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SPNHC NEWSLETTER

Society for the Preservation
of Natural History Collections

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USE OF POLYCARBONATE FOOD STORAGE PAILS IN WET COLLECTIONS

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In the Division of Herpetology at the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History (OMNH), we use 22-quart, transparent, polycarbonate, round, food storage pails to house large, fluid-preserved specimens. These containers are a unique alternative to comparably sized fluid storage containers because they are clear. Although they have snap-on lids, a potential problem for evaporation, the clarity of the pails allows fluid levels to be closely monitored. To help reduce evaporation, we recommend the use of Builder's sealing tape (3M product #8086) around the lid-pail junction. To help monitor fluid levels, we recommend using a wax pencil to mark the level of fluid when the pails were last filled. The pails are durable, easy to carry, and can be nested for storage when empty.

Description and pictures of the pails

The pails and snap-on lids are made of transparent, food-grade, polycarbonate (Camwear®) manufactured by CAMBRO Manufacturing Company, 5801 Skylab Road, Huntington Beach, CA 92647, 1-800-833-3003 (CAMBRO Product Number RFSCW22). The pails, with molded-in handles, have graduated markings on one side and are available in sizes from one to 22 quarts.



Figure 1. CAMBRO 22 Qt. round polycarbonate pail and lid

History of pail use at the OMNH

We purchased about 50 pails in 1991 to replace ceramic crocks formerly used to house large specimens. In 1999, the collection was moved across campus to a new facility at the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History. The pails were used heavily during the move, and only one pail was broken during the process. Since the move, the pails have been stored in the Collection of Amphibians and Reptiles at the OMNH. In the collection, temperature is maintained at 68°F (±3°F), and the relative humidity is maintained at approximately 50%. The lights are equipped with ultraviolet filters but remain off most of the time.

As with all plastic storage containers, the pails should be kept in the dark or behind UV filters and monitored for yellowing, embrittlement, and/or scratching. The long-term stability of these pails in fluid collections has not been studied, but the polycarbonate pails used at the OMNH are in excellent condition after 11 years of performance.

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Purchase information: The pails cannot be purchased directly from CAMBRO Manufacturing Company; however, most restaurant supply companies sell the pails for about \$25 for a case of six.



Figure 2. CAMBRO 22 Qt. round polycarbonate pail with specimens in 70% ethanol. Note the graduation marks on the left side of the pail. Builders sealing tape has been placed around the lid-pail juncture.



Figure 3. Storage of pails in the Collection of Amphibians and Reptiles at the OMNH. Note empty pails nested for compact storage.

AAM Position Statement University Natural History Museums and Collections

At its November meeting, the AAM Board of Directors issued a position statement concerning the current difficult situation at many university natural history museums and collections.

AAM is greatly concerned “that a significant number of America’s natural history museums and collections affiliated with universities are currently threatened with severe financial cutbacks, dispersal of collections, and outright closure.”

At risk are collections of irreplaceable objects, such as geological, paleontological, zoological and botanical specimens, anthropological and historical artifacts, and archives. These collections are held in trust for the public; they are the priceless heritage of this and future generations; and, they constitute critically important resources for new knowledge.

University museums provide unique contributions to the public good through education and research. Their collections are a shared legacy, serving as a constantly growing database to document the diversity and history of life on earth, to develop strategies for the management of natural resources, and to find solutions to some of the world’s most pressing problems, from biodiversity conservation to the discovery of new medicines. In addition, exhibits and programs in university museums help to advance broader understanding of the scholarly and scientific enterprise.

AAM urges university administrators, trustees, state legislators, and alumni to do everything in their power to preserve, protect and support their university museums and collections of natural and cultural history. Temporary financial difficulties must not be allowed to interfere with the overriding responsibility of the governing authority to be effective stewards of these collections and to safeguard the public interest by assuring continued access to them.

AAM strongly urges the leadership of universities, and their museums to work together to develop creative financial and organizational strategies that will secure their museums and collections for future generations.

AAM also strongly urges universities, museums, governmental agencies, foundations, and other stakeholders to begin a national dialogue with the aim of providing long-term stability for America’s university museums of natural history and their irreplaceable collections. A major aim is to strengthen connections to constituencies that can speak in support of these important museums.

Visit SPNHC on-line at:



www.spnhc.org

Presidential Report

ROBERT HUXLEY,

*Department of Botany, The Natural History Museum,
Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD, United Kingdom*

This relatively short Presidential Profile will be my last before I hand the gavel to Iris Hardy at this year's meeting in New York. I would like to take the opportunity to reflect briefly on how our community relates to the world at large, and in particular the role of SPNHC. As is all too evident, our community, and the collections in our charge, have been under threat from a number of quarters, mainly economic and political, and this has been documented in these columns over the last few years. SPNHC has, on the other hand, continued to thrive and importantly, in my view, has become the prime organisation to which decision makers refer on collection issues. This has manifested itself in a number of ways - past-President Sue McLaren being invited to sit on the White House-driven, Preservation Working Group and the *Save America's Treasures* campaign. Furthermore, the speakers and participants list at last year's annual meeting clearly cut across the hierarchy. Our particular strength has been to maintain respect at management level, whilst providing a forum and source of practical help to all those working day to day with natural history collections. I see this bridging role as strengthening each year.

