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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Review

Paine, C (Ed.) 1992 *Standards in the Museum Care of Biological Collections*. Museums and Galleries Commission, London. 55pp. ISBN 0.948630.18.3

This work consists of two main parts, preceded by a Forward by the Earl of Cranbrook, and an Introduction, and finished with three Tables of environmental data.

Part One on 'Managing Collections' contains nine sections covering standards for: collecting; disposal of specimens; curation and conservation; access; loans out; documentation; research; care of living collections; biological records.

Part Two on 'Protecting Collections' contains a further nine sections covering standards for protection against: theft; fire; flood; physical damage; damage caused by poor construction or maintenance of buildings, furnishings and fittings; poor environmental conditions [RH, Temp., Light]; together with standards for protecting primary records and protecting people from specimens. The last section covers disaster planning.

The Tables give information on recommended levels of relative humidity and temperature for the display and storage of biological specimens, and for biological records, together with the recommended maximum levels of illuminance and ultra-violet radiation for biological materials.

Some of the areas where BCG members could find this book useful include:

1. Helping to persuade governing bodies to make more resources available for the care of natural science collections.
2. Help in drawing up sensible performance indicators and objectives for the care of collections, when these are requested by the funding bodies.
3. Help external auditors assess how an authority is looking after its collections.
4. Even if you do not agree with every standard, most will be helpful in drawing up a collection management policy; often all that will be needed is 'will follow the appropriate standard(s) in the *'Standards...'*

These standards will certainly change as techniques and expert opinions change.

Individuals and institutions may disagree with specific statements, or may feel that the work could be improved upon, but the standards do contain a consensus of current professional opinion of best practice to which every museum might aspire. The 'Expert Group' who largely drafted the standards consisted of 21 active curators and conservators (mostly BCG members) and a further 52 museum professional were consulted on some or all of the draft. The Museums and Galleries Commission intends to publish an updated edition of this book every few years, so anyone who feels strongly about anything contained in the *Standards* should make their views known to Steven Douglas at the Commission.

The work is presented as an A4 spiral bound book in glossy card covers; the rear cover is extended to provide a fold-out finding guide to the various sections, and also forms a handy bookmark. The *Standards* are available from the Museums and Galleries Commission, 16 St Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AA at £7.00 postpaid. I recommend this book as a useful reference work that should be on every member's desk.

Charles Pettitt

Wanted

Historic, prehistoric, wild and domestic cat samples from Britain and worldwide are requested by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to establish the identity of the Scottish wildcat. SNH's research is testing the hypothesis that no genetically or morphologically distinct wild living cat populations remain in Scotland. DNA analysis is being carried out on prehistoric, historic and contemporary cat samples. To date, carcasses and a live trapping programme have produced 325 samples while a further 120 historic samples have come from specimens in six Scottish museums. SNH are keen to maximise the number of samples and wish to collaborate with any museums with wild, hybrid or domestic cat material **from any time period** and **from anywhere in the world**. If you can help or require further information please contact: Mike Daniels or Dave Balharry, Scottish Natural Heritage, 2 Anderson Place, Edinburgh, EH6 5NP. Tel 031 554 9797 or Fax 031 446 2405.