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may say more about me than the book but I'll let you discover that for yourselves. As a baseline recommendation, for anyone starting up in natural history this is an invaluable publication and should be read from cover to cover. For us old lags there is enough to jog our memories and remind us to change our bad habits.

Steve Woolfall, Grosvenor Museum,  
Chester

## PUBLICATIONS

**Natural Science Collections in Scotland** - this is the catalogue produced by the Scottish Natural Sciences Collections Research Unit in 1987. Now slightly out of date but still very useful. Anyone who balked at the original price of £25 can now pick up a remaindered copy for the unbelievable bargain price of £5 (incl postage), from the Publications Section, National Museums of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh.

**Checklist of the Cerambycidae and Disteniidae (Coleoptera) of the Western Hemisphere** - available from Wolfsgarden Books, P.O.Box 10716, Burbank, California 91510-0716, USA. Price \$84.60 incl. international postage.

**World Checklist of Seed Plants** - vol 1 parts I and II now available for 260 Swiss Francs from MIM Editions, Lakkorslei 114, 2100 Antwerp, Belgium.

## EXHIBITIONS

**Natural Curiosity** is a new and very interesting small exhibition in the entrance of the Royal Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh. It traces the history of Natural History in Scotland from the seventeenth century using historic specimens from the Scottish national collections.

**Feather, Fur and Fin: a look at taxidermy** is a new display at Chelmsford Museums Service tracing the origin and development of taxidermy using specimens of (mainly) birds, fish and other animals which have been included in the specimen conservation programme initiated eight years ago and which it seems, unfortunately, will be the swansong of the South East Museums Service conservators.

**Julius Brenchley, Gentleman Explorer** is a new exhibition at Maidstone Museum. This tells the story of JB's life and various travels

around the world using the natural and ethnographic objects he collected.

**The Centre for Understanding the Environment** is the latest development at the Horniman Museum and has been described as one of the most advanced ecological projects of the last ten years. Built from sustainable timber CUE is insulated with recycled newspaper, finished with non-toxic organic paint and topped with a living grass and wild flower roof. [This is crying out for a review, volunteer please - Ed]

**Bird Biology: an exhibition about birds** - a soaring Ruppell's vulture, *Gyps rueppellii*, has spotted a dead young antelope lying on the arid sands below. It circles above the carcass rapidly losing height and eventually lands nearby, the first scavenger to arrive at this meagre meal. After tearing through the thin skin, the vulture begins to feed on the soft internal organs while a marabou stork, *Leptoptilus crumeniferus*, watches on, patiently waiting for scraps. You could be watching this scene in Africa, but you are actually looking at this first spectacular exhibit in Bird Biology, a new permanent exhibition about the biology of birds, which opened to the public last October.

Bird Biology focuses on three main aspects on the biology of birds - flight, feeding and reproduction. It makes use of the extensive collection of mounted birds of the Natural History Department, many of which were formerly on display in the gallery next door. But instead of serried ranks of every conceivable bird on Earth, this new exhibition shows how the shape, structure, coloration and size of a bird are adaptations to help birds exploit virtually every food source in every habitat all over the world.

Intermingled with the older mounts are many new specimens, which have been mounted specially in dynamic poses to show particular behaviours. So now, you can see a lammergeier vulture, *Gyaepatus barbatus*, swallowing large lumps of bone like a sword swallower, a female wreathed hornbill, *Aceros undulatus*, which has incarcerated herself in a tree nest hole with a wall of mud, leaving only a small slit through which the male feeds her, and the bizarre courtship of the male houbara bustard, *Chlamydotis undulata*, which resembles a feather duster crossed with a headless chicken.

The introduction shows that birds evolved from small carnivorous dinosaurs and the function of the vital combination of feathers, skeleton and eggs which defines birds. It also shows the biggest living bird, the ostrich, *Struthio camelus*, alongside one of the smallest, the vervain hummingbird, *Mellisuga minima*, which is no bigger than the ostrich's eyeball.

The second section, Flight, shows how birds fly and, in particular, how wing shape affects the way in which they fly, whether it be a sparrowhawk in rapid pursuit of its prey or a pheasant taking off vertically to escape a fox. Many birds in a museum are shown sitting on a perch or on the ground, but Bird Biology shows a multitude of birds in flight. The apparently mysterious way in which birds successfully migrate over thousands of kilometres is also investigated. The highlight of this section is a newly mounted female wandering albatross, *Diomedea exulans*, which can be seen gliding over the ocean with her wings stretched fully to their three metre span - a truly magnificent sight.

The third section, Finding Food, aims to show some diversity of the birds of the world by looking at how they are adapted to feeding. By focusing on different diets (eg seeds, fish, nectar etc), it is possible to see how different bird families have evolved either very similar or very different solutions for feeding on a particular diet.

The fourth section, The Cycle of Life, looks in detail at the many different aspects of reproduction from nest-building to hatching from the egg and rearing of the young. In particular it looks at the wide diversity of nests and nesting materials and how these relate to the shape and coloration of eggs. It also focuses on cuckoos and other birds which parasitise the nests of other species and so avoid the labours of parenthood, and contrast them with many other bird species, in which young from the previous year help to rear their siblings.

The final section, Attracting a Mate, completes the cycle of life by showing the different ways in which birds attract mates using songs, brightly-coloured plumage and often bizarre displays. It shows that birds have two main mating strategies - most are monogamous, but a few are polygamous with either males or