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# Study Weekend at Leicester

## → reports and A.G.M.

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Thirty five members and several students from the Leicester course attended the B.C.G. annual general meeting and study weekend held from 11-13 April at Leicester.

The A.G.M. commenced on Saturday morning and was well attended. Some difficulty was experienced in obtaining from the members any positive reaction to the problem of electing new officers and committee, in spite of prior warning through the newsletter, and so with the exception of voting in John Mathias (who replaces Kelvin Boot as Treasurer and Members Secretary) the 1978-79 officers and committee are still serving in various capacities. Charles Steel (Booth Museum - Brighton) suggested that the business of the B.C.G. might be better served in the future by holding the A.G.M. at the end of the meeting rather than the beginning, by which time members would have had sufficient time to discuss the election of officers and serving officers may even have had a chance to spot likely new committee members! There also appeared to be confusion as to whether or not the B.C.G. was properly constituted or, indeed, whether a constitution existed at all. Charles Steel, who raised the point, kindly offered to write one, should it be required. Perhaps someone could clarify the situation? [The committee are working on this during the year - Ed.]

Following the A.G.M. Peter Morgan (National Museum of Wales) gave a brief but informative outline of the proposed alterations and additions to the wildlife protection laws with particular reference to the need to form a register of all birds' egg collections, whether owned privately or held by a museum. Eight museums had already volunteered to help implement the scheme by acting as registration centres. An amnesty period had been proposed, during which those people in possession of eggs which, in terms of the 'old' law, were illegally taken, would be able to register the specimens without attracting penalty. I must admit to a growing scepticism as the discussion proceeded, as to the ultimate success of a scheme aiming for completion of registration in under a year from now - how are the public to be adequately informed of the new law and the specimens they hold, plus all those held in museums throughout the British Isles, be registered by April 1981? Let us hope that the public are made more aware of the proposed new law than of similar existing ones relating to the protection of specimens in the wild, the existence of which, in my experience, the majority of people remain blissfully ignorant. Also, I can't help feeling that one of the effects of any mandatory registration scheme will be to immediately create an even more profitable black market, which is partly what registration is trying to prevent. This will apply not only to birds eggs but ultimately to a whole range of mounted specimens as well. As taxidermists are likely to be the most effected by the proposed legislation, it was a great pity that there were none present to represent their views at the meeting.

Finally I can almost hear the groans of those overworked, underpaid curators who still have stored in some dark recess, boxes of birds eggs or cases of mounted specimens which they have been meaning to do something about for the last few years and which they now find need to be registered by April 1981--- or will museums press for more time? As has been suggested, let us hope that the Government can be persuaded to finance a specialist team who can inspect, identify and catalogue such collections where they exist and thus help to reduce what could in some cases be a considerable extra burden for 'non-biological' Curators of small museums.

After lunch, Tony Fletcher treated us to an intriguing demonstration of a method he has perfected of identifying lichens by thin layer chromatography - identification by chemical fingerprint. Later, Don Hall-Smith demonstrated the technique he employs in removing lepidoptera genitalia for identification purposes. Mr. Hall-Smith did say before starting that he had been unable to acquire the microscope attachment necessary to allow all of the members to observe him working and so it was difficult for someone who has never done genitalia preps to learn the technique employed. This was a great pity as his expertise was made obvious by the speed with which he completed the preps, the excellent results of which all were able to observe individually afterwards. After this, Mr. Hall-Smith demonstrated a technique he had evolved for removing corroded pins from insects, using an adapted electric soldering iron to heat up the pin and loosen it, allowing the insect to be removed and re-mounted with a drop of glue on a stainless steel pin. I must admit to a certain feeling of tension as smoke began to appear from one or two of the more stubborn cases- for some curious reason as they finally spiralled down their pins they reminded me of those distant smoking biplanes one sees shot down in films of first world war dog fights! However, all seemed to end well although I personally would hesitate to consign the more valuable specimens to such treatment. As Mr. Hall-Smith explained, finer control of the heat was desirable!

