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## The Biology Curator

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"It's got chubby little legs" "Sometimes they look a bit evil to me". "The face looks like a mask". "It's got huge eyes and the eyes are looking forward just like ours". "The owl looks like an inexperienced hairdresser has been at it". "Look how pointed his beak is". "Yes it looks as if it could break a mouse's back". "The bottom of the beak is curved in. There's a sort of dip in it, like a jug". "It hardly looks like feathers here, it's more like fur". "The feathers on his head are very soft, sort of fluffy". "The wings and tail are not fluffy, they are more shiny". "It's all combining colours, browns, blacks and greys, all different shades". These children were using the education service at Portsmouth Museum.

The NC for 11-14 yrs states that they should begin to make personal decisions and judgements based on their scientific knowledge. Scientific activities should allow pupils to relate environmental factors to human well-being and study the effects of supply and demand and human activity on the exploitation of raw materials including air and water. Museums can help youngsters understand the nature of global interdependence enabling pupils of this age to "think globally and act locally" with a sense of environmental responsibility.

Lastly, the NC for 15-16 yrs states that they should begin to consider the effect of technological developments on individuals, communities and environments. They should consider the impact of human activities on ecosystems and be aware of the exploitation of resources. Currently 85% of pupils are following a double award science course. The single award is designed for pupils who may need for a variety of reasons to spend more time on other subjects. Some schools do three separate science subjects and figure one shows the subject content that is common to many of the Biology syllabuses for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE).

#### What can Museums do to help?

In a study John Yorath did on 'Education Provision in Surrey Museums' in 1992 he found that out of fourteen museums only three had part time museum education officers and a few made use of teachers who were temporary, seconded or part time. The majority of school visits were conducted by curators, who clearly enjoyed their contact with children but nevertheless face the dilemma that education work is time consuming and they have several curators who were deliberately not marketing their services fully for fear that they could not cope with the anticipated demand. Whether or not to encourage schools to visit will also depend on what is on offer and far the students have to travel. Visits by pupils in key stages 3-4 will generally have to fit into a two period, eighty minute slot, which may include travel time.

Time spent on teachers' workshops and initial and inservice courses for teachers is time well spent. Similarly time spent in the preparation of simple guides to relate displays to the National Curriculum could save much repetition. Teachers' notes, packs, activity sheets, guides, catalogues, postcards, posters, slide sets, videos, software and laser disks about the museum's collections will help teachers and lecturers prepare their students for museum visits and reinforce learning after the visits.

Curators can often suggest habitats suitable for fieldwork at different ability levels and suggest contacts with organisations and individuals who could help schools extend their studies. Such resources and expertise are valuable not only to schools and colleges but also to individual learners. I shall now touch on some of our leisure time courses that have a Natural History basis.

#### Leisure Learning

The children's Art and Craft Workshop is open morning and afternoon every Saturday and six days a week in school holidays. This has been going since 1949 and we welcome the first twenty children through the door for each free session. The theme for Easter holidays is 'Desert Designs' which will be interpreted using model making, painting, textiles, pottery and collage. This year's competition theme is 'Small World' and it is heartening to see in the children's work their concern for the 'fragile Earth'. Botanical illustration is an adult course, an intensive week-long course, run

twice a year, always with a waiting list. Botanical spirals were causing them trouble, so by special request we ran a Saturday course with a mathematical tutor, protractors and graph paper. Shells too offer potential for mathematical fun. We are trying to offer windows to different models of learning.

Once a month there are Horticultural Demonstrations in the Gardens and the Horniman Flower Club meets once a month in the Conservatory. More formal courses include 'Garden Design' which we have run for the past two years with the Open College of the Arts. 'The Flower Garden' is a course started at the museum last September in conjunction with Goldsmiths' College. This is one module towards the City and Guilds 'Gardening Scheme'. In the summer we shall have 'Practical Gardening' and move on to 'Trees and Shrubs' in September 94. For many years we have run the Certificate course in 'Ecology and Conservation' in conjunction with the extra-mural department of Birkbeck College.

