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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Author(s): MDA

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For information regarding COLLECTION FORUM please contact the Editor: Dan Faber, National Museum of Natural Sciences, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K2A 3Y6. For details regarding this year's Annual Meeting contact Steve Williams at the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15206 or phone (412) 665-2611. For local contact write: Ingrid Birker, Dept of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, 105 Princess Road East, Leicester LE1 7LG, England.

## Legal Niceties

Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981:  
The Quinquennial Review  
(Information from DOE News Release no 493)

The outcome of the quinquennial review (which is required by the provision of the 1981 Act) was made public in September 1987. The number of native species protected from being taken from the wild, injured, killed or destroyed is increased by 48 animal species and 31 plant species, bringing the total number of species now protected to 177. The additions are to schedules 5 and 8 of the Act and include:

- \* full protection for wild cat, dormouse and pine marten
- \* full protection for all cetacea using British waters
- \* extension of protection afforded to viviparous lizard, slow-worm and grass-snakes to make it an offence to kill or injure them
- \* full protection for a number of plants which are known from one site only, such as sand crocus and pygmy weed.

The two species removed from the protected list are the chequered skipper butterfly and the carthusian snail.

The full list of additions is given below (the odd notation of common names comes straight from the press release). More information on the plants can be found in BSBI News no 47 (December 1987) p19.

### Schedule 5 (animals)

Anemone, Ivell's Sea  
Anemone, Startlet Sea  
Apus  
Beetle, Violet Click  
Cat, Wild  
Cicada, New Forest  
Dolphin (all species)  
Dormouse  
Leech, Medicinal  
Marten, Pine  
Mat, Trembling Sea  
Moth, Viper's Bugloss  
Porpoise, (all species)  
Sandworm, Lagoon  
Shrimp, Fairy  
Shrimp, Lagoon Sand  
Turtles, Marine (all species)  
Vendace

Walrus  
Whale (all species)  
Whitefish

### Schedule 8 (Plants)

Adder's-tongue, Least  
Cabbage, Lundy  
Colt's-foot, Purple  
Cottongrass, Slender  
Crocus, Sand  
Cudweed, Red-tipped  
Fleabane, Alpine  
Fleabane, Small  
Gentian, Fringed  
Germander, Cut-leaved  
Goosefoot, Stinking  
Grass-poly  
Hawk's-beard, Stinking  
Helleborine, Youngs  
Horsetail, Branched  
Hound's-tongue, Green  
Marshwort, Creeping  
Milk-parsley, Cambridge  
Naiad, Holly-leaved  
Pennyroyal  
Pigmyweed  
Ragwort, Fen  
Rampling-fumitory, Martin's  
Restharrow, Small  
Rock-cress, Alpine  
Rock-cress, Bristol  
Speedwell, Fingered  
Star-of-Bethlehem, Early  
Stonewort  
Strapwort  
Viper's-grass

### Skeletons in the cupboard

There must be many botanical collections in museums up and down the country whose curators are unwittingly breaking the law. How can this be so?

Try out the following check list. If the answer to any of the questions is "yes", then you should read to the end of the article!

- 1 Have you Coca specimens in your herbarium? If so, is it possible that any of them are *Erythroxylon coca*?
- 2 Now examine your collection of medicines. Do you have any morphine tablets?
- 3 Many museums have collections of economic botany samples. Do yours contain any poppy heads, perhaps with grooves scored in them?
- 4 There may well be a bottle of Dr Bowe's Liniment in a medicine chest. Did you know that it contains morphine?

The point of all these questions is simply that many museums have collections which contain Class A and Class B drugs (otherwise known as Schedule 1 and Schedule 2 drugs). Under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, possession of any of these drugs is an offence (even if there is no criminal intent).

However, do not panic! A simple remedy is available, in that the Home Office operates a licensing system which allows bona fide custody of such substances to be registered. So instead of telling your Director that he could be facing a spell in chokie, you could simply point out that it only needs a letter to the Drugs Branch of the Home Office to start to put matters straight.

