



<http://www.natsca.org>

The Biology Curator

Title: Book Review: Storage of Natural History Collections: a Preventative Conservation Approach.

Author(s): Stansfield, G.

Source: Stansfield, G. (1996). Book Review: Storage of Natural History Collections: a Preventative Conservation Approach.. *The Biology Curator, Issue 7*, 22 - 23.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/505>

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.

Conference Reports

particularly where collections do not have natural history curators, this was not touched on by the congress.

Sir Robert May for example spoke only about funding for taxonomic and ecological research, not the more mundane but equally important problems of storage and documentation.

For all the enthusiasm about global information exchanges a number of points were overlooked; in taxonomy it is still necessary to examine specimens and original documents, although computers may help to locate specimens and may possibly shorten search times. Condensing information for data entry may omit valuable data. Paper records often have annotations and may be used to verify identities of researchers etc., in the rush to computerise we should not undervalue written records.

Several speakers talked about management of information which seemed slightly worrying. The reality is that information is a valuable commodity and there was little explanation of how this would be dealt with.

The number of talks and nine o'clock start made for long and tiring days. The most valuable part of the meeting were the workshops, where the delegates could actually discuss their different problems and approaches to solutions. The major disappointment for us all was scheduling clashes meant that we were all only able to attend one conservation workshop, when they were all so relevant. For example on the second day a chance to meet UK natural sciences conservators, (a room which should have been open throughout the whole congress) was timetabled against workshops running at the same time. In future we suggest that workshops and discussion groups occupy a more prominent part of the proceedings.

It would seem nothing much has changed since Paul Richards' review of the Madrid Meeting (Newsletter Feb. 1993, Vol.10, No.1) !

The attendance of the authors at this Congress was possible as the result of each of us receiving a £100 bursary from the Biology Curators' Group for which we are very grateful.

| | |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Kate Andrew | Shropshire County Museum Service |
| David Lampard | Ipswich Museum |
| Clare Valentine | The Natural History Museum, London |
| Tony Walentowicz | Chelmsford Museums Service |

WORLDWIDE WEB SITES

Please send in any favourite sites, useful sites or just plain funny sites of interest to natural science curators.

Chris Collins tells me that there is an on-line Newsletter set up as a result of the Cambridge World Congress of 1996. To request inclusion on the mailing list send an e-mail to WCCR-request@esc.cam.ac.uk

Ingrid Birker at the Redpath Museum, McGill University, Montreal, Canada sends details of their Homepage on <http://www.mcgill.ca/redpath>

The Natural History Museum home page is on <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/index.html> This should contain information on the UK Systematics Forum too.

Manchester Museum has range of pages available. Collections information on line is present for parts of the Invertebrate Zoology, Minerals and Vertebrate Zoology collections. The home page is on <http://www.mcc.ac.uk/museum/> but turn off your "auto load images" setting first, because the home page is rather heavy on slow images!

The most exciting recent development from a local authority museum is from Hampshire County Museums Service. Their pages are part of a big Hampshire site covering many of the County Council's functions. The Museum Services pages are extremely extensive, and contain detailed collection catalogue information. The botany catalogue contains a list of vascular plant species, with the lowest level giving quite detailed catalogue entries. The search facility is excellent, but try to use more than the one word, because 'adder' brings up ladder and bladder too! Do have a look at this excellent information resource at <http://www.hants.gov.uk/museums/index.html>

Steve Garland

Book Review

Rose, Carolyn L., Hawks, Catharine A. and Geonways, Hugh H. (editors). 1995. *Storage of Natural History Collections: a Preventative Conservation Approach*. Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, 448 pp. Price \$36.00.

(This is a complementary volume to *Storage of Natural History Collections: Ideas and Practical Solutions* (Rose and de Torres, 1992)).

Contents

This new monograph claims to provide the basic information required to select storage approaches that are appropriate in a particular set of circumstances, and to make informed judgements about all aspects of collection environments.

It is presented in 5 sections together with a glossary and comprehensive (17 page) index. The following description of contents is drawn largely from the Preface to the book.