These examples underline once more that we have many publics. Volunteers help us with ecological management tasks on our disused railway line the last Sunday in every month. There are large groups who watch the horticultural demonstrations and come to talks on Wildlife Gardening or join in Bat Walks. There are those people who seek qualifications or have a more intense interest in the horticultural, ecological or conservation scene. Some want to upgrade their skills as botanical or animal illustrators or flower arrangers and others want to work in family groups making flying creature kites or pop-up cards using the Aquarium as inspiration. All are learning and using the natural history resources of the Museum and Gardens.

The museum networks with many agencies, including Colleges, University Departments, London Wildlife Trust, London Bat Group and many more. We could not do all that we currently manage without their cooperation and we piggy-back on their publicity.

#### Working together

Education staff in museums are unlikely to have the curatorial expertise of their Natural History colleagues. I am sure that I speak for GEM members in saying that we are most grateful for the instruction on the collections and guidance that Natural History staff can give us. The skills that museum educators offer their colleagues are in concept formulation and the sequencing of learning. They are familiar with language levels for target groups and have knowledge of the needs and expectations of such groups.

I have touched on learning theory, a *souçon* of National Curriculum, leisure learning activities, and the importance of networking. I shall add one *caveat* for 1995. Do not plan any major museum activities between 5-22 May. All the 11 and 14 year olds in the country are going to be tied up with assessments.

#### Dates to avoid in planning for 1995

May 5-12 National tests in English, maths and science for KS3

May 15-22 National tests in English, maths and science for KS2

In conclusion, the key message I give you today is that natural history curators and museum educators must work together and support each other. Both are in short supply in museums - endangered species almost. Together we have the potential to lay the foundations for an informed community, where individuals will actively participate in the protection of the environment and the careful use of natural resources.

#### Keynote Talk: CURATORS AND THE CONSERVATION ETHIC

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#### The challenge.

There is a tiger in the Hong Kong Museum of History. Beautifully mounted, it stares out from a plastic jungle at passing museum visitors, reminding them that the sprawling concrete and neon of the ultimate urban environment was once an area of incredible natural beauty, a true wilderness. There is still beauty in Hong Kong, but of a different kind, the surrounding mountains and



sparkling sea now providing a backdrop to concrete and glass towers which reach for the sky. Nature keeps a small foothold in the public parks of Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, where parrots argue noisily in trees, bats fly by at dusk, and black kite float on the thermals above, patrolling a new kind of jungle.

On a recent visit I was fascinated by the way that even in this seemingly hostile environment, nature still had this small, and to me, important presence. Yet few people, whether locals or tourists, seemed to notice; most ignored it; no-one I met knew what the birds, insects or trees were called. The urban environment, and the need to simply survive, had seemingly made the natural environment irrelevant. In Hong Kong, making money is important, nature is not. Unless of course nature is a source of wealth and survival – (nature is also a commodity as well as a source of enjoyment) – the dried fish stalls, purveyors of fungi, and herbalists shops provide evidence of this, as do the caged finches offered for sale in local markets. It is only here that urban dwellers and wildlife appear to meet. These observations could be repeated in any metropolis on Earth; in any overpopulated urban environment, human beings are becoming almost totally divorced from nature. This fact becomes more relevant, and of increasing concern, as the human population continues to migrate to live in urban situations. So where does this lead us? Will we see a growing population that denies nature exists, that disregards the interconnecting webs that bind us to a wider environment, a population with a total lack of interest or concern for the natural world? As nature is subject to increasing threats from man's activities, primarily through habitat loss, but also from overcropping, pollution and wildlife trade, this is the moment when the human population needs to be most aware, most concerned, about wildlife, wilderness and biological conservation. We have then a real dilemma – on the one hand an uncaring population which feels divorced from nature, and on the other natural habitats and ecosystems which need protection. It is not simply a case of loss of biodiversity, but the role that species play in the long term maintenance of global ecosystems, and ultimately the survival of humankind. Here then lies the greatest challenge to face curators and educators in museums, to be intrinsically involved in the wider movement to document biological change, but perhaps more important, to attempt to raise awareness of conservation issues and change attitudes to wildlife and environment to enable its protection. The 'curators' of the title of this note must therefore embrace all who work in museums, especially those at the cutting edge, the education staff.

