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The Biology Curator

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Author(s): Francis, P.

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3) Existing information out-of-date and patchy.

Therefore we actively encouraged recording *via*

1) Local society involvement including Bolton Wildlife Project funded by Council and Lancs Wildlife Trust.

2) Beetle-down week, holiday activity and environment weeks are used to talk to the public and extract records from them .

3) Producing recording forms :

a) General ones for existing recorders.

b) Specific species forms e.g. Fox Watch work better than asking for general records for the majority of casual recorders.

4) *Recorder Newsletter* – species maps and information produced as feedback for recorders encourages further records.

Hardware in use: Four PC-compatible computers linked by BNC cable (three 486DXs and one 66MHz Pentium), with a total of 2Gb of hard disk space. One OKI 391 dot-matrix printer, and a 250Mb tape-streamer for backup. Daily backups are done by copying data to a second computer.

Software in use: English Nature's RECORDER package, running under a runtime version of Advanced Revelation 3.0, was installed on our computer in December 1991. The networking system is Novell Personal Netware. Mapping is done using an AREV package DMAP for printing the map, with link software provided to transfer the data from RECORDER. Initial hand drawn maps and card indexes made map production very difficult when we first started (eg. for the *Recorder Newsletter*) but RECORDER and DMAP allow great flexibility.

Data development: When the computerisation was started we mostly had site based information, so we built on what we had. How did we do it? First site was a garden used for moth trapping, but we needed to be less *ad hoc*. Therefore we asked other users of RECORDER what they did – some went by grid ref. and others just where record from. We went our own way, and developed a complete coverage of our area by sites starting with Bolton Metropolitan Borough boundary, including urban areas. This was done under a strict methodology:

a) Phase 1 survey sites

b) Local nature reserves, SBIs, SSSIs using Greater Manchester Countryside Unit (now Manchester Ecology Unit) outlines. This is a joint borough initiative to identify sites of interest and classify them

c) Bolton Museum's own identified sites

d) The 'rest' – still being added as and when needed for areas outside the borough) Recently liaised with Lancashire County Planning Department for sites that overlapped – in hindsight should have done this earlier as changing boundaries or using sub-sites is more difficult where records are already entered for an existing site.

N.B: for anyone contemplating drawing site boundaries DO NOT use the middle of roads, railways/rivers as boundaries. ALWAYS make sure they are completely in one or other site. The confusion arising from a dead hedgehog, and which site to put it in is very irritating!

Problems:

Paying for our own success!

a) For example Fox Watch 1992: between 1985 and 1990 we had 46 fox records. Between 1990 and 1995 we had 350+ fox records to contend with.

b) Manual site files (reports, surveys etc) mushroomed – space problems for filing cabinets again!

c) Many more regular contributors – RSPB, South Lancs Bat Group and local Field Naturalists' Societies as well as specialist individuals produce a constant deluge of records e.g. one recorder (who has repetitive strain injury and therefore cannot put any records on the computer himself) goes out every day to the same area covering about 40 sites and records everything he sees – about 2,000 records a month. Other enthusiasts have produced records for areas we otherwise would not cover as part of our own survey work.

d) All information given goes on, including e.g. blue-tits (how else can we assess population fluctuations if the commonest birds are omitted) and at the moment we can keep up but the backlog of old site information, journals and card-indexes is very neglected. The use of work-experience students and volunteers does help.

Benefits:

It is nice to get information out. Maps and species lists for sites were impossible to do before and again demand is increasing, proving that data we hold is of great value to local naturalists. In 1994/5 we dealt with around 600 enquiries relating to the Records Centre. Free access to the data is provided for everyone except commercial users. Commercial users pay for our time in providing data, performing surveys or laboratory data. Some examples of output are:-

a) Site maps and grid refs are given to those who monitor their own their own favourite area making processing the records much quicker.

b) Local college students on environmental management course use us extensively for their project work. We get records, they get a better result.

c) The Planning Department at first did not know we existed but now we do get enquiries for information when they want to destroy a particular site! Communication is getting a lot better and compromises are even possible.

Summary:

Over 170,000 records have been input in three and a half years,

Over 1,400 sites have been made.

Over 12,000 people have given us the information.

THE BOLTON 'WILDLIFE ON YOUR DOORSTEP' GALLERY & WILDLIFE STUDY CENTRE

Patricia Francis, Bolton Museum.

The gallery displays the wide variety of habitat to be found in the Bolton area. Represented habitats are urban, woodland, Pennine moorland and wetland habitats characteristic of the area, that is upland streams and reservoirs. These are portrayed by large dioramas and smaller subsidiary displays which explain linked topics in more detail, for example, waste-disposal and recycling in the urban section and invertebrates to be found in dead wood in the woodland section. Photographic panels also cover some aspects of each habitat. Several features especially help children to use and to enjoy the gallery. A carpeted step running entirely around the gallery allows even very small children to see into the displays. All labels were deliberately kept short, with a low-reading age and are of a large point size. Also, simple interactive areas are included within the

displays. There are real tree trunks where bark rubbings can be made; a large cartoon panel representing the Bolton area incorporating lift-up doors with questions and answers about pollution, and a large floor game which can be used to explain food chains and webs and also helps form a link between all the species represented in the gallery.