Section 1 'Creating and Managing Storage Facilities' explores the factors that cause deterioration and threaten collections, and the assessment of those risks. Methods of creating a protective and secure building for housing collections, as well as maintenance policies and procedures to retain its protective qualities, are then discussed in detail. Topics include: facilities management, architectural design concerns, and approaches to security, fire protection and emergency preparedness.

Section 2. 'Creating and Monitoring Storage Environments' focuses on the localised environment of storage facilities. This section presents methods to estimate storage space needs, to choose among the macro- and micro-

environmental options, and to select environmental control systems. This section also explores the specialised environments that prevail in cold storage, low-oxygen storage, and especially in the fluid environment of wet collections. Monitoring methods to enable staff to understand existing collections environments and to evaluate new environments in terms of temperature, relative humidity, air quality, pest control, or human health and safety are also covered.

Section 3 'Selecting and Testing Storage Equipment and Materials' discusses the materials that form the immediate environment surrounding specimens and objects. It explores the compositions and properties of storage equipment, and other housing materials. Topics covered include the materials science of cellulosic materials, including wood and plastic products, of plastics, and the identification and testing of storage components.

Section 4 'Storing Archival Collections and Collection Documentation' discusses issues that have an impact on the long term preservation of a variety of collections documentation media. In addition to photographic materials and paper-based library and archival holdings, the care of modern media such as videotapes and compact disks is also discussed.

Section 5 'Funding for Collections Care' looks at funding strategies that have been successful.

Assessment

The publication of a new monograph relating to natural history collections is always a cause for celebration. This exhaustive and carefully researched book, with extensive references, useful glossary and excellent index provides a thoughtful and practical approach to a subject which has, until recently, received scant attention.

The main reservation of this reviewer concerns the merits of attempting to cover all matters relating to storage in a single volume. Some chapters (e.g. those dealing with architectural considerations, security etc.) deal with general museological concerns which are already the subject of an extensive literature. In practice, a curator embarking on a new storage project would be wise to consult this literature rather than rely on the condensed version in this volume.

The question also arises as to whether it might have been preferable to produce a combined volume on storage *and* handling. Many writers have adopted this approach as there are some areas where the two are inextricably linked. However, this would have produced an even more unwieldy

volume. (In fact handling is dealt with in some chapters ('Paper Documents') but not in others).

Some chapters are particularly valuable in that they deal with topics specific to natural history collections which have not been covered adequately elsewhere. Such topics include 'Storage in Standard and Ultra-Cold Freezers: Living Biological Specimens', and 'Storage in Fluid Preservatives', both of which are excellent and sharply focussed. (The latter chapter duplicates much of the material in *Manual of Natural History Curatorship* which was apparently not available to the authors). The inclusion of case studies (e.g. Pest monitoring) is useful as it allows the reader to compare theory and practice.

There are some minor inconsistencies and omissions. For example, whilst in some places the special needs of natural history collections are considered in some detail, (e.g. 'Wet Collections' in the Chapter on Fire Protection), in large sections of Section 1, no mention is made of the special needs of natural history collections. In the 'Health and Safety' section of the Chapter on 'Architectural and Design Considerations' it might have been appropriate to discuss the specific building and design needs for processing natural history collections (e.g. pathological specimens which might be carrying dangerous pathogens; material which might have been treated with highly poisonous pesticides). In 'Storage Equipment' a discussion on the suitability of compactor storage units of different types of natural history collections would have been useful.

UK readers should note that references tend to be heavily weighted to North American literature, and that organisations referred to (funding bodies, sources of information, specialist suppliers) are, without exception North American. However, all in all, it must be said that this is a carefully prepared and very useful monograph, and one which any natural history curator embarking on a storage project should consult. It is available for \$36 from SPNC Treasurer, 121 Trowbridge Hall, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242-1379, USA and may be purchased with *Storage of Natural History Collections: Ideas and Practical Solutions*, for \$70. Optional air mail \$10 per volume, \$20 for the set.

Geoff Stansfield

September 1996

Auk Egg Search

All but one Great Auk egg in this country has been traced by the author of a book on their history.

The un-located one was known to have been sold by Spinks Auctioneers between 1975 and 1980.

If anyone knows where this egg is please contact: Errol Fuller, Oxenhoath, Hadlow, Kent, TN11 9FS or 'phone 01732 810615.