It also vital that all specialist disciplines become involved – although biologists might justifiably claim that conservation is their prerogative, all curators can use their collections to good effect to promote conservation messages. The art curator can refer to past landscapes and habitat loss, or the ways that wilderness, plants and animals have always been a huge source of inspiration for artists. The social historian can paint vivid images of the impact of overcropping (the fishing industry) or the environmental impact of extracting natural resources (coal, lead and pollution effects). Archaeologists can, for example, point to the evidence of man's implication in the extinction of a species (mammoths), and ethnographers describe civilisations that have amazing knowledge of local species, peoples that can live as part of an ecosystem without endangering its existence. Costumes specialists? – the impact of the trade in feathers and cat skins, alligators and turtle shell. Everyone can, and should, play a part.

### Our changing view of nature.

The idea that man is divorced from nature, that he sees himself as something separate or special, is neither new, nor, despite my earlier observation, confined to city-dwellers. To the native North Americans, the white settlers were identified as being separate from nature rather than a part of it; they had little appreciation of wilderness for its own sake, seeing land and wildlife only as a commodity. Chief Luther Standing Bear (quoted in Botkin and Keller, 1982) said that *"We did not think of the great open plain, the beautiful rolling hills and the winding stream with their tangled*

*growth as wild. Only to the white man was nature a wilderness and the land infested with wild animals and savage people"*.

It has been argued that hunter-gatherers worldwide do not recognise a separate "wilderness"; that it is only with the development of agriculture and herding came the idea that wilderness was distinct from human habitat.

In Europe, humankind has taken a variety of attitudes to nature through history. Many classical Greek and Roman philosophers saw nature as an ordered system, one that was balanced and harmonious. Lucretius however argued that nature was capricious and fickle – that the vagaries of the environment gave man a hard time. When reading the epic poem Beowulf one is reminded that in Anglo-Saxon England wilderness was regarded as dangerous – the word 'wilderness' is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word wild (d) eor – wild beast. Buffon in 18th century Europe described the commonly held view that nature was chaotic and wilderness a *'melancholy desert'*. An alternative view was put forward by the English Romantic poets of the 19th century, who saw nature as something beautiful, sublime and inspiring; this view differs little from the idea of nature as dramatic and powerful, as scenic wonders which uplifted the spirit were 'discovered' by pioneer explorers of the American West.

A real change in the appreciation of nature came in the 19th century, and especially with George Perkins Marsh and the publication of *Man and Nature* in 1864. Here was the first realisation that as land is tamed or changed there are consequences for mankind. It was the first time that the view had been put forward that sustaining human life depends on maintaining the balance of nature. Of course, people had been fascinated by natural history before this; identifying plants and animals, or collecting fossils, was educative, even important in terms of social standing. But post 1864 nature was seen to be important in her own right, and the idea of the land ethic, *ie.* that nature – animals, plants, even rocks – had rights also came into being through the work of Aldo Leopold. In *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) Leopold makes the case that people are responsible not only to other individuals and to society, but also to animals, plants, rocks, minerals, soil and water – the environment.

In the 20th century we have absorbed this feeling for nature; environmentalism has been a driving force in changing attitudes. It may be too late, but we are now taking Marsh seriously – all of a sudden we realise that nature is important to our survival.

I suspect that this is why I felt apprehensive in Hong Kong – a feeling that through the ways in which we could be forced to live in the future we may lose our interest in the environment, may lose sight of our commitment to sustaining it – and ourselves.

### Action for the future?

I believe that it is up to us in museums to try and maintain the contact between ourselves and the environment, through our displays and educational activities. People may be puzzled about what we do as curators or educators – *"I spent the weekend sleeping with life-size dinosaur models" ... "I'm running an activity day on snakes" ... "I spent all day making origami animals" ... "I've spent all week pinning out those beetles we collected" ... "Putting fish in alcohol – again"*. For those who don't understand our role, it is very easy to mock. But – I believe that what we do is very important.

