

THE CARD-CATALOGUE SYSTEM ADAPTED TO
MUSEUM REQUIREMENTS.

By EDGAR R. WAITE, F.L.S., Zoologist.

In a thoroughly up-to-date Museum there must always be going on an active exchange of specimens with kindred institutions in other countries. To catalogue the collections in such an establishment may in itself be a matter of some difficulty. If one is content merely to enter the names and particulars of current acquisitions in a book form register, and rule out, or otherwise mark, entries representing specimens sent away, nothing could be simpler. Such a register, however, cannot be kept in systematic order: a great disadvantage when dealing with Natural History specimens, and hours may be spent in tracking the source of any particular object.

In dealing with the large number of specimens under my care at the Museum, namely, Mammals, Reptiles, Fishes, and all Osteological preparations, I had the inadequacy of the usual form of register for ordinary working purposes, forcibly brought home to me; for my own convenience, therefore, I duplicated the record of current donations, etc., according to the plan below referred to.

Eighteen months ago the Curator instructed me to prepare a catalogue of the duplicate Mammals available for exchange, and for this purpose I was provided with an additional register. I then explained what system I had instituted, and the Curator heartily approving, permission was accorded me to officially adopt it in the Institution, as referred to in his Annual Report for 1898.*

The Curator's remarks were based on a six months' trial, during which time a comparatively small catalogue only had been prepared. All the collections in the various sections previously mentioned are being catalogued on this plan, and so far the work has occupied an assistant nearly the whole of the eighteen months indicated.

Many important libraries are now catalogued by the "card" system, and it is simply an adaptation of this to Museum requirements that I desire to bring into notice. Once a book is placed in a library it usually remains there, and if worn out is merely replaced, the substituted book bearing the reference number of the discarded one; changes occur only by interpolating new volumes. With a museum collection the case is different, for, in addition to the new material, specimens are constantly being removed by exchange, and old examples can never be actually replaced, for unlike a book, each has an individuality of its own, depending on locality, age, sex, season, or other condition.

* Aust. Mus. Ann. Report, 1898 (1899), p. 6.