Between lectures I visited the Museum's Natural History gallery which I found immensely effective - you can't beat the immediacy of open displays. I also liked very much the small cases devoted to comparisons, one of nests of birds, mammals and insects, another of vertebrate and invertebrate skeletons. A long case demonstrated size comparisons of birds' eggs and, because it was near Easter, included a chocolate egg and some Easter chicks - just the sort of human touch which I am sure causes the public to remember and talk about the displays and one, unfortunately, so often lacking in museums.

The Sunday session started with an interesting talk by Geoff Swinney (Royal Scottish) entitled Collecting Fishes (or should it have been Collecting Fish?). He commenced with a brief history of the fish collection in the R.S. which was originally formed around the old Edinburgh University collections. Several ex Keepers - Clark, Ritchie and Stevens, had published papers, mostly confined to fish in Scottish waters. It was not until 1976 that a systematic collection was started and, as the Antarctic, South Atlantic and Pacific were already represented, active collecting was concentrated in the N.E. Atlantic and Western Europe.

Geoff is fortunate in being able to collect in the field from various research vessels and in his talk, which was illustrated with slides, he explained the use of a variety of nets and traps and some less conventional collecting methods he has used including parachutes, polo - mints and power stations! Apparently he used a small drogue 'chute on one occasion to act as a sea anchor on a purse seine net being used to collect delicate planktonic organisms. Trap nets which require a cheap but effective control to spring, have a polo-mint built into the trigger which take just the required length of time to dissolve before activating the mechanism! The use of power stations for fish collecting turned out to be nothing more exciting than picking out the fish trapped in the water inlets to the cooling towers.

A method of collecting fish fry samples was described and illustrated which overcame the bow wave and eddy effect normally encountered when pushing a conventional fine mesh net through water and thus acts as an early warning system to alert fish fry. The device, which was held in the water in front of the boat, was fitted with a metal cone-shaped front, attached to a plankton

sampling net. The cone effectively reduced eddy and allowed accurate fish fry sampling to be undertaken. The device was further improved by attaching the tapered end of the net bag to a hose pipe through which the sample water was drawn by a pump inboard - apparently the fish fry remained undamaged. Geoff also described a method of electric fishing using a D.C. generator and electrodes placed in the water. The current causes the fish to gravitate to the positive electrode where they may be netted with ease (and a well insulated net!) He finished his excellent talk with a series of slides showing various methods of storing some of the specimens in the spirit collection.

Hugh McAllister (Ness Gardens) gave a lecture on Cytotaxonomy in which he described a method of determining the taxonomy of *Hedera* (Ivy) by tracing chromosome variations and also by examination of the scale hairs on the leaf surface with the aid of a x10 magnification hand lens. I must say Mr. McAllister certainly knows how to deliver a lecture in a clear and interesting manner, if only all speakers acquired his technique. Unfortunately, I had to leave before the final talk on Sunday afternoon and so cannot comment on the Collecting and Preserving of Marine Algae.

Speaking personally I found the whole weekend to be interesting, informative and well organised: my thanks to all those members of the B.C.G. and the staff of Leicester Museum responsible.

Denis Murphy  
Nearsyde County Museums

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SURGICAL SPIRIT AS A RELAXING AGENT. — Having had problems with mould in relaxing tins, I tried using water mixed with a small amount of surgical spirit in my relaxing tin. This proved to be most effective; as well as preventing mould, this mixture has the advantage of relaxing very quickly, 24 hours being sufficient for all but the largest insects. I have even used this relaxant on dried and crumpled leaves prior to pressing them, again with great success. — P. J. JOHNSON, 7 Haverhill Road, Horseheath, Cambridge, CB1 6QR. 23.xii.1979.

(1980) Entomologist's Record, 92(2); 49.

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