So far as the curator is concerned, the main impact of the licence requirements is on storage arrangements. Naturally, the authorities insist on a high standard of security. For this reason, the author of this note prefers to remain anonymous, but in order to assist the indexing of the Newsletter I will adopt the initials "MDA" (for Misuse of Drugs Act, you understand?).

The other important requirement is that a register is kept of all drugs in the inventory, and all movements in and out of storage. In my museum I found that several of the more antiquated containers refused to be opened, so for purposes of stock control a gross weight (including the container) was recorded. An accurate weight such as one obtains using modern electronic scales is almost impossible to falsify. A Museum accessions record is not considered adequate for the purposes of registration; a book must be kept with the collection.

Another problem I encountered while establishing our register was that some of the names on the samples were pretty archaic. For instance, one of the samples was labelled "Narceine" which I think is a synonym of Morphine. I have already mentioned Dr Bowe's Liniment; one must read the small print on the labels. To solve this problem, I used the BRITISH PHARMACEUTICAL CODEX (1973 edition) in conjunction with a Victorian book of *Materia Medica*: Pereira's "THE ELEMENTS OF MATERIA MEDICA AND THERAPEUTICS" (1849). A surprising aspect of the exercise to compile the register was that controlled drugs were found in so many different collections, including a set of samples from a local pharmaceutical organisation, a ship's doctor's portable medicine chest, a collection of "economic botany" samples, and even in the herbarium. Dried parts of plants are embraced by the Act; it does not apply only to extracted substances.

Some biology curators will doubtless say "not my problems"; but if not, it is worth asking one's colleagues whether they have any skeletons in their cupboard. If so, the address to write to for further information is: Drugs Branch, The Home Office, 90 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1.

MDA

# Diary

15th to 16th April 1988

BCG AGM meeting at Bolton Town Hall  
Further details in this Newsletter

22nd April 1988

GCG and British Geological Survey  
joint meeting at Keyworth, Notts.  
BGS - a service to the nation  
Contact: Brian Taylor, BGS, Keyworth,  
Notts NG12 5GG.

11th to 13th May 1988

Association of Systematics Collections  
(ASC)  
1988 Annual Meeting at the Field Museum  
of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois  
Programme includes symposia and workshops  
Contact: Annual Meeting Coordinator,  
ASC, 730 11th St NW, Second Floor,  
Washington DC 2001, USA

30th May to 3rd June 1988

Society for the Preservation of Natural  
History Collections  
1988 Annual Meeting at the Carnegie  
Museum of Natural History, Pittsburgh,  
Pennsylvania

24th and 25th June 1988

GCG meeting at Whitby Museum, North  
Yorkshire  
Lifeline for a small museum  
Contact: Shawn Lofthouse, c/o Whitby  
Museum, Pannett Park, Whitby, N.  
Yorkshire, YO21 1RE

12th to 15th July 1988

Systematics Association  
European Floristic Studies, joint meeting  
with Linnean Society and the Flora  
Europaea Organisation, at Reading  
University.  
Contact: Dr J R Akeroyd, Botany  
Department, University of Reading, PO  
Box 221, Whiteknights, Reading RG6 2AS

September 1988 (date to be decided)

BCG Autumn meeting at Exeter Museum  
Details to be published in the next  
Newsletter.

21st to 24th September 1988

Museums Documentation Association (MDA)  
in association with the Getty Art History  
Information Program  
International Conference on Terminology  
for Museums at Cambridge.  
'As a growing number of museums build-up  
computer databases and improved records,  
effective terminology controls is a  
crucial issue .... This conference will  
provide a substantial review of recent  
developments of systems within individual  
institutions.' Special sessions on  
natural history and geology.  
Contact: MDA, Building 0, 347 Cherry  
Hinton Road, Cambridge CB1 4DH.