papers presented at a meeting of one of the regional Associations of American Museums. It does not attempt to present a picture of the natural history museum movement in North America but is intended to be of relevance mainly to the museums in the Mountain Plains region. Most of the papers presented are short and many are restricted to a few pages with very little opportunity for exploring subjects in any depth. Some papers have extensive lists of literature cited (but with few from outside the United States) and others, disappointingly, have none. These restrictions make it a rather disappointing volume with few papers addressing those issues which are of current concern to the international natural history museum community. The volume serves to emphasise the rather parochial nature of natural history museums at a time when there is an overwhelming need for a concerted and integrated international approach. To be fair, however, this is perhaps the only monograph to have been published on natural history museums since the special issue in 1969 of the Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington 'Natural history collections; past, present and future' and as such it is very welcome. It is also relatively modest in price.

Geoff Stansfield
January 1992

Controlling Museum Fungal Problems

T. J. K. Strang and J. E. Dawson

Technical Bulletin no 12. Canadian Conservation Institute, Ottawa. 1991. French and English. ISBN 0-0662-54950-3

This short eight page booklet gives a basic introduction to fungi, and goes on to explain briefly the identification of fungal problems in museum organic materials, including outdoor wood. It emphasises the importance of the preventative measures described, but also gives an account of the possible chemical and non-chemical methods of control and the associated health hazards.

This publication is easy to read, covers the subject concisely and is essentially a good practical guide for museum curators of all disciplines.

Controlling Vertebrate Pests in Museums

T. J. K. Strang and J. E. Dawson

Technical Bulletin no 13. Canadian Conservation Institute, Ottawa. 1991. French and English. ISBN 0-0662-54950-3

This nine page booklet covers the identification of vertebrate pest problems in museums in Canada. It advocates the common sense precaution of exclusion rather than extermination as the best method of control.

Whilst this publication gives some useful suggestions for the detection of rodent problems and for some of the methods of control, many of the vertebrate species described are not found in the UK. Also, it must be borne in mind that the legal situation regarding the use of poisons and the treatment of protected species (eg. bats and their roosts) is different in Canada compared to the UK.

Both of the above booklets are produced in Canada and may well be difficult to obtain in the UK at present. They can be ordered direct from the publishers at the following address: Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI), Department of Communications, 1030 Innes Road, Ottawa, Canada K1A 0C8

Ann Nicol
Graduate Trainee (Biology)
Leicestershire Museums Service

News

Announcing a Systematics Priorities Initiative

The American Society of Plant Taxonomists, the Society of Systematic Biologists, and the Willi Hennig Society have formed a steering committee to organize an initiative to document research trends and priorities within systematics, to be called **Systematics Agenda 2000: Integrating Biological Diversity and Societal Needs**. **Systematics Agenda 2000** will have as its major themes the role of systematics in the analysis of biodiversity, the integrative role of systematics in comparative biology, and the importance of systematics in human affairs. The initiative is charged with (1) identifying important research trends and questions and with establishing priorities among them, (2) assessing the status of current infrastructures supporting systematics research and evaluating future needs, (3) documenting the broad role that systematics plays in human affairs and evaluating its future contributions and needs in those endeavours. **Systematics Agenda 2000** has established 28 committees to undertake this initiative.

A detailed description of **Systematics Agenda 2000**, including a list of the members of the Steering Committee and the co-chairs of all Standing Committees, can be found in the last issue (no. 4, 1991) of 'Cladistics, Systematic Botany, and Systematic Zoology'. All systematists, and nonsystematists interested in the role that systematics plays in their discipline, are invited to contact the appropriate committee co-chairs to discuss how each might contribute to this effort.

Enquiries to Elizabeth C Hathaway
Association of Systematics Collections
730 11th Street NW, Second Floor
Washington DC 20001, USA

Two new Keepers for the Natural History Museum

The Natural History Museum in London has appointed two Keepers for its departments of Entomology and Zoology.

The posts, which have become vacant as a result of staff retirement, have been taken by Dr Richard Lane and Professor Colin Curds.

