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Biology Curators Group

Title: Cataloguing in the Manchester University Museum Bird Egg Collection

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Cataloguing in the Manchester University Museum

Bird Egg Collection

In view of pending legislation (Wildlife and Countryside Bill) which may require museums to register at least part of their bird egg collection with the DoE, it may interest curators to know that at Manchester we have been running a pilot scheme to catalogue our own egg collection. It was proposed that we start by cataloguing the eggs of schedule I species, just to get some idea of the work involved. We could then record the work statistics which would enable us to estimate the size of the job if we were ever called upon to register all, or part, of our collection.

The work went so well that we decided to go ahead and catalogue all the British Birds; this also went well, so that we decided to do the whole collection. We have no idea how many eggs are involved - it could be as many as 15,000 clutches, say 75,000 eggs. On the other hand, past experience has shown that estimates based on number per drawer and number of drawers usually lead to over-estimates of collection size.

So far (3.4.81) we have filled in data input sheets for 5,900 clutches; 5,640 of these records are now input to the computer, and 2,633 records have been merged to a database which can be used as a catalogue, indexed or searched, even before the whole job is complete.

The work statistics for all 5,900 records are as follows:-

178	man/days	for	coding
25	"	"	" punching onto cards
4	"	"	" input to machine and merging files
50	"	"	" editing
—			
257	"	"	TOTAL
—			

This works out at about 23 records/man/day, or 43 man/days/thousand records. At Manchester we are fortunate in that the Regional Computer Centre punches the cards, so that for us the overall figures are: 25 records/man/day, and 39/man/days/thousand records.

It must be emphasised that these statistics refer to all stages of the work, and that the result is a usable catalogue with all the obvious errors eliminated. The process of editing is a continuing one, as one usually finds errors, or improvements to be made, as one uses the catalogue.

In terms of the volume of characters involved, we have calculated that the average record contains 181 characters spread over about 9 lines.

The 4,650 records which have so far been input occupy two magnetic tapes.

We hope that these figures may help other curators in estimating the amount of work required to catalogue their own collections. We are lucky in Manchester in that we have an M. S. C. team of cataloguers (whom we gratefully acknowledge) available to carry out the work. Depending on how many eggs we have, it would seem that a four man team could catalogue all our egg collection in between 20 and 30 weeks (assuming 10,000 and 15,000 clutches respectively).

Dr. M. V. Hounsome

C. W. A. Pettitt

Manchester University Museum.

History in the Service of Systematics 13-16 April 1981

A joint conference organised by the Systematics Association and the Society for the Bibliography of Natural History at the British Museum (Natural History), South Kensington. This conference attracted 103 delegates from eight countries. Twenty one lectures were presented covering a variety of topics ranging from the fate of specific collections and expedition material to the evolution of the Zoological Code of Nomenclature. Examples quoted included algae, lichens and *Banksia* for the botanists and deep sea faunas, insects, molluscs, birds and even a rhinoceros for those whose interests lay with animals. The geologists in the audience had to be content with the remarkable fate of a Shropshire geological collection.

Having catered for the biologists, the needs of the bibliographers were not ignored by the organisers. The hidden resources of part publication and printed wrappers were explored. Those of us who are fascinated by biographical information learnt a great deal more about such characters as Sir Hans Sloane, Joseph Banks, Robert Brown and William Burchall.

The social needs of the delegates were well provided for with a reception at the Linnean Society on the first evening and a splendid buffet at the private view of Nature Stored Nature Studied at the museum. Some delegates took advantage of the afternoon excursions to Charles Darwin's residence at Down House and the Guildhall and Clock Museum in London.

Viewed overall the conference was well organised and provided an enjoyable and informative forum which maintained the standard set by the joint SBNH and BCG Conference of two years ago.

J. R. A. Gray
May 1981