As an educated, and perhaps privileged sector, most museum folk have from an early age, been exposed to images of countryside and wildlife. I was fortunate, despite living in an industrial Lancastrian town, to be able to escape easily into the countryside, and as a consequence become fascinated by it. If you are fascinated, interested, and want to know more, and learn more, then respect for wildlife and environment follows. The Senegalese conservationist Baba Dioum echoes this elegantly:-

*'In the end we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we will understand; we will understand only what we are taught'*.

I feel very strongly that the end result for museum education about wildlife, whether using biological, geological, archaeological or ethnographic specimens, is to develop and enhance a conservation ethic. I persistently argued this case on the BCG/GCG



curatorial courses – that the ultimate reason why we curate collections, why we put on exhibitions, why we do research, why we devise educational programs, – the ultimate reason is for conservationist ends. Yes, there are other aims along the way – our own intellectual satisfaction, awakening or reviving an interest in wilderness or wildlife in others, the fulfilment from working with children or adults, letters received from classes of children. *'Dear Mr. Davis, thank you for telling me all about sharks. It was fun. Love from Rachel. Dear Mr. Davis, thank you for telling me all about sharks. It was fun. Love from David. Dear Mr. Davis, thank you for telling me all about sharks it was fun. Love from Adam., p.s. I liked the bit about the man being chopped up'*. Enjoy these letters, – despite the ability of some children only to remember the weird or gruesome details, it demonstrates the beginnings of awareness, steps to understanding.

Is it possible that educating people about wildlife and the environment goes further than simply engendering respect? Consider this passage from a poster advertising the display of a whale skeleton at Queen's Square in Liverpool in the mid-19th century:-

*'Why are our highways, our streets and our houses, so obnoxious and exposed to depredations, arson and plunder? Why are the lives of individuals in so much danger from daring and sanguinary marauders? Whence are our youth of both sexes, in many melancholy instances, so hostile to society as to be made, by the laws of their country, shocking examples of public justice? The answer is – education is founded upon erroneous principles. The study of nature is entirely neglected, although, next to religion, it is that exact study which propagates, cherishes, and nurses up to maturity, the best affections of the human heart, and the best principles of an orderly and loyal citizen. On this ground a visit to the whale is recommended, and we are glad to see, that it is a subject of unceasing admiration ... it is visited by such multitudes that a hope may be entertained that the grandeur and sublimity of the object is infusing a love for the works of nature into the character of the whole town'.*

Perhaps this is a slightly exaggerated claim for the benefits of viewing a whale skeleton, but I still believe that the idea being put forward here is important and even more valid in today's society. The descriptions of Liverpool in the 19th century could equally be Newcastle (or Hong Kong) in the 1990s. So does learning about nature have a real social impact? I can point to no research which confirms it – though in my own naive way I have the suspicion that understanding how the natural world behaves can help us to comprehend the activities of people. And even perhaps like them, and respect them too.

If you take on board these arguments then it is apparent that we have a vital role to play – we can help individuals, society, wildlife, the world. That is a huge responsibility. And it becomes more of a responsibility as our world becomes more accessible, increasingly multicultural, (or even more worrying, monocultural) as at the same time biodiversity continues to fall, and other environmental ills threaten.

Who are our audience for the messages that we in museums are trying to reach? Not just Derby Road First School, Key Stage 3 that's for sure. Our audience must include the elderly, the out of work, ethnic minorities. How do we tackle the difficulties that attitudes to animals or environment in different cultures pose us? How are we, as curators, as educators, going to cope with such demands?

Let's make things a bit easier for ourselves. We are not alone .... there are other people out there, also trying to convince the world that a conservation ethic is important. Wildlife photography seems to reach new standards of excellence each year, the network of conservation organisations at international, national and local level continue to grow; a new role in conservation education is being assumed by zoos, botanical gardens and aquaria.

It is especially important that museums work with these other agencies to provide comprehensive and cohesive messages – networking is the keyword and it is important. We still don't do

enough of it, and in times of economic hardship we need to share resources and expertise to deliver good educational packages.

