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COUNCIL FOR NATURE, NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETIES COMMITTEE

I have been the Museum Association's representative on the Natural History Societies Committee of the Council for Nature since 1971, following on from the previous representative who was Geoff Stansfield. For various reasons, this Committee scarcely met for three years, and when it did was mainly engaged in discussions on how it could improve its effectiveness, who should be represented on it and what its future was.

From 1974 the Committee has become considerably more active organising three national meetings for natural history societies which has proved a reasonably successful method of improving contact between the Council for Nature and natural history societies. A further national meeting is planned for September 1978 in the Sheffield area, and it is proposed to follow a biennial pattern in future. The programme on the theme of "Natural History in Urban Areas" will be arranged taking into account the replies received from a questionnaire on the subject.

The Committee is composed of representatives from national and local amateur natural history bodies, the local representatives being elected on a regional basis. Its main objectives have recently been restated and are as follows:-

1. To serve the needs and aims of the affiliated bodies.
2. To encourage co-operation at all levels between natural history disciplines.
3. To collect and disseminate information on natural history and conservation to its affiliated bodies.
4. To organise national meetings of natural history bodies to exchange ideas and information.
5. To initiate regional meetings of the natural history societies on topics of current interest.

One of the topics that has been discussed by the Committee over the last two or three years is Biological Record Centres, and this is undoubtedly an area in which liaison with natural history societies through the Council for Nature could be of considerable benefit. Currently on the recommendation of the full Council, the Committee has become involved in the production of a "Handbook for Natural History Societies". This will be between 5,000 and 10,000 words in length, covering many of the subjects on which enquiries are at present received by the Secretariat of the Council for Nature. It will include sections on Administration, Publications, Activities, Field Meetings, Junior Sections, Co-operation, Publicity, and Finance. The Co-operation section, for which I have undertaken responsibility, will include some mention of the resources available in museums. Draft submissions have already been prepared, and applications for grants toward the publication of this handbook are being made to various bodies. A joint meeting with the Council for Nature Youth Committee has been arranged to discuss junior sections of natural history societies, and I have been nominated as one of the four members of the Committee to attend this meeting, which is on the 24th January.

If any members of the BCG have comments on any of the topics or activities described above, I shall be pleased to hear from them and if relevant to pass them on to the Natural History Societies Committee. The next meeting of this Committee is in April 1978.

Having now served as a representative on this Committee for six years, I had already considered that I might well resign from this particular office in 1978, and now that representation has been vested in BCG I feel that this might be in any case an appropriate time to hand over. I think that it would, in any case, be more appropriate now that someone more active in natural history should be the profession's representative, and I should be pleased to hear from any volunteers who would be prepared to consider succeeding me.

Janet E. Chamberlain
Portsmouth Museums