



<http://www.natsca.org>

Biology Curators Group Newsletter

Title: Report of the Meeting of the ICOM International Committee of Natural History Museums Held in Austria from 13th to 19th May 1979

Author(s): Stansfield, G.

Source: Stansfield, G. (1979). Report of the Meeting of the ICOM International Committee of Natural History Museums Held in Austria from 13th to 19th May 1979. *Biology Curators Group Newsletter*, Vol 2 No 3, 100 - 102.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/1694>

NatSCA supports open access publication as part of its mission is to promote and support natural science collections. NatSCA uses the Creative Commons Attribution License (CCAL) <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/> for all works we publish. Under CCAL authors retain ownership of the copyright for their article, but authors allow anyone to download, reuse, reprint, modify, distribute, and/or copy articles in NatSCA publications, so long as the original authors and source are cited.

REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE ICOM INTERNATIONAL
COMMITTEE OF NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS HELD IN AUSTRIA
FROM 13th to 19th MAY 1979.

This was the second meeting of the International Committee of Natural History Museums to be held outside the general ICOM triennial conferences, the first having taken place in Canada in 1976.

The conference was attended by some 70 delegates representing the natural history museums of 20 countries and including 30 delegates from Austrian museums.

The formal sessions were held in the Museum of Natural History in Vienna from 14th to 16th May, followed by an excursion to visit museums in Graz, Salzburg and at the Kremsmunster monastery.

There were three main themes to the conference.

Dr. David Munro, Director-General of IUCN was the opening speaker for the first session on Natural History Museums and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Dr. Munro outlined the need for a public awareness programme to draw attention to the destruction of wildlife and wildlife habitats. This was followed by a paper on the Role of the Museum in Environmental Education by John Whiting of the National Museum of Natural History in Ottawa. A lively discussion took place and this in turn led to the adoption of a resolution at the business meeting later in the week (see attached paper).

In the second session on Ethics and the Collecting of Natural History Material, Dr. Mahan of the Cleveland Museum, Ohio, outlined the guidelines incorporated in the Museum Ethics paper of the American Association of Museums. Dr. Klemmer of Frankfurt and Dr. Engstrom of Sweden described the situations in Germany and Sweden respectively. This subject is of growing concern to museums in the light of the possible effects of collecting on rare and threatened species and the need to observe the new conservation laws of individual countries and the Convention on International Trade in endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

During the discussion it became clear that there was a need for more information from different countries and a resolution to this effect was adopted at the business meeting.

The third session was devoted to the International Year of the Child. Dr. Padget described the new Children's Hall at the Natural History Museum in Vienna and delegates were able to visit the hall and see it in use. Dr. Nair from New Delhi also presented a paper on Natural

History Programmes for Children.

In addition to the three main themes the conference also provided the opportunity for papers to be presented on miscellaneous subjects. During this session the writer gave a paper on the Training of Natural History Curators. The paper described the teaching of the natural history option of the Museum Studies Course at the University of Leicester. It was received with interest and generated a useful discussion with several enquiries about the possibility of overseas students attending the course. It appears however that the Leicester Course presents one of the few opportunities for specialised training in this field. The writer was also able to speak briefly in an informal session about the three specialist groups in Britain, the Biology Curators Group, the Geology Curators Group and the Group for Educational Services in Museums. Samples of the literature of the three groups were displayed.

As is usual the case with such conferences, the informal and social sessions also resulted in many useful discussions and exchanges of information. There is no doubt that these meetings will result in the continued exchange of information and the establishment of new links between museums and curators.

Draft of the main resolutions passed by the ICOM International Committee of Natural History Museums in Vienna in May 1979

Resolution 8

- a) Recognising the vital and urgent importance of promoting broader public understanding of ecology, including human ecology and the conservation of natural resources.
- b) Convinced that natural history museums can contribute effectively to promote this understanding.
- c) Noting that while appropriately designed exhibition and extension programmes are needed in all parts of the world, the most serious problems of conservation and renewable resources are in the developing countries.
- d) Aware of the capability of IUCN through its network of commissions and members to identify and define critical conservation issues throughout the world.
- e) Noting also that the committee encourages and promotes the philosophy of museums working together to solve global problems.
- f) Aware of the necessity that local museums of a country are the

best and most appropriate advisors on the interpretation requirements of the country.

Be it resolved that the International Committee of Natural History Museums of ICOM establish with IUCN a small working group to define methods and undertake pilot projects for co-operative museum based activities aimed at enhancing public understanding of ecology and conservation and to report its findings through the committee's newsletter and bring for discussion at the next meeting of the committee in Mexico City in 1980.

Resolution 9

- a) Desiring to develop a world wide code of ethics for Natural History Museums,
- b) Recognising that few facts are available regarding present codes of ethics (if any), that already exist in the world's natural history museums.

Be it resolved that in so far as is possible, the Natural History Museums Committee of ICOM inquire about the present status of ethics codes for the world's natural history museums and further that the committee develop a world wide code of ethics for all natural history museums.

Resolution 10

- a) In as much as one of the handicaps in the development of Natural History Museums in the developing nations of the Asian and South East Asian Region is the shortage of technically trained personnel,

Be it resolved that the Natural History Committee of ICOM recommend to ICOM to recommend to UNESCO to consider the possibility of organising a Regional Training Centre for Natural History Museum personnel in Asia.

G. Stansfield,
May 1979

ONE-MAN BAND

At the March AGM, I wondered how long it would be before the Buckinghamshire County Museum was asked to contribute to the