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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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## Animal Welfare and Museums

Several museums have, in recent years, come under scrutiny from animal rights groups over their use of animals and the display of live animals in particular. BCG has been concerned over this development and, as well as organising the Blackburn seminar on the Educational Role of Live Exhibits, it has produced a leaflet 'Animal Welfare and Museums' to try to alleviate, or at least explain, this highly emotive issue.

Sample copies are enclosed with this Newsletter; more are available from Charles Pettitt at the Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL.



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## Museums Association

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### Support from unlikely places

It has often been suggested that the Museums Association has been less supportive of the natural sciences in museums than it might have been. In particular, the *Museums Journal* has been criticised for the relative lack of natural science content. This summer has seen the balance redressed to some extent.

The August issue of the *Museums Journal* was a 'green issue', and although this had been planned for some time, it was fortified by a number of subjects that grew out of the BCG AGM, in Liverpool, earlier this year. The *Journal* was part of a process that began with Beetle Down, and has been high on the BCG agenda ever since - self publicity; not on the behalf of individuals, nor even on behalf of BCG, but on behalf of all natural history museums and curators.

To most of us, the argument that 'we have the right policies, but are not presenting them effectively' is tediously familiar, slipping from the mouths of

government spokespersons as election-time approaches. The fact of the matter is that in our case it is true. We are doing quite a lot right, but we do not shout about it enough.

We know that our displays and exhibitions are the most popular in museums, yet we still compete for resources with the arts on grossly inferior terms. We know that, nationwide, our Environmental Records Centres affect the lives of millions through their input into the planning process, yet well-resourced centres are still notable exceptions to a depressing rule. We know that the 1990s are the green decade, yet we are still labelled by some as storehouses of corpses.

Improving the public perception of 'the natural history museum' (including the Natural History Museum) is, of course vital - presumably most of us spend many of our waking hours trying to do just that. The real challenge however, is to convince our administrators of our worth; the councillors heading up Arts strategies *sic*, the university chancellors seeking yet further cuts, the trustees looking for