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## The Biology Curator

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# The Biology Curator

*The Publication of the Biology Curator's Group*

ISSUE 9

JULY 1997

## Diary Dates

### **Celebration of Bicentennaries of Charles Lyell and James Hutton**

30 July- 3 August or 5-9 August 1997, London or Edinburgh  
Contact : Lyell-Hutton Conference Office, Geological Society, Burlington House, London, W1V 0JU

### **First Biennial International Conference of the Systematics Association**

19-21 August 1997 St. Anne's College, Oxford  
Contact : Toby Pennington, Systematics 97, Royal Botanic Garden, 20A Inverleigh Row, Edinburgh, EH3 5LR

### **BCG Conference Session at MA Conference - Specialist Curators : An Endangered Species ?**

17 September 1997, National Museum and Gallery, Cardiff  
(Possible discussion topics inside) Contact : Steve Thompson 01724 843533

### **Natural History and the Sea**

26-27 September 1997, Discovery Point, Dundee  
Contact : Mike Taylor, Perth Museum and Art Gallery, George St., Perth, Scotland, PH1 5LB

### **New Directions in Systematics**

15-18 October 1997, Hersonisos, Crete, Greece  
Contact : Ms. Nicola Donlon, European Science Foundation Network in Systematic Biology, Natural History Museum, Cromwell Rd., London, SW7 5BD

### **Gentlemen and Players.**

22 November 1997 : Meeting of the Malacological Society, Conchological Society and Society for the History of Natural History on the gradual professionalism of malacology during the early 20th century.  
Contact : Elizabeth Platts, Belmont, New Road, Littleton, Winchester, Hants. SO22 6QR

### **Progress on Pest Control in Collections**

2 December 1997, Natural History Museum  
Contact : Phil Ackery, Dept. of Entomology, The Natural History Museum. Tele. 0171 938 9346

### **Entomological Collections : Entomology for Non-entomologists**

24 February 1998, BCG meeting, Tullie House, Carlisle.  
Details to follow.  
Contact : Steve Hewitt, Committee Member

### **BCG AGM**

April 1998, Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh

## 1997 BCG AGM

### **Chairman's Report**

The last year, my first as Chair, has been an extremely busy one for BCG. A lot of hard work has been done so if my report sounds a little like an Oscar acceptance speech in parts please forgive me. We have moved forward on a number of fronts and in particular I am glad to report the Biology Curator, edited by Patricia Francis and Kathryn Berry at Bolton, is going from strength to strength and is looking extremely good! Many thanks to them. We have also worked hard to strengthen contacts with other organisations particularly the Systematics Forum and the MGC and Steve Blackmore and Val Bott respectively attended one of our committee meetings this year.

The biggest amount of my time and that of the Committee has been taken up by the Collections Monitoring Cell, led by Mike Palmer. It is extremely sad that this is the case but worrying developments in many museums means this is a vital part of the Group's business. We have acted, either by letters or reviewing documents, at Bristol, Leicester, Manchester, Kew Gardens and Passmore Edwards and have kept a watching brief on Nottingham, Glasgow and Eton.

## Contents

BCG News.....	1
Collections Management.....	5
Course Report.....	9
Courses.....	10
Conference Report.....	11
Vacancies.....	14
Society Launch.....	15
Stop Press.....	16

**Deadline:** All items for next publication to reach Editors by 8th September 1997.



The situation in Scotland has recently caused considerable concern. On a positive note a new post in Reading and the replacement of a natural history curator in Bedford (Rosemary Brind having been moved upstairs, so to speak) show that it is not all doom and gloom. However we need, even more, to try to get the message across to councillors, trustees and managers that biology collections are both important to, and popular with, the general public. Mike feels strongly that a letter from your Chair (often after the event) is not a terribly effective response and, to that end, is writing an Action Pack as part of a new BCG initiative which will be launched later on this year. He also is intending to set up a network of regional reporters to feed back any worrying signs or developments to the Cell. We have made good contacts with the *Museums Journal* to try and keep the profile of biology collections high. Mike would be pleased to hear from anyone who would like to become involved in the work of this Cell.

