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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Sciences 2: Communicating Science, 14 March - 18 March 1994

A look at how museums communicate science. This wide ranging course will examine techniques used in science and discovery centres, in exhibition, site interpretation, publication and education. Again the focus will be on developing techniques and knowledge which can be applied directly in the museum. It is for scientists of all disciplines.

Cost per course is £220. B&B accommodation is available at £13-£20 per night. I am afraid that the Department is no longer able to provide University accommodation for its part-time students, however, private accommodation lists will be sent on request. Contact: Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, 105 Princes Road East, Leicester, LE1 7LG. Tel 0533 523963, Fax 0533 523960.

Simon Knell

PUBLICATIONS

Preserving Natural Science Collections: Chronicle of our Environmental Heritage is by W. Donald Duckworth, Hugh Genoways and Carolyn Rose. This American publication, now available through the National Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Property, synthesises information gathered from meetings, calls for public education about the importance and uses of natural science collections, and recommends the creation of a natural science conservation training programme. (Does that sound vaguely familiar?). Available from NIC, 3299 Street, NW, Suite 403, Washington, D.C. 20007 price \$16.50 incl p&p.

Index Kewensis. This important botanical publication is now available on compact disc at £995. The disc comprises the original publication plus all nineteen supplements published since 1893. Contact Janet Caldwell, Customer Services Manager, Electronic Publishing, Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP (tel 0865 267979).

Beetles of Somerset by Andrew Duff contains details in 270 pages of 2298 local species giving a status summary, notes on dispersion, habitat, periodicity and national status with lists of all accepted records. Available from Somerset Archeological and Natural History Society, Taunton Castle, Taunton, TA1 4AD at £12.25 incl UK p&p.

Passages from The Natural History of Selbourne, Naturalist's Journal and other writings by Gilbert White is a selection of classics illustrated by the addition of wood engravings by Thomas Bewick. Available direct from Silent Books, Boxworth End, Swavesey, Cambridge, CB4 5RA for £11.20 incl p&p.

MEETING REPORTS

The care of spirit Preserved collections Seminar

The BCG seminar was a resounding success in spite of the IRA and their Reading bomb which resulted in one speaker and some delegates not making it past Cardiff and a second speaker being ill. Not many seminars these days have a waiting list for participants - thanks to Kathie Way and her superb organisation.

It was a singularly worthwhile day for all concerned - speakers and delegates alike - a full appraisal will appear in a future newsletter. It was good to see so many younger workers of the profession participating and a salutary lesson for some older members on how much we take for granted, how much we still don't know and how much we can still learn from each other. This was definitely a meeting in the Reg Harris tradition (see BCG Special Publication no 3 and the last Journal of Biological Curation). We obviously need a follow up meeting, with perhaps more time for a general discussion and maybe even a series of hands on workshops.

*Rosina Down,
University College, London*

SPNHC Conference, Victoria, June 1993: Flood Disaster at the Texas A & M University

The Conference was opened with a talk by Dr Geoff Scudder of the University of British Columbia. He talked about the importance of research collections in museums to those scientists who are endeavouring to uncover the mysteries of the natural world. He quoted many historical examples of discovery through museum collection research, adding that much time and expense would have been saved if some famous naturalists had started their groundwork in a museum collection rather than in the field. Using this maxim and the importance of precise field data, he pointed out the mistakes made by Darwin with the Galapagos finches and the muddling of their original but vague collection data. This has been subsequently re-worked by Sulloway (1982). He also quoted Batesian mimicry, by the palatable Viceroy butterfly, of the unpalatable Monarch but then, ironically, wiped out by pesticides; the interbreeding of butterflies caused by glaciation of ecosystems and the parallel effects caused by global warming if the boreal regions were to warm up by 8°C. The mention of DNA caused much rustling of paper as he quoted the recent research into specification of Miocene termites in amber - the oldest DNA yet extracted (15-30M years) and the subsequent elaboration of this and DNA cloning by the film *Jurassic Park*. He finished by advising curators and conservators against the required pulverising of