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A METHOD OF SYSTEMATICALLY ARRANGING A COLLECTION OF
MOUNTED BRITISH BIRDS

The collection of mounted British birds held by the Grosvenor Museum, Chester, has recently been catalogued and systematically arranged. Specimens are stored, for economy, in unit size cardboard boxes in vertical 'runs' on open shelving. The systematic basis for arranging the collection is the 1971 B.O.U. checklist.⁽¹⁾ Unlike its 1952 predecessor⁽²⁾, used by Steel⁽³⁾, this is unnumbered but gains from being an inexpensive authoritative guide to the status of British and Irish birds; in itself a useful addition to the curator's bookshelf. From this a system for locating a specimen's position and importance has been evolved. This facilitates use of the collection by persons who are neither familiar with the taxonomy of British birds nor with the value of individual specimens.

Each species has been allotted a unique code group as outlined below:

Order	:	capital letter e.g. A
Family	:	roman numeral e.g. I
Genus	:	arabic numeral e.g. 1
Species	:	lower case letter e.g. a
Sub-species	:	suffix to above e.g. aa

The sequence of lettering and numbering follows the B.O.U. checklist and is exemplified by:

A	:	Order <u>Gaviiformes</u>
I	:	Family <u>Gaviidae</u>
1	:	Genus <u>Gavia</u>
a	:	Species <u>Gavia Stellata</u> (Red-throated Diver)

- b : Species Gavia arctica (Black-throated Diver)
- c : Species Gavia immer (Great Northern Diver)
- d : Species Gavia adamsii (White-billed Diver)

The species code group may be followed by suffixes which indicate the sex, variety and importance of the specimen:

- ♂ : Male
- ♀ : Female
- A : Albino
- R : very important specimen; for example the only one taken in Cheshire.
- R : important specimen; for example one cited in a work on the local avifauna.
- (S) : specimen without data; suitable, when replacement data specimens of the species are obtained, for use by the Educational Services Officer. Hence it will ultimately be placed in category S.
- S : specimen without data; suitable for use by the Educational Services Officer.

When no suffix concerning the specimen's importance follows the species code group it is one having complete data but is a 'recent' acquisition. Such specimens are used only for display purposes, unlike those in category S which may be handled by the public.

A typical code group might be A.I.1a.♂.R. - an important specimen of a male Gavia Stellata (Red-throated Diver).

Each specimen has an attached swing tag bearing the species code group and all the known data pertaining to it. They are wrapped in unsealed polythene tubing and, when possible, have been mounted on wooden bases. Each box, which has a packet of naphthalene flake inside, is labelled with the species code group, taxonomic and common name, and accession number.

Indexes of collectors, donors, localities, species and individual specimens have been prepared. The latter contains all the known data for each bird. The species index allows a rapid appraisal of the collection's contents to be made.

Computing the numbers of specimens in each of the specimen importance categories (R, S, etc.) into percentages has indicated the importance of the collection. For example some 20% of specimens are in categories R and R.

The system also has the advantage of being easily adapted for use with IRGMA cards; the taxonomic number becoming the storage number.

It is hoped that the system outlined above will commend itself to others who may find it necessary to catalogue and rehouse, on a limited budget, a collection of mounted British birds.

References

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Records Committee, (1971). | <u>The Status of Birds in Britain
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| (2) British Ornithologists' Union,
List Sub-Committee, (1952). | <u>Check-list of the Birds of Great
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| (3) Steel, C. A. B., (1970). | <u>Museums Journal</u> , 70 (1). 10 - 12. |

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