The cliché that the organisation's strengths are in its membership remains as true as ever and this brings me to my annual list of appeals. Firstly, to maintain the highly participatory nature of SPNHC I would encourage you to become involved in our various committees. Every new addition brings a suite of new experiences and outlooks, and I cannot emphasise enough how inclusive and friendly these groups are. Secondly, the membership can contribute to the society's aims and success by attending and contributing to the annual meeting and by presenting papers on collections care projects. So, do sign up and come to what promises to be an exciting and highly relevant meeting in New York this May. The meeting will be held at the American Museum of Natural History, New York and tackles, head-on, the sensitive issue of disaster awareness. It includes a technical session focusing on issues relating to emergency preparedness and response and a one-day workshop on practical issues encountered in responding to the first 24 hours after a disaster. To add some historical perspective, an extreme lesson in disaster planning was learnt here at the Natural History Museum, London in the dark days of 1940 when an incendiary bomb fell through the roof of the Botany Department. Although there was inevitably fire damage, possibly more damage was caused by the well intentioned action of volunteer fire crews whose axes damaged cabinets and specimens, hoses washed labels off and resulting water even allowed some 200-year-old seeds to germinate! In spite of this a triage system after the event allowed much to be saved.

It has been a main aim of the last year to strengthen our ties with sister organisations and in New York we will be sharing our meeting with the International Society for Biological Repositories (ISBER) bringing together managers of "traditional" collections with those of frozen tissues and other "new collections" in their charge.

SPNHC is firmly establishing itself as a truly international organization representing those who study and care for natural history collections. The annual meeting in London in 2005 will be a milestone in this process and will strengthen our links to several other organizations. It will also see the launch of a pan-European set of standards and benchmarks for natural history collections with application in the

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The **Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections** was formed in 1985 and is recognized as a non-profit organization [501(c)(3)] in the United States. SPNHC members receive *Collection Forum*, a biannual journal of reviewed technical information, and two issues of the *SPNHC Newsletter* each year. The Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC) is a multidisciplinary organization composed of individuals who are interested in development and preservation of natural history collections. Natural history collections include specimens and supporting documentation, such as audio-visual materials, labels, library materials, field data, and similar archives. The Society actively encourages the participation of individuals involved with all aspects of natural history collections.

The **SPNHC Newsletter** (ISSN 1071-2887) is published twice a year, March and September, by the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, c/o Division of Ichthyology, Natural History Museum & Biodiversity Research Center, University of Kansas, Dyche Hall, 1345 Jayhawk Boulevard, Lawrence, KS 66045-7561, USA.

Changes of address should be directed to Lisa Palmer, Treasurer, PO Box 797, Washington, DC 20044-0797; palmer.lisa@nsmh.si.edu.

Submissions are welcome. Please forward announcements, articles and notes to the Newsletter Editors by mail or email.

Deadline for the next Newsletter is August 1, 2004.

..... Continued from page 3: *Presidential report*

wider world. Now is the time to start lobbying for support to attend what promises to be the major international meeting of its kind for some years.

I would like to end with a quote that is as relevant now as it was in the 19th century. "It is therefore, an important object, which governments and scientific institutions should immediately take steps to secure, that in all countries the most perfect collections possible in every branch of natural history should be made and deposited in national museums, where they may be available for study and interpretation. If this is not done, future ages will certainly look back upon us, as a people so immersed in the pursuit of wealth, as to be blind to higher considerations. They will charge us with having culpably allowed the destruction of those records which we had within our power to preserve; of having allowed many to perish irrecoverably from the face of the earth, uncared for and unknown." Alfred Russell Wallace

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Conservation Committee Report

The activities of the Conservation Committee, since the annual meeting in Lubbock, have been directed toward meeting the goals and objectives outlined in its 2003-2004 work plan. Most of the activities undertaken so far have fallen under the auspices of three subcommittees.

Resources Subcommittee

The two resource display units, which are maintained by Subcommittee Co-chairs Cindy Ramotnik and Janet Waddington, were advertised in the Spring 2003 *Collection Forum*. Additional advertising venues, both electronic and print, are being investigated. Robin Panza is checking the display materials and suppliers information provided on the website in order to determine whether all are still current. Cindy recently sent out the American unit to the Lower Hudson Conference of Museums for use in two workshops this spring. In May, it will travel to the American Museum of Natural History for the annual SPNHC meeting. Contact Cindy or Janet if you are interested in helping with the Resources Subcommittee (especially if you would like to relieve Janet of her caretaking duties for the Canadian unit) or if you would like to request the display for use at your institution.

Citations Subcommittee

Subcommittee Chair Paula Work continues to collect and provide citations from publications of interest for the SPNHC

newsletter. This year, she is also compiling a list of the journals currently being reviewed. Conservation Committee members will then review the list in order to determine whether additional journals need to be included. Contact Paula if you would like to offer any much-needed assistance with the work of this Subcommittee.

Adhesives Subcommittee

Gretchen Anderson, Subcommittee Chair, along with Subcommittee members Jude Southward, Lisa Kronthal, and Barbara Hamann have continued discussions regarding potential structure and scheduling of an adhesives workshop at a future SPNHC annual meeting.

We look forward to seeing both new and familiar faces at the meeting of the Conservation Committee at AMNH this May. Updates on current projects and proposals for new ones are invited. If you have any suggestions or questions in the meantime, feel free to contact Barbara Hamann or Jude Southward.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Hamann and Jude Southward, Co-Chairs

Membership Committee Report

CALLING ALL SPNHC MEMBERS! We have to be wary of the tendency for our numbers to diminish. Out of last year's round of approximately 400 individual renewals, apparently about 70 folks chose not to renew.

While there will always be some attrition, it's good to think of how we might counter this trend. Do you attend professional meetings or other gatherings where you might encounter potential members? If you'd like membership brochures to carry along, please let Lisa Palmer know, as she is the custodian of our vast brochure supply.

And think in "interdisciplinary" ways: our organization often appeals to people with a strong technical or cultural interest in natural history collections, but who are not necessarily "collections professionals". Our organization and its members provide info and advice you can hardly get elsewhere.

Do you know of an area where we might "beef up" our services and thus do better at member retention? Please send those suggestions along to any SPNHC officer.

Respectfully submitted,
James M. Bryant, Chair

Education & Training Committee Report

The Education and Training Committee is concentrating its efforts on SPNHC objectives related to providing training opportunities, developing workshops, and improving membership services.