Dr Lane was Head of the Vector Biology and Transmission Dynamics Unit in the Department of Medical Parasitology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. His own research field concerns the role of sandflies in the transmission of leishmaniasis, a debilitating, disfiguring sometimes fatal disease affecting 12 million people worldwide. He returns to the Museum after an absence of eight years, having previously worked in the Entomology Department as Head of the Medical Insects Department. He took up his post on 1 February 1992. Dr Lane is 40.

Professor Colin Curds, a protozoologist, originally joined the Museum in 1971 from the Water Pollution Research Laboratory. He was appointed Deputy Keeper of Zoology at the Museum in 1976 and has held the post of acting Keeper since 1989. He took up the permanent position in November 1991. Previous research experience includes the investigation of protozoa as indicators of freshwater pollution and the role of protozoa in aerobic waste-treatment processes. He holds a visiting chair in Environmental Protozoology at the University of Mexico City. Professor Curds is 54.

News from Sheffield

Following Derek Whiteley's appointment as Principal Keeper in March 1991 the section changed its name to the Natural History Section. Derek's former post of Assistant Keeper (Zoology) has been designated a 'monitored vacancy' (i.e. frozen) for at least 14 months.

In July Steve Toher and Jeremy Brown joined the staff as 'Temporary Entomologists' supported by a RECAP grant administered by Y.H.M.C. using M.G.C. Biology Collections U.K. money ('Sunflower Money'). Steve and Jeremy have identified, rehoused and listed over 15,000 British Lepidoptera, now

stored in new units. Smaller RECAP grants have allowed curatorial work to continue on Diptera and Coleoptera collections, by independent specialists.

In September Natalie Barlow joined the section as Trainee Assistant.

The City Ecology Unit still remains an integral part of Natural History following its restructuring in October; Ian Rotherham became Principal City Ecologist. Jean Glasscock joined the Unit as Assistant Ecologist (Contracts) in December, to assist with the consultancy part of the Unit's activities. Jean was formerly a Scientific Officer in English Nature's Derbyshire Office. Three other posts were created or redesignated within the Unit, but these remain vacant for the time being.

Derek Whiteley

Information

Sticky Traps - a possible attractant

The sticky traps now widely used in museums for pest monitoring purposes are also used in industrial sites for monitoring cockroaches and pests of flour and other stored food products. Where such economically important pests are concerned, sufficient research has been performed for pheromone attractants to have been developed. This increases the chances of pest detection considerably. Unfortunately, as far as I am aware, no such pheromone attractants are available for museum-type pests.

After examining a large number of traps recently, a feature of some catches struck me. On a number of occasions, a spider, or other large creature, had become trapped and was surrounded on the trap by spider beetle, psocids or silverfish. Somehow they must detect the dead creature because the rest of the surface of the sticky tape was usually clear!

I am, therefore, making a tentative suggestion that it may be worthwhile to bait the traps with dead insects; a valuable use for those corpses of discarded fieldwork specimens or even those successfully swatted bluebottles! I would be interested to hear of any results, positive or otherwise.

Finally, if you have problems with 'stuck-together' traps or are lucky enough to capture a creature worthy of preservation for posterity, we have found that the glue is softened by using 1,1,1 trichloroethane.

Steve Garland
Bolton Museum

Off the shelf computer interactive for gallery use

Novus Publishing have developed an interactive presentation incorporating touchscreen technology, with visual buttons allowing easy access to information. Presentations can be designed to fulfil many functions such as providing interpretive displays, information points, or educational applications - or simply to view archive material not available to the public. The system can form the focal point of an exhibition or provide a multi-screen major attraction.

Available free, as part of a relevant Novus Presentation, is a computer-based Nature Sketchbook featuring flora and fauna of the British Isles. Information contained in the sketchbook includes concise notes on status, habitats, etc., complete with bird and animal sounds. The nature sketchbook has been specially designed for public use in museums.

Contact: David Roland, Novus Publishing Limited, 48 Rose Hill, Rednal, Birmingham B45 8RT. Tel: 021-457 8008.

Programme

29th and 30th May 1992
BCG AGM meeting at Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery, Carlisle
Meeting the Standards - Making the Grade

The conference will take as its theme the state of Biology collections management and conservation in Britain today. Is the situation improving or worsening, and what does the future hold?

