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Editors Note

Due to your editor being promoted earlier in the year, with an attendant increase in workload, I have not been able to pursue copy with the usual zeal and fervour so the current issue of The Biology Curator is therefore a bit thinner than of late. As you will read later in this issue, negotiations for the merger of BCG and NSCG are underway and this may mean that the next issue of the Biology Curator could be the last. I would like to therefore make an appeal to BCG members for papers, articles and short communications you may have been wanting to write, particularly any reminiscences, anecdotes, stories etc from the last 27 years of the groups existence. All contributions gratefully received.

This would also seem an opportune moment to remind the various good people who agreed to do write-ups of the trip to America earlier this year for their copy. Many thanks to those who have supplied their write-ups.

Insect Pests in Museums 11-12th March 2003 The Natural History Museum

A 2 day course led by David Piniger, of interest to those with responsibility for natural history specimens, ethnographic collections, folk collections, textiles etc. Covering: pest monitoring and control and pest management among other topics. Further details from:

Sharing our Skills, Education Unit (Administration), Communications and Development, The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD. Tel: 020 7942 5555

Collections Disposal

Sandwell Museum Service offers for disposal four cases of mounted birds and animals.

Due to the recent decoration of Wednesbury Museum and Art Gallery, Sandwell Museum Service has four cases of taxidermy available for transfer. The cases were previously on display within the entrance hall at the gallery and due to severe storage and display restrictions cannot be accommodated elsewhere.

As a registered museum service we are committed to the Museums Association guidelines upon disposal of museum objects and are therefore making every effort to ensure that these objects remain within the public domain, preferably at another registered museum site.

The items are:

Case 1: 7 bird specimens (various species), 1004mm (W) x 1820mm (H)

Case 2: 8 pheasants, 1003mm (W) x 1800 (H)

Case 3: 1 fox and 1 rabbit, 708mm (W) x 1005 (H)

Case 4: Various bird species, 093mm (W) x 1005mm (H)

The specimens in case 1 require extensive cleaning and conservation, all other specimens are in fair condition.

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BCG/NSCG Merger Meeting

NHM Entomology Seminar Room,
1pm, Wednesday 24th July 2002.

As instructed by the AGM at Norwich, here below is a report of the business conducted at the first BCG/NSCG merger meeting.

- Attending:- NSCG: Simon Moore (Chair), Kate Andrew, Paul Brown & Donna Young.
BCG: David Carter, Nick Gordon, Howard Mendel & Steve Thompson.

Chair of the committee

Simon Moore agreed to chair the series of merger meetings and that the post of chair will revolve amongst the committee if he was unable to attend.

- Committee confirmed understanding of the remit given to them by BCG & NSCG AGM's "to write a constitution for the combined organisation and recommend the mechanism for merging".

The Structure of the new group

It was decided that the new organisation should have a central Executive Committee. The Executive Committee will have the power to form subcommittees, as the need arises, to cover 1. Conferences & Meetings, 2. Publications, 3. Membership & Publicity, 4. Collections Management & 5. Conservation.

It was noted that the structure and constitution of the new group should be established so as to allow GCG to merge into the new group at a later date, should they so wish.

Charitable status

The Charity Commission was approached and based on their communications, four options were put to committee:-

1. For BCG to gain charitable status and then merge with NSCG charity. BCG is already considered to be a charitable organisation but is not registered as such.
2. For BCG to be subsumed into the NSCG Charity with change in NSCG constitution to accommodate BCG.
3. For NSCG to close and move into the BCG with change in BCG constitution.
4. For both NSCG and BCG to wind up at next year's AGMs and for both to hand over their assets to one new charity to be set up before next year's AGMs.

Proposals 1, 2 and 3 would be more

complicated and require extra general meetings so would take longer to achieve merger. All present agreed that proposal 4 be the best way forward as the process should be as swift as possible.

Committee decided that we should follow option 4 and set up a new charity, dissolving both groups into the new charity at next year's AGM's. The Inaugural meeting of The New Charity would then take place immediately after the two final AGMs. The Trustees of The New Charity will initially comprise of the members of the merger committee.

The new (April 1998) Charity Commission "model constitution" provides a much less complex method for composing a charitable constitution than when NSCG established their charitable status. A new charitable constitution will be written up using the form and agreement on the new Name, the Objects and the Powers for the New Charity will constitute the main area for discussion.

Constitution.

The following set of Objects for the New Charity were presented to, amended and agreed by committee:-

1. To raise public awareness and appreciation of the scientific and cultural value of natural sciences collections.
2. To promote the highest standards in the management, preparation, conservation, care, interpretation and research of natural sciences collections and specimens, for the benefit of the public at large and other users.
3. To encourage exchange of information between individuals and institutions about natural sciences collections and records.

Finance & Membership Fees.

Subscription rates were discussed and will be set between the NSCG membership rate of £10 and will be lower than the combined NSCG/BCG combined rates of £18. A higher rate for Institutional membership is envisaged. Overseas members may not be charged extra as yet.

Publications.

This will require a subcommittee to agree to a new, possibly peer reviewed journal to be published once a year and a newsletter to be published three times a year. This will take some time to develop and might evolve from the improving Biology Curator. The respective editors for BCG & NSCG would be part of this committee with possible referees for peer review. A possible name for a publication could be 'Natural Sciences Collections' or 'The Natural Sciences Collector'.

A Name for the new, combined group.

The name 'Natural Sciences Collections Association' (NSCA, NaSCA or NatSCA) has been selected. Committee agreed that NSCA had the benefit of describing the group accurately, and was all encompassing including a full geological remit as well as the biological and conservation ones. [There is another group using the acronym NSCA (Natural Science Collections Alliance). However, they refer to themselves as the NSC Alliance, and as this is a relatively small American group, there should not be a conflict.]

- Until the merger has actually taken place, the general business of BCG and NSCG will continue as before.
- Decisions made by this committee must be communicated to the NSCG and BCG memberships. This should be in the form of selected bullet points published in 'The Biology Curator' and 'The [NSCG] Newsletter'. These could also be passed on to the Geology Curators Group via Steve Thompson. It was agreed that the process should be as open as possible, with all members being kept up to date with the progress of the merger committee.
- It was agreed that the meeting had gone extremely well and had been well chaired.

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Mammal Collections Curation, Conservation and Uses

Grant Museum of Zoology, University
College London, Gower Street
17th December, 2001

The following two papers complete the previous issues write ups of the mammals meeting.

The Conservation of Vertebrate Collections

Julian Carter, Conservation Officer
Department of Biodiversity and Systematic
Biology, National Museum and Gallery
Cardiff, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NP

Vertebrate collections are used in a whole variety of ways within the museum environment including display, education and research. Put together our vertebrate collections are a valuable resource. The range of material that forms these collections is very diverse. This includes the traditional 'stuffed animal' or taxidermy mount; skeletal material; study skins; fluid preserved collections; freeze dried material; models and casts; and associated documentation. (*NB. Fluid preserved collections have additional conservation issues to those discussed in this brief article.*)

When considering the conservation of these collections it is important to consider what is meant by the term 'conservation'. A suitable definition could be '*the employment of best practise to prevent or arrest the long term physical deterioration of natural science specimens, along with associated artefacts and documents to preserve their scientific and cultural worth*' (Carter and Walker, 1999). Essentially the aim of museum conservation is to halt the processes of deterioration, but to do this in such a way that the specimen is altered or changed as little as possible. Any treatments carried out need to be properly understood and practical to apply. One of the main 'ethics' of conservation practise is to ensure all treatments are 'fully reversible'. In