The "Use of Digital Technology in Museums" workshop was held at the 18th Annual Meeting in Lubbock, Texas, and was organized by members of the Host and Documentation Committees. At the Lubbock meeting, the committee discussed upcoming workshops as well as plans for a new web page. A workshop on "Emergency Response" is planned for SPNHC 2004 and is under development by Barbara Moore and the 2004 Host Committee. A future workshop on "Adhesives and Consolidants" is under development by the Conservation Committee.

The Education and Training Committee will continue work on 1) improving membership development and services; 2) improving professional expertise in managing and caring for collections by communicating the importance of participation in professional development activities, providing training opportunities, developing workshops, and providing for the active exchange of information; and 3) ideas for increasing collaboration with other organizations.

Respectfully submitted,
Laura Abraczinskas and Lori Benson

Publications Committee Report

The Publications Committee has very little to report. Since the last issue of *Collection Forum* was published we have received eight manuscripts, mostly short, all of which are still in either review or revision stage. With the increasing demands on everyone's time, our team of dedicated Associate Editors is dwindling. If anyone is interested in becoming an associate editor for *Collection Forum*, please contact the Managing Editor at janetw@rom.on.ca.

Two special publication projects are underway. Steve Williams and Cathy Hawks are gathering manuscripts and have started the review process for a book entitled "Museum Studies: Perspectives and Innovations" in memory of Carolyn Rose. Cathy Hawks is also the primary SPNHC editor for "Health and Safety for Museum Professionals," a book being coordinated with the Health and Safety Committee of AIC.

All members should have received a special order form for SPNHC books offering a limited time 10% discount. Orders must be submitted to University Products on the special form in order to get the discount. Copies of the form are allowed. This is your opportunity to buy our latest publication "MuseumWise: Workplace Words Defined" as well as picking up copies of "Managing the Modern

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Membership

Membership applications for individuals (US\$25), Libraries (US\$30) or Associates/Corporate (US\$50) may be submitted to:

Lisa F. Palmer, SPNHC Treasurer
P.O. Box 797
Washington, DC 20044-0797
USA

Be sure to include the following information:

Name, Discipline Specialty, Institution
Address (Street, City, State/Province, Country, Zip/Postal Code)
Voice telephone, Fax Telephone, E-mail address

Payment may be made by cheque, money order, Visa or Mastercard.

Membership application/renewal form by portable document (Adobe Acrobat Reader required): <http://www.spnhc.org/renew.pdf>

Membership application/renewal form by Word file: <http://www.spnhc.org/renewal.doc>

Life Membership

The SPNHC Life Membership is a special membership category for those interested in the long-term financial stability of our organization. Life membership monies are invested towards the future goals of the Society. SPNHC life memberships are available for \$625. The fee is 25 times the Individual Membership rate, currently \$25. Life Memberships may be paid in one of three ways:

- (1) one-time payment of \$625;
- (2) two-year installments of \$350/1st year and \$275/2nd year;
- (3) three-year installments of \$300/1st year, \$200/2nd year and \$125/3rd year.

Please contact the Treasurer should you require further information about life memberships.

Lisa F. Palmer, Treasurer
National Museum of Natural History

..... Continued from page 3: *Publication Committee report*

Herbarium” and the two popular storage volumes “Storage of Natural History Collections: A Preventive Conservation Approach” and “Storage of Natural History Collections: Ideas and Practical Solutions.” The deadline is April 30.

Respectfully submitted,
Janet Waddington,
Chair and Managing Editor, *Collection Forum*

Call for Nominations

NOMINATIONS are being sought for any and all SPNHC awards! Please refer to the web site for complete descriptions of the various awards and grants given by the Society.

Send any questions and/or nominations to: Dr. Jean F. DeMouthe, California Academy of Sciences, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, CA 94118. You can call or e-mail Jean at: 415-750-7094 or jdemouthe@calacademy.org.

2004 SPNHC renewals are overdue

Please submit your renewal to SPNHC Treasurer, P.O. Box 797, Washington, DC 20044-0797 if you wish to retain your SPNHC membership. The SPNHC Newsletter and Collection Forum are benefits of your membership. If you would like to continue to receive these publications, you must renew your SPNHC membership.

To learn more about our membership categories visit our Membership page at www.spnhc.org. Questions? Contact Lisa Palmer at palmer.lisa@nsmnh.si.edu.

Welcome NEW SPNHC Members

Associate Members

Michele Greenan of Indiana State Museum
William T. Ripley of The Children's Museum
The Registrar at the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History

Library Members

Documentary Research Centre at the Canterbury Museum
Lafayette Natural History Museum & Planetarium
Marine Resources Library of the South Carolina DNR/MRD
Natural History Branch, Smithsonian Institution
Universitetsbiblioteket Tromsø, Norway

Regular Members

Liath Appleton	James B. Ladonski
Melissa Arthur	Travis J. LaDuc
Lisa Bergwall	Athena LaTocha
Gerald Braden	Angela Linn
Marc Branham	Travis Marsico
Julie L. Brush	Gary Mason
Carol R. Butler	C. Giles Miller
Neftali Camacho	Alison Murray
Judy Chupasko	Victoria Noble
James Cordeiro	Kathy Omura
Gwen Corder	Pamela R. Owen
Jacques Cuisin	Alison M. Paul
Deborah Deibler Steele	Suzanne C. Peurach
Abby Grace Drake	Olga Potapova
Jennifer A. Dropkin	Babs Potter
Wayne Elisens	Carolyn Rebbert
Marilee Flannery	Dennis R. Ruez, Jr.
Karen E. Francl	Donna L. Ruhl
Ronald Fritzsche	Nancy Russell
Tim Gamble	James C. Sagebiel
J. Tom Giermakowski	Akiko Saito
Tino Gonsalves	Judy Sanders
Robert H. Hanner	Sally Sapienza
Niko Herzog	Amy Singer
Jackie Hoff	Soledad Tancoff
Vicki Jackson	Leonard C. Thorson
Ronald A. Javitch	Krista Zala