The conference will begin with a retrospective look at the Biology Collections UK report and its effects; come up to date with the Natural Sciences Incentive Fund; look to the future with the 'Standards for the care of Biology Collections' and Collection Management Plans; and ask where we stand with the conservation of our collections when there is no officially recognised body of trained Natural History conservators?

The annual dinner will be on the night of 29th May. Saturday 30th May will offer the opportunity to visit some of the varied wildlife habitats of Cumbria and the Borders.

18th - 20th September 1992

The History of Ornithology

Joint meeting with the British Ornithologists' Union, the Society for the History of Natural History and BCG.

To be held at the University of Liverpool, South Liverpool Conference Centre. Details in Newsletter 5(7) or from Clem Fisher, Liverpool Museum.

1993 BCG AGM

The 1993 AGM will be held in Inverness, probably on 28th May.

Further details in the next Newsletter.

In the Press

The **Journal of the Scottish Society for Conservation and Restoration** regularly carries items of natural history interest. In volume 2 no 3 (August 1991) Mark Shaw discusses the establishment in Scotland of *Anthrenus sarnicus* and *Reesa vespulae*, both significant pests in museum collections. The presence of *A. sarnicus* has been known for some years south of the border, but *Reesa vespulae* is not one of the usually quoted pest species in the British Isles. It was found infesting herbaria and insect collections in Scotland. The article ends with some sensible guidelines on how to trace infestations and how to prevent them.

Volume 3 no 1 (February 1992) reports further work by N Tennant, R Baird and D Littlejohn on 'Bynes disease', the white crystalline efflorescence found on

molluscs and eggs which have been stored in particular enclosed environments. The acetic and formic acids evolved by the woods and adhesives used to fabricate storage cabinets react with agents within the objects to form complex salts - typically a calcium acetate formate hydrate or molluscs. This 'storage cabinet chemistry' is discussed in detail and it is relevant to note an intensification of investigation in this field with the award of a research studentship in the University of Glasgow Chemistry Department to take this further. The project 'Analytical Studies of the Decay and Conservation of Museum Artifacts' has Glasgow Museums as its co-operating body.

In the same issue Philip Howard, taxidermist at the National Museums of Scotland, describes the methods used to prepared specimens for the new fish gallery. Practical details are given on moulding techniques, casting and painting the completed fish.

What could turn out to be a very influential paper was published by Mark Gilberg in **Studies in Conservation** vol. 36 no 2 (May 1991) on the effects of low oxygen atmospheres on museum pests. Laboratory cultures of *Tineola bisselliella*, *Lasioderma serricornis*, *Stegobium paniceum* and *Anthrenus vorax* were exposed to low oxygen atmospheres (0.4% oxygen, the balance nitrogen) at 30°C for three weeks. Complete mortality was observed for all developmental stages. These findings are discussed in terms of offering a viable alternative to conventional chemical fumigation. The experiment used a prepared oxygen : nitrogen gas flow to produce the atmosphere under test, but it is noted that oxygen scavengers are available which can easily reduce oxygen in enclosed atmospheres to less than 0.4% by volume.

Studies in Conservation (36) contains an article titled 'The use of a commercial pheromone trap for monitoring *Lasioderma serricornis* (F.) infestations in museum collections' by Mark Filberg and Alex Roach. The studies were performed in the Australian Museum anthropology collections using pheromone traps made by Fuji Flavor Co. Ltd, 3-5-8 Midorigaoka, Hamuramachi, Nishitama-gun, Tokyo 190-11, Japan.

The authors found the traps to be very useful and were able to detect infestations at an early stage. They were no use for controlling the pests, because only male beetles were attracted. The traps were baited with both pheromone sex attractant and food attractant, but the effectiveness of the food attractant was not evaluated.

Pesticides used included CIG Pestigas 0.4%

Pyrethrins Insecticide, Ficam W Insecticide and Wellcome DIA CON*IGR, none of which I am familiar with. The paper also points out that pheromone research on other museum pests would be valuable, but is not available.

Steve Garland, Bolton Museum

BCG SPORT

Sir Rat: the Final Whistle?

