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## The Biology Curator

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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

which discussion is easily handled and work can be felt to be shared. There is also benefit in retaining this directness of link with the parent body.

Although we do want, and need, to retain our focus on the larger collections, we recognise that we must try not to be elitist. There are two main ways we aim to avoid this. The first is to make known the initiatives that we are identifying before we actually start on them, so that others can have a chance to suggest modifications, and the second is to try to offer any benefits that may result from our own cooperations to as wide a range of insect collections as we can. In fact these ways of trying to consider the needs and aspirations of smaller collections within the framework identified by focusing on the large ones are closely connected, and they will depend on our making reports of our progress to The Biology Curator and on the readers who have a view contacting one of us to have their input taken to our next meeting.

So here is a brief report. The group has met twice (at the Natural History Museum on 2nd March 1995, and at Oxford University Museum on 20th September 1995 – our next meeting will be at the National Museum of Ireland on 22nd March 1996) and has started to discuss the following:

(1) **Intentions to database holdings.** Agreed priorities: (a) Primary types at specimen level; (b) Taxa held (not at specimen level) for British Collections. Agreed that a common database, in concert with revised checklists of British Insects, needed before the second project can start in earnest.

(2) **Taxonomic Database for British Insects.** Following from the above. To serve for collections management, nature conservation, and to generate checklists. Recognition of needs for unification, and efforts to promote this.

(3) **Storage systems.** Promotion of standardization of size and specification to cut costs. Possible exchanges.

(4) **Curatorial supplies.** Bulk ordering/brokerage possibilities.

(5) **Legislation affecting insect collections and their management.** Information exchange, e.g. Lacey Act in USA.

(6) **Collecting/disposal policies (including acceptance of donations/bequests).** Information exchange.

(7) **Prospects for rationalisation of collections.** Analysis of options; starting to prepare summaries of holdings. General agreement that certain exotic holdings probably currently in the wrong place.

(8) **Pest control.** Two-day seminars are being run at NHM: anyone involved in Natural history curation wanting to go on one should contact Phil Ackery (0171 938 9346).

(9) **Policies for DNA and other destructive sampling.** NHM has policies in draft which may provide a suitable standard.

(10) **Services charged for.** Information exchange.

(11) **Prospects for cooperation/coordination in recruitment.** To be discussed.

Many of the above are more or less ongoing or open-ended issues, and are to be kept under review. Anyone wanting to find out more, or make a comment, is encouraged to contact any of us. Below is a list of the membership of the group, with phone, fax and e-mail details.

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*Mark R Shaw, National Museums of  
Scotland*

### **SPECTRUM: Rallying to the Standard**

SPECTRUM: The UK Museum Documentation Standard, published by the Museum Documentation Association (MDA), has been out in the museum community for well over a year now and is becoming established as a valuable tool for anyone working with collections. As familiarity with SPECTRUM grows, more and more museums are incorporating it into their working practice. Museums have already used SPECTRUM in producing procedures manuals, writing policy reviews, drawing up job specifications, and generally