



<http://www.natsca.org>

Biology Curators Group Newsletter

Title: The Booth Bird Labels: a case for relabelling and cataloguing using a mini-computer

Author(s): Legg, G.

Source: Legg, G. (1984). The Booth Bird Labels: a case for relabelling and cataloguing using a mini-computer. *Biology Curators Group Newsletter*, Vol 3 No 10, 571 - 575.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/1297>

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.

The Booth Bird Labels

a case for relabelling and cataloguing using a mini-computer

Gerald Legg, Keeper of Biology,
The Booth Museum of Natural History, Brighton.

In 1874 E. T. Booth opened his museum on the Downs in Brighton. This contained his life's work: a display of most of the British birds in cases fitted up to represent as far as possible their natural condition with their natural surroundings. On his death in 1890 the museum and collection were bequeathed to the town of Brighton. Since then other specimens have been added; so now there is a total of 476 cases of which 306 are original Booth cases.

Each case possesses a black-painted label bearing gold lettering, giving the common name of the bird(s) present, together with a small case number label. Several of these old labels have names which are either no longer valid or they are out-of-date. Catalogues of the cases were published in several editions, and these contain extensive information about each of the cases and the birds they contain. Copies of the catalogue are available for the public to use should they wish to know more about particular cases and birds.

This state of affairs was considered unsatisfactory and so in 1978 it was decided to provide further detailed information about each bird on labels in close proximity to the relevant case, a daunting task with 476 cases to deal with.

The production of the labels can be broken down into a series of stages:

- 1) design of the labels and the information they were to contain, how they were to be mounted and protected;
- 2) making a plan of the distribution of the cases throughout the museum;
- 3) writing out in case order, that is in the order in which the cases appear on display which is not necessarily the same as their number order, details of each specimen;
- 4) checking and editing the draft labels;
- 5) designing the label holders and contracting out their production;
- 6) entering the corrected draft labels on to computer discs;
- 7) checking the entered labels for errors;
- 8) printing the labels;
- 9) mounting the labels.

The draft labels were largely prepared by a supervised sixth-form student who was employed for a short time. Problems occurred with the firm that was producing the label-holders which resulted in considerable delay in the programme for relabelling. Details of the holders are given in Fig. 1.

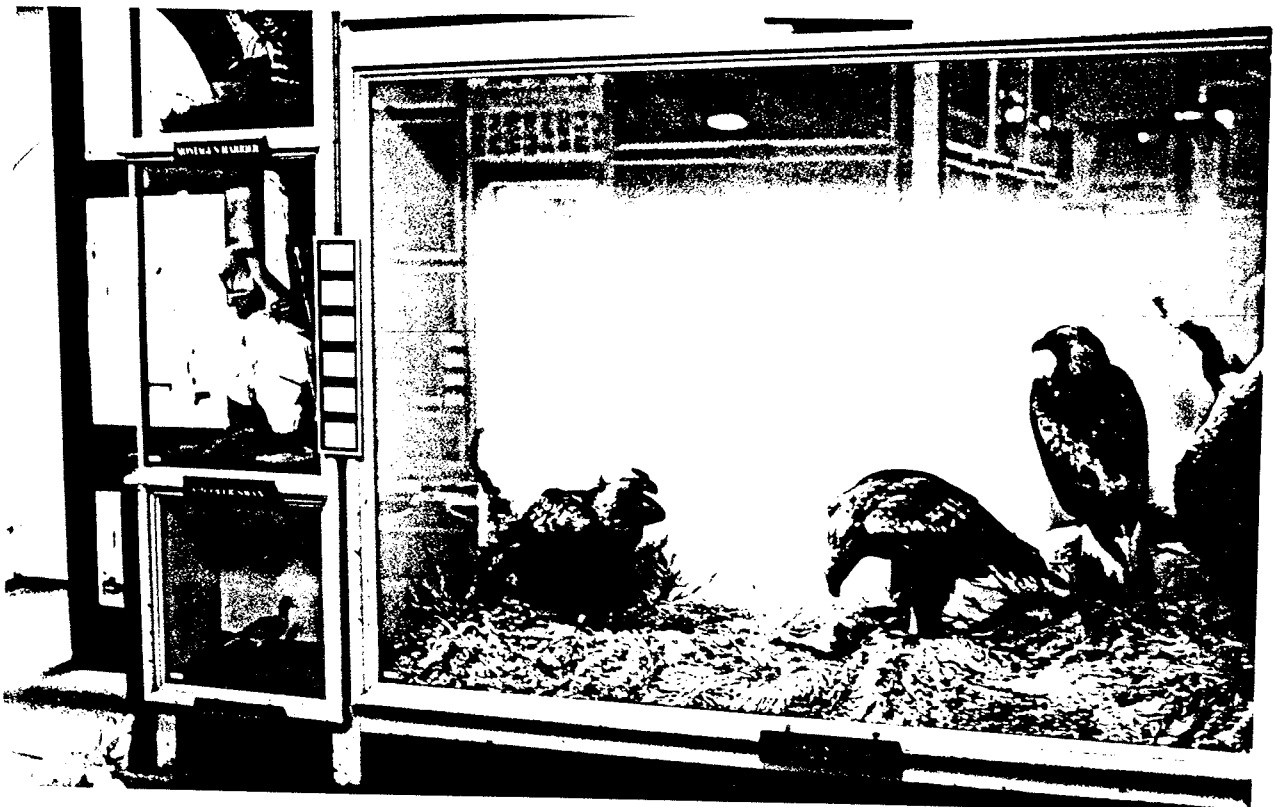
The large number of labels needed meant that they had to be both unobtrusive and also easy to read. Consequently it was initially decided to have them typed. Various type styles and layouts were tried and at one point it was intended to "Letraset" the English and Latin names using different type faces. This idea was dropped because it would have involved a great deal of extra work and expense.

