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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Many of the other schemes have also brought extremely tangible benefits to the museum and the collections, particularly the sponge, anthozoan and nudibranch schemes. Species have been added to the collections which would have been impossible by any other means. Additions to the known distributions and even the occurrence of species has occurred at almost every level from the local to National. Several species have been recorded and collected which were new to the British Isles. The taxonomy of some of the more difficult groups has been substantially aided by the acquisition of further material and most importantly by the use of underwater photography on LIVING material. It is amazing how different species may be in life which are almost indistinguishable in a museum jar.

I should sincerely recommend anyone interested, or a museum which holds collections of sublittoral material to make contact with the society. A system of regional coordinators covers the country.

Write to the Projects Coordinator: Dr. R. Earll, Candle Cottage, Kempley, Gloucestershire.

David G. Erwin

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#### MODEL DISPLAYS

Recent trends, in natural science exhibition have perhaps offered greater scope to the modelmaker than to the taxidermist, and our galleries, like those in Cardiff and the less controversial areas of South Kensington, reflect these trends. Botanical models, if hardly in the same profusion as in Cardiff, are still much in evidence, and the techniques of modelling in wax have been applied in many invertebrate displays featuring worms, mollusca and bryozoans. In addition, polyurethane foam, vacuum-formed plastics, freeze-dried material, and engraved, edge-lit perspex have been used, sometimes adventurously, and on the whole with a considerable degree of success.

The final display in the "new" galleries, not yet completed, will demand not only the application of all these techniques, but also a theatrical expertise in lighting which will test our abilities to the limit. This is a series of five large cases showing marine vistas which will surround the viewers, putting the spectator in the case, as it were, with the exhibits outside. There are no labels, since the intensity of lighting will in at least three areas be too low to make reading possible, and in one case, there are some 2000 specimens! The information will be relayed by a taped commentary so the cases are illuminated in sequence. The magnitude of the task may be judged by the problems which arise in just one of the cases, which deals with the surface layers of the open sea. In this, a large leathery turtle and a thresher shark will be shown, marbled by the shifting light from above, which fades gradually to the murky depths below and is lost in the distance on all sides. The background is far from being totally featureless, as it includes a vast shoal, or rather the illusion of a vast shoal, of herring, and the surface is studded with a large number of jellyfish. If the problems of lighting can be solved, other difficulties may well dwindle, since the herrings need not be modelled in the usual detail - indeed it will be preferable to suppress the detail, in order to focus attention on the wood, rather than on the trees, as it were. And after this? Back to the beginning again, like the Forth Bridge painters, Government finances permitting, of course.