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BIOLOGICAL RECORDING CELL REPORT

Steve Garland - Bolton Museum, Art Gallery & Aquarium

The Millennium bid has unfortunately failed, as announced to the bid team on the 4th of February. Every BCG member should have received a copy of the latest summary of the LRC section. In the period up to then, most records centres have taken the opportunity to discuss possible consortium structures with other organisations. Rather than establishing new stand-alone LRCs in each county, most seem to be looking at networking existing resources. Now that the Millennium Bid is no more, it is up to organisations such as the BCG and NFBR to try to develop some of the ideas further.

The Internet is still a rather slow and unreliable way of networking information, but the continuing development of better telephone lines (including ISDN links), faster modems and faster computers will result in steady improvements. The political implications of establishing new LRCs or centralising existing resources are significant. The key to the successful development of biological recording nationally is networking at a local and national level. A major benefit of a successful bid would have been the addressing of universal problems relating to such things as Data Quality, Copyright, Accreditation Standards, standards for access to data, charging policies and software compatibility. These are still vitally important issues which will need resolving before any real national or regional networking can take place.

Local Agenda 21 and Biodiversity issues are a strong lever to support LRCs. In the North West of England there are discussions continuing at several levels about how to approach biodiversity. Many Boroughs are developing Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs), but most are realising that a county or regional perspective is necessary for many aspects. Most counties are approaching BAPs at that level, but a North West Biodiversity Steering Group has been formed to take a regional view. This will be especially important for organisms which are poorly known. It may be impossible to assemble meaningful data at a county or borough level. Everyone is quickly realising that LRCs provide the best hope of collating the vast quantities of data needed. BAPs are not a 'one-off' thing, but require monitoring and adapting continuously. LRCs are vital for this development and should capitalise on the opportunities presented. Co-ordination of LRCs and national data sets would help to provide a complete picture of the current knowledge of our fauna and flora.

The BCG meeting in Nottingham was well attended and a number of interesting presentations examined biological recording and its relationship with collections. Graham Walley will present more details in the next Biology Curator. BCG will be working with NFBR to drive forward several museum LRC interests. The meeting agreed a resolution for BCG and NFBR to pursue creation of an Advisory Board to supervise Biological Recording - more on these developments in future issues.

If you are discussing developments in your county, please let me know what is happening; even if it is just a short letter, fax or e-mail. I want to try to develop a clear picture of museum LRCs and developments nationally. In the North West we have set up a NW Recorder User Group, which already seems to be discussing issues wider than just the use of Recorder. Has anyone else done the same thing?

Although there will be no Millennium funding, I think that the excitement that the Bid generated in the field of biological recording must be harnessed to ensure the future development of a national network, by some means.

BRISC

BIOLOGICAL RECORDING IN SCOTLAND CAMPAIGN

FROM David Mellor, Chair of BRISC.

Dear Pals

Following the news of the NBM bid's demise and taking into account our organisation's desires to be treated as (more) equal partners in any future initiatives I am writing to make the following points.

1. Between them, our organisations contain a substantial, if not complete, representation of LRCs. It is essential that we collectively help to catalyse the formation of an organisation that does properly represent LRCs as soon as constitutionally possible. This point has been endorsed by BRISC and, I think, by the membership of the other organisations. The role of the CCBR should be examined as part of this.

2. If the NBN project is to be pursued, then significant changes need to be made to its design and the way it is administered to take into account the weaknesses of the previous bid. These include the poor (as far as I know) degree of consultation with Local Authority structures; the difficulties that the proposed monolithic development process would cause to ineligible existing LRCs; the absence of any direct LRC representation on the consortium; the almost complete lack of discussion about other elements of the bid.

3. The 'Consortium' is obviously a wider organisation with a developmental role and the consortium's bid was obviously much wider than just LRCs. Any continuing consortium-like organisation should continue to have a wider membership and if possible retain a wider remit. However, I think that we should be prepared to *insist* that proper representation is given to LRCs on an equal basis to other partners on any such organisation. The arguments deployed against this, that we do not have any money to put on the table, nor any significant human resources to contribute are insufficient. What we do have is accumulated experience and expertise. We have, indeed we are, the existing system on which any future growth must be founded. The recognition of this fundamental did not seem entirely clear from the NBN documentation.

4. I understand that an LRC advisory sub-group is scheduled to meet on 18th February at which the attendance of A. M. Smout (BRISC) and yourselves is planned. This meeting may be rescheduled in view of the bid's failure, whenever it happens I think the points above should be discussed.

5. The real decisions will be made at the next full consortium meeting whenever that is. Assuming we all agree, then I propose that we attempt to persuade the Consortium immediately to open up that meeting to the rest of us to that and make our case there as well. If we are accepted then all well and good, if rejected, then at least the situation will be clarified.

6. There is a 'window of opportunity' here to salvage the useful aspects of the bid and to try and add to it our own contributions. It means recognising a short if unspecified timescale over the next couple of months and putting our efforts in together as early as possible. BRISC has a small amount of money to help finance any meetings and associated travel. I'm sure the BCG and NFBR are in even better circumstances. We have a worker who could be called on to do any contacting/organising.

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PLANT COLLECTIONS FOR NON-BOTANISTS WORKSHOP PART 2

The following continues the report on the above workshop held at Liverpool Museum on 26th February 1996. This section covers the practical session on non-vascular plants, fungi and economic botany. As already mentioned in the last issue of the Biological Curator these sessions were run on an informal question and answer basis. The write-ups, therefore,

are based on information sheets or retrospective reviews by the demonstrators concerned. If you require further information or clarification I am assured that all the demonstrators named here are more than happy to be contacted.

Mike Palmer

CURATION OF FUNGI

Demonstrated by Dr Brian Spooner, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

Fungi represent a special group which is handled in many ways differently from flowering plants. The Kew system has evolved over many years but is not necessarily the only system. It could be altered and adapted to local requirements.

What are fungi?

They are a huge and extremely diverse group of vast ecological and economic importance world-wide and still very poorly known. It is estimated that perhaps only 5% of fungi are yet described and that as many as 1.6 million species exist.

They were previously curated as Cryptogams, including all groups of non-flowering plants, fungi & lichens, myxomycetes, mosses and liverworts. This is an artificial assemblage of unrelated taxa. Fungi are a Kingdom in their own right and this does not include myxomycetes although myxos are traditionally considered as fungi and are usually maintained in mycological herbaria.

Curation

A curatorial system for such a huge group needs to be user-friendly, i.e. species and specimens to be located easily, and to provide information on taxonomy. It is, therefore, useful if related taxa are housed together: this reflects taxonomic opinion and, in practice, can facilitate identifications.

Until recently, Kew based its curation of the fungal herbarium on Saccardo. He compiled, in 25 volumes 1882 - 1931, a descriptive catalogue of all fungi. These were arranged according to an artificial, though practically useful, system based largely on colour and septation of spores, form of fruitbody etc., and each fungus was numbered. The first 11 volumes provide the main compilation complete with index. Later volumes contained new species, each given a new number, i.e. not following on from the numbers previously applied to that group. A recent index to all volumes has been published. Saccardo was continued by Petrak to 1939, then by International Mycological Institute's (IMI) Index of Fungi, ongoing listing all new taxa, and published twice a year.

Kew maintained a system using Saccardo classification and numbers as in vols. 1 - 11. Species described subsequently were maintained in alphabetical sequence as an addenda. This was eventually unwieldy as the addenda was often large, confusing to visitors, and in no way reflecting modern taxonomy. In recent years the herbarium has been recurated and a numbered classification introduced. This has also allowed expansion of the herbarium.