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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

Title: Have you seen a mermaid?

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When police searched Anthony Coleman's home they found an illegal collection of stuffed, dead birds, Brighton magistrates heard.

Coleman, 26, of Beaconsfield Road, Hastings, admitted burglary at the Booth Museum in Dyke Road, Brighton. Coleman, a butcher, also admitted having a dead kestrel, long-eared owl and a buzzard, in breach of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

Esme Grant, prosecuting, said museum staff found Coleman in an exhibit storeroom cordoned off from the public with a bag filled with rare birds' eggs. He told police he stole the eggs because he had not wanted to take them from the wild.

Anne Markwick, defending, said: "He is a wildlife enthusiast. In itself this is a very harmless hobby but he was under stress because he was separated at the time from his wife." Miss Markwick said Coleman was completely ignorant that he had the stuffed birds illegally. She said by law the dead birds should have been registered with the Department of the Environment and the owner has to show how they died.

He bought the birds, which were in cages, eight years ago from a junk shop and because he could not say how they died he had to plead guilty. Coleman was fined £250 for stealing the eggs and £75 for having the stuffed birds.

Note from Editor: the culprit was apprehended almost by chance on a Sunday afternoon. John Cooper happened to be walking through the museum with an attendant when they heard the floor creak above their heads. No-one should have been there, so they investigated and caught the man red-handed.

Since then, the access stairs to the stores have been enclosed to prevent anyone from climbing in and security has been tightened generally. It is also likely that the Booth Museum will be offered the culprit's illegal collection.

The only really mystifying aspect to this whole affair is: what was John Cooper doing walking through his museum on Sunday afternoon when he should have been at home watching footy on the telly!

Have you seen a mermaid? Do you have a mermaid in your collections?

Do you know of any mermaids in other collections?

If so we would like to hear from you., We are conducting a survey of mermaids, and mermen, and would like to know about any material (extant or destroyed) that may be known to you. References in local publications, ephemera, manuscript notes and correspondence may provide important clues to the whereabouts of specimens - if your collections include any references to merfolk we would be very interested to hear from you. Even records of specimens you may have seen elsewhere would be appreciated.

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Manual of Natural History Curatorship

**Editors: Geoff Stansfield, John Mathias,
Gordon Reid**

At a recent meeting in the Museums and Galleries Commission of the editorial sub-committee for the Manual of Natural History Curatorship, at which most of the contributors were present, the following outline for the Manual was agreed. In fact, most contributors have now expanded this outline into a detailed breakdown of contents for their chapters, and two of the chapters have already been written. The bulk of the meeting was spent going through the details of chapter contents and ironing out possible areas of overlap between contributors. The Manual is to be published by HMSO and is being supported financially by the Museums and Galleries Commission. We are looking for publication by the end of the year.

Outline of contents and contributors

1 Function and organization of NHM's
Functions and organization of natural history museums to include national, local authority, university and private museums, their individual characteristics as far as funding, administration and functions.

Geoff Stansfield