

## SGU3A Natural History Group – 11<sup>th</sup> January 2023 – The Dorset Museum, Dorchester

### Natural History Collections at the County Museum

11 group members enjoyed a guided tour of the museum's collections. A team of volunteers showed us around the huge collections room and described how the museum had acquired these large, sometimes anonymous, natural history collections over its long history. They brought out trays of butterflies and moths which showed the enthusiasm of private collectors who named and displayed many species, often in varied sizes and with slight variations. A tray of tiny micro-moths impressed us at the dedication of this collector who preserved the adults of tiny leaf miner caterpillars. In the herbarium were pressed leaves with the holes created by these miners.

Obviously collecting of Lepidoptera is now done largely by photography and records are kept on databases. Records of the historic collections in the museum are varied but requests to investigate for research purposes can be considered. We also saw cases of bird taxidermy which need care in storage and careful restoration if examples are to be moved to the public display. Seeing a large bird egg collection made us recognise the importance of the introduction of wildlife laws in more recent years.



After this insight into the preservation role of the County Museum we then visited the public display of natural history in the new 'Natural Dorset' room in the Lulworth Gallery. Here were specially selected examples displayed to illustrate the geology of the county and the work of a few notable scientists and naturalists. These included Alfred Russel Wallace, important in the development of the theory of evolution, Helen and Nelson Richardson's 19<sup>th</sup> century study of insects in Portland and Purbeck, as well as Mary Anning's contribution to palaeontology through her fossil collecting.

Filmed images of Dorset wildlife in different habitats showed the county's great diversity and a selection of landscape paintings reflected the variety of those places we enjoy.

The museum's website gives a useful reminder of what we saw on our visit. We thanked the museum staff and volunteers for making this a valuable morning for our group.

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