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Title: The Effect of High Market Prices on the Valuation of Vertebrate Fossils

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often people fail to understand this important role of such collections, so that while a government grant of a million pounds to purchase a famous painting may be seen as a public benefit, the use of ten thousand pounds to conserve and document a major natural science collection is likely to be regarded as a drain on the public purse.

This paper will seek to demonstrate the great value society should place upon research collections by presenting evidence of the wide-ranging ways in which these irreplaceable storehouses of information are used to support such aspects of the structure of society as education, law enforcement, medicine and health, commerce, agriculture and fisheries, and historical studies, as well as the way they have influenced fine and decorative art.

### THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF UNIVERSITY NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS

*Ms Jane Pickering, University Museum, Parkes Road, Oxford OX1 3PW*

University natural history collections form some of the oldest and largest such collections in the U.K. The changes in university funding mean that central facilities such as museums are coming under increasing scrutiny. Coupled with this the traditional use of natural history collections for teaching has declined dramatically, particularly in the life sciences. Museums must emphasise their educational value which does not mean redefining past objectives in the light of the prevailing ethos but recognising their true value to the whole community.

The Government's recent White Paper on Science and Technology has said that all users of public money must consider the public understanding of science. Museums as a whole have a responsibility in this area, which is made easier by the public interest in natural history collections, but what about university collections? They provide a direct link between the public and the research scientists in the universities. Also the collections have been developed for teaching which gives them a broad coverage and global perspective. This complements the facilities in local natural history museums and means they provide a regional resource where otherwise the public would rely on the national museums.

The recognition of university museums' value to the whole community has led to recommendations that these museums should be funded directly through the DNH.

### THE NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL COLLECTION OF ZOOLOGICAL INSTITUTE, RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.

*Professor Roald Potapov & Professor Vadim Zaitzev, 199034, Zoological Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences, Universitetsyaya nab.1, St. Petersburg, Russia.*

The Zoological Museum was established in 1832 and from this time until now it was the centre of the zoological investigations of Russian scientists not only in Russia and adjacent countries but all over the world. Due to the efforts of several generations of zoologists in the Museum numerous collections of all groups of animals were

assembled, and the total amount now is nearly 15 million specimens. The collections of animals from Polar and Pacific oceans, North-West North America, Central Asia, Siberia and Eurasian Tundras are most complete and rich. Now no serious research on Palaearctic faunas can be complete without a study of this collection. The Institute (the Museum was transferred to the Institute in 1930) constantly expends serious efforts, including financial, to support the collections and to increase its value.

### MUSEUMS AND THE MINERAL SPECIMEN MARKET

*Ms Monica T. Price, Assistant Curator, Mineral Collections, Oxford University Museum, Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3PW.*

Mineral specimens are widely collected for their beauty and rarity and a thriving worldwide market revolves around these natural works of art. It is influenced as much by politics and economics on a national or local scale as by the chance find of a pocket of fine crystals or the break-up and sale of an old collection.

An up-to-date knowledge of the mineral market is part of the connoisseurship which enables a curator to make judicious decisions about how an existing collection is used or expanded. Mineral shows in Britain and overseas provide curators with excellent opportunities to evaluate the ever-changing specimen market and, in turn, to establish the value of the collections in their own care. Museum authorities should encourage and enable their curatorial staff to attend shows as much for professional development as for any purchasing of specimens.

### PAPER GIVING A LOSS ADJUSTERS VIEW OF THE VALUATION OF COLLECTIONS.

*Mr Stephen Rollo-Smith, Robins, Davies House, 1-3 Sun Street, London EC2A 2BJ*

[Abstract awaited]

### THE EFFECT OF HIGH MARKET PRICES ON THE VALUE AND VALUATION OF VERTEBRATE FOSSILS.

*Ms Sally Y. Shelton, Collections Conservation, San Diego Natural History Museum, San Diego, California 92112, USA*

In the past few years, vertebrate fossils have become highly sought-after items, and their catalogue prices have climbed. These prices and the availability of buyers at those prices have had serious adverse effects on the conservation of fossils and fossil sites worldwide. Can museum staff working with vertebrate fossils fairly assess the value of these specimens for administrators, insurers, and the public, without basing their values on runaway market prices? Does the purchase of top-price vertebrate fossils by museums encourage activities which work against the conservation of those fossils and their sites? Does a market value or an appraised monetary value make an assessment of scientific and scholarly value more difficult? Are these values

mutually exclusive? Is a high market value an open invitation to quick deaccessioning for profit? And can the costs of recovery and preparation be fairly factored in to an appraised monetary value? Ongoing legal and political activities spurred by the value of vertebrate fossils will provide some answers, and may set some precedents for natural history valuation as a whole. Examples of the effect of high market values on vertebrate fossil excavation, sales, ethics and scientific data will be discussed.

