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proportion of the combined Kings and Chelsea College collections have been lost through disposals to other collections and destruction. Today, only one biological collection within the University, the Museum of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy at University College, is in its original home. Yet, in spite of this transformation, it is remarkable that such a significant amount of historically and scientifically important material survives.'

The report also includes a recommendation, because of the scale of the overall holdings, that a single university museum collection for biological material be created to provide appropriate care for specimens of 'suitable quality and value'. This would appear to be a sensible course of action, especially in view of the UGC University Biological Review which is currently in progress and which may well recommend the rationalisation of the teaching of biological disciplines in the London Colleges anyway.

The BCG Committee, through Rosina Down (Curator of the University College collections) has been keeping a watchful eye on these collections, particularly when some were under severe threat; members will be kept informed of any developments arising from the publication of the report.

John Mathias
Editor

USES OF BIOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS - BCG SURVEY

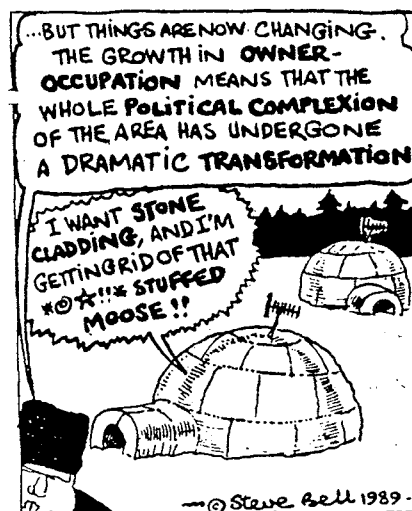
Charles Pettitt at the Manchester Museum is still accumulating information on the many and varied uses of biological collections. One very useful response has arrived from Dr Elaine Hoagland, Executive Director of the Association of Systematic Collections based in Washington quoting US references for published data on this theme.

The importance of Charles' survey was brought home to me at the recent meeting held at the Museums and Galleries Commission on their response to 'Biological Collections UK'. A repeated request from the non-biologists present (and these included most of the people who control money which could be made available for the maintenance of biological collections) was - what is all this stuff used for? We can of course answer this question in general terms, but it is becoming much more important politically to be able to quote facts and figures on these occasions.

This is why it is so important to respond to the survey. When Charles has sufficient data he will prepare a paper for publication. Using the data in a simpler form, BCG can produce a leaflet for general distribution on the value and uses of the collections we spend most of our working lives maintaining. The committee feel that this subject is so significant that a session will be devoted to it at next year's AGM meeting on the Isle of Man.

So please get your acts together and send to Charles Pettitt at Manchester Museum, The University, Manchester M13 9PL, information (facts and figures if possible, if not your impressions and stories) on who uses your collections and what for - serious or trivial, all comments are valuable.

John Mathias
Editor



Interesting note on disposal of biological collections in the Guardian (Steve Bell's If cartoon strip).

RESEARCH INTO SCOTTISH UNIVERSITY COLLECTIONS

The Scottish Museums Council has announced details of a major research project into museum collections owned by Scottish Universities.

There are over 100 collections which were used or are still used for teaching in Scotland's eight universities. A Research Unit has been established to identify and record each collection, assess its importance and recommend possible improvements in its running.

An experienced Project Officer, Laura Drysdale, began the research in October

1988 - six months later she has just completed the first phase of the project. Ms Drysdale has visited all the Scottish Universities and collected the data which will form the basis of the Unit's culminating report in 1990. The collections surveyed include objects ranging from extinct birds from New Zealand to the death masks of Burke and Hare.

The Project Officer believes that University Principals, Courts and Senates are not fully aware of the importance of collections for which they have ultimate responsibility. She said, 'This research has a wider than local significance - the collections constitute an important part of the national heritage.'

Professor Frank Willett, Director of the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, is Chairman of the project's management committee. He said, 'It is very exciting that this Research Unit is the first of its type in Scotland and is a pilot study for what is intended to be a thorough study of university collections in Britain.'

The total cost of the project is £30,500. It is being funded by Principals of the Scottish Universities, the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland, the Museums and Galleries Commission, the MacRobert Trusts and the Scottish Museums Council.

For further details contact:

Miss Laura Drysdale
Project Officer
2 Terrets Place
Upper Street
London N1 1QZ

BIRDS' EGGS: 1954 - 1981

We have recently made an interesting discovery concerning the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and the protection afforded to birds' eggs.

There was a recent prosecution in Burnley of an egg collector. The usual low fines were imposed but one thing caught our eye in all of the newspaper reports. All stated that the offender was allowed to keep all of his eggs collected prior to 1981! We thought that this was probably due to confused journalists and thought no more about it.

Shortly afterwards, Bolton Museum received a call from a local man who had been an egg collector and now wished to give his collection to the Museum. When we saw the collection it

contained eggs collected in the 1966 to 1978 period, clearly illegal! Much of the material was of local interest and nearly all had excellent full data.

We contacted the DoE to sort out what we should do. Would there be a prosecution? Would the eggs be destroyed? Imagine our surprise when a phone call informed us that no licence was necessary and we could keep them because they were collected before 1981!!

We would be interested to hear of any other members' experiences in this field. It does seem very odd; a quick look at the 1981 Act clearly shows that the 1954 and 1967 Bird Protection laws still apply.

I am hoping to find out whether this is a DoE policy decision or a court decision but in the meantime it seems that all eggs illegally collected before 1981 have now been legalised.

Steve Garland and Kath Berry
Bolton Museum

Editor's note

Kath wrote to the DoE in Bristol requesting confirmation of the telephone conversation, and the following paragraph is quoted from it (ref WLF 4922/9):

'Under the terms of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 the possession of eggs taken prior to the Act is not illegal and a licence is not required to be in possession, or to give away an egg collection. The Museum are [sic] therefore able to accept the collection without further reserve.'

A further paragraph deals with the question of Schedule 1 eggs in the collection which have no data, and the obligation on the museum to prove that these eggs were collected before 1981 or held legally if collected after 1981.

These waters are definitely muddy, and the BCG committee has decided to hold a Seminar in the winter of 1989-90 to try to sort out some of these difficulties.

John Mathias
Editor

REMINDER

Many members have not yet paid this year's sub. It's the same as last year and includes the Journal, so it must be good value at £6.00 for personal members, £10.00 for institutional and overseas members. Cheques, postal orders, cash, money cowries, wampum, elephant tusks and rhino horns to Adam Wright, Coventry Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry CV1 5RW.