

# NAT HIST NEWSLETTER

No. 1

A Newsletter of the ICOM International Committee for  
Museums and Collections of Natural History



Editor: H.W. Lack, Berlin, Germany.

Distributor: University of Bergen, Norway.

## EDITORIAL

Dear reader,

The title of this newsletter stands for "Newsletter of ICOM International Committee for Museums and Collections of Natural History". It is published in an English and French version and is distributed free of charge to all members of the ICOM International Committee for Museums and Collections of Natural History (subsequently called the Committee) and is available upon request to other parties interested.

The aim of the NAT HIST Newsletter is three-fold:

1. to increase communication
2. to act as forum for discussion
3. to inform about current activities and news from members of the committee.

Consequently you are encouraged to regard this newsletter as your newsletter and explicitly invited to send reports, comments, notes and reviews to the editor for consideration and publication.

Yours sincerely,

HW Lack

## THE POLICY OF THE BOARD

Dear members of the Natural History Committee,

A year has passed since the Quebec meeting. The board of the Natural History Committee was elected this spring and since a board meeting was not feasible, the board held a teleconference on May 7 to allocate responsibilities.

The board consists of

- Andreas L. Steigen, Norway, President (ICOM 95)  
S. M. Nair, India, Vice-President (Environmental Education, Asia)  
Michel van-Praet, France, Secretary (Contact with ICOM Secretariat and UNESCO)  
Christopher Hill, UK, Treasurer (Co-Editor)  
H. Walter Lack, Germany, Editor (Contact with members in Central, East and South-East Europe)  
Amadou Seck, Senegal, Co-opted member (Africa)

The first priority of the board means promoting the organisation, and first of all this means to *increase contact between board and members*.

As a start you will receive this Newsletter twice a year, and all members are invited to use it for communication. The number of voting members (only 157 in the last election) has to be increased. There is, however, not much the board can do by itself. So the board appeals to all members to recruit new members and to re-recruit former members, individuals and institutions. If our committee is to have any influence on natural history museum issues, we simply have to multiply. The board is very much aware of the fact that to enlist new members we must have something to offer, on the other hand, to be able to have something to offer to our members we must have a minimum number of dedicated members! As to other initiatives from the board, read the Newsletter thoroughly!

The second priority is to *improve our finances*

The low membership means limited resources. Giving the university museums higher priorities, the University of Bergen will pay for printing and postage of this and the next Newsletter. But this will be an exception. So all good and feasible suggestions on how to increase our bank account are welcome!

The third priority is to inform about and arrange meetings and seminars.

There is a long list of other important activities, but in the present situation the board finds it necessary to concentrate on a few issues. Other tasks lying ahead are to appoint special action groups, publishing a directory of natural history museums, books and reports, environmental education (may be in an international context where natural history museums act as nodes in a distance education network), research programmes in pertinent aspects of natural history, new look at environmental ethics, a critical look on bioprospecting, consulting services, strengthening museums in the south according to The Convention on Biodiversity, museums and bioimperialism, etc.

The list can be made impossibly long, and this is only a fraction of the obligations and possibilities lying ahead. There is a lot that can be carried out by the board. It is, however, important to stress that the board can only act as facilitating body in most issues. The strength and potential of the organisation is expressed by the activity of its members. And this is the most important message from the board: If the Natural History Committee is to prove its existence, all members must feel responsible and dedicated.

AL Steigen

## PRESENTATION

Christopher Hill

Is a retired member of staff of the Department of Public Services, Natural History Museum, London. He studied chemistry and crystallography and did research in solid-state physics; later he joined the Department of Mineralogy, Natural History Museum, London, became involved in exhibitions and took part in the administration of the educational and exhibition functions of this institution. He was secretary of the British National Committee of ICOM 1976-91 and contributed a keynote paper to the 1989 Council of Europe Seminar on the natural history museums and Europe's natural heritage.

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H. Walter Lack

Is Director and Professor at the Botanischer Garten und Botanisches Museum Berlin-Dahlem and Professor at the Freie Universität Berlin. Currently he teaches plant taxonomy and is in charge of the library, the museum and the publications of his institution.

He was a recipient of a A.v. Humboldt Fellowship and is also President of the German Horticultural Library; he has published c. 100 papers on taxonomy of Compositae, history of botany and museology.

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S.M. Nair

Is Director of the National Museum of Natural History, New Delhi, and Vice President of the Museums Association of India. He was a recipient of the Rockefeller III Fund Fellowship, the Homi Bhabha Fellowship and a Smithsonian Institution Fellowship in the field of Museology and has also served two terms as Vice President of the ICOM Natural History Committee in the past (1980-86).

S.M. Nair  
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Barakhamba Road  
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India

Michel Van-Praet

Is Professor at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, and Director of the Department of Museology at this institution; he is also a Professor of Museology, at the René Descartes University in Paris since 1991. Currently he teaches museology, museum education and evaluation of the visitors, and is in charge of the Galerie de Zoologie renovation.

Previously he was Assistant Professor and Curator at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, Head of the Museum Education Service, and has published c. 40 papers and books on the biology of collenteroles.

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36 rue Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire  
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Andreas Ludvig Steigen

Is Associate Professor at the Centre for Studies of Environment and Resources at the University of Bergen, Norway, since 1992 and former Head of the Museum of Zoology (1987-90) and employed there since 1972. Trained as a systematicist and terrestrial ecologist, thesis in environmental energetics. Recently he has been engaged in reorganising biology studies at UoB, developing a distance education programme in environmental sciences and sustainable development, member of the committee for reorganising the university museum, teaching a one semester course in environment and development, developing contacts with universities in Africa. He was nominated for the Norwegian National Literature Award (1991) for his interdisciplinary textbook on environmental problems and sustainable development.