Transportation of Dangerous Goods

During the 2003 SPNHC Meetings at Texas Tech University, many of us were surprised and concerned by a presentation by Frank Walski, the Shipping Manager at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. Sylvie Laframboise had conveyed information about the same subject in Montreal in 2002. However, Frank's presentation, with its admonition that it is not legal to send fluid-preserved specimens in any quantity via the U.S. Postal Service, sent shockwaves through the group. As a result, President Rob Huxley appointed a Sessional Committee on Transportation of Dangerous Goods. As a first step, we want to make the SPNHC membership universally aware that these regulations exist. They are worldwide – not just U.S. or Canadian based, and not just being enforced as a result of the September 11th tragedy. In fact, some of the regulations have been in affect since 1974.

The term “Dangerous Goods” is used internationally, whereas for many years the same materials have been called “Hazardous Substances” in the U.S. Frank Walski has created a CD that provides a basic overview of dangerous goods/hazardous

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Museum Collection Resources Display Available for Loan

The Resources Subcommittee of the Conservation Committee (SPNHC) maintains two displays of supplies and materials used by many museums for the storage and preservation of natural history collections. Examples of items included in the displays are: materials used in the construction of storage containers and specimen supports; equipment for monitoring storage environments (e.g., humidity, temperature, air quality, insects); and a variety of containers for the storage of collections and documentation. Some of the products are discipline specific (e.g., pH neutral glassine for interleaving between herbarium sheets) but most can be used in multidisciplinary collections (e.g., Ethafoam® for lining shelves and drawers; Tyvek® tape for box and tray construction). The displays are available for loan to interested parties for meetings, conferences, and other museum related activities. Shipping costs to and from the requested venues are the responsibility of the borrower. There is no loan fee but SPNHC invites borrowers to make a voluntary contribution to cover the costs of routine maintenance. For additional information, or to borrow a display, contact:

Cindy Ramotnik
US Geological Survey
Department of Biology
University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131
telephone (505) 277-5369
fax (505) 277-0304
ramotnik@unm.edu

Janet Waddington
Department of Palaeobiology
Royal Ontario Museum
100 Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 2C6
telephone (416) 586-5593
fax (416) 586-5863
janetw@rom.on.ca

MUSEUM SOS: Strategies for Emergency Response and Salvage



19th Annual Meeting of the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections

This Spring the American Museum of Natural History will host the 19th Annual Meeting of the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (May 11-16, 2004). The theme of the meeting is *Museum SOS: Strategies for Emergency Response & Salvage*, and as part of this year's activity we will be devoting one day of the conference's technical sessions to talks focusing on issues relating to emergency preparedness

and response. A one-day workshop that deals with practical issues encountered in responding to the first 24 hours after a disaster, the most critical time period, will follow the meeting. In addition, the International Society for Biological and Environmental Repositories (ISBER) will join SPNHC and organize a specialty session covering issues related to biomaterials and setting up tissue repositories. The first 100 SPNHC delegates to register will travel to New Haven, Connecticut, to visit Yale University's new Environmental Science Center, an arm of the Peabody Museum of Natural History. As always the SPNHC banquet promises to be a special night for the 2004 delegates. We will board the World Yacht's MV Empress for a night of good company and spectacular views of the Manhattan skyline and the Statue of Liberty.

Deadlines to remember:

Abstract submission: February 18, 2004

Early Registration: March 15, 2004

SPNHC 2004 Meeting: May 11-16, 2004

Information on abstract submission, registration and housing is available on the SPNHC 2004 web site and remember to make your hotel reservations early! For more information, visit www.peabody.yale.edu/other/spnhc/, or contact Chris Norris, Department of Paleontology, American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, New York, New York 10024; norris@amnh.org. For ISBER program information, visit www.isber.org/MeetingNY04.

We hope to see you this May!

Chris Norris

..... Continued from page 6 : *Transportation of Dangerous goods*

substances issues. It is available from: Frank Walski, Smithsonian Institution, NMNH Shipping Office, P.O. Box 37012, Washington, DC 20013-7012. This CD covers what it is impossible to discuss within the space of a Newsletter article. However, to legally handle and ship materials such as ethanol, formalin and even dry ice in the United States, one is required to take special training and obtain certification. The depth of information obtained during that training is not attempted in this CD.

Having now gone through two different courses for certification myself since last September, I am better equipped to Chair this Sessional Committee. One goal of the Committee is to seek specific interpretation of the regulations for museum collections. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that we may even be able to achieve some relief from regulation by petitioning the proper international agencies regarding our unique circumstances. We hope to report some progress on behalf of the museum community by the time of the SPNHC meetings in New York. Until then, we hope that many of you will find Frank Walski's CD helpful.

Suzanne McLaren, Sessional committee chair

AAM Helps Collections Stay in the Public Domain

The American Association of Museums has established the Collections Exchange Center, part of the AAM Web site, where member museums may make deaccessioned material available to other member museums via sale, trade, or donation. At the time of writing, postings include natural history and ethnographic material, including a holotype specimen of *Megaptera osphyia* (Humpback Whale).

It is AAM's hope that this site will assist museums in the effective management of the collections while also helping to ensure that material held in the public trust remains available to researchers and to the public. By providing this through AAM museum membership, the Association provides a secure and confidential venue in which museums can exchange information with their peers about collections that need a new home. Access the site at www.aam-us.org/newcec. To view or post listings will require an AAM institutional member id number. The site also includes resources available to all users regarding legal, ethical, and safety issues related to deaccessioning. For more information contact Beth Merritt at bmerritt@aam-us.org.