#### **MICROBIAL GENETIC RESOURCES: THEIR USE AND ORGANIZATION.**

*Dr David Smith, International Mycological Institute, Bakeham Lane, Egham, Surrey TW20 9TY.*

Microbial genetic resources are essentially collected to provide an organism base for future sustainable use. They are maintained to provide reference points for names, representatives of research and patent strains, organisms used in industrial production processes and organisms for screening and research. The discovery of new natural products with properties of relevance to humankind stimulates the collection, isolation and storage of organisms. There are 481 collections worldwide registered with the World Data Centre for Microorganisms but they hold only a small percentage of the microorganisms known to man. There are several organizations that support collections but there is some way to go before a coordinated policy is put in place. There is a growing awareness of this problem and the need to have a comprehensive inventory of microorganisms. The present microbial resource collections have been established on an *ad hoc* basis and currently do not appear to be capable of adequately conserving the vital world resource. In the fungi various estimations have been made of the numbers of species: 1.5 million is one suggested figure, of which 72,000 are described and yet only c. 11,500 are held in collections. There are around 1,700 new species of fungi described annually. The task is enormous; exploration of as yet unexplored environments is yielding large numbers of new species. Microorganisms can be collected without depleting natural populations and maintained in relatively small laboratories. However the task of maintaining representative collections of microorganisms cannot be left to chance. *Ex-situ* conservation of microorganisms has an essential role to play in making available this enormous resource for future use and benefit to mankind.

#### **NOTES ON THE QUALITY AND ECONOMY OF A NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTION.**

*Dr Karel Sutory, Department of Botany, Moravian Museum, Preslova 1, Brno, 602 00 Czech Republic*

Using the Department of Botany of the Moravian Museum in Brno (Czech republic) as an example, possible ways to enhance the quality of the botanical collection are suggested. This could be achieved only by higher demands on newly obtained material. A new approach to old preserved material would also be advisable. The full use of computers in museums and new attitudes to museum

material documentation generally would be profitable as well.

From the financial point of view the highest demands in the botanical collection are made by the wages, which amount to over 75% of all expenses.

#### **A SCIENTIFIC/HISTORICAL/EDUCATIONAL HERITAGE FOR WHOM?: THE VALUE OF GEOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS IN A SMALL MUSEUM.**

*Simon Timberlake, Travelling Geology Curator, South Eastern Museums Service, Brighton Building, Dept. of Earth Sciences, Madingley Rise, Madingley Road, Cambridge CB3 0EZ.*

How much do we value our heritage of natural science collections and on what basis or assumption do we collectively make this valuation? I would anticipate that there is currently plenty of discussion on the issue of their monetary value. For instance, old 'museum' specimens of fossils, reptiles in particular, are now beginning to command high prices in the auction houses. There is also the matter of their insurance and undoubtedly this will also be the concern of many of those people attending this conference. However, there is another common approach and that is that of the scientist. Indeed, such is the weight of this opinion that one is unlikely to find many willing to disagree with this rule-of-thumb yardstick of measuring a specimen's worth by its value to science. However, both of these approaches worry me.

A debate carried out between scientists, dealers and valuers alone offers little in the way of help and encouragement to those fighting to keep specimens of moderate scientific or historical importance within the context of the small local museums where they belong. The situation is even worse for those of us engaged in trying to raise enthusiasm and support for the other 99% of specimens not perceived to be of national or local importance, or of any financial worth whatsoever. Reports dismissive of the value of some of these collections, or else the plundering of these same collections for specimens 'in order to safeguard items for research', has helped contribute, as much as has ignorance and the lack of funding and specialist help on the ground, to the disintegration and present appalling demise of small museum collections. It is vitally important that we should now be seen to be sending out the right messages. In the great majority of cases all of a collection has a value.

There is no inherent reason why a TYPE specimen should be seen as any more **worthwhile** an object to be cared for than an unlocalised mammoth's tooth or ammonite which is popular amongst visitors and regularly used in a handling collection. What is absolutely essential however is that both are managed and used in the right way. The irony is that it is so often the moderate to poorer quality material which proves to be of the greatest practical value to visitors.

This paper argues for a broader based approach to this problem which would be designed to safeguard the future of natural science collections in situ within small museums.