The Wildlife Study Centre, adjacent to the new gallery, is an informal classroom in which school furniture, which is attractive but very resilient, has been used to create an environment which is familiar to children. It contains the more highly technical, interactive areas including a sealed unit containing a video-camera with a self-focusing macro-lens which allows instant magnification onto two television screens of all sorts of objects from the natural world. These objects are available in 70 clear, perspex-lidded plastic drawers as well as specimens on open display about the room. A touch-screen computer provides details on local sites and species and is complementary to the habitats displayed in the gallery. Notice-boards and a small display case are available for local societies, voluntary groups and museum staff to display details of field meetings, wildlife surveys and other events.

Both the gallery and the study centre opened on 17 August 1994, winning the North West Museum of the Year award in June 1995 for the category "best, new, innovative display."

WILDLIFE ON YOUR DOORSTEP GALLERY – EDUCATIONAL USE.

Trish Harper, Bolton Museum.

School visits are regarded by the children as time off school, and we try to make the session as different an experience as possible. Teachers must feel that the visit has been worthwhile educationally so we try to tackle each subject in some depth, covering material that would take several lessons in a normal classroom situation.

Lessons are planned to relate closely to the gallery collections, and research in the galleries plays a key part in all lessons. Children are encouraged to be active – to go and look, to ask questions, to find a book, or to try things out for themselves.

The introductory part may be organisational information or, as in the case of 'On the Rocks', a short talk on which to build the session's activities. This is given to the whole class, and then the children are divided into smaller groups so that they can carry out a series of different activities. The activities are planned in a sequence, but the children can start at any point and complete a circuit – which means that no-one is kept waiting, everyone is busy. The concluding activity may simply be a showing of the work completed, or a reporting back session by the children.

While obviously in the natural history galleries and the aquarium we are dealing with National Curriculum Science, we find that we are covering a very important part of the English National Curriculum, that of speaking and listening. Most of the workshops and lessons are geared to Key Stage 2, this age group being the bulk of our visitors.

COPING WITH THE NUMBERS – NATURAL HISTORY DOCUMENTATION AT GUERNSEY MUSEUMS & GALLERIES

Alan Howell, Natural History Officer, Guernsey Museums.

Although the scale of our documentation 'challenge' is somewhat smaller than that of the Natural History Museum,

it does none-the-less present a challenge, given the resources which are available. Any situation is a product of history and a short resume of the museum story in Guernsey will help to clarify this. The Museum's natural history holdings (estimated at 35,000 items) essentially come from two Victorian collections:

1. *The Lukis Collection* – amassed by members of the local Lukis family during the nineteenth century and bequeathed to the States [government] of Guernsey in 1907. The material includes geology and conchology. A contemporary manuscript mineral catalogue lists 901 items and some of the 5000 or so specimens bear numbers relating to this – some others have data labels. The shells are mostly without data but include the first living *Triton* specimens recorded from British waters – a matter of some controversy at the time.

2. *The Guille-Alles Collection* – the contents of the Guille-Alles Museum, founded in 1885 (but incorporating older material) and deposited on long loan to the Guernsey Museum & Galleries service in 1978. The Guille-Alles Museum had strong support from the local natural history society and amassed considerable natural science holdings in most of the traditional areas of collecting. It includes the insect collection of William Luff – estimated at 20,000 specimens in 1910. The only documentation for the collection as a whole consisted of display labels and an inventory made by contracted (non-specialist) labour just before the museum was packed for transfer to Guernsey Museum's main storage premises. The Guille-Alles Museum had been run by a succession of honorary curators, with no permanent full-time staff. Guernsey only appointed a full-time and professionally trained curator in 1972 (despite having been responsible for the Lukis Collection since 1907) and the modern States administered service has developed since that date. The first natural history specialist was appointed in 1986, bringing the curatorial complement to three. With the other behind-the-scenes staff (Director, education officer, three general technicians and two administrative staff) the service supports eight museums at three sites. There is no separate registrar or documentation specialist, although experience has shown, and continues to demonstrate, that this would be desirable.

Given the poor state of documentation relating to the natural history collections in 1986, improvement of this was seen as something of a priority for the newly appointed Natural History Officer. The task was part of the overall need to assess and curate these two Victorian collections. The physical curation of the collections was largely deferred, pending removal to a new storage facility. Although the scheme to provide this facility (as a separate entity) has latterly been shelved in favour of a revised service-wide storage solution, the situation did provide an environment where some concerted effort was possible on the documentation of the collection.

From the outset it was decided to computerise the data, and in effect the natural history collections provided the pilot for the introduction of computers into the service generally. The MDA's MODES software was the chosen route, although the service did not have a history of using the manual MDA system, having used typed, loose-leaf accession sheets, with duplicate series arranged by subject and storage location. The production of these typed sheets had not progressed to include any of the older natural history material, so it was doubly appropriate to commence the computerisation effort in this area. The approach has been to