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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Scientific and Industrial Research, Auckland, New Zealand. BCG has not yet received a review copy but should do shortly.

DIPTERISTS DIGEST - A NEW JOURNAL ABOUT FLIES

DD is a new journal for diptera enthusiasts with interests in the recording, ecology, distribution and natural history of British and N W European flies. It will be of particular interest to museum biologists as new taxonomic keys, county and regional accounts, national distribution maps, new techniques and nomenclature changes will be regular features.

For example, the first issue includes an extensive review of French and N W European hoverflies with special reference and keys to those likely to occur in Britain (M C D Speight) plus a number of regional articles - examples are Buckinghamshire, Coventry and Merseyside. It has 48 pages and is A5 in size.

Future editions will include new and updated national distribution maps and reviews of museum collections.

Dipterists Digest is an independently produced journal.

Issue No 1 costs £3.
Advanced subscription to No 2 £2.50
(£3 Institutions)
Advanced subscription to Nos 2 and 3 £5
(£6 Institutions)

Note: Individual members of BCG can sample Issue No 1 for £2.50 post free.

Cheques payable to D Whiteley please.

Dipterists Digest
c/o Derek Whiteley
730 Eccleshall Road
Sheffield S11 8TB
Tel: Sheffield 668487

Techniques

Kless, J. (1986): "Ein neues Verfahren zum Aufweichen unpräparierter Käfer" in Ent. Blätter, 82, pp 120-121 (kleine Mitteilung 2051)

A method is described for relaxing unsoftened beetles, either completely dry or from formalin, in cases where the normal relaxation techniques prove ineffective. The specimen is placed in a solution of pepsin (1g per 100ml water) activated with 1ml concentrated hydrochloric acid, which destroys the muscular protein without damaging the chitinous exoskeleton.

Small species become relaxed after three or four days submersion, whilst large species can take up to 14 days. No deterioration in colours is reported and soft bodied species have been successfully treated. Even submersion for 10 months does not harm specimens. An added bonus is that specimens emerge from the solution thoroughly cleaned. No mention is made of the effect on pubescence.

Derek Lott

CONSERVATION INFORMATION NETWORK

The Conservation Information Network is a new international service offering conservation information. It is a database containing: abstracts of virtually all conservation literature published (with well over 100,000 citations); information on materials used in conservation including adhesives, consolidants, coatings and pesticides; information on suppliers and manufacturers of conservation materials and equipment.

Access to the system can be direct by subscription or indirect via The Conservation Unit and MGC. Subscription is not very expensive: £30 covers registration and operating manuals and £10 buys the communications software; thereafter access time costs about £30 an hour but communication is fairly rapid. Subscribers need a computer - IBM, IBM compatible or Apple Macintosh or ASCII terminal and a modem link to the telephone network. Alternatively, search requests can be directed to The Conservation Unit and the charge will be for Network usage time only. For subscribers a Support Service is available run by The Conservation Unit and MDA.

Another benefit of the service is an electronic mailing system - ENVOY 100. Messages can be sent instantaneously to any other subscriber anywhere in the world (the Network is based in Canada).

So much for the blurb. The Leicestershire Museums Service subscribes to the Network so (with considerable technical help) I tried to estimate the extent of the biological information in the bibliographic databank. The database is interrogated through a series of keywords; the on-screen display can be tailored to those parts of the (very comprehensive) record you wish to see. Getting the hang of the keywords takes a little time but is not difficult. Thus the stem BIOL* was recorded in 277 documents; TAXIDERM* in 25; HERBARI* in 2; FUMIGATION in 292. Using combinations of keywords cuts down the size of the data set to be displayed. Thus SPECIMEN appears in 204 documents, NATURAL in 1188, HISTORY in 9426, PREPARATION on 67; combining these sets gives PREPARATION and NATURAL and HISTORY and SPECIMEN appearing in 43 documents. These could be displayed or downloaded onto disc in about 10-15 minutes. One of the standard formats would give for each item: literature

type; author; title; source; page numbers; language; abstract; subject keywords (which the initial search interrogates). The latter category gives clues as to which other keywords might prove useful in further searches.

