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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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96% are kept in these dire circumstances. The RSPCA graphically compare this confinement to expecting three people to live together forever in a telephone booth. Factory farmers argue that the battery method reduces the incidence of disease, cuts labour costs and provides a plentiful supply of eggs at sensible prices. Along with a growing band of people, I am now happy to pay that little bit more for free range eggs.

In the final section of the exhibition, a central tableau of human divers beside an inflatable boat highlights the massive RSPCA rescue campaign in 1988 to save hundreds of sick and dying seals from along our coasts - victims of a distemper virus. The disease is of unknown causation but there is a suspicion that marine pollution may have played a part, or at least in exacerbating the problem. A nearby showcase featuring an oiled seabird was -especially following the Gulf catastrophe - another grim reminder of how cruelty to animals can be brought about simply through a failure to control environmental pollution.

Overall, 'Action for Animals' is very worthwhile. It places the RSPCA in a historical context and shows just how much they have moved on from the soft 'cuddly kitten' image to tackle hard issues in animal welfare involving horrific or undesirable practices both in this country and overseas. From an organisation that twenty years ago concentrated mainly on domestic animals (and, in doing so, perhaps lost its way) emerges a more radical RSPCA prepared to act on critical aspects of zoo and laboratory animal welfare and also deal efficiently with the problems of wild animals. This last point makes 'Action for Animals' especially relevant to natural historians. The exhibition is available for touring and comes with comprehensive literature packs, including well-produced teaching notes and school worksheets. Leicestershire Museums have organised a full series of interesting lectures to accompany 'Action for Animals' and any curator wishing to provide another venue for this exhibition may similarly be able to obtain speakers through the RSPCA, Causeway, Horsham, West Sussex RH12 1HG: Tel. Horsham (0403) 64181.

Gordon McGregor Reid, 12.3.91

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## Book Reviews

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### Two softback editions of standard works from Harley Books

#### **The Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland**

Edited by A. Maitland Emmet and John Heath

Volume 7 part 1 of The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland

Softback edition (1990) ISBN 0-946589-37-2 £24.95

#### **Grasshoppers and Allied Insects of Great Britain and Ireland**

Judith A. Marshall and E. C. M. Haes

Softback edition (1990) ISBN 0-946589-36-4 £15.95

To my mind, softback is a much more relevant description of these publications than paperback. The latter suggests tattiness, a short active life, and disposability; none of these are characteristics of the books in question. They are superbly produced and will, I am quite sure, withstand long term handling and use. Both have stitched spines and a laminated full colour cover which appears to be waterproof should one wish to take these books into the field.

Alas, there lies the rub. They are still fairly hefty works and at 20.1 x 25.3 cm, they are an awkward size for anything other than desk or bench use. Mind you, they contain far more information than one would wish for in a true field guide so they are perhaps better suited to life on the workbench than life in the rucksack. The illustrations are of such excellent quality that Harley Books might consider the viability of publishing just these with key identification characters alongside as pared down but still attractive pocket-sized field guides which could be used in conjunction with the monographs.

The text for both books is pretty much the same as for the hardback originals. 'Grasshoppers' has new records (to August 1990) noted on pages 13-14, revisions to the VC and island records on page 253, and corrigenda on page 254; there is also an illustration of silhouettes of representative species from each Order covered in the book together with a millimetre scale - presumably to be used in the field although I have stated my reservations about this above. 'Butterflies' has the same brilliant illustrations that were widely commented on when the hardback version was published, and there are a few minor text revisions.

The good news is the cost. Considering their quality, both are well priced; you save £25 by buying the softback version of 'Butterflies' and £14 by buying the softback 'Grasshoppers'. The sound guide (tape) for 'Grasshoppers' is still available at £5.75 and is an essential companion to the book.

Both of these books were reviewed when they came out in hardback. Please refer to BCG Newsletter vol 5 no 5 for 'Butterflies' and Journal of Biological Curation vol 1 no 1 for 'Grasshoppers'.

John Mathias

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## **An Atlas of the Land and Freshwater Mollusca of Northumberland and Durham**

by **Ralph Lowe**

Special publication no 4 of the Northumberland Biological Records Centre (1989) ISBN 0-95 09680-6-4. Cost £6.50 from Hancock Museum.

This is an A4, softback, plastic ring-bound book of 139 pages. Its large size belies its meagre content - by this I mean it could easily have been produced at a quarter its length or even less, simply by reducing the size of the distribution maps to more sensible proportions. There are 124 distribution maps at one per A4 page and it would, I feel sure, have been a simple task to reduce these to six per page to make a much more reasonably sized book.

As well as the maps there is a contents page, acknowledgements, introduction and six pages of habitat notes - about a line per species; at the end there is a bibliography and index. Nothing on the distribution of habitats in the area under study; no notes on the species distributions - simply a name and a map; no date categories - it is unclear when the records were made, and by my reading of the introduction they could be post 1934 (when Blackburn published his survey) or post 1965 (when the author's interests were rekindled) there is no real historical review of recording in the area. I would really have expected these to form part of any modern-day atlas.

These points aside, I welcome this addition to the mollusc atlases which are slowly emerging from the regions in the wake of the national atlas published by the Conchological Society in 1976, and under the strong encouragement and support, generously acknowledged in this volume, of Mike Kerney, the

national recorder. The coverage is good (the commonest species are marked off in all but one or two of the 10 km squares) and the species range is impressive (eleven *Pisidium* species are represented), but I would have liked some comparison between these recorded distributions and those of Blackburn in 1934 and even Alder in 1848.

In summary, this book is good as far as it goes, but with even a little more thought and effort it could have gone a great deal further.

John Mathias

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## **Big Mouths and Long Necks**

by **Michael A Taylor and John G Martin**

Published by Leicestershire Museums Service, 1990. ISBN 0-85022-287-7. Cost £1.50 (£2.00 by post)

This lively A5 booklet is one in a series of five (so far) on geological (specifically palaeontological) subjects published in association with the dinosaur gallery at the Leicestershire Museum. *Big Mouths and Long Necks* is about the plesiosaurs - what they might have looked like, how they might have lived, how their remains were found, their place in evolution, where they can be seen (a good plug for museum collections here). It is well illustrated and accessible, good for children and adults alike. As a non-geologist, I can recommend a dip into this informative and attractive little book, and suggest it would be a good seller in any museum shop where vertebrate fossils feature in the displays.

John Mathias

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## **WOT A BARGAIN! Biology Curators Group Newsletter**

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