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Author(s): Thompson, S.

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Fenscore Webmaster (c.pettitt@man.ac.uk) or the List Moderator (ian@nms.ac.uk). The discussion list will carry up to the minute reports on Fenscore activities, and is intended also as a forum for the discussion of all matters to do with collection research.

At their recent meeting, the Committee decided to apply to the Heritage Lottery Access Fund for a grant to bring all the CRU databases up to a minimum standard of completeness and currency. It is intended the work will again be done on an area by area basis, with local knowledge input from the existing CRU members, although with the help of paid peripatetic surveyors. Visit the Website and/or join FENSORE-L to keep up-to-date on this exciting new development.

Bill Pettitt
email: c.pettitt@man.co.uk

Skin and Bones

Summary of the meeting held on March 25-27, 1999

After some hectic rushing around (at least of a telephonic nature) the skin and bones meeting finally made it to the light of day. It lasted two and a half days, split between London and Margate, and involved talks and tours at both sites, not to mention centrally organised transport and accommodation, an ambitious undertaking that nevertheless went off well, though to say without a hitch would be stretching a point.

DAY 1: Bones

There were four talks on the morning, held at the NHM in London. In the first, Julian Carter gave an overview of the raw material, bones of every shape and size. He covered composition, structure and development of skeletal material, and followed this up with a quick run through the preparation, cleaning and consolidation of bone. However, if one wanted to sum up the latter part of this talk, it would probably be "don't". While we all subscribe to the necessity of using reversible methods wherever possible, the truth is that, like so many things in life, this is really an unobtainable dream.

The second talk, from Adrian Doyle, was, notwithstanding the above, about how to deal with conservation problems, and how to carry out conservation procedures. In accordance with the moral of the first talk, though, he did advocate the use of environmental control as the preferred solution for at least 65% of all conservation problems. However, if you must, there are certain things that you should be aware of. Old attempts may well affect current ones, so specimens must be carefully inspected to see what has been done in the past, and if necessary, remove it. You must always make good records of everything that you do, so that when future conservators come along, they will know straight away what processes have been carried out, instead of having to work it out for themselves. Remember that what you do will change the specimen. For example, filling cracks may well reduce

Local Records Centres (LRCs)

- **Collect/Collate Software development ('Recorder 2000')**

The aim of this project to re-develop/replace Recorder, the standard software used in most LRCs. The design for the new software has been agreed by the project board and is on the National Biodiversity Network web site (<http://www.nbn.org.uk>). For details see: Ball, S. G., 1999. Progress with Recorder 2000, NFBR Newsletter, no. 24, pp. 7-10. Delivery of the finished product is scheduled for September 1999.

- **The Heritage Lottery Fund bid to fund the National Biodiversity Network**

A complex bid of a little under £4,600,000 was formally submitted in autumn 1998. It was withdrawn early this year because it was perceived not to be aimed at the right beneficiaries; voluntary sector naturalists and public users. A new, slimmer bid focussing on these groups will be prepared. Details of the National Biodiversity Network are available on their web site (<http://www.nbn.org.uk>).

- **New Publication**

Developing a Local Record Centre, a new loose-leaf handbook on how to establish or further develop a Local Records Centre as part of the National Biodiversity Network has now been published. Copies are available from: Rachel Hackett, Biodiversity Information Officer, The Wildlife Trusts UKNO, The Green, Witham Park, Waterside South, Lincoln LN5 71R (tel. 01522 544400; e-mail lrc@wildlife-trusts.cixco.uk).

- **Long-term funding**

English Nature has further elucidated its Position Statement on Local Record Centres (originally dated May 1998; for information see English Nature's web site <http://www.english-nature.org.uk>). It seems that long-term financial support for LRCs may be made available through Service Level Agreements. This is potentially very good news for many of the existing museum-based records centres.

- **What should the smart LRC do now?**

Submit your own lottery bid ASAP before the various committees get bored with plans to develop LRCs. Please keep me informed of local bids so that I can keep interested parties advised.

