

Meetings

Systematic Collections

During the last year and a half, a number of directors of natural history museums and herbaria held three informal conferences. The first two, supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation, were held, respectively, at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, 19–20 May 1958, and at the New York State Museum, 13–14 October 1958. The third conference, which had no outside sponsorship, was held at the Florida State Museum, University of Florida, 9–10 April 1959.

The following museums and herbaria were represented at one or more of the conferences: Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia; American Museum of Natural History; Bailey Hortorium, Cornell University; Bernice P. Bishop Museum; California Academy of Sciences; Carnegie Museum; Chicago Natural History Museum; Florida State Museum, University of Florida; Gray Herbarium, Harvard University; Herbarium of the University of Michigan; Missouri Botanical Garden; Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University; Museum of Natural History, University of Kansas; Museum of Zoology, University of Michigan; National Museum of Canada; Natural History Museum, Stanford University; Natural History Museum, University of Colorado; New York Botanical Garden; New York State Museum and Science Service; Peabody Museum, Yale University; Royal Ontario Museum; United States National Museum; University of California Herbarium; and University of Nebraska State Museum. Also represented at the conferences were the National Science Foundation, the American Institute of Biological Sciences, and officials of the individual host institutions.

The conferences were quite productive, and many topics of concern to systematic biology were identified and discussed. Among these were centralization of holdings and the question of establishing national centers for collections; over-curating versus under-curating; national needs in terms of facilities and personnel; and fringe benefits for curatorial personnel.

The conferences also foresaw the need for, and provided for the establishment of, a far broader group, tentatively called the Association of Science Museum Administrators, which held its organizational meeting in Pittsburgh on 2 June 1959, the day before the annual meeting of the American Association of Museums. C. B. Schultz, of the University of Nebraska State Museum, was elected chairman of the new association.

Conference committees were formed to conduct a survey of zoological collections (chairman, T. H. Hubbell, Museum of Zoology, University of Michigan); to consider interinstitutional cooperation in the standardization of containers and cases for zoological collections (chairman, C. B. Schultz, University of Nebraska State Museum); and to consider interinstitutional cooperation in the standardization of cases for herbarium specimens (chairman, I. L. Wiggins, Natural History Museum, Stanford University).

The substance of several resolutions adopted at the conferences is as follows:

1) The conference, recognizing the tremendous need for additional research positions in the field of systematic biology, recommended that ways and means be found to provide support for such positions.

2) The conference recommended that the National Science Foundation seek means of supporting institutional programs involving maintenance of research collections in order to increase basic research, to facilitate loans that make material more generally available on a national and international basis, and to improve services to the scientific public.

3) It was recommended that journals not publish descriptions of new species unless the types are deposited in stable institutions that permit free access to the collections by qualified and responsible investigators, and further, that granting agencies require recipients of grants involving systematic studies to agree to place all types resulting from such work in institutions of this kind.

4) The conference commended the National Science Foundation for hav-

ing the foresight to provide long-term grants and urged the Foundation to make greater use of this procedure.

5) In view of the great and increasing interest of the Division of Scientific Personnel and Education of the National Science Foundation in the teaching of science and the recruitment of scientists—and the devotion of over half the budget of the National Science Foundation to these ends—it would be to the national advantage as well as to the advantage of natural history museums to emphasize the educational importance of these “nurseries of scientists.” It was therefore recommended that the conference bring to the attention of the National Science Foundation this as yet generally unrecognized national educational asset, with the express hope that funds might be made available for the expansion of curatorial and other museum activities directly related to educational programs. Since no representations of this sort have yet been made, the results might be surprisingly rewarding, and do much to increase the prestige as well as the effectiveness of our institutions.

6) Since it is believed desirable to improve and formalize the status of museum staffs, it was resolved that all science museums with study collections and research programs seek to establish standards of academic background, professional competence, and salary range for members of their curatorial staffs equivalent to those for faculty members at nearby colleges and universities.

7) The transfer of holotypes from small inactive collections in possibly unstable situations to continuing institutions having significant material or specialists on the group represented is considered desirable and should be encouraged.

Limited numbers of the *Transactions* of the three conferences are available, and interested persons should request them from the directors of the three host institutions.

The fourth conference of this kind is scheduled for the spring of 1960, to be held at the National History Museum of the University of Kansas.

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Forthcoming Events

April

20–21. Council on Medical Television, 2nd meeting, Bethesda, Md. (J. Mackenzie, Council on Medical Television, 33 E. 68 St., New York 21.)

20–22. Biological Waste Treatment, 3rd conf., New York, N.Y. (W. W. Eckenfelder, Dept. of Civil Engineering, Manhattan College, New York 71.)