Elizabeth Merritt
Director, Museum Advancement & Excellence
American Association of Museums

The Long Awaited Arrival of Issue 13 of the Natural History Collections Working Group Newsletter

The International Council of Museums Committee for Conservation (ICOM CC) has numerous working groups attributed to it and one such group is the Natural History Collections Working Group. After almost six years the working group has just published its 13th issue. The first issue of the newsletter was published in April 1986 and continued annually until March 1998. The long break in the publication of this, the most recent issue, was due to the stepping down of the last coordinator with no replacement. The newsletter is now available to fully paid up ICOM members and back issues 1 through 12 are also available as pdf files on request.

The last triennial meeting held in Rio de Janeiro in September 2002 introduced a new coordinator, Andries van Dam and an assistant coordinator (editor) Victoria Purewal. The newsletter communicates the role of the working group and its future plans and it also includes technical papers, news, events, web page addresses and conference dates all relating to natural history collections and the necessary conservation. If you would like to receive the newsletter or would like to contribute to it please email vicky.purewal@nmgw.ac.uk. I hope to hear from you soon as it needs your support - otherwise another six years could slip by.

The fourteenth triennial ICOM CC meeting will be held in The Hague, the Netherlands, September 10 -16, 2005, and abstract submissions for posters and papers are requested by April 15, 2004.

For further information on ICOM and ICOM CC access: <http://icom.museum/> and, <http://icom-cc.icom.museum/Start/> respectively.

Victoria Purewal UKIC ACR,
Department of Biodiversity and Systematic Biology,
National Museum and Gallery of Wales,
Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NP, Wales, UK

This space could be yours.....

SPNHC Newsletter is looking for articles, news items, etc., for the next edition. Articles of 1000 words or less are welcome. The deadline for submissions is August 1st 2004. Contact Andy Bentley (ABentley@ku.edu) for information or to submit materials for consideration.

What Should We Call the Components of Museum Collections?

John E. Simmons¹

¹Collection Manager, Natural History Museum & Biodiversity Research Center and Coordinator, Museum Studies Program University of Kansas, 1345 Jayhawk Boulevard, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7561; jsimmons@ku.edu.

Two words are usually employed to refer to the components of museum collections—*object* and *specimen*. *Specimen* is commonly used in reference to the components of biological collections; *object* is used in reference to the components of non-biological collections. But what is the best word to use to refer to the components of all collections? Is there an inclusive term that can be used to refer to the components of any kind of museum collection? The words most frequently used in the literature for the components of museum collections include *artifact*, *item*, *object*, *specimen*, and *thing*.

The word *artifact* refers specifically to something made or modified by human beings. *Artifact* (or *artefact* in the British spelling) means “Anything made by human art and workmanship; an artificial product” (all quoted definitions and usage quotations are from the Oxford English Dictionary, or OED). Perhaps a better definition of *artifact* for museum purposes is an object showing human workmanship or modification. The word *artifact* is derived from the Latin word *arte* (skill) and *factum* (to do). The first recorded use of *artifact* was by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1821, when he penned the line, “The conception of all these, as realized in one and the same artefact, may be fairly entitled, the Ideal of an Ink-stand” (OED).

The word *item* can be ruled out because it is too imprecise. The definition of *item* is “A statement, maxim, or admonition such as was commonly introduced by the word *item*; a saying with a particular bearing. Hence, generally, an imitation, a hint” (OED). The second definition is “An article or unit of any kind included in an enumeration, computation, or sum total...” (OED). *Item* comes from the Latin word *ita* (thus). The first recorded use of *item* was in 1578, in the sentence, “The lawe layeth no Item to youre charge” (OED).

Specimen is unacceptable for all collection components because of its Aristotelian or typological implications, and because it refers to a representative part of a whole (not every collection component is a representative part of a whole). *Specimen* is defined as “A means of discovering or finding out; an experiment... A pattern or model” (OED). As such a *specimen* usually means a part typical of a group, or something that belongs in a particular category (as in the title of Walt Whitman’s Civil War memoir, *Specimen Days and Collect*, which has nothing to do with specimens or collecting in the museum sense). *Specimen* is derived from the Latin *specere* (to look at). The first recorded use of the word *specimen* in English was in 1619, “Our Resurrection shall be like our Saviour’s: His and ours make a mutual Aspect; His the Specimen, and ours the Complement” (OED).

Thing can be eliminated because its use to describe collection components is too distant from its original meaning, and because the word refers to something inanimate. *Thing* means “A meeting, assembly, esp. a deliberative or judicial assembly, a court, a council... An entity of any kind. That which exists individually” (OED). The best definition of *thing* is probably a spatial entity or an inanimate object. The word *thing* comes from the Goth word *theihs* (time); it was first recorded use in English in about 888.

This leaves two interesting words, *object* and *element*. The meaning of *object* is reasonably adequate to the task, but *object* carries with it a certain amount of historical baggage as it has traditionally been used to refer to the components of non-biological collections. The definition of *object* is “A statement thrown in or introduced in opposition; an objection... Something ‘thrown’ or put in the way, so as to interrupt or obstruct the course of a person or thing; an obstacle, a hindrance... Something placed before the eyes, or presented to the sight or other sense; an individual thing seen or perceived...” (OED). In general, an *object* is defined as something capable of being seen, touched, or otherwise sensed. *Object* comes from the Latin word *objectum* (thrown in the way). It was first recorded in English in 1398, “e obiect of the eye is all may be seen, & al maye be herde is object to the herynge” (OED).

The word *element* is much better for the purpose of referring to all the components of all museum collections. *Element* means a constituent part of a whole, which is what a component of any collection is. An *element* is defined as “One of the simple substances of which all material bodies are compounded” (OED). The best modern definition of *element* is a constituent part. It comes from the Latin *elementum* (the original meaning of *elementum* is uncertain). The first recorded use of the word *element* in English was in 1724, in the sentence “The chemist makes spirit, salt, sulphur, water, and earth, to be their five elements” (OED). *Element* also has meaning in the sense of an element of a set, which is how collections should be conceived—as sets (Simmons and Muñoz-Saba 2003). At its most basic, a collection is a set of elements, assembled because of their recognized affinities, and arrayed in some order. There are aspects of set theory from mathematics that can be applied to the processes of collection management and to analysis of collections.

