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There will also be a section entitled 'Work in Progress' for people to give short presentations about current projects that are unfinished or talks that do not need a full session. £10 members, £15 non-members. Cost includes tea, coffee and lunch. Transport to Colchester Museum on the 28th will be an extra £5.

Offers of talks, poster presentations etc. and enquiries to Bob Entwistle, Secretary NSCG, Ipswich Museum, High Street, Ipswich, IP1 3QH

23-24 April 1996 Insect Pests in Museums. Natural History Museum, London. A two day course by David Pinniger covering: pests and damage, pest identification, pest environments, pest monitoring and control, pest management amongst other topics. Further details from P.R. Ackery, Dept of Entomology, Natural History Museum, tel 0171 938 9346.

30 Apr 1996. BCG / GCG Meeting on Training including BCG AGM Newcastle. Details mailed separately.

20-24 Aug 1996. Second congress and international symposium on the conservation and preservation of natural history collections. Cambridge. Programme now available. Contact Chris Collins, Sedgwick Museum Cambridge.

Nov 1996. BCG Paris. Yes we're off again! Not to be missed. Details to be circulated.

EXHIBITIONS

Tell me if this hurts is a temporary exhibition on early surgery and medicine at Scunthorpe Museum. Until 19 May.

The Majestic Swan is a new exhibition at Fleetwood Museum produced by the Lancashire County Museum Service with the help of the North West Swan Study Group. Includes the results of extensive ringing activity in the region. Plus the history and customs associated with the Mute Swan, its influence on our culture and the present day problems it faces. From 5 April 1996.

ASC move: The Association of Systematic Collections is now at 1725 K Street NW, Suite 601, Washington DC, 20006-1401. Phone (202) 835 9050, fax (202) 835 7334. Email asc@ascoll.org

DISPOSAL

Collection offered: Eton College is modernising its museum displays and various specimens including

mammals, bird skins, bird mounts, mollusca and trophies are offered to interested museums. Much of the material is offered on 'permanent loan' but preference will be given to curators able to offer exchanges of specimens. A few valuable items are offered for sale or exchange. For further details contact Dr David Smith (Curator), Natural History Museum, Eton College, Windsor, Berks. SL4 6EW. Tel 01753 671288/710730. Fax 01753 671159.

LETTER

Manual of Natural History Curatorship: I was delighted to see Steve Woolfall's review of the *Manual* in *TBC Issue 4*. Perhaps I could clarify a number of points raised.

HMSO have assured me that they sent copies of the *Manual* to all contributors when it was published in September 1994. Although I did not speak to all contributors, those that I did speak to had certainly received their copies.

The book was very much a BCG project. John Mathias, Gordon Reid and myself were asked to prepare the *Manual* for BCG. Our first hurdle was to find the necessary funds and, in discussing the project with MGC we were advised to approach HMSO who had agreed to publish a similar manual for the Social History Curators Group. HMSO agreed to publish the *Manual* and MGC agreed to provide a grant of £2000 (later increased to £2300) to cover out of pocket costs of postage and photocopying and a small fee to each of the contributors. There was no money to cover time spent in editing and correspondence.

The original proposal was for a much smaller publication but when we produced detailed proposals we found that it was not possible to do justice to the subject without substantial expansion. We sent detailed briefs to every contributor setting out the number of words to keep within the limits we had set. Most contributors exceeded their brief by up to 100% and we were faced with drastic and time consuming editing without which we would have had an even larger book.

We would have liked to have many more illustrations but Steve is correct that we were limited by HMSO because of the cost. Similarly we would have liked a much more extensive index but this too was limited by HMSO.

With hindsight it would probably have been better to approach a number of publishers to see whether we could have obtained a better deal. As it is we feel that the *Manual* brings together a useful corpus of knowledge on which to build. If BCG members have reservations about sections of the book, it is very much hoped that they will put their ideas into print.

The promotion and publicity for the *Manual* (including the number of reviews), by HMSO and also by BCG whose project it was, have been disappointing.

Geoff Stansfield, Bowness on Windermere

MANAGEMENT OF THE LARGEST INSECT COLLECTIONS IN THE BRITISH ISLES

The UK Systematics Forum was established in 1994, initially for a two year period, following a recommendation in the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology's 1992 report on Systematics Biology Research. One of its remits is to promote co-ordination and communication between institutions having major biological collections. It was clear that an effective way to do this would be to encourage meetings between groups of curators/collection managers responsible for the same kinds of material, and a group for Insect Collections was established in March 1995.

The main purpose of the group is to establish areas for co-operation, standardisation and commonality of intent between the largest and most important insect collections – politically there is the overlay of "especially those that receive funding through central government" – and it is vital that the group is able to focus on problems that are relevant at the scale of these large collections. The nearly impossible choices over who ought to be included were solved ruthlessly by inviting each of the member institutions of the UK Systematics Forum that has an insect collection to participate, and to extend a further invitation to the National Museum of Ireland. This heavy-handedness has, at least, caught all of the really large or really important insect collections, even if there are some medium sized ones that are larger and more important than the smallest that are included, and it has resulted in a small group in