Then in 1983 things changed. The museum started a Manpower Services Community Programme Scheme which was aimed at the production of catalogues of and indexes to the collections to be made available to the general public. To help with the work of the scheme an IBM personal mini-computer was purchased. By coincidence the relabelling of the Booth cases was ideally suited to the scheme. The availability of the IBM completely changed the ideas concerning production of the labels. It opened up other very beneficial opportunities: the production of indexes and catalogues which could be made available or even sold to the general public. Consequently, instead of typing the draft labels on an ordinary machine the data were entered into the IBM and stored on discs. Before this could be done suitable programmes had to be written.

The labels were initially stored in case order number so that they could be prepared more easily prior to putting them in their respective label holders. They were mounted in strips of 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 or 9, depending on their position and the number of cases being referred to (Plate 1). Once formatted the data could be printed in a standardised way, an example is given below. Changes in format, alterations in text and corrections can all be easily made by calling up the relevant record on the computer and altering as appropriate and then reprinting the label(s) in question.

The labels were printed on an EPSON MX 100 III printer that interfaces with the IBM. To enhance the contrast of the final labels they were photocopied on a Xerox 2830 copier set on "darker copy". They were then trimmed to size to fit the holders, coated with "Library Film" (plastic self-adhesive film) to protect against dirt and handling, and then mounted individually in the "windows" of the label holders.

Once all the labels and their text were on file the data could be manipulated to produce a catalogue and series of different indexes (Linnean name, common English name, French and German names, etc.), see below.



Examples of Labels

323 BARN OWL variety Tyto alba guttata
 (N. & E. European dark breasted subspecies)
 Chouette Effraie Schleiereule

Status Irregular vagrant

Distribution N. and E. Europe

Habitat Farmland, open country

Nest Sites In barns, churches, hollow trees, but this subspecies not in Britain

Collected Shoreham, Sussex, September 1901, October 1893. Rottingdean Sussex, November 1900. (for British subspecies see case 54)

370 GREAT SNIPE Gallinago media
 Becassine Double Doppelschnepfe

Status Annual vagrant

Distribution Europe

Habitat Stubble fields, heaths

Nest Sites Marshy country, but not in Britain

Collected Nr. Lewes, Sussex, October 1867. Coney Hill, Patcham, Sussex, September 1909. nr. Oxford, October 1867. Thorpe, Suffolk, August 1875: adult female

Examples of Indexes

REC#	CASE	ENGLISH NAME ALT ENG NAME	LINNAEAN NAME NOM FRANCAIS	DEUTSCHE NAMEN
37	483	WILD CANARY	Serinus canaria	
38	476A	DUSKY THRUSH	Turdus naumanni eunomus Grive à Ailes Rousses	Rostflugeldrossel
39	360	WOODCHAT SHRIKE (Corsican Woodchat)	Lanius senator badius Pie-Grièche à Tête Rousse	Rotkopfwürger
40	343A	CRESTED LARK	Balerida cristata Cochevis kuppe	Haubenlerche
41	440A	BLACK-HEADED WASTAIL (subspecies of Yellow Wagtail)	Motacilla flava faldlegg	

ENGLISH NAME	ALT ENG NAME	CASE
ALPINE SWIFT		361A
AMERICAN BITTERN		371
AMERICAN WIGEON		052
ARCTIC SKUA		221
ARCTIC SKUA		224
ARCTIC TERN		206
ARCTIC SKUA		227
ARCTIC TERN		203
AVOSET		372
PAILLON'S CRAKE		390
BAR-TAILED GODWIT		144
BAR-TAILED GODWIT		145
BAR-TAILED GODWIT		151
BARN OWL	(N. & E. European dark breasted subspecies)	323
BARN OWL (white-breasted subspecies)		054
BARNACLE GOOSE		401
BEAN GOOSE		081
BEARDED TIT (BEARDED TITMOUSE)		032
BEARDED TIT (BEARDED TITMOUSE)		040
BEARDED TIT (BEARDED TITMOUSE)		037
BEE-EATER		364
BENICK'S SWAN		232
BITTERN		069
BLACK BRENT GOOSE	(North Pacific form of Brent Goose)	396A
BLACK GROUSE		069