As collections (and their associated data) grow larger and more complex, we need to manage them as sets, which implies recognizing the commonalities as well as the differences in collections. Precise terminology is important for writing

..... Continued on page 10

..... Continued from page 9: Components of museum collections

comprehensive collections management policies and for advancing museum collections management as a profession. For these reasons we need to define an inclusive vocabulary to address collections issues. The glossary of museum words recently published by SPNHC is an excellent step in this direction (Cato *et al.* 2003). I suggest the use of the word *element* to refer to the component parts of collections in general. Words such as artifact, object, and specimen should be reserved for the particular kinds of collections that they describe.

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SYNTHESYS – The World’s Largest Network of Natural History Institutions

Robert Huxley, Synthesys Deputy Network Leader, Department of Botany, The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD, UK

It goes without saying perhaps that even the largest natural history collections in the world do not hold all material from all taxa, territories and times and even if they do, the degree of accessibility may vary considerably. Many institutions are the sole repositories for usable collections and others are totally lacking in some groups, regions etc. Together, on the other hand, they form a vast resource in support of systematic, environmental and other research.

The SYNTHESYS programme considers the major Natural History Museums of Europe as one large-scale facility for research in a similar way to how particle physicists regard large accelerator laboratories or astronomers the world’s major telescopes.

The project brings together 20 of the major collections in Europe and is supported by a €13million grant from the European Union. There are two major elements to the project; the first is a programme of support to European researchers to encourage them to make best use of collections and other facilities across the EU; the second is a series of networking activities aimed to improve access to this vast and diverse resource.

There are five networking activities dedicated to maximizing utility of European natural history collections for the longer

term. These are supported by a management activity coordinating and bringing together these highly integrated tasks.

The activities are:

- **Complementarity Activity** brings together information on the strengths of each institution’s collections and expertise, thus leading to a co-ordinated European development plan.
- **Standards Activity** will set standards for the long-term preservation and access to the collections, and will assess the collections to identify priorities for improvement through mechanisms such as training courses.
- **Database Activity** will coordinate the development of collection databases across Europe to create an integrated, distributed European collection database system.
- **New collections Activity** (such as tissue samples for molecular study) will establish common policies and methodologies.
- **New analytical methods Activity** will assess techniques from other disciplines (such as CT), and assess how they might be applied in systematics and other natural history studies.

The second activity, Standards, will perhaps be of most interest to SPNHC members as it parallels and builds on a number of initiatives which the organization has been involved with over the years. The first step will be to build on existing work on standards in collections care and conservation and draw up a European standard for natural history collections. This will be launched at the SPNHC 2005 meeting in London, UK. Having set appropriate standards and benchmarks, institutions will be measured against these to determine where gaps exist and how these relate to the priority collections identified in the complementarity activity. Once gaps are recognized the second phase of the project will set up a series of workshops and other training activities to raise collections management standards where necessary. Finally Pan-European Protocols for Disaster planning will be established to ensure a network of help to assist institutions should disaster strike in any form.

Standards do not exist in isolation and the activity will be closely integrated with the parallel work on complementarity, databases, new collections, and analytical techniques.

The Networking Activities will add value to the integrated access that will be provided to the scientific community by the 20 institutions with the main beneficiaries being the European research community in the biosciences and geosciences, and particularly those researchers with an interest in biodiversity. It will reach long beyond the 5 years of the project leaving an established network of collections access and care on an unprecedented scale. Whilst primarily a European project, it is obvious that these activities have application and value across the natural history community and there is enthusi-

asm for the exchange of ideas and networking on the broader scale.

The Project is managed and co-ordinated by the Natural History Museum, London and further details and a list of the participating institutions can be obtained from:

www.nhm.ac.uk/science/rco/sysresource/

NHCOLL-L Natural History Collections Listserver

To post messages to NHCOLL-L

Compose email addressed to **NHCOLL-L@LISTS.YALE.EDU** and put what you want to say to the group in the text of your email. Please include a several word synopsis of what your email is about in the Subject line.

Managing your NHCOLL-L subscription

All email for managing NHCOLL-L subscriptions should be addressed to **LISTPROC@LISTS.YALE.EDU** (not to the posting address).

For more information: the NHCOLL-L FAQ Sheet contains a comprehensive discussion of NHCOLL-L, including hints and links to sites that allow you to search the email archives. Questions or comments not answered by the material above or by the NHCOLL-L FAQ Sheet can be sent to the NHCOLL-L listowner, Gregory Watkins-Colwell at gjwc@optonline.net

Publications of Interest

This section is from the Conservation Committee and chaired by Paula T. Work of the Citations Subcommittee. Prices and availability are cited when available. Annotations are provided by John Simmons. Contributions and comments may be submitted to Paula Work, Maine State Museum, 83 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333; (207) 287-6635(voice); (207) 287-6633(fax); paula.work@maine.gov (email).