The rat has been silenced! Well, muffled anyway. I've never been one to hold back but I have to admit that the latest batch of news from the league contains some very sensitive stuff: items which really shouldn't be allowed to go any further than these four damp and slimy walls. Items passed to me in the strictest confidence. You know the sort of things - succulent, juicy, embarrassing and libellous! I'm just sorry that I can't share them with you. Well, not unless you promise that they'll go no further. OK, then this is for your eyes only.

What about young David Alias then? Up before the beak for nobbling the under-pitch heating system at Lakeland Town - allegedly? All for a good cause apparently. Fed up with playing on a filthy brown mud covered pitch he wanted to see the return to natural frozen grass during the winter months. Retaining the appearance of 'Green peas' I think he said, but I could be wrong. He realised that longer studs would have been simpler but not as environmentally friendly - allegedly. I can't help thinking that his case would have been stronger if he hadn't been filmed doing it for Match of the Day.

While on the subject of the environment, how many of you consider industry to be part of the sports scene? Well, it would seem that the Scots do. A board room leak at Celtic allegedly suggests that a new team structure is afoot to bring the two together. I can't see it working myself. All that heavy machinery cutting up the pitch. Facilities to accommodate team reserves alongside ship welders may be required, whilst during a match extra hooters are sounded for 30 minute tea breaks and union meetings. I ask you! Hang on this doesn't sound too bad! I wonder what the Rangers service will make of it. Who knows, if it catches on we might find Steve Coppell a manager of the people's palace!

Rumours are also abounding that Brighton and Hove Albion are to drop part of their team next season for the usual reasons. Expense before experience again. When will they learn that you simply can't climb the first division and bring the crowds back without the players to back it up? Perhaps I'm being unfair. Maybe the reason they want the captain out is because they can't pronounce his name over the P. A.?

On the recent U. E. F. A. visit to Burnley it was gratifying to see the specially laid on exhibition about the wonderful world of football. Many historical old faces were there but there was strangely no mention of yours truly. What have I ever said about Burnley that might make them leave out the greatest moment in the history of the game - when I picked up the ball and ran, thus spawning a whole new concept called 'penalty for hand-ball'?! Talking of doing a runner; it looks like Gordon McGregor Banks has upped and left recently promoted Horniman aquarists for Chester Zoo of all places. I think he's seen 'Bedknobs and Broomsticks' too often for his own good. Animals don't really play soccer Gordon, it was only a cartoon! My scouts have tipped me on who they want to replace him but I refuse to enhance anyone's ego through this column so I'll leave you guessing.

I'm not one to start rumours of course but is there something Bruce Langridge ought to tell us? No sooner has he taken up the position of groundsman at Oldham than Jane 'is it a squirrel' Mee is off to Ludlow - allegedly.

There's just so much going on this year that it's hard to keep up. Both the annual training camp and forthcoming challenge cup in Madrid look set to reveal some new international talent. Let's hope that there's still the money around next year to keep them on the circuit. So many just seem to be in it for the money these days. No wonder they all end up as leisure consultants. Let's hope that the House of Lords come to the conclusion that the basic skills are what we need to emphasise and recommend some increased funding. (Income taxonomy??)

The new 'Players Manual' should help to establish some ground rules to bring back the quality. Although some of the tales I've heard about its production might not give you that impression. Suffice to say that the final draft (leaked by a mole - they have such unpleasant habits) looks great despite being originally written by a bunch of ~~dystestics~~ ~~Desticksits dextixix~~ drunks!

One other publication which caught my attention was the leaflet on Players Welfare. I particularly like the

graphic illustration of the dangers of staring closely at floodlights. The Glasgow floods seem particularly mesmerizing, if a little small.

There's so much more I could tell you but space and attention spans are limited. One final bit of news which will sadden the hearts of you both ... if not the editor ... is that Sir Rat is hanging up his boots. Not because of increased censorship or severe editorial policies but because I can't handle the fame anymore. I just wish to crawl back to my little sewer and live on past glories. Lying to my grandchildren without fear of contradiction or libel actions. This is the end, allegedly,

'Bye
Sir Rat 'you wouldn't let it lie' Buzzbee

The fact that both the editor and Sir Rat have retired simultaneously is purely coincidental - honest!



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