

**E-MAIL CONTRIBUTIONS****Women should consider a career in taxonomy****MIRIAM ROTHSCHILD**

Today there is a chronic shortage of systematists and morphologists in museums and related organisations. It is strange that it has not been realised that women who are interested in animals and plants and attracted by the natural world, would be encouraged to specialise in systematics and taxonomy if they could continue their job, working at home, while their children were young. This would not entail costly or complicated apparatus, all that is required is a microscope, a tray of slides or specimens from the museum collections and access to the relevant literature.

I myself was mildly surprised to find my children more interesting than fleas, and I gladly abandoned field and laboratory experiments, and contrary to a prevalent view that systematics are dull, found them exceedingly interesting. Collaborating with a retired entomologist and the Natural History Museum draftsman we produced five volumes describing and cataloguing the Museum's unique but uncatalogued flea collection. This entailed the study of 10,000 sections of whole fleas - after the children had gone to bed. During this ten year period I was exceedingly proud that we were never once late for nursery school!

The possibility of such a scheme has received unqualified support from people with whom I have discussed the idea. There have been varied suggestions for modifying or enlarging such a project. It was agreed that it would be beneficial both for museums and systematists, who could keep and extend an interesting job (with remuneration), while raising the family.

The possibility of combining biological study with a reasonable salary and life at home with the young children would, initially, provide an attractive factor when selecting a career.

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