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[Thanks also to John Simmons for his input to this list]

Position Announcements

If you would like to submit job descriptions, please send postings to the Newsletter Editor. See the SPNHC web site, www.spnhc.org, for current postings

COLLECTIONS MANAGER, SCHIELE MUSEUM, The Schiele Museum is seeking a Collections Manager to assume responsibility for the care and management of its collections. Providing overall collections management leadership, establishing goals, developing strategic and tactical plans and priorities, allocating resources, developing and executing a budget, and establishing policy will be prime responsibilities. We seek an experienced museum professional with the demonstrated ability to lead a collections management function that embodies the best practices and standards of AAM. Supervises a part-time or contract Technician/Assistant Registrar, Interns, and works with the Curatorial Research Coordinator to develop and implement collections policies and procedures and computerized record keeping. B.A. or B.S. in relevant natural or social science with systematic museum collections experience required. M.A. in museum studies with a collections management focus and two to three year's supervisory responsibility as Assistant Registrar or Assistant Collections Manager level desirable. For an application, contact the City of Gastonia, Employment Division, PO Box 1748, Gastonia, NC 28053 or in person at 175 W. Franklin Blvd. Resumes may be e-mailed to donnad@cityofgastonia.com. Position is open until filled. The Schiele Museum-City of Gastonia is an equal opportunity employer. Salary: \$25,870 to \$46,592.

COLLECTION MANAGER, INVERTEBRATE PALEONTOLOGY, YALE PEABODY MUSEUM, Reporting to the Curator-in-charge of the Invertebrate Paleontology Division, the IP Collections Manager is responsible for the day-to-day management of the invertebrate fossil collections including all aspects of the maintenance and use of the collections.

1. Manages the day-to-day activities associated with the maintenance of the collections, associated archives and supporting documentation, and collection facilities. 2. Responsible for all aspects of collection management including processing of incoming material and existing collections, care and conservation, security, and inventory of all collections. 3. Assigns duties and oversees the work of museum staff, students and volunteers. 4. Administers divisional budget and funds for collection improvements. 5. Supervises the databasing and cataloging of all specimens and associated data; works with Computer Systems office to ensure integrity of invertebrate paleontology database. 6. Interacts with national and international scientific community, including management of specimen loans, responding to inquiries, hosting visitors and maximizing utilization of the collections. 7. Advises curator regarding collections growth, accessions, destructive sampling and rights and reproduction requests. 8. Coordinates Division activities in Museum-wide initiatives such as integrated pest management programs, risk assessments and disaster planning. 9. Participates in exhibit and public education initiatives, museum programs and other Museum events; interacts with the public, and participation in outreach programs, and other Museum service (such as leading collections tours, etc.). 10. Keeps records of collections usage and growth; prepares collections-related grant proposals and prepares annual reports of collection activities. 11. Participates in fieldwork to collect invertebrate fossils and other associated fauna and flora.

Qualifications: Three years collections management experience and a Masters Degree in Biology, Geology or a field closely related to Invertebrate Paleontology, or equivalent combination of experience and education. Must have experience in collections management, knowledge of invertebrate paleontology and stratigraphy. Must have effective interpersonal skills and ability to work independently. Supervisory experience preferred. Demonstrated competences in database management, digitization and informatics, and in the writing of grant proposals and reports. Full time position, 37.5 hours/week. Yale University offers a highly competitive salary and liberal benefits. Qualified applicants are invited to send a letter of application, resume and names of three references to: Ms. Sharon J. Rodriguez, Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History, 170 Whitney Avenue, P.O. Box 208118, New Haven, CT 06520-8118 or to sharon.rodriguez@yale.edu. Yale University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer.

Calendar of Events

The Calendar of Events is maintained by Christine Chandler of the Documentation Committee. Application deadlines, conferences and symposia relevant to collection management, computerization and conservation of natural history collections are listed. Notices may be submitted to Christine at Putnam Museum of History and Natural Science, 1717 West 12th Street, Davenport, IA 52804; (563) 324-1054 ext. 226; email chandler@putnam.org or dinoceras@juno.com.

March 2004

March 1, 2004. **IMLS, National Leadership Grants for Museums deadline.** Institute of Museum and Library Services, 1100 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20506 USA; 202.606.8539 (phone); www.ims.gov (website).

March 1, 2004. **NPS, NAGPRA Tribal and Museum and Documentation Grants deadline.** National Park Service, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, 1849 C St. NW, Rm. 2253, Washington, DC 20005 USA; 202.354.2201 (phone); www.cr.nps.gov/nagpra (website).

March 2, 2004. **NSF, Presidential Awards for Excellence in Science, Mathematics, and Engineering Mentoring deadline.** National Science Foundation, 4201 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, Virginia 22230 USA; 703.292.8616 (phone); www.nsf.gov (website).

March 3, 2004. **Attack of the Giant Mold Spore**, a Solinet Inc., preservation workshop, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, USA. For more information on this and other Southeastern Library Network workshops, contact Vanessa Richardson at vrichardson@solinet.net (email); 800.999.8558 (phone), or check out www.solinet.net (website).

March 12 - 13, 2004. **CEOs and Governance**, an AAM professional education seminar, St. Louis, Missouri, USA. Visit www.aam-us.org (website) or call 202.289.9114 (phone) for information.

March 15, 2004. **AAM Museum Publications Design Competition** entry deadline.

March 22, 2004. **NEH, Consultation Grants for Libraries, Museums, or Special Projects deadline.** National Endowment for the Humanities, 1100 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Rm. 402, Washington, DC 20506 USA; 202.606.8400 (phone); www.neh.gov (website).

March 24, 2004. **Integrated Pest Management: Beating the Critter Jitters**, a Solinet Inc., preservation workshop, Columbus-Lowndes Public Library, Columbus, Mississippi, USA. For more information on this and other Southeastern Library Network workshops, contact Vanessa Richardson at vrichardson@solinet.net (email); 800.999.8558 (phone), or check out www.solinet.net (website).

March 24 - 26, 2004. **Legal Problems of Museum Administration**, an AAM professional education seminar, New York, New York, USA. Visit www.aam-us.org (website) or call 202.289.9114 (phone) for information.

March 25, 2004. NAGPRA symposium, **Respectful Treatment of Crow Spiritual Items at Plenty Coups State Park**, Billings, Montana, USA. Presented by the Friends of Chief Plenty Coups State Park Advisory Council and the Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. For details, contact Tim Bernardis, Friends of Chief Plenty Coups State Park Advisory Council; 406.638.3113 (phone); tim@lib.lbhc.cc.mt.us (email); or go to http://lib.lbhc.cc.mt.us/pcms/default.htm (website).