Although I approached this exercise with some scepticism, thinking that biology as a discipline has been poorly served by the conservation community in recent years, I was surprised to find so many references to biological (and, incidentally, geological) sources. There are many obvious gaps in the coverage, but perhaps BCG should be pressing to fill these, linking with the Network through The Conservation Unit at MGC. In the meantime, I can recommend that biological conservators try to arrange access to the Network and make use of its obvious advantages.

John Mathias
Editor

MDA TERMINOLOGY GROUP - BIOLOGICAL DATA STANDARDS

I have received the following examples of data standards for biological objects, and my thanks go to the following members for responding so promptly:

Margaret Reilly, Hunterian Museum, Glasgow
Bill Pettit, Manchester Museum
Nick Moyes, (ex Kirklees) Derby Museum
Bob Allkin, Kew

Clearly the next step is to prepare a set of standards for new/future users, using the above as examples. This is quite a large job and requires a volunteer to co-ordinate and liaise with MDA Terminology Group. I have applied to MDA for a small grant/bursary for someone to undertake this work, and I await their answer.

Derek Whiteley
Secretary

BIOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS UK

This report was officially launched by the Museums Association on 4th August 1988 and elicited a sympathetic response from the quality press - notably the Independent and Guardian. It is expensive to buy, but BCG has received a complimentary copy from the Museums Association. I propose that this copy is made available for circulation on a short-loan basis to members of BCG who would like to see it. It is quite heavy (600+ A5 pages), so return postage would be appreciated.

Please apply to:
BCG Secretary,
Derek Whiteley,
City Museum,
Sheffield S10 2TP

FOR LOVE OF BIRDS

An exhibition to celebrate the centenary of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds which was founded in Didsbury, Manchester in 1889.

This exhibition is available for hire from 1 July 1989 to 31 December 1990.

The exhibition looks at the history of the RSPB and bird conservation from 1889 to the present. It is produced by Bolton Museum and will be hired through NWMAGS to museums around Britain.

If any museums are interested please contact Steve Garland, Bolton Museum, Le Mans Crescent, Bolton BL1 1SE (tel: (0204) 22311 ext 2211) for further details.

BLACK KITE (*Milvus migrans*)

The Dorman Museum was fortunate enough recently to receive a donation of a Black Kite specimen from Mr David J Britton, on 20th May 1988.

Three recorded sightings have been made in April and May this year of Black Kites around the Teesmouth area. Mr Britton actually sighted a Kite at the South Gare of the Tees on 5th May 1988 and continued to observe it over about five days. As all sightings were made around the same area, it may have been the same bird, although this can only be speculation. It is certainly interesting to think that more than one Kite has visited Cleveland in such a short space of time, particularly as this specimen is the first record for Cleveland. The Black Kite is a national rarity, although Martin Blick (ornithologist with the Cleveland Nature Conservation Trust) informs me that several Black Kites have been seen further south this year, along with the usual Red Kites.

The specimen now in the museum was found dead on the tide line at Teesmouth by John Wilmot on 18th May. It was thought to have been dead about a week. The bird has been identified by Chris Brown (Cleveland Group RSPB leader) and David Britton (Member of the British Birds Rarities Committee) who has photographed and described it for submission to the Committee.

Due to its rarity, the museum specimen is being mounted as soon as possible. A NEMS grant has been obtained towards the cost of taxidermy and Eric Morton, taxidermist at the Hancock Museum, Newcastle is carrying out this work. The Kite will then be added to the Dorman Museum permanent collection and, hopefully, will be available for inspection by museum professionals and other bona fide enquirers, if not put on display. Enquiries should be directed to the Museum's Curator.

Leigh Lampard
Assistant Curator, Kirkleatham Museum
(formerly at Dorman Museum)