LINNAEAN NAME

PAGE 2

LINNAEAN NAME	ENGLISH NAME	CASE
Athene noctua	LITTLE-OWL	352
Athene noctua	LITTLE-OWL	352X
Aythya ferina	POUGHARD	105
Aythya fuligula	TUFTED DUCK	195
Aythya marila	SCAUP	111
Aythya nyroca	FERRUGINOUS DUCK	434
Bartramia longicauda	UPLAND SANDPIPER	314
Bonbycilla garrulus	WAXWING	355
Botaurus lentiginosus	AMERICAN BITTERN	371
Botaurus stellaris	BITTERN	069

NOM FRANCAIS	CASE	DEUTSCHE NAMEN	CASE
Accenteur Mouchet	028	Alpenkrane	096
Agrobate Roux	452	Alpenschneehuhn	074
Aigle Royal	305	Alpenschneehuhn	077
Aigle Royal	306	Alpenschneehuhn	080
Aigle Royal	001	Alpensegler	361A
Alouette Calandre	346A	Alpenstrandlauer	300
Alouette calandrielle	342A	Alpenstrandlauer	393
Alouette des Champs	166	Alpenstrandlauer	301
Alouette des Champs	169	Amerikanische Rohrdommel	371
Alouette Leucoptere	343	Asse!	175

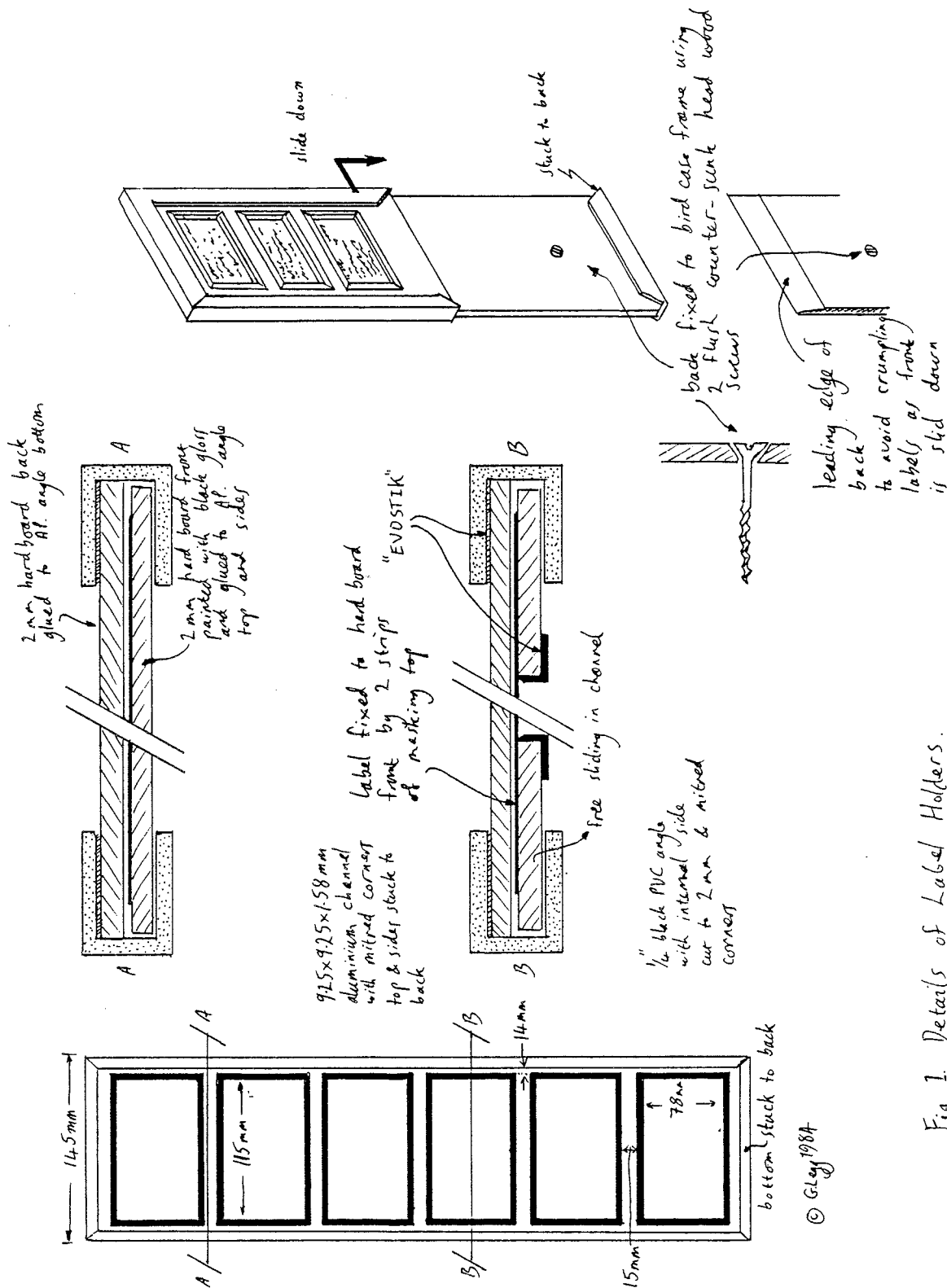


Fig 1. Details of Label Holders.