Andreas L. Steigen  
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## INDIA:

### A SUCCESSFUL CONTEST FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Nearly a quarter of a million entries were received in response to the "Care for the Environment Contest" conducted by the National Museum of Natural History, New Delhi in India. The purpose of the contest was to initiate a nation-wide, multilingual, multimedia forum for the people of the country, to give expression to their thoughts and concern for the environment.

The contest comprised of six different categories of entries, five of which could be represented in any of the fifteen languages. These were

1. Designing a symbol or logo that could represent our concern for, and the importance of, protecting the environment.
2. Writing a slogan for motivating an action plan.
3. Composing a song or poem expressing love and concern for nature.
4. Illustrating a comic strip reflecting the spirit of environmental awareness and action.
5. Scripting a film based on an environment related story.
6. Painting a poster to promote awareness of an environmental issue/concern.

This contest was one of the most ambitious and challenging tasks undertaken by the National Museum of Natural History, New Delhi.

A separate cell was created in the Museum for the sorting, classification, documentation and assessment of over a quarter of over a quarter of a million of entries received. This was a Herculean task based on 15 languages for the award of 613 prizes.

The entries received in the various categories reflected the enthusiasm and commitment with which the participants have tried to express their concerns about environment and conservation. The outcome of this project has not only given an indication of the widespread environmental concern in the country, but also proved that contests are an effective means of creating environmental awareness. Secondly, it has created a multiplier effect on other contests. Entries were shortlisted by Screening Committees on the basis of which Final Judging Committees selected 344 Prize Winning Entries.

The contest has generated an enormous wealth of material depicting people's perception of caring for environment. It will be the endeavour of the museum to use them in a suitable manner for further disseminati-

on to promote environmental awareness among the people. Truly a contest with rich pay-offs!

SM Nair

## MEETINGS

### 1993

#### INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NATURAL SCIENCE MUSEUMS AND ENVIRONMENT,

August 26-29, 1993, Beijing, China

Closing date for registration June 30, 1993

Closing date for abstracts: June 30, 1993

Closing date for papers: July 31, 1993

#### Scientific programme:

- 1 Museums and biological diversity
- 2 Museums and marine environment
- 3 Museums and endangered species
- 4 Museums and social environment
- 5 Science and technology -  
Museums - Environment
- 6 Science and technology museums  
and the future

AL Steigen

#### INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE CULTURAL TRADITION AND THE ENVIRONMENT, November 16-18, 1993, Praha, Tsejekkia

It was suggested last year in Quebec that the Natural History Committee should prepare a meeting during this conference. The Board has, however, decided that it is not feasible neither to organise a meeting nor to prepare a programme at such short notice, and will concentrate efforts in organising a meeting in 1994 (see below).

AL Steigen

### 1994

#### NATURAL SCIENCES, ENVIRONMENT AND THE EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF MUSEUMS

Meeting of the Natural History Committee  
May 26 - 29, 1994, Paris

The views of scientists, educators and specialists on evaluation will be confronted in order to clarify experiences, limits and perspectives.

The participants will be encouraged to extend the subject beyond museums in the traditional sense to include arboreta, botanic gardens and national parks.

The meeting has to prepare a proposal for the triennial action plan of ICOM (1995 - 98) to be adopted at Stavanger, of which "prevention, study and environmental education" will be one of the main topics to be dealt with by several international committees.

The meeting will include visits to the new Galerie de l'Évolution at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, the Arboretum of Chèvrelpoup (near Versailles) and a natural history museum outside Paris.

M van Praet

## 1995 ICOM 95

The next triennial meeting of ICOM will be arranged in Stavanger in 1995. The organising committee is working hard to make this a meeting well worth attending. In Quebec last fall we discussed the topic for the meeting of the Natural History Committee in Stavanger. The theme "Museums and Biodiversity" was suggested and acclaimed and the Board has approved this. Being responsible for the programme, I would like members to suggest topics for lectures. Biodiversity might be a rather academic discipline, but amateurs all over the world make important contributions every day. My experience as former head of the zoological museum is that this is an area where the amateur and the professional scientists meet. No doubt in the struggle for protecting the biodiversity of the globe, natural history museums, zoos, botanical gardens etc. have an important job to do. In fact these are well designed institutions to take care of this obligation. It is important that museums act and not leave the whole area to biotechnological companies that may be more interested in exploiting than in protecting the biological diversity. Both strategies may be united in a mutual effort. It is important to design a coherent

programme that all members will find worth attending. I would like to receive suggestions on scientific, practical, museological, ethical topics; strategies for training of personnel, and how to strengthen and expand the international network of museums working in this field.

I am open to any suggestions, especially if they have an unorthodox twist to the topic "Museums and Biodiversity".

AL Steigen

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### Book notes

Two important directories for botanists: Heywood, C.A., Heywood, V.H. Jackson, P.W. (eds.), *International Directory of Botanic Gardens V*, ed. 5, Königstein, 1990. available from Koeltz Scientific Books, Herrwaldstr. 6, D - 6240 Königstein. Holmgren, P.K., Holmgren, N.H. Barnett, L.C. (eds.), *Index Herbariorum Part I: The Herbaria of the World*, ed. 8, New York, 1990. available from New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, New York 10458 - 5126, USA.

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