### Bioparks, missions and audiences.

I spent a few weeks in America last summer working in Philadelphia, researching the American museum approach to environmental education. I met curators and educators in a variety of institutions, and discussed their role in raising conservation awareness and the activities they undertook. I was particularly impressed by the way that live animal and live plant collections are becoming increasingly geared to environmentalism. Zoos and botanic gardens are of course regarded as museums in America, and it seems to me that in that country the distinction between botanic garden, zoo and museum is becoming increasingly blurred. The concept of the Biopark – the combination of live plants and animals and museum displays using objects and interactives has been proposed by the Director of the National Zoo in Washington, Michael Robinson. The recent launch of 'Amazonia' in the Washington Zoo is his first step towards it. I suspect that bioparks exist already, even if not called such, at other institutions in America – at the Missouri Botanic Garden for example. I also suspect that Europe came up with the concept first, through Emmen Zoo in the Netherlands, with its Biochron museum at the entrance, and exciting immersion habitats.

However, what I found particularly interesting in America was the adoption of conservation as a key objective within the mission statements of virtually all the institutions I spoke to or obtained information from. The Missouri Botanic Garden's mission statement reads – *"To discover and share knowledge about plants and their environment in order to preserve and enrich life."* George Perkins Marsh would have been proud of that one.

There are many fascinating displays and activities taking place in American museums, but one deserving especial mention has been taking place in the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia for a number of years. I mention it because it returns to the theme of who we should be trying to get our messages through to – who our audience are. The project is known as WINS – Women Into Natural Sciences – and it is an effort by the educational staff of the Academy to reach out into the black community of Philadelphia. The target for the scheme is young black women from single parent homes within certain geographical neighbourhoods of the city. The concept is to invite them to become part of the museum team for a day a week, and to provide them with basic training in the natural sciences within a unique, friendly environment. It has been running for many years now, and is a real success – not only have some of the women found jobs within science, but virtually all return to the Academy regularly, some as volunteers, some as visitors, some simply to rekindle old friendships. All the women on the scheme I met and talked to were enthralled by the museum, and delighted to be part of a scientific institution; needless to say they had boundless enthusiasm for natural history – and as a result had become educators in their own right. Indeed, many of them went on to be involved in educational activities within the museum. Who can evaluate what impact this sort of scheme has on society? It is unlikely that the women will influence attitudes to wildlife or environment in their own tough communities; but there has to be some increase in understanding somewhere, even if only a little, perhaps within immediate family.

I think we need innovative ideas such as this; we also need to provide exciting natural history displays, to recognise the ways in which all our collections can be used to a conservationist end. Above all, we need the abilities of people to build on the interest in them to communicate messages, and instill understanding. To do this we need to share ideas and expertise, and that is what the Oxford meeting of BCG/GEM (to which a version of this paper was a contribution) was all about. It is encouraging to see the number of exciting developments that are taking place, and to recognise that museums continue to make a vital contribution to the environmental movement.



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## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AT TOWNELEY HALL ART GALLERY AND MUSEUMS, BURNLEY

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### Introduction

Awareness of the consequences of man's impact on the environment has radically increased in the last decade, and there is evidence to show that children exhibit the greatest environmental concern. Their knowledge of global issues such as the destruction of the tropical rain forests, global warming and pollution of the oceans is usually fairly extensive. However, they may well be unaware of problems in their own local environment. Therefore it is essential that education policies ensure that all children receive a sound environmental education.

The introduction of the National Curriculum has helped to formulate a consistent approach to link the environment with all subjects in cross curricular activities. In fact in 1989 HM Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science produced a booklet entitled '*Environmental Education from 5 to 16 Curriculum Matters*'. This document formally recognised environmental education as one of the cross curricular themes within the National Curriculum.