The Millennium bid for the National Biodiversity Network has also been an important issue this year. Steve Garland, head of our Biological Recording Cell, will talk about the details of his report but I would reiterate BCG's concern over this issue. We will endeavour to keep you informed of new developments, as the first bid has now failed, and to represent our members' views. We have had a number of successful meetings (including a hastily arranged one in Nottingham on Biological Recording — thanks Graham!) which Steve Thompson will talk about in his report. Many thanks to all those involved in organising them including of course Julian Carter, who has put together this splendid meeting here in Cardiff! Nick Goff (who will give his own report) has been keeping us up-to-date with documentation issues whilst Nick Gordon has been our contact with NSCG and also has started work on new BCG display panels to increase our publicity at meetings. David Carter has continued to act as liaison between BCG and the specialist curatorial groups set up by the Systematics Forum.

To conclude I would like to thank all the members of the Committee who have all been working extremely hard for BCG. I also would like to thank our Secretary, Steve Thompson, and Treasurer, Kathie Way, for all their work to keep the Group running. Also to Helen Burchmore for ably taking the Minutes! Finally I would like to thank Mike Graham and Steve Woolfall, who are retiring from Committee, for all their hard work. Mike, in particular, has devoted time, first as Secretary and then as Chairman, to BCG and as the incoming Chairman I should like to express my gratitude to him for all his efforts over the past years.

Jane Pickering

### Editor's Report

Production of the Newsletters has proceeded fairly smoothly and all have gone out within a reasonable time of proposed production timetables. Barring unforeseen problems we expect this to continue but it does depend on the cooperation of contributors to send their articles on or before the copydates shown on the back cover. This is particularly important for the July edition since the printers have a two week break in July making it difficult for them to send the Newsletters out on time if there are any delays.

We would like to thank all the contributors who have sent us material in the last year, as well as Northern Whig, particularly George, who has been very patient with us!

We look forward to receiving articles for the Next Newsletter, as well as photographs, comments, drawings or letters — so get your thinking caps on now, we need all the help we can get!

*Patricia Francis and Kathryn Berry*

### Secretary's Report

Committee has held three meetings this year, they being on:

- 7 May 1996, eight present out of thirteen;
- 9 September, 11 present; and
- 20 January, 1997, eight present, four absent and Steve Garland was there in spirit.

Much of what we discussed has already been covered, but some other things should be mentioned. The last meeting was attended by Steve Blackmore, chair of the Systematics Forum and Val Bott, Deputy Director of the MGC,

Steve was there to tell us about the SF. They were set up to promote communication and good practice in Natural History museums, and to develop a national strategy for systematics research. This will not be a strategy for collections, but they will obviously be a key aspect of any strategy and the SF will liaise with the specialist groups in order to get the most comprehensive and representative results.

Val was there to tell us about what the MGC were doing, particularly with respect to how it affected the natural science community. Their principal roles are in advice, standards and advocacy, and also had the task of implementing government policy, such as outlined in the recent DNH review. They have no scientists on their staff and are keen to liaise with specialist groups. There will be articles on both these topics in a future TBC.

Other items that were covered included:

The production of some display panels for the group to put up at meetings, currently being dealt with by Nick Gordon.

A review of membership and recruitment, to be on the agenda at the next meeting.

Advising on the destination of the Jourdain Society collection of birds eggs, and also liaising with Wiltshire Police over the destination of some egg collections confiscated before what turned out to be a successful prosecution.

Involvement in the Leicester University Museum Studies course.

One topic that was taken forward was the idea of what we chose to call Stage 2 meetings, which were to be more detailed meetings, following up the early year meetings that we have held on bones, botany etc. One such meeting was organised by Kathie Way, to the NHM Wandsworth store, but insufficient interest was expressed and the meeting was eventually cancelled. If there is an interest in this kind of meeting, could we have some feedback please.