

## Professional Zooarchaeology Group (PZG) Minutes

### Microfauna, Oxford Archaeology, Oxford, 1st July 2006

Our third meeting, on the theme of microfauna, was a great success and thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended. We should like to thank Chris Gleed-Owen (herpetofauna) and Jim Williams (small mammals) who organised the sessions, and Rebecca Nicholson, Lena Strid and Fay Worley who hosted the day at Oxford Archaeology.

During the morning we were informed of the principal issues and questions surrounding the study of microfauna. Jim began by presenting us all with a very useful manual, together with some articles – thank you so much! He then gave us an overview of the shifts in British small mammal species that have occurred since the Late Glacial period, followed by a brief introduction to best practice in sample processing (use a sieve <0.5mm), extraction (by tweezers) and data analysis (surprisingly, MIs are usually the best represented body part). Through Jim's discussion of small mammal taphonomy we learnt how natural and predator deposits might be distinguished and, more importantly, how the assessment of predator deposits can provide insights into site formation processes and palaeoecology.

Chris talked us through the taxonomy of British herpetofauna: there are currently 13 native species (7 amphibians and 6 reptiles) with 2 species that have gone extinct during the last 1,000 years. As we were shown the present day distribution of these species it became clear just how useful the ancient biogeography of herpetofauna can be for reconstructing past environments. Chris then explained how the behavioural ecology of amphibians/reptiles might help us interpret the mechanisms and seasons of deposit formation.

After a splendid lunch, Fay gave us a tour of Oxford Archaeology's zooarchaeological facilities. We were then taken to the human remains 'suite' for the afternoon practicals - the identification of small mammal and herpetofauna remains. Many of us had brought our own samples along and, with the help of Jim and Chris, were able to make sense of them. Using microscopes, we had the opportunity to put what we had learn in the morning session into practice - in particular identifying acid etching on digested small mammal bones and teeth.

Chris (or should we call him Rolf?) took us on a flipchart-drawing extravaganza, pointing out the many criteria for sexing and separating the bones of frogs and toads and identifying reptile remains. Putting these criteria into practice was a revelation and several of us were forced to admit just how many amphibian bones we had sent to fish specialists in the past – watch out for those pesky frog jaws!

The day was rounded off with a general PZG discussion.

NOTED Following up the last meeting (Palaeopathology), Richard Thomas informed us that the Image Bank for interesting specimens was now on line and requested that we send our digital images and descriptions.

NOTED All PZG members who have not submitted their biographies were requested to do so, in order that the peer review facility might be set up.

NOTED The possibility that the PZG might act as a spring board for setting up collaborative PhDs

### Next meeting

Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> January  
*Fish Remains: Challenges and Opportunities*

University of Bradford, Division of Archaeological Sciences, School of Life Sciences,  
Phoenix Building SW

The day will be run by fish specialist Andrew Jones and will concentrate on fishes from both freshwater and marine environments from the British Isles, mainland Europe and the Mediterranean Sea.

### Programme

10.30            Tea and coffee

11.00            Introduction

11.30. Key issues in the identification of fish remains.

1.00            Lunch

2.00            Hands-on identification with "show-and-tell" specimens. Participants are encouraged to bring specimens for identification, discussion and comment.

As usual, lunch will be provided but we would be grateful for a contribution of £3.50 to cover costs.

For a place please contact: [naomi.sykes@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:naomi.sykes@nottingham.ac.uk), 0115 95 14183

Minutes contributed by Naomi Sykes

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