In response the National Curriculum Council published Curriculum Guidance Document 7 the following year. This document attempts to define a framework for environmental education and provide assistance to implement cross curricular themes and activities. Several interesting and important points were covered (this summarises the approach we have adopted at Towneley Hall Natural History Centre):

*The long-term aims of environmental education are to improve management of the environment and promote satisfactory solutions to environmental issues.*

*Environmental education aims to:*

- \* *Provide opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment.*
- \* *Encourage pupils to examine and interpret the environment from a variety of perspectives – physical, geographical, biological, sociological, economic, political, technological, historical, aesthetic, ethical and spiritual.*
- \* *Arouse pupils' awareness and curiosity about the environment and encourage active participation in resolving environmental problems.*

Teachers are usually extremely resourceful people; however, in the present economic climate, with resources dwindling and core subjects demanding the greatest financial input, it is vital that museums play a supportive role and hopefully provide facilities for schools to help with environmental education.

The staff at Towneley Hall believes that environmental education is important. Burnley Borough Council have invested and are prepared to continue investing in a variety of resources to help schools and to ensure that every child is given the opportunity to learn about wildlife and the environment first hand through direct experience.

However, this has not been achieved overnight and the rest of this paper will deal with the development of the Natural History Centre and its role in environmental education in Burnley.

### The Development of the Natural History Centre

The Natural History Centre was erected in Towneley Park on the site of the two old greenhouses in the old walled garden. The greenhouses were used by the parks department to exhibit various plants and animals on a very informal basis to the general public.

The new building was financed from the proceeds of a municipal lottery at a cost of £35,573 and was officially handed over to the local authority at the end of February 1981.

The original concept of the Natural History Centre was to provide an education facility for schools, colleges and the local community. In June 1986 a decision was made to upgrade the aquarium within the confines of the Zoo Licensing Act 1981 and improve the educational potential of the whole centre.

It was also decided to make the exhibits relevant to the local area by displaying fauna and flora found in and around Lancashire. In order to display as many diverse organisms as possible and demonstrate relationships between these organisms it was decided that the display should contain seven ecosystems...

- (i) Stream
- (ii) Canal
- (iii) Predator Tank
- (iv) Lake
- (v) Estuary and River
- (vi) Tidal Rock Pool
- (vii) Sub-Littoral Area of a Rocky Sea Shore

It was felt that within these biological niches it would be possible to show how physical and biotic factors influence the relationships between various organisms and the effect of the organisms on their environment. The aim was to demonstrate aspects of ecology such as competition, dependence and interdependence food chains and food webs.

### The Educational Role of the Aquarium

The original concept of the aquarium was to provide a series of displays showing the variety of freshwater fish and invertebrates found in and around the Burnley area, and marine animals found around the coastline of Lancashire. To date we have exhibited a wide diversity of water life with associated behavioral mechanisms, e.g. schooling in salmonoids and symbiosis between shrimps and sea anemones. Feeding patterns have been used to illustrate food chains and food webs to many children during practical sessions. The 'Catch' from a day's pond dipping is usually transferred to a suitable aquarium for closer detailed examination. This has enabled the staff at the Natural History Centre to interpret many aspects and objectives of the National Curriculum, and encourage and develop an interest and appreciation of all forms of life. Live displays are dynamic and provide an excellent vehicle for promoting an attitude of curiosity and scientific enquiry, and are extremely useful in experimental and investigative work in the study of biology. In the Pond Life Package simple experiments have been set up to help children make and record accurate observations, and to analyze, interpret and draw conclusions from the data and other biological information.

The live exhibits at the Natural History Centre have a very important role in education, and can stimulate children to realise the importance of wide range of conservation problems, as well as providing an insight into aspects of biology which are not normally seen in the classroom.

In order to realise the full educational potential of living displays the design and maintenance has to be of very high standard, with careful consideration given to inherent problems in running a closed system.

### Environmental Education in the Galleries, Classroom and Park

*"There is a groundswell among young people of concern for the natural world. This is the foundation on which we can build a wider understanding of the issues. It is important that we capture this enthusiasm and that no opportunity is lost to develop knowledge, understanding and concern for the environment through school education".*

Angela Rumbold, MP, former Minister of State of Education and Science

Helping children adopt a positive approach to the environment should be central to environmental education. Promoting positive attitudes to the environment is essential if children are to value it and understand their role in safeguarding it for the future.