



NatSCA

Natural Sciences Collections Association

<http://www.natsca.org>

The Biology Curator

Title: What's Important?

Author(s): Knell, S.

Source: Knell, S. (1995). What's Important?. *The Biology Curator, Issue 3*, 11.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/533>

NatSCA supports open access publication as part of its mission is to promote and support natural science collections. NatSCA uses the Creative Commons Attribution License (CCAL) <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/> for all works we publish. Under CCAL authors retain ownership of the copyright for their article, but authors allow anyone to download, reuse, reprint, modify, distribute, and/or copy articles in NatSCA publications, so long as the original authors and source are cited.

financial support for scientifically significant collections will be enhanced.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

Simon Knell, University of Leicester, 105 Princess Road East, Leicester, LE1 7LG.

This paper will essentially concern the fallibility of the collecting and curatorial process. It will test the basis on which decisions are made concerning the evaluation of collections; the role of connoisseurship; and the underlying assumptions of the collecting process. It will then go on to examine how value judgements concerning specimens are involved in the curatorial process - acquisition through to disposal - and how the process of collecting alters our perceptions of the material concerned.

Basically my argument is that natural science collections are too complex to evaluate effectively - they originate from a diversity of causes and then are wrapped up in a web of subjective assumptions in the hope that they will ultimately fulfil some immeasurable potential. Is it possible to make objective judgements about the value of natural science collections?

I do not intend to go into the valuation of collections - really my arguments concern the process that precedes valuation.

A DUTCH EXERCISE IN THE VALUATION OF NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

J. Krikken, National Museum of Natural History, P.O. Box 957, NL-2300 RA Leiden, The Netherlands.

A massive rescue operation for the preservation of cultural heritage in The Netherlands was initiated in 1990. This government sponsored national programme required a complete inventory of the considerable backlog in the conservation, restoration, housing, registration and documentation of collections in museums and archives of all sorts. This inventory involved a classification of all the state-owned collections and their included objects into four categories of relative importance, A through D, applicable to all cultural heritage disciplines, from the arts to archives. Top level material, e.g. type material in natural history collections, is in category A; bottom level material, unsuitable for storage or any further action other than complete disposal, comes in D. This nationally uniform approach to valuation questions was a *conditio sine qua non* for setting priorities in the allocation of funds by the government agency concerned, ie the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs. The application of the A-D valuation system to natural history collections required a further refinement and more precise definition of the four categories. This was achieved by the formulation of straightforward criteria representing widely accepted indicators of biological, geological, and display values, as well as some supplementary curatorial criteria, such as ownership status. In The Netherlands the system is now widely used, not only for grant allocation, but also in planning documents, acquisition proposals and other collection management tools. In this paper the A-D

categorization is described and problems encountered in its application as a tool in implementing collection management policies are discussed.

AN ATTEMPT AT VALUING THE ZOOLOGICAL REFERENCE COLLECTION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGY, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE.

Kevin K.P. Lim and Mrs C. M. Yang, Zoological Reference Collection, Department of Zoology, National University of Singapore, Kent Ridge, SINGAPORE 0511, Republic of Singapore

An attempt is made to review the scientific, cultural and monetary value of the Zoological Reference Collection of the Department of Zoology, National University of Singapore (ZRC). We feel that its overall value is essentially the same as many other established zoological collections.

The ZRC consists largely of the original zoological collection of the former Raffles Museum, presently the National Museum of Singapore. It is a repository for research collections of Southeast Asian fauna and is one of the largest and most complete in the Sundaland region. It is unique and irreplaceable because a lot of the material originates from biotopes which are lost to development. Therefore, it is valued as a "natural heritage" for the region. The specimens continue to form the basis of many scientific publications. Although mainly consulted by taxonomists and systematists, the ZRC is also used by other biologists, as well as illustrators.

The ZRC plays a significant part in Singapore's cultural history and is valued as a "national heritage". It was founded by Sir Stamford Raffles, who was also the founder of modern Singapore. Assembled sometime before 1887, it has survived the Second World War and unfavourable government policies in the 1970s. Many specimens were donated by famous personalities in Singapore's history. A small part of the collection is on display for educational purposes.

It is very difficult to assess the monetary value of the ZRC. Ways of valuing each specimen through division of the amount used to procure and maintain resulted in ridiculously high prices. The only way to come up with a "reasonable" price is through arbitrary quotation. We concur that the collection is priceless as many species are presently endangered and are quite irreplaceable in our rapidly changing world.

THE COST OF COLLECTING: COLLECTION MANAGEMENT IN UK MUSEUMS.

Barry Lord, Gail Dexter Lord and John Nicks (1989), Lord Cultural Resources Ltd, 10 Windmill Row, London SE11 5DW

Lord Cultural Resources was engaged by the Office of Arts and Libraries to conduct a national study on the cost of managing collections in British museums including systematic collections. This pioneering study combines quantitative survey data with detailed case studies of representative museums to develop a profile of the state and costs of collection development and management, and