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The Biology Curator

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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.

The group organised three meetings in 1996/7, including last year's AGM meeting, which was jointly held with GCG in Newcastle, on training issues. The Paris meeting was very successful, a good time was had by all, and we even visited a museum. The meeting in Nottingham was organised at very short notice by Graham Whalley, but was well attended, very interesting and promoted a lively debate. There should be a write up in a future TBC.

In addition to these, BCG also worked on the Cambridge international conference, another very successful event. I would like to record here our thanks for the enormous amount of work put in by Chris Collins and his team.

We also put together, again at very short notice, a session at the MA conference, on the issues of orphan collections and collections at risk. This was very successful in that it attracted a large proportion of non-natural scientists and generated a very lively discussion, amply demonstrating the interest on the part of the wider museum community in these issues. We will be hoping for an even better response for this year's session, which will look at the future of the specialist curator, and is being organised jointly with GCG and SMA.

We are in the process of putting together another European trip, to Vienna, at the end of this year, and are hoping to do the early year meeting in 1998 on entomology, the venue yet to be decided. Details of these and other meetings will be available in future issues of The Biology Curator.

And I will finish with the usual request to you to let committee know of any issues you think we should be covering, and your feedback on the things we do. Thank you.

Steve Thompson.

Treasurer's Report

DETAILS OF EXPENDITURE AND INCOME FOR THE PERIOD 1 APRIL 1996 - 31 MARCH 1997

INCOME

Study trip to Paris	£6,931.00
Subscriptions	2,943.75
Interest on bank account	91.25
Sale of publications/advertising	73.00
Total income	£10,039.00

EXPENDITURE

Study trip to Paris	6,928.61
1996 AGM Newcastle	205.12
Cambridge SPNHC meeting bursaries	500.00
Postal costs	73.88
Refund of postage to J. Morgan (back issues of Newsletter)	13.15
Bank charges	3.00
Gift for Rosina Down	30.25
Book for use by M. Palmer	10.00
Biology Curator 6	977.81
Biology Curator 7	998.75

Total expenditure £9,740.57

Income over expenditure £298.43

Total at bank 24 March 1996 £8,863.24

Total at bank 1 April 1997 £9,191.67

MEMBERSHIP

Personal members	219
Institutional members (UK)	67
Overseas members	41
Exchanges	9
Total membership	336
Total annual income from subscriptions	£3,372.00

Kathie Way
March 31 1997

Members who have not paid Subscriptions for 1996 or 1997 will be deleted from the Membership List.

Minutes of the BCG Annual General Meeting

Held on 16 April 1997 at the National Museum of Wales

- Apologies for absence:
Shona Allen, Helen Burchmore, John Edmondson, Simon Heyhow, Chris Norris, Paul Richards, Ian Wallace, Kathie Way, Derek Whiteley.
- Minutes of the last AGM:
The minutes of the 1996 AGM were accepted as an accurate record.
- Matters arising:
There were no matters arising.
- 4-7 Officer's reports:
- Any other business:
Ray Barnett thanked BCG for their support over the situation at Bristol Museum. He also wanted to bring attention to the fact that there was a discrepancy between the need expressed for natural science and what was actually happening.
Steve Garland gave a short report on the Millennium Fund bid for biological recording, and requested information on the Wildlife Trust's new bid, about which conflicting reports had been received. Dave Mellor reported that his experience from his involvement in the situation had been most unsatisfactory. SG will follow up on his comments. Howard Mendel suggested that BCG set up an initiative to represent museum-based record centres. Dave Mellor proposed that BCG hold a special meeting to look at the issues related to biological recording. It was resolved that an emergency action meeting would be organised to do this.
Jenny Moore wanted BCG to address the problems facing specialist curators. Rob Huxley recommended promoting the increased representation of natural sciences on MA Council.
There were two committee posts vacant at this time, and one candidate had been nominated by committee, Sam Hallett, proposed Jane Pickering, seconded Steve Thompson.