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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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## Proposed Wildlife Legislation

In the last newsletter (vol. 2, page 252) mention was made of a "possible scheme for the registration of skin collections ..... by the Guild of Taxidermists". This was erroneous in its implications and the Guild's representative on the B.C.G. committee, Bari Logan, has asked us to correct this impression. Their current discussion with the D.o.E. on this matter resulted in the following note published in their last Newsletter (March 1980) page 56.

In the Spring of 1978 the Department of the Environment consulted the Guild about the proposed Wildlife and Countryside legislation in connection with the E.E.C. Directive on the conservation of wild birds.

Guild representatives (Messrs. Logan, Metcalf, Sharp and Trodd) and Mr. P. Robinson of the R.S.P.B. met with the D.o.E. in April, 1978 to discuss a proposed registration system for taxidermists who sell mounted birds.

To clarify this issue, the legislation is only concerned with specimens which a taxidermist has legally acquired himself, are therefore his own property, and which he subsequently mounts and offers for sale. It does not concern itself with specimens legally acquired by a third party and given to a taxidermist to mount for that third party nor does it concern itself with specimens that a taxidermist mounts for himself.

The D.o.E. suggested that the Guild should act as a registering body, a suggestion initially refused by the Guild on the ground of its already heavy workload.

On 10th October, 1979, an emergency meeting was called to discuss this topic again and to clarify certain points in the proposed legislation. Notice of this meeting was sent to fourteen taxidermists (seven museum and seven commercial) in order to get a fair representation of Guild opinion. Attending the meeting were Messrs. Trodd, Metcalf, Sharp, Rose, Dickinson, Teasdale, Dunton, Summers, Stoate, Owen, Robinson (R.S.P.B.), Waymouth and Padden (D.o.E.).

It was made quite clear that the D.o.E. had no particular interest in taxidermy or taxidermists and was mainly concerned with implementing the proposed legislation. It was also pointed out that if the Guild refused to act as the registering body then the cost of such a scheme run by the D.o.E. itself would be considerably higher. In order to keep the cost as low as possible and to safeguard the interests of all taxidermists the Guild agreed to act as the registering body providing that the administrative costs would be met by the D.o.E. and from registration fees.

At present it is proposed that taxidermists who sell mounted birds, other than a small number of game and wildfowl species, will be registered with the Guild and must keep an up-to-date log-book containing the following details:

- Name of bird, sex and log number.
- Name and address of finder.
- Date when found.
- Locality.
- Condition of carcass, cause of death where known.
- Preparation i.e. skin, mount or skeleton.
- Customers name and address.
- Date of sale.

As most taxidermists keep a log-book already this should not involve much extra work. Each bird processed and sold will have an official number attached to it which will coincide with the number in the log-book. As the log-book will be open to inspection at any time it will become the taxidermists main safeguard when justifying the legal status of birds which he offers for sale. This documentation is very important as the R.S.P.B. has often stated that a specimen without full data is a specimen suspected of being illegally taken.

At present the Guild Working Party under the Chairmanship of Mr. C. E. Owen, Deputy Director of Leicestershire Museums is still discussing the finer points of the registration system and an up-to-date account of their progress will be included in the next Newsletter.

There appears to be some confusion over the possible consequences of the proposed Wildlife Legislation. Firstly, it is necessary to point out that the proposals for such legislation have not yet been fully drafted by the Department of the Environment. Therefore, nothing said to date need form part of any resulting Act of Parliament.

The legislation, with regard to birds, will apply only to Schedule I species and will not replace or cancel the current Protection of Birds' Acts. It appears to fall into two distinct categories in the bird section, that is eggs and birds. This also appears to cause two distinct problems for museums, one being the "registration" of birds' eggs and the other the position of taxidermists and their dealings with mounted specimens. By this is meant not only the position of museums when they wish to buy specimens or objects incorporating parts of the protected species, etc., but also museum-based taxidermy operations.

The B.C.G. is involved at the committee level in discussion on these topics, with the D. of E., the Museums Association and the Guild of Taxidermists. This is notwithstanding the rather odd fact that the initial list of bodies circulated by the D. of E. did not include either B.C.G. or the M.A., nor the fact the initial reaction of the M.A. to this proposed legislation was uninformed and disappointing. Members who have any questions or comment on the subject are urged to write to the Secretary of B.C.G., address given at the end of the Newsletter.

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#### DRAGONFLY FICTION IN BOLTON

It seems to be a peculiar impression which local people have that dragonflies are valuable. In this area of (formerly) south-east Lancashire, several children each summer come into the museum to ask who will give them money for unidentified parts of the dragonflies which they catch in a variety of containers. There is now no one that I can trace that has ever given money for these insects so where does the "legend" come from? It seems to extend from Bolton to include the areas around Leigh and Swinton and originated in at least their grandparents' generation. The basic idea appears to be that pharmacists took these in (rather like various shops do with rosehips) and extracted a form of chemical useful to mankind and his medicine, according to some from the brown wings of *Aeschna grandis* (L). This is not so, as reference to any pharmacopeia or chemist will not produce any information on dragonflies. One local pharmacist actually suggested they may have been used for bloodletting years ago but, contrary to folk names such as Horse Stinger and Devil's Darning Needle, they are incapable of inflicting such wounds.

The only reasonable suggestion to explain this situation is that there was once a local chemist who collected insects and was prepared to pay a penny or shilling to the person who brought him a rarity not represented in his collection. Or perhaps other regions of the country can provide an answer?

E. G. Hancock.