March 31 - April 3, 2004. **Museums and the Web: An International Conference**, Charlotte, North Carolina, USA, organized by Archives and Museum Informatics.

April 2004

April 5 - 7, 2004. **Creative Space: An International Conference Exploring Museum and Gallery Space as a Creative Medium**, Dept. of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, UK. For further information, contact Barbara Lloyd, Dept. of Mus. Studies, Univ. of Leicester, 105 Princess Road East, Leicester LE1 7LG; +44 (0)116 252 3962 (phone); +44 (0)116 252 3960 (fax); bl5@le.ac.uk (email).

April 28 - May 2, 2004. **Canadian Museum Association (CMA) Conference 2004**, Quebec City, Quebec, Canada. Visit www.museums.ca/conferences (website) for more information.

May 2004

May 6 - 10, 2004. **AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo™**, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA.

May 10, 2004. **Advanced Building Community Connection Workshop**, an AAM professional education seminar, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA. Visit www.aam-us.org (website) or call 202.289.9114 (phone) for information.

May 11 - 16, 2004. **Museum SOS: Strategies for Emergency Response & Salvage. 19th Annual Meeting of the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC)**. American Museum of Natural History, New York, New York, USA. Visit www.peabody.yale.edu/other/spnhc (website) for more information.

May 16 - 21, 2004. **Museums Australia Conference 2004**, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. Visit www.museumsaustralia.org.au/conference (website) for more information.

May 25 - 30, 2004. **Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property (CAC) Conference 2004**, Quebec City, Quebec, Canada. Conference website is at www.cac-accr.ca/econf.html (website).

May 26 - 31, 2004. **Joint Meeting of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists**, hosted by the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, USA [20th Annual Meeting of the American Elasmobranch Society, 84th Annual Meeting of the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists (ASIH), 62nd Annual Meeting of the Herpetologists' League (HL), and 47th Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles (SSAR)].

June 2004

June 9 - 12, 2004. **American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta (AABGA) Conference 2004**, Dallas, Texas, USA. Go to www.aabga.org (website) for more information.

June 10 - 11, 2004. **Colleges, Code and Copyright: The Impact of Digital Networks and Technological Controls on Copyright and the Dissemination of Information in Higher Education - Center for Intellectual Property 2004 Annual Symposium**, Adelphi, Maryland, USA. Contact: Olga Francois at 301.985.6426 (phone); ofrancois@umuc.edu (email); www.umuc.edu/odell/cip/symposium/cpapers.html (website).

June 12 - 16, 2004. **84th Annual Meeting of the American Society of Mammalogists**, Humboldt State University, Arcata, California, USA. Contact Brian S. Arbogast, Dept. of Biological Sciences, Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA 95521 for more information; 707.826.4180 (phone); 707.826.3201 (fax); bsa@humboldt.edu (email).

June 25 - 26, 2004. **Learning in Museums**, an AAM professional education seminar, Boston, Massachusetts, USA. Visit www.aam-us.org (website) or call 202.289.9114 (phone) for information.

July 2004

July 7 - 10, 2004. **Summer Educational Institute (SEI) for Visual Resources and Image Management**, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, USA. SEI is jointly sponsored by the Visual Resources Association (VRA) and the Art Libraries Society/North America (ARLIS/NA). More information is available at www.vraweb.org/2004sei (website).

August 2004

August 3 - 7, 2004. **Visitors Studies Association (VSA) Conference**, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA.

August 16 - 21, 2004. **122nd Stated Meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union**, Université Laval, Québec City, QC, Canada.

September 2004

September 7 - 11, 2004. **2004 Mountain-Plains Museums Association (MPMA) Annual Conference**, Casper, Wyoming, USA.

September 19 - 22, 2004. **Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC) Annual Conference**, San Jose, California, USA, hosted by the Tech Museum of Innovation. Check out www.astc.org (website) for more information.

November 2004

November 3 - 6, 2004. **64th Annual Meeting of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology**, Denver, Colorado, USA. Check the SVP website at www.vertpaleo.org (website) for updates.

November 7 - 10, 2004. **Annual Meeting of the Geological Society of America**, Denver, Colorado USA.

November 10 - 13, 2004. **Great Technology for Collections, Confluence, and Community - 2004 Museum Computer Network Conference**, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. For more information, contact Susan Rawlyk at 403.288.9393 (phone); rawlyks@igs.net (email), or visit www.mcn.edu (website).

2005**May 2005**

May 1 - 5, 2005. **AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo™**, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA.

August 2005

August 2005. **123rd Stated Meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union**, University of California, Santa Barbara, California, USA.

September 2005

September 10 - 16, 2005. **ICOM-CC 14th Triennial Meeting**, The Hague, The Netherlands. Abstract deadline April 15, 2004. For information, go to www.icom-cc.icom.museum (website) or secretariat@icom-cc.org (email).

October 2005

October 15 - 18, 2005. **Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC) Annual Conference**, Richmond, Virginia, USA, hosted by the Science Museum of Virginia. Check out www.astc.org (website) for more information.

October 16 - 19 2005. **Annual Meeting of the Geological Society of America**, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA.

2006**April 2006**

April 27 - 30, 2006. **AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo™ (AAM Centennial)**, Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

August 2006

August 13 - 19, 2006. **24th International Ornithological Congress**, Hamburg, Federal Republic of Germany.

October 2006

October 22 - 25, 2006. **Annual Meeting of the Geological Society of America**, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA.

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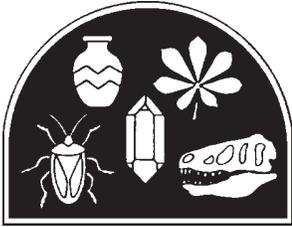
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