Howard Mendel, Collections Manager, Department of Entomology, The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD (Tel. 0171 938 8782; e-mail h.mendel@nhun.ac.uk).

Exhibition Event

its ability to respond to environmental changes, and so make the situation worse. Try to be aware of what current practice is, and what materials are currently preferred. In fact, if you must do something, get someone else to do (and then blame them?).

Olly Crimmen gave a talk on preparing fish skeletons, something that most of us might not give any thought to, and if we did would walk away from rapidly. He pointed out that hard information on many of the traditional conservation problems is hard to come by when it comes to fish. Very little preparation of fish skeletons is now carried out, and the traditional methods often destroy much of the valuable information by less traditional methods, X-ray examination and clearing and staining for small specimens. (The pictures were very pretty, though I don't suppose the animals themselves were too chuffed.) He also mentioned a method for preparing large specimens in the field, which allowed the return of even pretty large specimens, though it did involve having a freezer available!

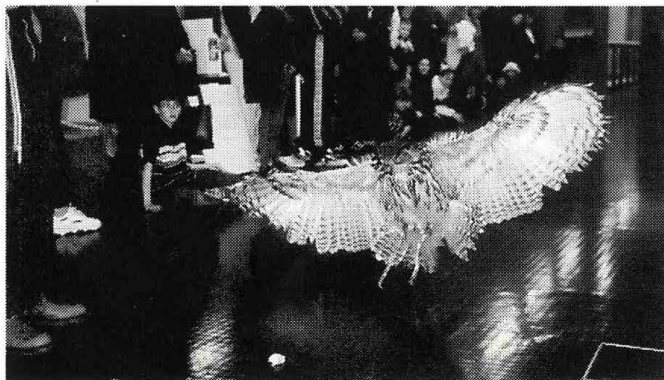
The final talk was from a firm of specialist removal experts, who had been brought in by the NHM to move some extremely large specimens, to wit, a pair of giraffes and a sperm whale, amongst others. It is difficult to describe this without the pictures, suffice to say it was a remarkable exercise, and not one for those of a nervous disposition, (unless, of course, you happen to have a dislike for giraffes!)

The afternoon was given over to tours of the various facilities at the NHM, including the fish collections and the conservation labs. Actually, the NHM does not have a conservation department, so I can only suppose that the large lab, filled with impressive looking high tech equipment, was actually a computer simulation. (I have it! The NHM has a holodeck).

Steve Thompson
Scunthorpe Museum

Live Animals in Natural History Galleries

Having just had a successful launch to Hull and East Riding museums of the new Birds of Prey temporary exhibition with live birds flying in the gallery I was wondering what similar live events other people have had in



their museums. For us the event was a terrific success, bringing in hundreds of visitors and packing out the gallery – I'm sure that live animals in museums could open many a can of worms, but has anyone else had any interesting experiences at such similar events?

To start the ball rolling our event involved seven birds in the gallery with flights every hour and a half or so. Of the birds the undoubted star was the massive Eagle owl who flew without hesitation many times up and down the gallery. Potential problems we considered were anti-hunting/animal liberationists, from birds getting bored and deciding to roost up in the beams of the museum, and the hazards of museum soundtracks with dogs barking. The gallery itself has no skylights or windows that the birds could fly into, and is about 30 metres long, although the birds could have probably flown in a 2 metre long space had they so desired.

The event itself attracted good media coverage with a considerable number of attendees reporting that they had heard about it on the local radio station Radio Humberside. Following the events success four more events for the 22nd of May, 26th June, 10th July and the 28th August were arranged. The only possible near incident was that a child had a cuddly toy that resembled all too closely a potential bird's dinner – however the bird handler noticed it before any incident could occur.

Should anyone be interested in either the exhibition on birds of prey it will be available from September as a touring exhibition, and the live birds came from the Park Rose Pottery, Bridlington.

Matt Stephens
Assistant Keeper of Natural History
Hull and East Riding Museum

