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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

Title: Book Review: "A Provisional Atlas of the Sepsidae (Diptera) of the British Isles" by A C Pont

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difficult to use, with a set of rather bland recommendations tacked on at the end. The US approach is to computerise the data and produce a series of reports and recommendations on various aspects of the survey results: brief, up to date, backed with relevant statistics, and aimed at a particular problem or funding agency. Rapier compared with bludgeon!

The other important difference of course is that the survey results in the US were discussed at a three-day seminar, whereas in the UK the report 'BIOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS UK' seems to have entered a kind of limbo. We now desperately need the conference which brings together the users, curators, administrators and funding authorities to discuss the problems which 'BIOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS UK' has, in its ponderous way, highlighted.

John Mathias
Editor, BCG

In the Press

The MUSEUMS JOURNAL (vol 88 no 4, March 1989) covering the Leicester University conference of December 1988 'A Future for Museums' has a summary of the paper given by Neil Chalmers, new director of the BM(NH). Called 'Defining our Mission', it discusses what Dr Chalmers sees as the future course for the museum in fairly general terms, including safeguarding and developing the collections, new areas of research and preservation (with an emphasis on genetic material), display and education.

An interesting item is Dr Chalmer's commitment to producing travelling exhibitions and distance learning materials based on the collections - a significant new development. One criticism might be that the curatorial activities and responsibilities of the BM(NH) have not been given a higher profile, and research into the preservation and conservation of specimens is not mentioned at all - which is one field in which the museum was once a traditional and undoubted leader.

In the same issue is a paper by R E Child: 'Fumigation in Museums - a Possible Alternative' which summarises the fumigation methods presently available and describes Rentokil's 'fumigation bubble' development. This has been noted in previous BCG Newsletters.

The British Dragonfly Society has now got its act together very nicely. It has been in existence for six years and in that time its publications have evolved from the 'interesting but scruffy' newsletter approach to what is now a very professional looking

JOURNAL and a series of associated booklets and leaflets. Two which caught my eye in the December 1988 mailing were:

- 1 CODE OF PRACTICE for collecting dragonflies in the UK, which contains a series of guidelines for collecting common species, rare, vulnerable species and isolated populations of common species;
- 2 POND CONSTRUCTION FOR DRAGONFLIES which is a very useful practical guide.

Enquiries for these should be addressed to the Editor, S J Brooks, 25 Salisbury Avenue, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 4UB.

Book Reviews

A PROVISIONAL ATLAS OF THE SEPSIDAE (DIPTERA) OF THE BRITISH ISLES
by A C Pont

Published by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, 1986. Price £3.00
ISBN 1-870393-00-7

This atlas provides distribution maps for the 27 known British species of Sepsidae. Accompanying each map is a paragraph of text giving information on frequency of occurrence, flight period, habitat preference and world distribution. There is also an introductory section to the atlas, giving interesting information on Sepsids, their distribution, and the sources of records used for plotting the maps. A table provides information on the number of records received per species, and on the number of 10km squares in which each species has been recorded.

Mr Pont has taken considerable care to avoid misidentifications being accepted, and the bulk of the records are from museum collections, or from material identified after the publication of the Royal Entomological Society's Handbook on Sepsidae, published in 1979. Thus historical published records have not been included.

One thing which I did find frustrating was that the maps only show the presence or absence of records - there is no means of telling how old a record is unless it is specifically mentioned in the text.

That criticism aside, I found it a most interesting publication containing much information. I am also far keener on the A5 format than the old, spiral bound A4 atlases.

Adam Wright
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