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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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'Exhibition Fauna - from Spectacle to Habitat Group'. She covers the eighteenth century entrepreneurial shows by Lever and Bullock, later links with romantic painting and sculpture, the 'tasteful' decorative displays popular with Victorians, trophies, the use of specimens in early photography, the growth of commercial taxidermy and its links with museums, and the development of the 'group method' of arranging specimens. The second part of the paper deals with the evolution of the 'habitat group' method of display, mainly in North America, and how these groups formed a focus for the popularization of natural history and the various 'back to nature' movements in the early twentieth century.

For those who like to theorise on the upsurge in popularity of conservation and natural history and how the average person can 'experience' wildlife as a leisure activity there is an interesting paper in **Biological Conservation** (53:3) by D A Duffus and P Dearden called 'Non-Consumptive Wildlife-Orientated Recreation: A Conceptual Framework'. It is concerned with the change in attitudes in North America from killing wildlife in a regulated way (hunting) and the management values this requires to what the authors' call the non-consumptive use of wildlife (photographing; 'experiencing wildlife' at first hand) and the differences in management philosophy and practice this more enlightened approach requires.

It may seem odd to try to rationalise a recreational activity in this way, but when mega-bucks are involved (in 1981, 3.6 millions Canadian spent 2.1 billion dollars on non-consumptive wildlife-orientated trips; in 1988 whale-watchers generated expenditure estimated at 4.2 million dollars on Vancouver Island) the providers such as national park managers, reserve wardens and conservationists in general need a way of assessing customer satisfaction at 'wildlife encounters'; counting the corpses in the bag doesn't work any more! It makes an interesting read once you penetrate the transatlantic jargon.

'Evaluating Interpretation' is the theme of the July 1990 issue of **Interpretation**, the Bulletin of the Centre for Environmental Interpretation. The whole issue is concerned with how we judge visitor response to interpretative exhibitions through the use of techniques like interviewing visitors in structured or unstructured ways, in groups or singly;

questionnaires; observation of visitor behaviour and using live interpreters who can answer visitors' questions directly. The techniques are summarised on the centre pages with a useful discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each and an evaluation of what each is likely to cost.

**BSBI News** (55) has a paper by A O Chater on the financing and publication of local floras which is relevant to all museum curators with hopes of publishing works on any aspect of local natural history. It draws on the returns (52) from questionnaires sent to the organisers of 58 local floras published within the past 20 years. Of particular interest are sections on total sales, print runs, pre-publication offers, costs, sources of funding and procedure. There is also a formula for calculating the selling price of a flora. The paper has a lot of practical information drawn from the real experiences of people who have actually done the job and is all the more valuable for that. But one fact is clear - with careful planning and costing, publishing a local flora need not cost you an arm and a leg; but it won't make you a fortune either.

All those members who attended the AGM on the Isle of Man this year will be interested in the following note from **Habitat** (26:8). 'A plan by the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) to help maintain and increase the small breeding population of Choughs on the Isle of Man, has been awarded £40,000 by Manx Airlines over the next ten years. The project will develop work already carried out by NCC on the Hebridean Islands of Islay and Colonsay - the only other Chough stronghold in Britain. The grant will go towards the costs of maintaining traditional buildings associated with long-established agriculture based on stock rearing and make permanent their otherwise temporary use as chough nest sites.'

**The Conservator** (14) has a paper by Haupt, Dyer and Hanlan which may be of interest to biological conservators who like to use traditional materials when renovating old biological preparations - 'An Investigation into Three Animal Glues'. The glues in question are rabbit skin glue, gelatin and isinglass and the test procedures included pH, surface tension, viscosity, film characteristics and mechanical characteristics (elongation) at various relative humidities. There is no 'best' choice between these;